



## Guided Pathways for Students in Jail

California Community Colleges in the Rising Scholars Network proudly serve incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students, including students in local jails. Although partnering with a jail brings some unique challenges, serving these students changes lives, reduces recidivism, is a critical matter of equity, and aligns with the Vision for Success. Thousands of individuals are incarcerated in California's 58 county jail systems, and nearly 90% of them are within 10 miles of a community college. The community colleges can be their bridge to a changed future.

Before beginning, take time to understand the landscape. Prisons and jails are not the same. There is only one state prison system, but California's 58 counties each independently manage their own jail system. A county may have more than one physical jail facility, but they will all be part of the same system managed by the county Sheriff. Unlike in the state prisons, county jails hold individuals who have not yet been sentenced in addition to individuals who have been sentenced to jail for misdemeanors or lower-level felonies. The average length of stay in a jail is much shorter than that of an individual incarcerated in a state prison, so students in jail could be released after a few weeks or months in custody. Colleges serving students in jail thus need to be prepared to welcome their jail students onto campus and support them to certificate or degree completion. Since most individuals released from jail will be supervised by the county Probation Department, colleges should also be prepared to partner with the Probation Department to ensure that their students have a smooth college experience while under supervision.

This Guided Pathway (GP) toolkit builds a roadmap for colleges interested in serving students in jail. Because many community college students in jail will complete their pathway on campus, this toolkit is divided into two sections. The first follows the journey of a student while they are in jail. The second follows the student as they transition from jail to campus.

### PART I: GUIDED PATHWAYS FOR STUDENTS INCARCERATED IN JAIL

Equity should be the centerpiece of any college program built to serve students in jail. Student outcomes and experiences should guide programmatic decisions, and students should be afforded the same supports as students attending college on campus although those supports may look different than they do on campus.

#### Programmatic Framework:

- Ensure success by building a strong foundation before you begin.
- Identify partners, address obstacles, and clarify expectations from the beginning.

- Designate main points of contact for the college, the Sheriff's Department, and other partners.
- Ask the Sheriff's Department about the average length of stay and the programming cycle for incarcerated individuals in the facility. Use this information to determine the appropriate term length. Credit courses may or may not be possible.
- Consider a compressed or shortened term. Work with the jail, college faculty, and relevant on-campus departments to implement the appropriate term length.
- Tour facilities to learn about security concerns, classroom size and availability, and the number of eligible students.
- Formalize the partnership by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- Work with the Sheriff's Department to develop a process for enrollment eligibility.
- Determine how students will enroll in courses and who will oversee enrollment. If enrollment cannot be done online, connect with Admissions and Records to create a paper enrollment process for incarcerated students.
- Work with the college to waive fees for incarcerated students where possible.
- Solicit interested faculty members through outreach and education about the program. Consider taking interested faculty on a tour of the jail to meet potential students and see classroom facilities.
- Form an advisory group consisting of members from the college, Sheriff's Department, Probation, and other relevant community or corrections-based organizations.
- Select interested and qualified instructors to teach in the program. Consider reaching out to other colleges in the Rising Scholars Network for guidance.
- Obtain security clearance for qualified instructors.
- Identify jail approved textbooks, resources, and materials.
- Create professional development opportunities for instructors who commit to teaching inside the jail.
- Connect with the on-campus Rising Scholars reentry program, or work with colleagues to start an on-campus support program that will be ready to welcome students transitioning onto campus. Offering courses in the jail without a plan to support and welcome those students onto campus is not advised.
- Prepare a dedicated space on campus where formerly incarcerated students can meet, do homework, and check in with program mentors.
- Prepare a transition planning protocol and onboarding procedure for students nearing release, and determine when students will begin to engage with transitions planning.
- Establish a plan for accurate MIS reporting using codes SG04 and SG15.
- Join the local Community Corrections Partnership and other county reentry groups.

## **Pillar 1: Clarify the Path**

- If offering a certificate, assure that the certificate aligns with employment opportunities that are available for Rising Scholars students.
- Offer orientation and outreach sessions for prospective students in jail, in-person whenever possible. Host on-site orientation or information sessions with counselors and enrollment specialists.
- Participate in jail job fairs or other opportunities to publicize the college program. Speak with prospective students about what the program will offer.
- Use these initial contacts to build trust with students. Do not make promises or commitments unless you are certain that you can follow through with them.
- Develop specialized handouts for the facility that identify specialized student supports on campus for students transitioning from jail to campus.

## **Pillar 2: Enter the Path**

- Walk students through enrollment and completion of the California College Promise Grant application, in-person whenever feasible.
- Consider ESL status, AB540 documentation, and the potential student's previous education experience during the enrollment process.
- Assign each student a case manager (academic advisor, educational advisor, or counselor).
- Prepare to provide approved instructional support materials such as pencils, paper, textbooks, and resources.
- Be aware of access barriers that arise when the college requires supporting documentation that incarcerated people cannot provide. Work with Admissions and Records and Financial Aid to ensure that eligible incarcerated students can enroll and receive financial aid.
- Provide individualized academic planning and counseling for each student, in-person whenever feasible and without undue obstacles or hurdles.

## **Pillar 3: Stay on the Path**

- Where possible, offer support services such as tutoring and continued academic counseling in person.
- Celebrate successes whether that be completion of a class, milestones along the way, or certificate or degree.
- Encourage students to continue attending jail job fairs and other opportunities to learn about community organizations and local employers who may be able to help them post-release.
- Connect incarcerated students with the on-campus Rising Scholars reentry program. Where permitted, bring formerly incarcerated peer mentors and program leads into the jail to talk about the support offered on campus. Not all jails will allow this.

- Foster peer support between students within the classroom.

#### **Pillar 4: Ensure Learning**

- Teach interactive curriculum that works with the constraints of the jail. Computer access, internet connectivity, and access to classroom resources may be limited. Prepare to work within these constraints while still offering an engaging classroom experience.
- Utilize universal classroom design to support students with a variety of learning styles.
- Consider offering new students a course that covers the college experience and provides information about how to be a successful student.

## **PART II: GUIDED PATHWAYS FROM JAIL TO CAMPUS AND GRADUATION**

The journey for a student incarcerated in jail begins during incarceration, but often ends with the students on campus. As students move from incarceration to campus, pay special attention to onboarding. Students leaving jail may be ready for Pillar 2 if Pillar 1 was completed while incarcerated.

#### **Pillar 2: Enter the Path**

- While the student is still incarcerated, discuss whether they can commit to continuing their education upon release. Obtain multiple ways to reach the student, including phone, email, mailing address, and contact information for a close family member before you lose contact. If the student is not yet ready to enroll, set a date and time to connect with them in the future.
- Ensure that the student knows how to reach you upon release. Give the student a business card for the campus Rising Scholars program. If possible, give the student a picture of the Rising Scholars office on campus, so the student knows what to look for. If there are multiple colleges in the area, provide contact information for multiple Rising Scholars programs.
- Whether or not the student is able to enroll immediately upon release, provide them with a packet that includes but is not limited to:
  - the student's college email address, with login instructions
  - the student's upcoming course schedule, if known
  - transcripts
  - information on campus services
  - points of contact and meeting times for the Rising Scholars reentry club or program
  - details of the student's probation reporting requirements, if known

- Schedule a counseling appointment for the incarcerated student before they leave the facility, so the counselor can guide the student through certificate and degree options that were not available in the jail.
- Identify the student's desired pathway and assist them in enrolling in the appropriate courses on campus.
- Describe relevant student services on campus including but not limited to EOPS, mental health counseling, CalWorks, DSPS, ESL services, financial aid, academic counseling, and career services. When the student arrives on campus, Rising Scholars program staff or a peer mentor should take the student to each office, introduce the student to relevant staff, and walk them through the process to obtain support.
- Use enrollment in non-credit courses for students released between semesters to fill the gaps until the next academic semester begins.

### **Pillar 3: Stay on the Path**

- Connect students to the campus Rising Scholars program.
- Ensure that students know they have the option to disclose or not disclose their incarceration history.
- Hire formerly incarcerated peer mentors who can cultivate meaningful and supportive relationships with incoming Rising Scholars students, and use those peer mentors to help with the onboarding process.
- Cultivate campus-wide support for formerly incarcerated students by offering flex-day trainings featuring formerly incarcerated student leaders. Describe the college in jail programs to campus faculty, staff, and administrators who are not connected with the work.
- Support and highlight formerly incarcerated student leaders. Highlight formerly incarcerated student success stories and graduates.
- Provide students with work-study jobs on campus.
- Identify and address gaps in student needs such as childcare, transportation, and technology literacy.
- Connect with local community-based organizations to address student needs that the college cannot meet, including record expungement.
- Work with the student club or program to ensure participants have ample opportunities to develop a peer support network. Provide consistency through regular program meetings.
- Schedule counseling appointments for students nearing graduation to explore next steps.
- Support students in completing the application for graduation.
- Open transfer opportunities by connecting students with CSU's Project Rebound and UC's Underground Scholars. For students who are interested, help them plan tours of four-year colleges and universities.

**Rising Scholars students should experience Pillar 4: ENSURING LEARNING in alignment with all other students on campus if student supports outlined in Pillar 3 are provided.**

Many of the principles and best practices were pulled from the following resources:

[Serving Formerly Incarcerated Students Guiding Principles](#)

[Serving Students Incarcerated in Prison Guiding Principles](#)