

## **AP - College behind bars - An old idea with some new energy**

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MONROE, Wash. (AP) — Eight years ago, when Noel Caldellis began serving time for killing a university student, his main objective was to make 20-plus years in prison pass as quickly as possible: work out, walk circles in the yard with inmates and watch TV.

A few years into his sentence at the Monroe Correctional Complex, Caldellis discovered he could spend his time developing his mind as well as his body, moving from the weight room to the classroom.

“It’s helped me tremendously to grow as a person,” said Caldellis, who is working on a bachelor’s degree in history.

College education in American prisons is starting to grow again, more than two decades since federal government dollars were prohibited from being used for college programs behind bars.

The shift comes as everyone from President Barack Obama to state policymakers are looking for ways to get better results from the \$80 billion the U.S. spends annually on incarceration.

Private money kept some prison education programs going when government dollars vanished. Several recent studies have shown those projects cut crime and prison costs by helping inmates go home and stay there instead of returning.

“Education in prison is transformative. It leads to safer communities and that’s to the benefit of everyone,” said Fred Patrick, director of the Center on Sentencing and Corrections at the Vera Institute of Justice, a New York nonprofit that combines research and demonstration projects associated with criminal justice.

Now more dollars are starting to follow those results, led by a recent decision by the U.S. Department of Education to experiment again with federal Pell Grants for inmate students. Forty-seven states have applied to participate in that program. States such as Washington, New York and California also are looking into spending more state dollars on these programs.

Rudy Madrigal, a student in Washington’s University Beyond Bars program, said the experience transformed his life.

Madrigal, who expects to serve about 24 years for second-degree murder and assault with a deadly weapon, said he had a rough start to his sentence, getting in fights and other trouble.

“Since I started school and educating myself, I’ve built up connections not just with people in here but with people out there,” said Madrigal, who hopes after prison to get into social services to help other people.

While his path is personally enriching, state officials and prison experts say the community is the real beneficiary. A Rand Corporation study on education in prisons found inmates who participate in any kind of educational program behind bars are 43 percent less likely to reoffend.

One way Washington is unique among the states is how many inmates are participating in its education programs. It has about 16,500 inmates and 11,000 are involved in education, said Mike Paris, state administrator of offender education. In comparison, in California less than a quarter of its more than 112,000 inmates participate in educational programs.

The Vera Institute's Pathways from Prison to Post-Secondary Education Program, which is paid for with private foundation money, gives inmates a free college education, both in prison and after release, along with other supports such as mentoring and housing assistance for inmates in Michigan, New Jersey and North Carolina. In 2014, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said the state would be putting money back into inmate education programs. Lawmakers fought the plan, saying it rewarded criminal behavior, but others pointed out how much less expensive it is to educate prisoners than to incarcerate them.

Authorities estimate New York spends about \$60,000 a year to incarcerate one prisoner while a year of college in prison will cost about \$5,000.

Katja Schatte, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington who teaches world history at the Washington state prison in Monroe, said criminal justice reform is intertwined with so many things happening in American society today — from the Black Lives Matter movement to inequity in public schools.

“People should be thinking about how do we keep people out of prisons in the first place and education is the answer,” Schatte said.