

Correctional Education Council (CEC) Board Meeting Minutes
July 28, 2025
Google Meet

Council Members

Secretary Carolyn J. Scruggs, Co-Chair, Deputy Secretary Jason Perkins-Cohen, Jack Weber, Jennifer Gauthier, Ruschelle Reuben, Dr. Kathleen M. Jordan-D'Ambrisi, Sarah Sheppard, Lyndsay Silva, Mary Ann Thompson, Rachael Stephens Parker

Staff and Guests

Ainsley Moench, Alyssa Webster, Andre James, Benjamin Mourad, Brittney Hansen, Casey Tiefenwerth, Danielle Cox, Deron Crawford, Ellen Bredt, Erica DuBose, Frances Tracy-Mumford, Francisco Vega, Heather Evans, Henry Franklin Jr, Janell Johnson, Jennifer Swiech, Jessica Johnson, Julie Givens, Kari Pompili, Katharine Lander, Melissa Murphy, Monica Thomas, Patrick Hruz, Peggy DallAcqua, Shakera Lambert, Stacey Royal, Stephen Steurer, Tamara Barron, Tanja Murphy, Tawanda Redding, Tayaabah Qazi, Terenda Thomas

Absent

Rachel Stephens Parker, Mary Ann Thompson, Secretary Carolyn J. Scruggs

Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) Deputy Secretary, Jason Perkins-Cohen called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from April 30 and December 2 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

Instructional Excellence and Data-Driven Practices

Director Reuben highlighted the systemwide focus on instructional excellence through classroom observations, professional learning communities, and targeted professional development. Deputy Director Johnson outlined scaffolded instructional strategies designed to meet adult learners' needs, supported by statewide learning sessions, principal-led coaching, and instructional rounds. Baseline classroom data was collected across institutions, and professional learning communities are being established to allow teachers to collaborate in subject- and role-specific groups, share best practices, and continually refine instruction. A new professional development framework was also introduced to align regional and local training with broader Correctional Education goals.

FY26 will specifically target scaffolded instruction designed to engage adult learners, drawing from adult learning theory to close gaps in students' prior educational experiences. The Plan-Do-Study-Act model is guiding this process, with principals meeting monthly to review enrollment, attendance, and completion data in real time. Instructional rounds conducted quarterly provide direct insights into teaching practices, classroom environments, and alignment to instructional standards. Teachers are using aligned materials and fostering positive classroom climates, but that more work is needed on explicit scaffolding and connecting instruction to

students' lived experiences. Professional learning is mapped for the year, including quarterly statewide sessions and school-level follow-ups led by principals and teacher leaders. Teachers are observed monthly, provided with feedback, and given coaching support as needed.

Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen emphasized the Council's role in reviewing data such as enrollment, attendance, and GED completions to identify patterns, compare facilities, and drive improvements. The importance of connecting instructional work directly to measurable outcomes was stressed.

Program Accessibility and Virtual Learning

Efforts to expand access include integrating virtual instruction, tablet use, and flexible reporting systems. Virtual learning is being used to mitigate disruptions caused by lockdowns, transfers, and facility shutdowns. Leadership discussed the need for night school and after-hours programs, though staffing shortages remain a limiting factor. Planning is also underway for a special high school certificate program for students with disabilities who cannot pursue a GED.

The accessibility strategy is also informed by successful transitional independent study pilots that have already provided students with flexible, self-paced learning at five institutions. Complementing this, correctional education has begun introducing social-emotional learning programming, with a focus on de-escalation skills and addressing non-academic barriers that affect student readiness.

Transition and Reentry Services

Dr. Erica DuBose reported 1,387 completions in FY25, surpassing the goal of 1,000, aided by the expansion of staff from 7 to 14 and the launch of new initiatives. Highlights include pilot tablet-based independent study programs, the first Entrepreneurship Academy cohort, and large-scale "Teacher Talk" workshops that reached hundreds of students. FY26 goals include 2,000 completions,

A major priority moving forward is the development of universal transition plans for all students. With added transition specialists, every student will leave with an individualized plan that integrates their academic progress, career goals, and special education needs where applicable. These plans will be shared with workforce systems like MWE (Maryland Workforce Exchange), allowing post-release re-entry navigators to access records and track labor outcomes. Together, these efforts aim to create a seamless handoff from correctional education to workforce reentry, improving alignment with DPSCS and labor partners and ensuring returning citizens have clearer pathways into employment and continued education.

Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen requested a consolidated chart at the next meeting to clarify how entry and transition specialists from different agencies align and avoid duplication. In addition, it was requested that correctional education keep track of how specific programs impact re-entry outcomes.

Library Services

Jennifer Swiech has focused on unifying correctional facility libraries and aligning them with national standards to ensure equitable, high-impact programming across all 14 sites. Swiech highlighted

efforts to make libraries hubs of correctional education and reentry preparation. Libraries are increasingly integrated with academics, occupational programs, and transition services, serving as key access points for literacy development, research, and social services. Librarians have adopted trauma-informed practices, a model already used in public and K–12 libraries, to create welcoming environments that encourage learning and help patrons bridge disrupted educational experiences. This includes new literacy-focused programming, patron-driven collection development, and universal models like “Books in a Bag” book clubs led by incarcerated individuals themselves. The emphasis is shifting from volume-based metrics to impact data that measures how library programming influences student outcomes and supports reentry.

FY26 will focus on strengthening librarians’ capacity to deliver high-impact programs, expanding library card registration so more patrons see themselves as users, and enhancing circulation tracking with a more robust system. Partnerships with CE leadership and community libraries such as Enoch Pratt are also being expanded to connect incarcerated learners with outside resources before release.

Special Education

Katherine Lander reported 169 students with IEPs served in FY25, with challenges in maintaining compliance due to transfers, security-related shutdowns, and outdated IEP records at intake. CE is aiming for a 90% compliance rate in FY26, with plans to conduct more meetings on segregation units and to schedule IEP reviews earlier.

Data shows that roughly 75% of special education students enter at the lowest levels of academic readiness. As a result, only 2 special education students earned a GED in FY25 which highlights the need for targeted instructional strategies. A significant number of students also exit services due to aging out at 21, release, or transfer from facilities like MTC, which experiences high turnover. New efforts include development of a high school certificate program for students unable to complete a GED, strategies to improve compliance rates, and the publication of a transition workbook tailored to students with disabilities. The goal is to ensure special education students have clearer pathways and stronger reentry preparation. Special educators will also collaborate regionally on professional learning in areas like differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and IEP implementation.

Academic Programs

In FY25, the program awarded 330 GEDs, slightly below the goal of 350, but marking a 25% increase from the previous year’s 265 completions. Despite facility shutdowns and restricted classroom access in some institutions, schools employed creative testing strategies and alternative instruction models to sustain progress. This was accomplished with strong leadership from principals, dedicated classroom instruction, and a heightened sense of urgency across the system as key factors in driving growth.

Looking ahead to FY26, the academic program has set a target of 385 GEDs, aiming for another 10% increase. Confidence in achieving this rests on ongoing professional development, expansion of hybrid and tablet-based learning (particularly in facilities most impacted by shutdowns). The program also began exploring alternative pathways such as the National External Diploma Program, which could provide a nontraditional route to completion for some learners.

Occupational Programs

In FY25, occupational training programs saw a 24.5% increase in industry-recognized credentials, rising to 1,465 earned. Key milestones included the launch of heavy equipment operator training simulators across six facilities, the first-time achievement of expert-level Microsoft Office certifications, and students earning ASE G1 professional-level auto tech credentials while still enrolled in entry-level training. The integration of tablets allowed learning to continue during disruptions, and renewed grant funding for the Certified Peer Recovery Specialist program supported further expansion.

FY26 priorities include expanding stackable credentials, increasing tablet-based and hybrid instruction, and piloting short-term pre-occupational workshops for students unable to complete longer programs before release. New CPRS cohorts will be launched to keep the pipeline strong, while cross-training and professional development will enhance instructional quality. By working closely with DPSCS and industry partners, correctional education aims to not only sustain but expand opportunities that build employable skills, provide meaningful certifications, and better prepare students for successful reentry into the workforce.

Concluding Remarks (Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen & Secretary Scruggs)

The meeting was adjourned at 2:53 p.m.