

Transforming Lives with Equitable and Consistent Access to Education

Blackboard's safe and secure learning environment means more opportunities for residents of Kansas Department of Corrections facilities.

Headquartered in Topeka, the Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC) operates eight adult correctional facilities throughout the state and oversees nearly 10,000 residents. With a mission of "partnering to promote safety and responsibility through best practices to carry out our vision of transforming lives for the safety of all," the agency offers educational programming to improve employment opportunities and help transform the lives of incarcerated individuals.

In April 2023, a revised Second Chance Pell experiment was announced, providing need-based Pell Grants to incarcerated individuals to allow them to participate in eligible postsecondary programs. And, earlier this year, the KDOC qualified for a governmental grant for technology to support residents' access to education and job skill training, including digital equipment and solutions for higher education.



INSTITUTION TYPE:
GOVERNMENT AGENCY

LOCATION:
TOPEKA, KANSAS

RESIDENTS:
9,586

STUDENTS:
200

COLLEGE PARTNERS:
10

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCT:
Blackboard





The Challenges

KDOC college partners' students can utilize Pell Grant funding to provide access to higher education across the agency's facilities.

Prior to government grant funding, KDOC residents relied on tablets to complete college assignments and were restricted to completing coursework offline. "Students were doing college programming and writing college papers on a tablet. Trying to write a paper, pecking at keys on a small tablet is pretty difficult," said Jennifer Brunenn, education coordinator for the Kansas Department of Corrections. "So, we wanted to be able to get laptops in their hands, not only to make their learning easier, but for us to be able to see how our students were performing. We wanted to be able to look at courses if we needed to and make sure our students are getting a quality education. We want their education to be equitable to the education students receive on a traditional campus."

Creating an equitable learning environment meant not only providing students with the right technology tools but also a seamless and consistent online experience. While some of KDOC's college partners were using a learning management system (LMS), others were not using one at all. KDOC decided it was time for a statewide LMS. "We really needed a consistent platform," said Macy Pickman, education director for the Kansas Department of Corrections.

KDOC also prioritizes safely and securely delivering technology and resources to students. The LMS itself had to be FedRAMP® authorized in GovCloud.

Part of our vision is transforming the lives for the safety of all. So this is one of those aspects, and one of the things is to invest in individuals. So we're investing in them and their education by providing this platform.



—Macy Pickman

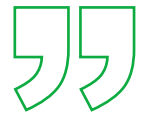
Education Director, Kansas Department of Corrections





With security being a critical consideration for the Kansas Department of Corrections, Anthology® Blackboard became the clear LMS choice. Blackboard on Amazon Web Services (AWS) GovCloud is FedRAMP and StateRAMP® moderate authorized.

We liked how robust Blackboard was, but we also loved that it was already FedRAMP approved, meaning that it's really safe for corrections and we don't have to worry about there being any breach in security.



—**Jennifer Brunenn**

Education Coordinator, Kansas Department of Corrections

This single, consistent LMS would enable KDOC to readily access and track student progress, attendance, and grades without relying on college partners to provide the information. Additionally, it would allow any residents who transferred to a different facility within the state to continue to access and use a platform with which they were familiar.

In February 2022, the KDOC selected Blackboard and began in-depth planning sessions with Anthology and each KDOC college partner. Anthology prepared a Learning Technology Planning overview to outline and document the training, team structures, goals, and other related aspects of the adoption of Blackboard. Implementation included creating a CSS overlay, a layer of code integrated with the Blackboard environment, customizing the platform to meet the specific needs of correctional facilities. “We actually listened to a lot of the tablet companies in the space and secure laptop companies so that we could appropriately secure Blackboard,” said Tom Herrmann, senior account executive at Anthology. Communication tools, for example, prevent students from communicating with one another but





Not only getting access to the courses but getting access to that digital literacy is going to help tremendously.

—Jennifer Brunenn

Education Coordinator
Kansas Department of
Corrections

still provide an avenue to directly communicate with their instructor and receive instructor feedback.

Currently, four KDOC college partners are using Blackboard, with plans to have them all using it by early 2025. To ensure the separation of data, each college partner is segmented with their own node in Blackboard.

More access to education and different programs will give incarcerated individuals more opportunities. “With [Second Chance Pell], we’re going to have a lot more colleges wanting to come in and offer programming. A lot of the programming will probably be online,” said Brunenn. “So with that, we could potentially expand access to more education programming, which is big for me. I think students should get the choice to pick what they want to study. Not everyone wants to be a welder.”

The agency has even expanded its educational offerings to include remote internships and apprenticeships.

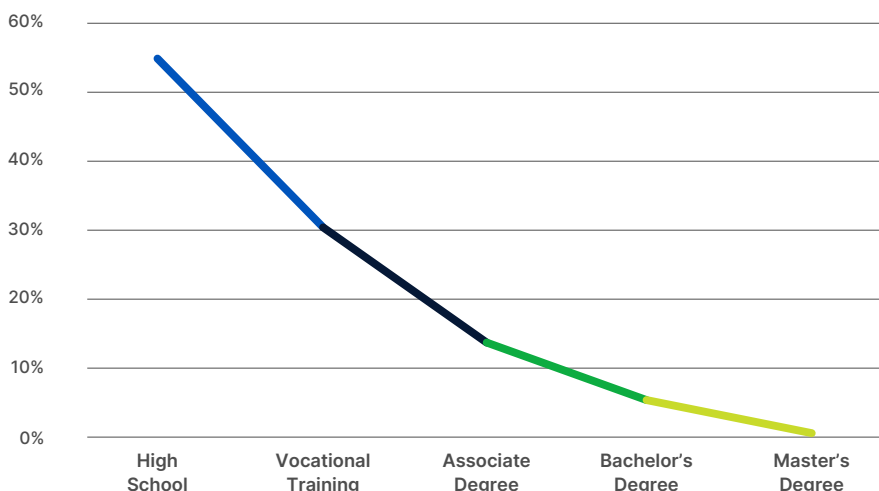
Why the Right Tech Matters

Studies have found that by completing just one college course, individuals are 20% more likely to gain livable wage employment. Research also indicates that people who enroll in education programs while incarcerated see higher earnings and reduced rates of crime relapse, which can lead to reincarceration or recidivism.



**Insights
Delivered**

Education and Recidivism Rates



- Formerly incarcerated individuals who complete some high school courses have recidivism rates of around 55%
- Vocational training cut recidivism to approximately 30%
- An associate degree drops the rate to 13.7%
- A bachelor's degree reduces it to 5.6%
- A master's degree brings recidivism to 0%

"Between 2016 and 2022, Kansas had just 875 students enrolled in higher education programming statewide. That's an average of 125 students. In 2023 alone, that number jumped to 932. Already, we've expanded from 22 higher education programs to 39 programs. All with the help of Second Chance Pell and Anthology," said Brunenn.



Epilogue

In the future, KDOC hopes to expand its offerings to include statewide programs and eventually become a hub for programs and education. Plans are also underway to set up staff training courses in Blackboard. "Honestly, I want to see every piece of staff training in it," said Brunenn. "I want every person that's taking a college course—whether it be online or an in-person course—I want them in Blackboard."

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Products highlighted in this customer case study:

Blackboard

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