



FLORIDA CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Dear CEA-FL Members,

I want to take a moment to express my sincere appreciation for your continued participation and dedication to correctional education. Your commitment to our chapter and our shared mission of transforming lives through education is truly inspiring.

I am excited to announce that nominations are now open for the **CEA Teacher of the Year** award! This is a fantastic opportunity to recognize the outstanding educators who go above and beyond in their service to students. If you know someone who exemplifies excellence in correctional education, I encourage you to submit a nomination. Nominations will be accepted until April 4th, so don't miss the chance to honor a deserving educator. Let's celebrate the incredible work being done across Florida!

Additionally, I invite you all to attend the **CEA Forum in Omaha, NE, taking place April 26-29, 2025**. This annual event is a great way to connect with fellow professionals, gain valuable insights, and engage in meaningful discussions about the future of correctional education. I hope to see many of you there!

I also want to thank everyone who has joined our **Monthly Virtual Meet & Greets**, held on the **third Thursday of each month**. These gatherings provide a wonderful opportunity to share ideas, ask questions, and build a stronger community within our chapter. If you haven't attended yet, I encourage you to join us! Thank you again for your hard work and dedication. Together, we are making a difference.

Best regards,

Robert Melgaard

President, CEA-FL

Mark Your Calendars:

2025 Correctional Education Association Forum

Join us for the 2025 CEA Forum: Sowing Seeds of Success Through Correctional Education, happening April 27-29, 2025, in vibrant Omaha, Nebraska.

This year's forum will bring together educators, administrators, and stakeholders to explore innovative strategies and solutions that transform lives through correctional education.

Don't miss this opportunity to network, share insights, and drive positive change in our field. Visit ceanational.org for more details and registration information. Let's sow the seeds of success together!



Message from the Secretary

Conner Birdsong
Secretary, CEA - Florida

Dear CEA-FL Members,

I recently had the privilege of attending the Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) Academic Conference in Tampa, FL, where I had the opportunity to connect with dedicated correctional educators, administrators, and stakeholders who are committed to improving education within our institutions. It was an inspiring event that reinforced the critical role of education in successful reentry and rehabilitation efforts.

During my time at the conference, I had the pleasure of discussing the many benefits of becoming a member of the Correctional Education Association (CEA). As many of you know, CEA serves as a vital network for professionals working in correctional education, providing access to valuable resources, research, professional development opportunities, and a platform to share best practices. The conversations I had with attendees highlighted the need for continued collaboration, advocacy, and innovation to enhance educational programs for incarcerated learners.

CEA membership offers access to a wealth of knowledge, including professional journals, networking opportunities, and training sessions designed to support educators in navigating the unique challenges of teaching in correctional settings. By joining CEA, we strengthen our collective voice and work together to improve educational outcomes, build stronger programs, and advocate for policies that support correctional education.

I encourage all correctional educators to take advantage of the benefits that CEA offers. Whether you are new to the field or a seasoned professional, being part of this association allows us to grow, learn, and support one another in our shared mission. If you have any questions about CEA membership or would like to get involved, please feel free to reach out!

Thank you for the work you do every day to make a difference in the lives of incarcerated learners. I look forward to continuing these important conversations and working alongside you to advance correctional education in Florida.



Celebrating Administrative Professionals in Correctional Education

April is Administrative Professionals Month, a time to recognize the dedicated individuals who keep our correctional education programs running smoothly. In the Correctional Education Departments, administrative professionals play a critical role in ensuring that educators, students, and institutions have the support they need to succeed.

From managing class schedules and processing student records to coordinating instructor resources and maintaining compliance with state policies, these professionals are the backbone of educational programming within correctional facilities. Their attention to detail, problem-solving skills, and commitment to efficiency help create opportunities for incarcerated individuals to gain education and workforce skills that lead to successful reintegration.

This month, we extend our deepest gratitude to these often-unsung heroes. Your hard work and dedication are transforming lives every day—thank you for all that you do!

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Christopher Dang, Education Supervisor at Baker Re-Entry Center, has dedicated eight years to correctional education, driven by a passion for growth and student success. A committed member of the Correctional Education Association (CEA), he values the professional development opportunities—continuing education, training, and research—that keep him at the forefront of the field.

At Baker Re-Entry Center, Christopher pursued CEA Accreditation to ensure high-quality educational standards, aiming to break the cycle of incarceration and transform lives. The process deepened his understanding of the need for strong policies, trained staff, and resources focused on administration, personnel, programs, and students. He encourages newcomers to network with seasoned professionals for collaboration and support.

Christopher finds motivation in the profound impact of his work, equipping students with life skills, education, and career training to reintegrate successfully. His career highlights include achieving CEA Accreditation and being named Florida Department of Corrections' Education Supervisor of the Year in 2024. A standout success story is Chanci Mixon, a former student who, with Christopher's guidance, overcame reentry challenges, reunited with his family, earned a CDL license, and now pursues a theology degree while mentoring youth. Chanci's journey embodies the transformative power of education and second chances that Christopher champions every day.

Know someone who should be featured next? Submit a recommendation for our Member Spotlight and help us recognize outstanding correctional educators!



An Education Matters—Give Prisoners One

Kris Bertelsen

Most people don't think of correctional facilities as education strongholds to foster learning and second chances, but now is a perfect time to reframe that thinking and highlight the innovation taking place in prison education and the change it can drive.

I've run Huntington Junior College's education program at South Bay Correctional Facility, Florida Department of Corrections, for two years. I work with some incarcerated individuals serving short sentences and others serving much longer sentences, including "lifers." The program we offer — with college-level classes in entrepreneurship, business management, and civics — is voluntary, and when I work with the students who enroll, I don't see many who have permanent chips on their shoulders.

Instead, I see students, people, who have taken a wrong turn in life — some very wrong — looking for a second chance. Most of the students in our program are enthusiastic learners who want to do their very best. Providing them with a connection to education, a shot at opportunity, is both the right and smart thing to do.

The challenge of recidivism gets a great deal of attention. That's understandable. More than 600,000 Americans will be released from state and federal prisons this year, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Within three years, data suggests, two-thirds will be rearrested again and more than half will be re-incarcerated. In far too many cases it's because they face daunting obstacles when they try to return to their communities. How do we break the cycle of recidivism and offer second chances without endangering public safety? How do we improve the lives of incarcerated people? The answer to both lies in education. Our program, and others like it, can help individuals with criminal backgrounds reestablish their footing when they're released by putting them in touch with intellectual pursuits while incarcerated. The prison education environment is changing, and HJC is proud to be part of it.

HJC has worked with Securus Technologies, using secure tablets to provide online courses with Lantern, Securus's learning management system, for the past couple of years. Under Securus's leadership, we can provide incarcerated students with academic experiences that are similar to those students experience on campus. We recently collaborated with Securus to provide students with access to JSTOR, a world-renowned database of academic articles. Access to this resource helps HJC students take their research and writing to the next level.

Data show that increased access to education reduces recidivism. Policymakers, who are beginning to realize that even modest reductions in recidivism can have huge economic and social impacts, have started to show renewed interest in prison education in recent years. In 2015, for example, Washington launched an experimental Second Chance Pell Grant pilot program giving some incarcerated students access to Pell funding. More recently, in December 2020, the FAFSA Simplification Act reestablished permanent Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students. This change took effect for the 2024-25 academic year. Changes like this can positively affect the trajectory of people's lives.

What policymakers face when poring over budgets and balancing the demands of various special interests is dramatically different from what I see in these students. I prefer my view and would like to extend it to others — because I see incarcerated students who are grateful, eager learners and want to do their best.

In their journal writings and assignments, I've read the stories of people who learned from their past mistakes and now sincerely want to help others. Some are now using what they learn in class to point their children, spouses, and fellow prisoners in the right direction. Education truly changes lives. Most incarcerated people will get out of prison and, ideally, return to their families and homes. It's in everybody's best interest to help them land on their feet and become successful contributors to society. Access to technology and learning management systems like those available through Securus play an essential role in HJC's mission to educate incarcerated people and help them achieve their goals.

Teacher OF THE Year

CEA-FL is now accepting nominations for the 2025 Teacher of the Year!

Help us recognize outstanding educators who transform lives through correctional education.

Submit your nomination to Conner@FloridaCEA.org by April 4, 2025, and celebrate the exceptional work of your colleagues.

NEW TEACHER ONBOARDING STATEMENT

CEA-FL is excited to support new educators in correctional education through our onboarding connections initiative! Designed to help you navigate this unique teaching environment, this program provides valuable resources, mentorship opportunities, and a network of peers to ensure your success.

Whether you're seeking advice, classroom strategies, or a sense of community, we're here to guide you every step of the way. Together, we can transform lives through education.

For more information or to get connected, contact us at Conner@FloridaCEA.org.



Reminder: We Value Your Feedback!

Don't forget to share your input by completing the survey! Your feedback is essential in helping us improve and shape future initiatives.

Click the link to participate:

[Complete the Survey](#)

Thank you for your time and valuable insights!