

The Windham School District (WSD) was established by the authority of Senate Bill 35, passed into law by the 61st Texas Legislature to be effective for the school year 1968-69 and thereafter. WSD was reauthorized by Chapter 19 of Senate Bill 1 adopted by the 74th Texas Legislature in 1995. This program is supported by the Foundation School Program and is governed by the policies of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice, which serves as the Windham Board of Trustees.

In keeping with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) tradition of naming prison units or major programs within the prison system for persons who have made outstanding contributions to correctional work, the Texas Board of Criminal Justice named the new school district for Mr. James M. Windham of Livingston, a 24-year member of the Board, retired.

The mission of the Windham School District is to provide appropriate educational programming and services to meet the needs of the eligible offender population in TDCJ and reduce recidivism by assisting offenders in becoming responsible, productive members of their communities.

The goals of the Windham School District are to:

- reduce recidivism;
- reduce the cost of confinement or imprisonment;
- increase the success of former inmates in obtaining and maintaining employment; and
- provide an incentive to inmates to behave in positive ways during confinement or imprisonment.

The Windham program is unique in almost every respect. It is the first education system of such scope to be established within a statewide prison system. Classes are conducted on 88 facilities located throughout the state. Over 80,000 offenders attend Windham classes during a school year.

A comprehensive assessment process is used to target and appropriately place students for maximum program benefit. The process includes achievement testing, GED testing, and vocational assessment.

Offenders are selected for enrollment in WSD programs based on the Individualized Treatment Plan (ITP) process. The ITP is a plan of treatment for an individual offender. The plan outlines programmatic activities and services for an offender, and prioritizes his/her participation in recommended programs based on the offender's needs, program availability, and projected release date. Offenders who are less than 35 years of age and within five years of projected release have the highest priority for placement in academic and vocational programs.

An integrated academic/career and technology education program provides instruction in the foundation skills and workplace competencies identified by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). An interdisciplinary approach is used to address multiple learning styles and learning in real-world contexts. Emphasis is placed on the skills employers demand, such as personal qualities, cultural sensitivity/tolerance, teamwork, decision-making, and problem solving.

The literacy program provides adult basic education for offenders functioning below the sixth grade level and secondary level adult education for those who are working toward attainment of a high school equivalency certificate (GED). Based on individual achievement, students are assigned to beginning, intermediate, or advanced level classes. Literacy classes are non-graded, competency-based, and operate on a 12-month scholastic year. Students generally attend literacy classes three hours per day. Students with reading skills below the fourth grade level may be enrolled in Literacy I--Reading, a special program designed to provide intensive instruction in reading. Other program options include Special Education services for students with disabilities and English as a Second Language (ESL) for students with limited English proficiency.

Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) labs are available at most campuses, providing opportunities for diagnostic, prescriptive, computer-based instruction to support and enhance the academic program.

The Career and Technology Education (CTE) program provides occupational training in a variety of areas. Projected employment opportunities and industry standards guide decisions to restructure courses, add new courses, or discontinue courses no longer considered viable for the labor market. CTE courses are designed to provide training to entry-level industry standards. The courses range from full-length courses (600 hours) to short courses (45 to 200 hours). Short courses are offered periodically to prepare offenders for specific prison jobs or to provide basic occupational skills training for offenders with imminent release dates.

A reintegration program, entitled Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success (CHANGES), offers a life skills curriculum to prepare offenders for release. The program content includes family relationships and parenting, civic and legal responsibilities, victim sensitivity, health maintenance, employability, money management, and other related life skills.

Cognitive Intervention, a program designed to improve behavior during incarceration and after release, teaches students to meet their needs without trespassing on the rights of others. Through instruction and exercises in interpersonal problem solving, the program helps offenders with anger management, problem solving, interpersonal communications, and self-control.

WSD offers a Parenting program at state jail facilities. The program provides a communication-based, interactive approach to support the development of healthy family relationships.

In response to hate crimes legislation, WSD offers a tolerance program for incoming offenders. In this 15-day program, entitled Perspectives and Solutions, students explore cultural diversity, personal identity, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (including racial, ethnic, religious, gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical disability). Students also receive extensive exposure to problem-solving techniques.

Windham School District has been accredited by the Texas Education Agency since September 1970. In December 1976, Windham received full accreditation from the Southern Association of College and Schools (SACS), thus becoming the first correctional education system in the United States to achieve such status from a regional accreditation agency. Accreditation with SACS was continued until December 1995.