

*Universities in six urban/metropolitan communities are building new forms of collaboration with local K-12 schools. The efforts focus on change strategies which are attempting to advance educational reforms at both the school and university levels to improve the academic achievement and success of all students, with particular attention to poor and minority children and youth. Undergirding the work in the six communities is the engagement of a broad spectrum of stakeholders both within and outside K-12 and post-secondary institutions. Informing their work are several principles which may serve as promising guides for defining "systemic," K-16 education reform in other urban/metropolitan communities attempting to reform their public educational systems.*

# Community Compacts: *Models for Metropolitan Universities*

Colleges and universities have had a long history in working collaboratively with K-12 educational institutions--ranging from creating programs to increase minority high school student access to higher education, to providing professional development opportunities for urban school teachers, to developing more substantive subject matter content for the courses taught in the schools.

However, much of higher education's engagement with schools has remained at the margins--programs have often reached only small numbers of students and teachers; collaborative initiatives have often remained dependent on short-term funding sources; university faculty engaged in such work often have received little in the way of institutional recognition or rewards for their efforts; and little connection has been made between school reform and the need for change within higher education institutions themselves. At the same time, a wide range of education leaders at the community, state, and national levels have also drawn increasing attention to the need for dramatic improvements in student achievement in the nation's urban areas, particularly for minority and poor students--improvements which would require an equally dramatic increase in the number and effectiveness of collaborative programs to help *all* students reach much higher levels of academic preparation and success.

## **The Pew-AAHE Initiative**

Together with The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Education Trust of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) began in 1991 a long-term effort, the Community Compacts for Student Success initiative, to help colleges and universities think differently about their engagement with K-12 education, to help move toward a more *systemic* way of thinking about university/school collabo-

ration. Although no single research source can be named as the basis for the Pew/AAHE initiative, the general experience during the past decade of the Boston Compact has been a particular influence on Pew's original thinking for the initiative; similarly, AAHE's own long-term experience with issues of school-college collaboration and higher education reform has been an importance source for the orientation brought to the Compact initiative by its Education Trust.

The Boston Compact, a school-business-higher education collaborative effort, has been in place in Boston since the early 1980s. Robert Schwartz, director of the Education Program at Pew, was a founder of the Compact and remained closely tied to its management for a number of years. Both the positive lessons (for example, the willingness of business and other community partners to commit significant resources to improved job and life chances for Boston high school graduates) as well as more negative ones (for example, that collaboration rooted in goodwill still may not produce significant improvements in the academic realities for most urban high school students and, therefore, that collaboration for deeper changes in K-12 education is a much more difficult, long-term enterprise than many had anticipated) have been important in Pew's conceptualization of the current Compact effort. In addition, the AAHE Education Trust has had a number of years of experience in sponsoring national conferences and initiatives on the subject of school-college collaboration as well as in sponsoring a number of publications such as the national directory of school-college partnerships, *Linking America's Schools and Colleges* (Washington: American Association for Higher Education, 1991). The Trust has engaged in extensive work and conversation with many leading scholars and practitioners in the areas of education reform and school-college collaboration and has integrated their knowledge and experience into its own approach to education reform work, particularly in the Community Compacts for Student Success initiative.

### Basic Principles

The Community Compacts for Student Success initiative seeks to make schools and universities as a whole--indeed, whole educational systems--work more effectively for all students, especially those who are poor and minority. The Compacts initiative is based on several underlying beliefs:

- that *all* students have the potential to succeed in postsecondary-level work and should be educated as if they were bound for college or university;
- that closing the gap between achievement and college success requires fundamental change in the way both schools and universities do their work;
- that the improvement of teaching and learning must be at the heart of any change strategy;
- that student achievement data, properly displayed, analyzed, and reported, can and must be an essential tool in the creation of any change strategy;
- that real change is most likely when school systems and universities engage in collaboratively planned, simultaneous reform;
- that strong community voices must be engaged in the reform discussion; and
- that partners in reform must commit to at least a decade-long effort to mount, sustain and mobilize community support for the reform initiative.

### How Communities Were Selected

When the Compacts initiative began at the end of 1991, Pew and the AAHE Education Trust invited college and university presidents, school superintendents,

and others to submit proposals for one-year \$40,000 planning grants to develop long-term strategies for systemic education reform in their communities. Proposals were received from over 100 institutions and communities across the nation; a majority were developed by urban and metropolitan universities. Twenty of the applicant communities received site visits during the winter of 1992 from AAHE and Pew staff members. Ten communities were selected that spring to receive the initial planning grants: Birmingham (AL), Boston (MA), El Paso (TX), Gary (IN), Hartford (CT), Philadelphia (PA), Phoenix (AZ), Portland (OR), Providence (RI), and Pueblo (CO).

Each of the ten communities engaged in a year- to eighteen-month planning effort based on gathering and using K-12 and postsecondary student achievement data, in a process led by broadly representative working committees in each city composed of K-12 and postsecondary administrators and faculty members, businesses, community-based organizations, parents, and other stakeholders in education. Out of this process, six communities were able to develop strategies for long-term systemic education reform in which (as of mid-1994) Pew is investing more significant support--\$150,000 annually per site--during the next three years, with potential continuation for another three years. These communities are:

- Birmingham (Birmingham Compact)
- El Paso (El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence)
- Hartford (Hartford Urban Education Network)
- Philadelphia (North Philadelphia Community Compact for College Access and Success)
- Providence (Providence Community Compact for Student Success)
- Pueblo (Pueblo Community Compact)

### Local Structures and Strategies

Each Community Compact engages leaders from universities, two-year colleges, urban school districts, businesses, and community-based organizations in intensive work to develop and implement *systemic* strategies for improving academic achievement and success for all students from kindergarten through the baccalaureate degree. These strategies incorporate five elements which Pew and the AAHE Education Trust believe are central to systemic reform:

- establishing clear, high goals and standards for all students;
- using and reporting publicly data on student achievement at all levels;
- shifting authority and responsibility for teaching and learning to the school building and university department levels;
- providing professional development support structures to students, teachers, faculty members, administrators, and parents; and
- developing accountability systems with real consequences for success and failure for schools/departments, professionals, and students.

The overall direction of each local Compact is guided by a board of directors, policy steering committee, or similar group composed of key college and university presidents and chancellors (both two-year and four-year), the local school superintendent(s), and key community leaders (including corporate executives, public officials, heads of community-based organizations and parent groups, and the like). The day-to-day work of each Compact is directed by a person who is designated as the Compact coordinator or manager and who commits at least half of his or her time to the position. In some cases, the manager is a university faculty mem-

ber, in others a school district administrator, and in still others is housed in a separately-incorporated entity. In some communities, such as Birmingham and Providence, co-managers have been appointed from the university and the school district. In all cases, however, the ability of the Compact manager or coordinator to facilitate communication among the many (and sometimes conflicting) community stakeholders in education has been a key to the initial effectiveness of local Compacts and, indeed, to their ability to receive long-term support from Pew.

The range of activities undertaken by each local Compact is quite broad and will be discussed in greater detail below. However, some general observations can be made about issues guiding the Compacts in their first full year of work (1993-94):

- Each Compact is attempting to pursue both a “top-down” and “bottom-up” change strategy. Basic support for engagement in systemic reform work is created within the top leadership group, but the development and implementation of specific strategies and programs occur at the “grass-roots” level – from faculty members, school and department administrators, community leaders, parents, and others who deal with student retention and achievement issues on a daily basis. Each of the six Compact communities can show significant engagement at both the institutional leadership and the community/classroom levels, as well as by persons at many points in-between.

- The development of new strategies to improve student achievement, or the re-orientation of those already in place, has not inevitably led to the creation of lots of new programs and projects. The work of the Compacts has often been as much or more about the re-direction or re-allocation of *existing* programs and resources in order to have a more significant impact on the academic success of larger numbers of students. For example, the work of the North Philadelphia Compact has been based significantly on the effort of the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative to create charter schools within the city’s high schools. Many of the strategies proposed in Providence are building on a wide range of existing programs between the University of Rhode Island and the Providence School Department. The health-related strategies of the Birmingham Compact will incorporate already-operating collaborative relationships between the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the surrounding community.

- A fundamental idea guiding Compact work is the creation of systemic reform strategies across the education continuum, not simply at the K-12 level. If there is an idea that may be particularly “radical” about the Compact approach, it is the belief that *both* K-12 and postsecondary education need to reassess what they are doing in order to have a bigger impact on the educational success of much larger numbers of students. Each of the six Compact communities has proposed a set of strategies for change at the postsecondary level, some of which will be described later in this article. All the Compacts are finding that *engaging* postsecondary institutions in a mutual reform effort with K-12 will be one of the most difficult, challenging aspects of their work during the next three years.

### Focus on Access and Retention

The Compact communities each have placed a particular focus on addressing access and retention issues for students at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. Some examples of initial Compact activities include:

**Improving the quality of K-12 teaching and curriculum:** Several Compacts are focusing significant time and attention to long-term professional develop-

ment for K-12 faculty members and principals in inner-city, low-income schools, both to improve faculty content knowledge in subject areas such as mathematics and science, and to build school-based teams to work on and support each other in more systemic approaches to improve the academic success of all students in their schools. El Paso is entering its third year of such institute work during 1994, and Birmingham will begin its first institutes during the summer of 1994.

**Improving the quality of teaching and teacher preparation at the postsecondary level:** Several Compacts are devoting energy to reshaping the quality and content of teacher education programs within postsecondary institutions, as well as addressing the need for improving the quality of undergraduate teaching by college faculty. The University of Texas at El Paso is reshaping its entire teacher education approach as a part of the Compact work in that city; Pueblo is developing a single entity which will provide resources and professional development for the improvement of teaching and learning for faculty both in the participating school districts and the participating four-year university.

**Providing students with more conducive learning environments:** In order to create more conducive environments in which their students can flourish academically, several Compact communities are developing small, face-to-face communities in which students are known and supported, and in which their contributions are valued. The terminology for these smaller, human-scale units can vary widely from place to place. For example, these small communities are known in Philadelphia's high schools as "charter schools" or "schools-within-schools;" at postsecondary institutions such as Temple University or the Community College of Philadelphia, such units are usually known as "learning communities." In Philadelphia, the groups within the school system are beginning to be linked to the learning communities within the two- and four-year higher education institutions involved in Compact work. A similar effort will begin in Providence within the next year.

**Helping students at key transition points:** All the Compacts are focusing greater attention on key transition points at which students seem most often to disappear from the education continuum--into middle school, from middle school to high school, from high school to postsecondary institutions and, within the postsecondary sector, from two-year to four-year programs. In this context, Hartford is focusing on improving information to parents and students about the options that exist around transitions so that they can make good choices, as well as focusing attention on the key role of the city's community-technical college in helping minority and other students prepare for four-year programs. Providence will focus attention on improving both the quality of counseling and guidance at the school and college level, as well as reconnect school faculty as key players in student academic advising.

**Creating higher expectations for college-going among urban students:** Several Compacts are focusing significant attention on the need to build community and family traditions of college-going for minority and low-income youth, so that college education or the academic preparedness to be able to choose to go to college will be seen community-wide as a part of every child's future. Hartford is placing a particularly strong emphasis on the rebuilding of a college-going tradition among its students, using mechanisms such as a Student Success Corps in each Hartford school to connect current students with local college students who are themselves graduates of the Hartford schools.

## Initial Results

The six Community Compacts have been implementing their Pew-supported

strategies only since mid- to late 1993. Therefore, it is difficult to point to a direct effect yet of Compact work on the academic achievement of poor and minority students. However, three long-term aspects of the Compact work as initiated by Pew and AAHE should help produce evidence regarding the success of local strategies as well as that of the overall program:

- Each Compact community is required to gather student achievement and retention data for grades 7-14 throughout the period of current Pew funding. This includes, as well, exit surveys of each graduating high school student in the six communities (or from high schools targeted by Compact strategies) as well as follow-up surveys of stratified samples of these students six and eighteen months after high school graduation. Already as a result of their Pew-supported work, several of the Compact communities have developed or are close to developing consistent student tracking systems K-16 which will enable them to follow large numbers of students well beyond the three- to six-year period of current Pew funding. It seems reasonable to expect, therefore, that evidence regarding the success of the Compact strategies will be available and reasonably clear within the next few years.

- The AAHE Education Trust is working closely with a Washington-based evaluation organization, Policy Studies Associates, to develop an overall qualitative as well as quantitative evaluation of the Compact initiative, both at the six sites as well as overall. Although the evaluation plan will not be complete until the summer of 1994, one major aspect of it will involve the use of local on-site evaluators drawn from each Compact community to gather both numerical as well as ethnographic information on the work and impact of each Compact. Again, the overall evaluation will be conducted over the next three years, with possible extension for another three years should some or all of the local sites receive continued support from Pew for their work. Some evidence regarding the effectiveness of the Compact approach overall should, therefore, be available within the next few years.

- Finally, a number of other communities around the nation, led in particular by local urban and metropolitan universities, have approached the AAHE Education Trust during the past year with an interest in learning more about the work of the six Compact communities and the possibility that a similar approach might be developed in their localities. Given the growing level of interest in such possible Compact replications, the Education Trust has begun a second effort, its K-16 Initiative, to help seed such similar systemic reform efforts elsewhere in the nation.

The preceding article by Kati Haycock describes in greater detail the thinking behind a K-16 approach to education reform. To begin the AAHE Education Trust's effort in this area, two introductory meetings were held in Washington, DC and St. Louis, MO during 1993 in which school, university, and community representatives from nearly 25 cities participated; many of those communities are now developing local K-16 councils and have been participating in a series of K-16 institutes during 1994. Some of the communities becoming involved in the K-16 Initiative include Portland, OR, San Francisco, CA, Reno, NV, Dallas, TX and Akron, OH. The level of interest being shown in the K-16 Initiative and, therefore, in the Compact initiative on which it is based, is another indication of the potential for success in improving student achievement in a range of cities and communities across the nation.

### **A Work in Progress**

The Community Compacts for Student Success initiative is a "work in progress." The Pew Charitable Trusts, AAHE, and education leaders in the six

participating cities believe that the compact approach holds great promise for improving educational outcomes in their communities, but realize as well that much hard work and many uncertainties lie ahead. By committing themselves to collaborative work over a long period of time, the initiative's partners expect that genuine differences will result both in student achievement and in the staying power of the local compact structures themselves. Let us hope that an issue of *Metropolitan Universities* devoted to school-university interactions five or ten years from now will be able to report on the ultimate success of these local compacts.

## *Is your institution a metropolitan university?*

If your university serves an urban/metropolitan region and subscribes to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Metropolitan Universities on page 26 of this issue, your administration should seriously consider joining the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities.

Historically, most universities have been associated with cities, but the relationship between "the town and the gown" has often been distant or abrasive. Today the metropolitan university cultivates a close relationship with the urban center and its suburbs, often serving as a catalyst for change and source of enlightened discussion. Leaders in government and business agree that education is the key to prosperity, and that metropolitan universities will be on the cutting edge of education not only for younger students, but also for those who must continually re-educate themselves to meet the challenges of the future.

The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities brings together institutions who share experiences and expertise to speak with a common voice on important social issues. A shared sense of mission is the driving force behind Coalition membership. However, the Coalition also offers a number of tangible benefits: ten free subscriptions to *Metropolitan Universities*, additional copies at special rates to distribute to boards and trustees, a newsletter on government and funding issues, a clearinghouse of innovative projects, reduced rates at Coalition conventions. . . .

As a *Metropolitan Universities* subscriber, you can help us by bringing both the journal and the Coalition to the attention of your administration. To obtain information about Coalition membership, please contact Dr. David Bell, University of North Texas, by calling (817) 565-2477 or faxing a message to (817) 565-4998.