

Creating a Seamless Educational System K-16: The Role of Higher Education in School Reform

Historically, the public schools and higher education have had rocky relationships. We have traditionally organized our institutions and our different segments vertically—creating separate and distinct silos: one for K-12 education and one for postsecondary education. Our students, however, experience our system much more holistically. As they move from their K-12 education to their postsecondary one, they experience gaps and inconsistencies that frustrate all parties and lead to unproductive, inevitable blame and finger pointing.

Over the past several years, a number of states have begun to forge new collaborative connections to serve all of our students better. These K-16 (or P-16, or K-18) partnerships are collaborative efforts among all segments of the educational community: K-12, two-year, and four-year institutions. The goal is to have all students experience a seamless educational system from kindergarten through their postsecondary education and training; and to give all students in the state the very best public education through a coherent policy of setting high standards for both teaching and learning.

Through these partnerships, the higher education community interacts with their K-12 partners, and in most cases, statewide business and community leaders, in continuous dialogue around critical questions: What should our high school graduates know and be able to do, and how will we know that they have achieved these goals? What should our teachers know and be able to do, and how will we know they have reached the standards we expect at all levels? What should all of our college graduates know—how do we define a liberal education for an informed citizenry in a democracy? Can we identify successful programs and practices in our state and around the country that can help us raise the achievement of our students in reading, writing, mathematics, and citizenship skills for success?

In a time of relative economic prosperity, education has emerged as the single most important domestic political issue. Across the United States, parents and politicians, business leaders and commentators, private think tanks and public policymakers are overwhelmed by reports of stagnant test scores, underprepared (and underpaid) teachers, and an unqualified work force. A policy debate is swirling around issues of “raising the bar” for both teachers and students, and our colleges and universities are finding themselves in the eye of the storm. We are the ones who admit students into our institutions and find that more than a third require remedial instruction before they can take college credit courses. We are also the ones who educate the teachers for tomorrow’s schools, and provide professional development for today’s teachers.

All fifty states are in the midst of standards-based K-12 reform, and close to one-third of the states have made a specific commitment to forging K-16 partnerships that cross traditional segmental barriers. As Chancellor Langenberg describes in his introductory essay, these K-16 states are working to forge collaborative recommendations that are reshaping the educational policy landscape. A great deal of credit for defining the states' agenda for K-16 must go to the Education Trust, under the leadership of Kati Haycock, and the National Association of System Heads, under the leadership of Don Langenberg. These leaders foresaw a need to build a network to support states that have made a serious commitment to systemic change.

This issue of *Metropolitan Universities* is really the first collection of articles written by an emerging group of K-16 policy experts whose portfolios are not yet fully defined. They write from their experiences at ground zero: forging new coalitions and collaborative relationships to define and address their states' educational objectives. Because the dominant issue for all school reform is improving student achievement, kindergarten through college, especially among our urban poor and minority students, this collection is particularly appropriate for this journal.

Our metropolitan universities resonate to the lost potential among our own, home-grown, urban student population, and are challenged to find ways to escape the remediation trap, which is harmful to both students and institutions. As readers will come to understand from these articles, the root causes of our troubled schools may, in fact, come back to our own doorsteps, in the guise of our failing to prepare and support teachers.

This collection is introduced with a brief essay by Don Langenberg, Chancellor of the University System of Maryland, and President of the National Association of System Heads, who contextualizes for us the role higher education must play in systemic school reform.

In the next article, Robert Stein offers a model of collaboration in Missouri that has emerged at the state level in response to an urgent need to address critical issues of student achievement. To create a seamless system, address issues of equity and quality, and align expectations around assessments of student performance, Missouri established a K-16 Coalition sponsored by the State Board of Education (SBE), the Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE), and the University of Missouri Board of Curators (UM). The agenda for the coalition is ambitious, and not without its problems, but Stein describes a coalition-building process that is very promising.

John Haeger and Nancy Shapiro describe a statewide K-16 initiative that began as a voluntary collaboration among the top stakeholders in the State Department of Education, the University System, and the Maryland Higher Education Commission. They describe the advantages and disadvantages of a state-level organization, which can mobilize mutual support for controversial policies in the area of high-stakes high school assessments, placement and remedial education, and the redesign of teacher education. Their article also speaks to the very real transformations that must occur if a college or university is to accept its share of the responsibility in K-16 education reform.

Ron Henry and Jan Kettlewell present another strong model of P-16 collaboration, this one organized around local K-16 initiatives anchored by the state colleges and universities. They detail, in particular, the workings of one of these local councils, the Metropolitan Atlanta P-16 Community Council, and describe their very active agenda

for aligning standards for P-16, with particular attention to the role of standards as an important tool for equity. Originally supported with private funding, the Georgia P-16 has subsequently received state funding to continue forging alliances across the state.

Penny Edgert and Bob Polkinghorn describe California's continuing efforts in the K-18 arena. Perhaps the longest running collaboration, the California Education Round Table, began, eighteen years ago, to address issues affecting student achievement and access. The authors describe the emerging California Round Table initiatives in the areas of alignment between high school graduation and college admissions, teacher education and subject matter alliances in the professional development of teachers, and the use of technology to streamline access to postsecondary education. They also note the critical importance of the political context and state funding commitments for realizing their ambitious goals.

Dorothy Minear details the role of the State University System of Florida in working with the public school system to ensure the economic viability of the state. In particular, Florida has been a leader in working on statewide articulation at both state and local levels between and among institutions and sectors. Minear describes the role of faculty discipline committees in supporting a common understanding of general education requirements between two and four-year institutions, and the role the Articulation Coordinating Committee plays in addressing common prerequisites for teacher education programs in the state.

Kate Harrington's essay describes the events leading to the Massachusetts Educator Certification Test furor last July: the policy background, including the initial decision to go forward with a statewide test, choosing a vendor, the decisions around the development of the test, and the consequences that resulted from the test administration. "The Sound and Fury of Teacher Testing in Massachusetts" is a case study of good intentions gone awry. The Massachusetts story teaches some critically important lessons that will help other states as they move forward in reforming teacher education.

Charles Coble carries the teacher education discussion forward by describing a model program, University-School Teacher Education Partnerships, that directly addresses the need for systemic reform of teacher education in North Carolina. Under the leadership of the university system president, and in a political climate strongly influenced by Governor Hunt, the chair of the National Commission on Teaching for America's Future, the University of North Carolina has made a strong commitment to reforming teacher preparation in the state's public universities. Coble describes how the partnerships work, and the internal reallocation of funding that supports the transformation under way.

Finally, Jack Bristol tells the El Paso story, and it is truly inspirational. While we can talk about systemic change and policy implications, the true value of K-16 reform can only be evaluated by measurable improvements in student achievement. He cites stunning improvements in the math and reading skills of K-12 students that have received national recognition. Like Shapiro and Haeger, Bristol challenges us to look first to our own institutions, where inertia and resistance to change among faculty, particularly in Colleges of Arts and Sciences, must be confronted and addressed. Only when the entire university accepts as its shared responsibility the recruiting and train-

ing of the best and brightest as our future teachers will we really reap the rewards of these education reforms.

Throughout these articles, readers will find common themes of raising student achievement, aligning standards, using technology to increase access, reforming teacher education to include stronger participation of arts and science faculty, and expanding coequal partnerships between two-year, four-year, and K-12 schools. The K-16 umbrella is wide, and that is both its strength and its weakness. Each state must look at its own culture and draw together its particular and context-appropriate approach. We know from recent research that high performing teachers are the single most significant factor in student achievement. Our metropolitan universities must continue to accept our share of responsibility for systemic education reform, because it is only through these authentic collaborations and partnerships that we will serve the best interests of our students, and of our society at large.