



The Progress of P-16 Collaboration in the States

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The Concept

Recent figures show that 60 out of every 100 9th graders in the country do not immediately enroll in college after high school. Of those who make it into college, only 50% pursued a college-preparatory curriculum while in high school, greatly reducing their chances for completion of a degree.¹ The current division between early learning, K-12 and higher education is largely to blame for the declining levels of educational preparation and attainment within the U.S. education system. P-16 – an integrated system of education designed to raise student achievement at all levels, preschool through a baccalaureate degree – has gained interest in many states because of its focus on collaboration, alignment and educational attainment.

The focus of a P-16 system is on what students need to become successful, rather than what institutions, administrators and practitioners need. While P-16 shares the goal of other education reform movements – raising student achievement – P-16 goes one step further and broadens the definition of student achievement and success to include preschool and postsecondary education. It focuses on the interrelated nature of the education pipeline, an idea that goes as far back as the 1980s. As Harold Hodgkinson wrote in *All One System*, “If people begin to see the educational system as a single entity through which people move, they may begin to behave as if all of education were related.”² Students already understand the interrelated nature of the education system since they are the ones who experience each sector. As interest in P-16 grows, policymakers are gaining that same understanding.

To date, 30 states are engaged in some kind of P-16 activity. Some have created P-16 initiatives or councils through legislation or executive orders. Others have formed voluntary associations between the different levels of education. Some have implemented a rigorous curriculum for all students and aligned high school graduation requirements with college admission standards. Some have focused on the early learning side while others seek to smooth the transition from high school to college. Some P-16 councils have dedicated staff and an operating budget; others have only formed exploratory committees or councils that meet sporadically. While one state, Florida, enacted a major governance change, most states have chosen to take an incremental approach to P-16.

This policy brief seeks to track the progress of P-16 collaboration in the states by focusing on states with established and successful P-16 programs, as well as states that are in the process of establishing P-16 councils. This paper does not seek to identify one approach as better than another, but simply to discuss results – are more students in the state moving through the pipeline, preschool through four years of college, and are more of these students achieving at higher levels than before?

The Components

Historically, the three levels of the modern American education system – early learning, K-12 and postsecondary – have developed and operated independently of each other, leading to a fractured and disjointed educational path for students to follow. These three levels, however, have mutual areas of concern and, together, have the responsibility and potential to raise student achievement across racial groups and income levels.

Early Learning:

- An often overlooked component of a P-16 system is the “P” part – early learning. According to researchers from the University of Michigan, the average cognitive score of high-income children before they reach kindergarten is 60% higher than children from low-income groups. These same underprivileged children are then placed in “low-resource schools” which magnify the initial inequality.³ In other words, if a child is not provided with quality educational opportunities at an early age, he or she may never catch up.

K-12:

- Preparation for college and the workforce is a growing problem for American students. While U.S. students in 4th and 8th grades score above the international average in mathematics, 15-year-olds score below the international average, according to the U.S. Department of Education.⁴ Once many of these same students get into college, 40% of four-year students and 63% of two-year students require remediation.⁵ This lack of preparation for college also prevents far too many students from participating in postsecondary education. Nationally, only 38% of 9th graders persist through high school and directly enter college.⁶

Postsecondary Education:

- If the transition between high school and postsecondary education is a problem, college completion rates are even worse. Even in Massachusetts, the top performing state in terms of college completion, only 29 out of every 100 9th-grade students graduates with an associate’s or a bachelor’s degree. Nationally, only 18% of 9th graders go on to complete a college degree “on time.”⁷ The United States simply cannot compete in a global economy with educational attainment rates this low.

Bringing these separate components together is the ultimate goal of P-16. Policymakers know the results of the current system – achievement gaps, low participation rates and remediation. P-16, with its focus on collaboration and integration, can provide the missing piece to the educational puzzle.

The Progress

Between 1995 and 2005, 30 states created P-16 initiatives or councils. Early leaders in the P-16 movement include Georgia, Maryland and Oregon. Recent arrivals to the P-16 movement include Arizona, Colorado and Virginia. As P-16 has progressed in the states, a common language and understanding of what it means has developed. Now that there is an understanding of what P-16 is, implementation and sustainability remain the next great challenge. While 30 states are engaged in P-16 activity, some have made more progress than others in aligning standards and assessments, smoothing transitions and raising student achievement.

Georgia:

Created in 1995 by Governor Zell Miller and expanded by his successor, Governor Roy Barnes, the P-16 initiative in Georgia is the oldest and most developed in the nation. The initiative has an operating budget of over \$12 million and employs a staff of 50 people. The P-16 network is run out of the University of Georgia with partners from the Governor’s office, the Department of Education and the Department of Early Care and Learning. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education also participates and plays an equal role. The P-16 initiative in Georgia is divided into 15 local councils, a structure that other states have emulated. Each local council can focus on the specific needs of the region it serves and implement the state’s P-16 goals accordingly. The larger network meets several times a year to share lessons learned and address statewide P-16 issues and concerns. The long-term goals of the P-16 network in Georgia are:

1. Improving student achievement, pre-school through postsecondary
2. Smoothing the transitions between the different levels of education
3. Ensuring that students are prepared to succeed at the next level of education
4. Closing achievement gaps between high- and low-income students and between white students and students of color
5. Educating and training higher quality teachers
6. Raising citizenship awareness in students and schools across the state.

Georgia has come a long way in meeting these goals. Reports have documented increased enrollment in preschools, a rising number of high school graduates and the implementation of teacher preparation policies that are designed to raise achievement levels of students from diverse backgrounds.⁸ According to the Pathways to College Network, Georgia's P-16 initiative has helped close achievement gaps between high- and low-income students and between minority and "majority" students.⁹ The number of students taking and scoring higher on advanced placement exams has also risen by 18% over the past year.¹⁰ Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Georgia P-16 Council is its longevity. P-16 is no longer considered a reform effort in Georgia, but business as usual.

Indiana:

Indiana's 40-member "Education Roundtable" was formed by the late Governor Frank O'Bannon in 1998. In addition to education stakeholders, there are representatives from community groups, business and the General Assembly. Indiana's P-16 effort is somewhat unique in the sense that it has survived a leadership change without losing momentum. Current Governor Mitch Daniels and Suellen Reed, the superintendent of public instruction, remain committed to P-16 efforts in the state. Indiana's vision for P-16 is long-term and far-reaching, as evidenced by the Roundtable's *P-16 Plan for Increasing Student Achievement*. In this report, The Education Roundtable identifies 10 key P-16 components, including early learning, school governance, teaching quality and technology. Recommendations include:

1. Stressing the importance of early learning by making full-day kindergarten available to every child in the state
2. Using technology to assess student learning and report data across systems to teachers, policymakers and parents
3. Providing additional technical assistance and financial support to schools with high numbers of underachieving students
4. Expanding instructional opportunities for students who need more time to reach standards
5. Making the "Core 40" – Indiana's rigorous college-prep curriculum – the "default" curriculum for all high school students.

Completion of the Core 40 will, in fact, become a requirement for high school graduation and a minimum college admission requirement for four-year public universities with the class of 2011. Just recently, Indiana created an "ADP Action Outline" that seeks to align college expectations and assessments and hold high schools and colleges accountable for preparation and student learning. Because of its commitment to P-16 education and continued activity, the Education Roundtable is having an impact on student achievement in the state.

Even though the state's P-16 initiative is relatively young, Indiana has already started to see the results of its efforts. The number of students enrolling in postsecondary education in Indiana has increased every year for the past three years. An increased focus on community college opportunities in the state has led to double-digit enrollment increases in the Ivy State Tech College system.¹¹ SAT scores have also improved in the state, with a five-point increase between 2004 and 2005. Those students taking the Core 40 curriculum scored higher than those who did not. As part of its P-16 plan, the Education Roundtable plans on conducting a far-reaching public relations campaign that explains the importance of P-16 to the public.

Kentucky:

A larger "Public Agenda for Postsecondary Education" in the state spurred the creation of "The Kentucky P-16 Council" in 1999. The 18-member council is a joint creation of the Kentucky Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education and includes representatives from early childhood, K-12, postsecondary and adult education in addition to business representation. Kentucky policymakers ask, and hope to successfully answer, five key questions related to education in the state:

1. Are More Kentuckians prepared for postsecondary education?
2. Is postsecondary education affordable for its citizens?
3. Do more Kentuckians have certificates and degrees?
4. Are college graduates prepared for life and work in Kentucky?
5. Are Kentucky's people, communities and economies benefiting?

Through the alignment of K-12 and postsecondary standards and requirements, and the improvement of teacher education in the state, the P-16 Council hopes to increase not only the quantity of students moving through the pipeline, but also the quality and diversity of those same students. Because of P-16 efforts and the larger public agenda in the state, total enrollment in Kentucky colleges and universities has risen by 25% and the number of degrees and certificates awarded has increased by 56% over the last five years. The participation rates of minority students rose from 15 to 32% over the same period.¹² Despite the gains in Kentucky, the P-16 Council still faces a number of challenges. Recent figures still show that 35% of students in Kentucky never finish high school and only 15% complete a college degree.¹³ And the number of students transferring from two-year to four-year institutions was actually lower in 2004 than in 1998.¹⁴

If the state hopes to double the number of college-educated Kentuckians over the next 15 years, the P-16 Council will have to focus its efforts on smoothing the transition from high school to college and easing the transfer between associate's and baccalaureate programs. The state plans on expanding outreach efforts to underserved regions of the state and improving the ability of the community and technical college system to deliver a general education component to achieve these goals.

A New Generation of States:

In the last year, a number of states have become players in P-16. Arizona, Colorado, and Virginia have launched large-scale P-16 efforts, a testament to the growing popularity of P-16 across the country.

- **Arizona:** Governor Janet Napolitano's executive order created the "Governor's P-20 Council" in 2005. The Governor co-chairs the council with the Chancellor of the Maricopa Community Colleges. Representatives from the Governor's office, the Legislature, the Board of Regents, the state Board of Education, university and community college presidents, students and parents are represented on the council. The P-20 Council is charged with aligning high school and college expectations to meet the skill sets required in high-growth occupations. Members will also assess the need to expand four-year degree programs at public universities in the state. The P-20 council is required to convene four times a year.
- **Colorado:** The "Colorado Education Alignment Council" was created by Governor Bill Owens' executive order in 2005. Part of the council's mission is to benchmark Colorado's high school and college requirements against national research on student achievement to determine where current state standards fall short of college and workforce needs. Members will also establish standards for what knowledge and skills students are required to gain at the postsecondary level and ensure that these standards meet the expectations of employers in the state. Thirty representatives from the K-12, postsecondary and business communities will serve on the council. A report of recommendations is due to the governor in October of 2006.
- **Virginia:** The "Virginia P-16 Education Council" was established by former Governor Mark Warner's executive order in 2005. The council is chaired by the Secretary of Education and consists of 19 members appointed by the governor. Members of the Legislature, the Department of Education, the State Council of Higher Education, the Virginia Community College System and a group of educators and business and community leaders all serve on the council. The council's responsibilities include serving as a steering committee for oversight of the state's education reform efforts as part of the NGA Honor States Grant and developing strategies to create data systems that can provide information about students at all education levels.

The Challenges

A handful of states have never made it past the planning stages when it comes to P-16. Some states have created P-16 councils that meet sporadically, if at all. Other P-16 councils appear to be symbolic, capable of developing recommendations, but lacking any authority for implementation. Turf issues continue to be a problem in many states, with K-12 and higher education competing with each other for authority and resources. Still other states, like the ones mentioned above, have made, and continue to make, progress towards the goals of P-16 education. The fact that some states have not shown significant improvement is not necessarily a reflection on their leaders, but perhaps a testament to the fact that P-16 implementation did not go *far enough*. Though an incremental approach to P-16 is often the

most sensible, such an approach can make it difficult for P-16 reform efforts to take hold and develop over time. Attributes that all of the states with successful P-16 systems have in common include:

- **Commitment to long-term reform:** Change takes time. Policymakers looking for a “quick win” can undermine the implementation of a P-16 system. Getting systems that view themselves in competition with each other to cooperate requires sustained effort. For example, dedicated staff and leadership in Georgia have continually advanced the goals of their P-16 initiative, with increasingly positive results.
- **Representation from key stakeholder groups:** It takes strong leadership to push the P-16 agenda forward. States with a committed governor seem to have the most success in developing a P-16 initiative. In addition to the governor, representation from early learning, K-12, higher education, business and the legislature is equally important. In Indiana, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Suellen Reed, was as instrumental in the creation and success of the Education Roundtable as Governor Frank O’Bannon.
- **Coordinated initiatives:** P-16 initiatives that are coordinated at the state level are often more successful than multiple individual initiatives. Very little can be accomplished if two or more initiatives in a state are working in isolation. Even though Georgia’s local P-16 Councils have a regional focus, their activities are still designed to improve education in the state as a whole.
- **Integrated reform efforts:** In an effort to improve sustainability, P-16 initiatives can be linked to ongoing education reform efforts in a state. This way, P-16 is not in competition with existing policies and practices. Reform efforts in a state could even begin working across systems with the introduction of a P-16 initiative. Kentucky’s integration of P-16 into its larger “Public Agenda for Postsecondary and Adult Education” has improved its staying power.

The Future

Like many recent education reform efforts, P-16 is a work in progress. Several states, including Georgia, Indiana and Kentucky, have been able to use P-16 to raise student achievement and foster collaboration between the different levels of education. But assessing the impact of P-16 in most states is a difficult matter. While there is early evidence of success, more concrete and compelling evidence of the benefits of P-16 is needed.

One of the major problems with gauging the effectiveness of P-16 is the lack of a P-16 accountability system in the states. The various levels of education normally use different measures to determine student learning and success. For example, the standards for holding schools accountable in K-12 education are not same as those in higher education. This fractured system of measurement leads to confusion when policymakers try to look at outcomes for the *entire* system, not just the individual pieces. Also, only a handful of states have data systems that follow a student from kindergarten through college, so beginning to think about including preschool in state data systems presents a whole new challenge.¹⁵ The bottom line is that a lack of data hinders our knowledge about the impact of P-16 in the states. As P-16 progresses into the 21st century, several questions need to be answered:

- Can a P-16 initiative be sustained without the implementation of a P-16 accountability model that links preschool, K-12 and postsecondary education in meaningful ways?
- Does a successful P-16 education system require a governance change?
- Should states develop P-16 funding systems that integrate early learning, K-12 and postsecondary education?
- How can all states create data systems that follow a student from school to school, level to level?
- Can P-16 initiatives survive a leadership change? Should states create a P-16 structure that exists outside of the executive office or the legislature?
- Should P-16 councils have the authority to implement recommendations, or is their only role advisory?

Endnotes

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- ¹⁵ These states are: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Texas and Washington. From *State Data Systems* [report online] (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 2006, accessed 18 April 2006); available from ECS: <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=913>

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