

FOCUS ON

P-16/20 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE



A TRENDS IN AMERICA SPECIAL REPORT



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Executive Summary

- ▶ Only seven of 10 students graduate from high school in the U.S. Among those who do, many are academically unprepared for postsecondary education. Consequently, remediation rates are high and nearly half of all students in public four-year colleges fail to earn bachelors’ degrees within five years. Because of the need for more college graduates over the next 15 years, this lack of college readiness is widely viewed as a crisis needing the attention of policymakers.
- ▶ P-16/20 councils have been created in 40 states. These councils are intended to create a unified governance system from preschool through postsecondary education—well beyond the traditional focus on K-12 education that goes only through high school. In theory, these councils create a seamless transition between all grade levels, particularly between high school and college, by aligning standards and curriculum so students leave high school better prepared for postsecondary education.
- ▶ Despite their promise, nearly all P-16/20 councils lack authority to enact and implement policies. Observers also have criticized these councils for often having a lack of focus and for a failure to bring the right policymakers to the table. They also say these councils often are little more than communication vehicles, rather than policy tools to produce real and lasting results.
- ▶ While some educational experts say no state has created an ideal P-16/20 or P-20 system that has, in fact, resulted in a seamless transition between high school and college, three states—Kentucky, Oregon and Rhode Island—have developed vastly different models to try to achieve the same objectives.

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Throughout the course of American history, education has been structured like a series of islands, none connected with the others. The disconnect between early learning, middle and high school grades and postsecondary education has deep roots and has not been addressed by policymakers until relatively recently. Only in the past 15 years have policymakers seen a benefit to bringing together all elements of education and building bridges, so to speak, to span each of these learning islands.

From a policy perspective, these bridges take the form of state and local governance entities that are variously referred to as P-16, K-16 and P-20 Councils, depending on whether the model includes preschool and/or graduate education programs. (This publication will use the term P-16/20, except in specific instances, in order to provide uniformity.) In theory, these councils provide a mechanism for building a seamless continuum of learning between grade levels. They often are comprised of education, political, business and community leaders working together to increase the success of all students. Although the councils typically lack authority to enact and implement policies on their own, they often play a vital role in coordinating a comprehensive approach to help prepare students for postsecondary education, reduce achievement gaps between low- and middle-income students, and lessen the need for remedial coursework in college.

Other purposes of bringing together K-12 and postsecondary systems are to enhance teacher education and professional development, create a wider range of learning opportunities for students in high schools, mandate the use of data systems to track students through postsecondary years and/or the work force and expand access to early learning and improve student readiness for kindergarten.

Forty states have enacted some form of P-16/20 council (see map), although the exact number of active councils is difficult to determine because some exist on paper but seldom meet and/or have limited authority, according to the Education Commission of the States, which conducts significant policy research and analysis of the P-16/20

movement. Additionally, some states, such as Ohio, have recently taken action to dissolve their councils. Some observers report certain state councils are subject to turf wars, vague agendas and/or a lack of funding that make their mission nearly impossible to complete successfully. Consequently, like a bridge that leads nowhere, many of these councils failed to live up to their potential to fill education gaps. This document will examine the promise of P-16/20 governing models and explore ways policy barriers can be overcome to make them more effective.

The Case for P-16/20 Reform

As the term suggests, P-16/20 councils are intended to improve education from preschool through postsecondary education. Many educational experts believe quality preschool programs are the launching pads that provide children with long-term educational benefits, particularly for children from disadvantaged families. According to the U.S. Department of Education, children who participated in quality preschools were less likely to repeat a grade or be referred to special education. Additionally, the department reports there is a connection between language development, vocabulary and early reading, making quality preschool programs an essential part of a child's development.

Quality preschool programs also result in economic benefits for society, according to a report from The National Institute for Early Education Research, or NIEER. NIEER estimates the average benefit from a universally accessible program at ages 3 and 4 is at least \$25,000 per child, substantially more than the costs of those programs. Among other measures, NIEER defines quality preschool as giving children an opportunity to learn skills necessary for future academic success. It also says quality preschool programs allow children to make meaningful decisions throughout the day.

After California created its P-16 Council in 2004, Catherine Atkin, president of Preschool California, said in a press release, "The P-16 Council will be a welcome forum to examine how preschool and all other levels of education can work together to

P-16/20 Data by State

	Year Established	Dedicated Source(s) of Funding	Council Supported by at least 0.5 FTE Staff Position	Governor Regularly Chairs Council	Number of Members	Council Meets at least Quarterly	State has Local and/or Regional Councils	P-16 Performance Goals Set for/ by Council	Authorizing Mechanism*
Arizona	2005	◆	◆	◆	39	◆		◆	EO
Arkansas	2003				19	◆			Stat
California	2004	◆	◆		52	◆			
Colorado	2007	◆	◆		35	◆			EO
Connecticut	2008	TBD	◆		TBD	◆	TBD		
Delaware	2003	◆	◆		12				EO and Stat
Georgia	2006	◆	◆		7	◆		◆	
Hawaii	2002		◆		30			◆	
Illinois	2008	◆	TBD	TBD	36	TBD			Stat
Indiana	1998	◆	◆	◆	35	◆			Stat
Kansas	2008	◆	◆		21	TBD			EO
Kentucky	1999				18	◆	◆	◆	
Louisiana (BRCEE)	1999	◆			36	◆		◆	
Louisiana (HSRC)	1994	◆			41	◆		◆	EO and Stat
Maine	2008	N/A	N/A		18	N/A		◆	EO
Maryland	2007		◆	◆	35	◆			EO
Minnesota	2002	◆			21	◆		◆	
Mississippi	2001	N/A	N/A	N/A	12	N/A		N/A	N/A
Missouri	2006	◆	◆		5	◆	◆		Stat
Montana	2006				15	◆			BR
Nebraska	1998	◆	◆		35	◆			
Nevada	2007		N/A		13	◆			Stat
New Hampshire	2006	N/A	N/A		8	N/A	N/A	N/A	EO
North Carolina	1992	◆	◆	◆	7	◆		◆	Stat
Ohio	2005	◆	◆	◆	25	◆	◆		Stat
Oklahoma	2005		◆		22	◆			Stat
Oregon	1998	◆			18			◆	Stat
Pennsylvania (STEM)	2007	◆	◆	◆	35	◆	◆	◆	
Pennsylvania (PASSHE)	2000	◆	◆		N/A		◆	◆	
Rhode Island	2005	◆		◆	10	◆			EO
South Carolina	2005	◆	◆		27	◆	◆		Stat
South Dakota	2007				21	◆		◆	
Tennessee	2005				9		◆	◆	
Texas	2003	◆			8	◆	◆		Stat
Utah	2006				15	◆	◆	N/A	BR
Virginia	2005	◆			22	◆		◆	EO
Washington	2007	◆	◆	◆	14	◆		◆	EO
West Virginia	2006	◆	◆		28	◆		◆	EO
Wisconsin	2000	◆			30				
Wyoming	2007	◆	◆		15	◆		◆	
TOTAL		26	21	8	ave. 22	29	9	18	

Source: Education Commission of the States (2008), accessed in Diplomas Count. * NOTE: BR is Board Resolution, EO is Executive Order, Stat is Statute

increase student success. We applaud (California) Superintendent (Jack) O'Connell's recognition of preschool's critical early role and its effect on all the education that follows."

As students progress through school, P-16/20 councils are intended to provide a coordinated approach to educating students at all grade levels. For example, educational experts contend that reading on grade level by the end of the third grade is considered essential and eighth grade is a critical year in math education. By coordinating educational outcomes at each grade level, P-16/20 councils are theoretically positioned to ensure students have an opportunity, given appropriate instruction, to obtain the critical skills necessary to progress to the next level.

However, the primary focus of P-16/20 councils thus far has been on aligning high school and college expectations to lessen the need for remediation and to ensure high school graduates are prepared for postsecondary education. Educational experts agree that too few students are taking the rigorous courses they need to enter college ready to succeed.

"Not only do we have a dropout problem in this country, but even for those students who do graduate from high school, they're not always prepared for college," said Dane Linn, education director for the National Governors Association. "One of the reasons is because the high school and college expectations aren't necessarily the same."

The need for increased numbers of college graduates is well-documented. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 80 percent of the jobs created in the next decade will require education beyond high school; one in five will require a four-year degree. Anthony Carnavale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, predicted that by 2012, the U.S. will face a shortage of 850,000 associate degrees, 3.2 million bachelor's degrees and 2.9 million graduate degrees. Another study from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, estimates 55 percent of the population will need college degrees by 2025 in order to equal the degree attainment in the top-performing countries, a potential degree gap of 15.6 million.

The Pathways to College Network predicts 54 percent of all new job openings in the 2004-2014 decade will be filled by workers with education beyond high school. Unfortunately, the U.S. has

been slipping in college participation, relative to other industrialized nations. Although the number of people enrolled in college in the U.S. increased between 1995 and 2005, the U.S. dropped from second to 15th place among 30 industrial nations in university completion for young people, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. This decline is attributed to increased college enrollment rates in other countries.

The situation threatens to become even more critical. While the U.S. boasts the largest percentage of college-educated persons in the 55 to 64 age group, these people are nearing retirement age. The young adult age group (ages 25 to 34) ranks seventh in the world, according to Pathways to College in the rate of college degrees.

Nancy Shulock, executive director for the Institution for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, said until relatively recently, only the most academically gifted high school graduates enrolled in college. She said those students had the ability to overcome the chasm between what they learned in high school and what they needed to know in college. "Now that higher education is pretty much a mass population enterprise, this divide is much more glaring and much more of a serious issue" as students who are less college-ready attempt to make the transition from high school to college, she said.

"We realize that almost all families, regardless of race or class, recognize that their children are going to need some postsecondary education to function effectively as citizens and parts of the work force," adds Janis Sommerville of the National Association of System Heads, which represents the chief executive officers in 52 public higher education systems.

Clearly, enrolling in college is not the same thing as being prepared for a rigorous college curriculum. Therefore, the success of the P-16/20 movement will perhaps be determined by the degree to which the councils result in improved readiness for postsecondary education, and whether the oft-touted "seamless transition" actually occurs.

A History of the P-16/20 Movement

In 1995, Zell Miller, then governor of Georgia, mandated through executive order the creation of the Georgia P-16 Council to coordinate the

efforts of the Office of School Readiness, Department of Education, Department of Technical and Adult Education, University System of Georgia and Professional Standards Commission. This entity became known as the Education Coordinating Council.

Five years later, the Georgia legislature enacted House Bill 1187, the A-Plus Education Reform Act, which was signed into law by then-Gov. Roy Barnes. A broad-based education reform bill, House Bill 1187 provided a legislative basis for the council Miller created earlier through executive order.

Under current Gov. Sonny Purdue, the Education Coordinating Council has been transformed into the Alliance of Education Agency Heads, which consists of agency heads and governing board chairs for the departments of early care and learning, education, technical and adult education, the University System of Georgia, and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. (See <http://www.gaeducationalliance.org/> for more information.)

Jan Kettlewell led Georgia's P-16 council from its inception until her retirement in 2008. She oversaw several transformations in the structure of Georgia's P-16 system and believes the current multi-tiered model is the most effective. It includes a top tier led by a CEO who keeps the work of P-16 visible and high on the public's agenda. A second tier consists of staff who implement and coordinate the work across agencies or levels of education, according to Kettlewell.

"That's where a lot of P-16 councils fall down is that they don't have dedicated staff to do the work and so it ends up being a communications vehicle where the whole agenda is to get ready for the next meeting," she explained.

One of the primary achievements of Georgia's P-16 initiatives is the creation of 28 enrichment programs called Postsecondary Readiness Enrichment Programs, or PREP. These programs are coordinated by University System institutions to provide academic support and cultural enrichment programs for at-risk youth. In three external evaluations involving more than 1,000 surveys, 89 percent of high school students indicated that PREPs helped them improve their grades. But, the program was discontinued in 2003 due to inadequate funding.

Although Georgia pioneered P-16 councils nearly 15 years ago, more than half of the state councils now in existence have been formed



since 2005. According to a study by the Education Commission of the States, these councils have been created through a variety of policy mechanisms:

- ▶ Governors in 12 states established councils by executive order;
- ▶ State legislatures authorized 13 councils;
- ▶ State boards of education formed two councils by resolutions; and
- ▶ The remaining councils are strictly voluntary with no official authorization.

The size of the councils ranges from five members in Missouri to 52 in California, according to the Education Commission of the States. Nine states also have local or regional councils. According to the commission's database, only 21 states have dedicated at least half a full-time equivalent staff member to focus on the council's agenda, and only 26 states have received financing for their councils.

P-16/20 councils may have received their biggest boost in 2005 when the National Governors Association awarded two-year matching grants of up to \$2 million each to 10 states—Arkansas, Delaware, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Rhode Island and Virginia—to create reforms to prepare students for college. One requirement for those grants was the states had to create P-20 councils. NGA also awarded six smaller grants of \$50,000 to six states—Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma and Wyoming—to either create or update their councils.

Linn of the NGA said P-16/20 councils have become a policy priority for governors, who believe the councils will help students become more college-ready. “So if you structure and use the P-20 council in an effective way, you’re going to be able to use greater efficiencies in the way you use resources and not just fix some of those problems but get out in front of some of those problems,” he said.

Some of the councils created through executive order, however, have been denounced in studies as little more than public relations tools of the governors, lacking legislative authority, dedicated staff, funding, measurable performance goals, or, in many cases, all of the above. Shulock said in many cases, P-16/20 councils created a new system to communicate P-16/20 issues, but failed to create a new education governance structure. “What we found was that nobody seems to want to create a new governance bureaucracy with actually governing powers in statute,” she said. “So you have these councils, and they don’t have any real authority.”

North Dakota created the nation’s newest council when Gov. John Hoeven signed House Bill 1400 into law in May 2009. Although the act does not use the term P-16 or P-20, it creates the North Dakota Commission on Educational Improvement, which is chaired by the governor and whose members include legislators, the superintendent of public instruction, commissioner of higher education and other voting and nonvoting educational leaders. The legislature specifically called on the commission to make periodic reports to the governor and legislature. It charges the commission to examine the state’s high school graduation requirements, curricular standards and assessments to ensure that students have the academic skills necessary to move seamlessly and without remediation from high schools to institutions of higher education

or to meet the performance levels expected by employers.

However, even as North Dakota was enacting legislation to create a governing board linking both K-12 and postsecondary interests, Ohio’s legislature through House Bill 1 was dissolving its Partnership for Continued Learning, a model of P-16 that was created in 2005 through Senate Bill 311. While the statewide council was eliminated, House Bill 1 mandates that, “Not later than December 1, 2009, the superintendent of public instruction shall develop a ten-year strategic plan aligned with the strategic plan for higher education developed by the chancellor of the Ohio board of regents.” Therefore, even without a formal P-16/20 council in place, Ohio law will require articulation between K-12 and postsecondary education.

A LOOK AT SELECT P-16 MODELS:

Kentucky

Kentucky is widely viewed as a national leader in the P-16 movement, even though the actions of its council serve only as nonbinding policy recommendations. Kentucky’s P-16 council was created jointly through an agreement between the state Department of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education in 1999. There has never been any legislation or executive order by a governor to give the council legitimacy, to provide it with any formal powers or a source of funding. In essence, the Kentucky P-16 council exists on a voluntary basis between two regulatory agencies that oversee K-12 and postsecondary education. In fact, a report by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in 2007 found that, “The perception of some is that the P-16 Council has served more as a debating and discussion forum than as an effective means to address critical, cross-agency issues.”

Eighteen members serve on Kentucky’s P-16 Council. They include three members of the Kentucky Board of Education, three members of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the state commissioner of education, the president of the Council on Postsecondary Education, two representatives of the Education Professional Standards Board, the Kentucky Department of Education director of Early Childhood Development, the Council on Postsecondary Education vice president for Adult Education, the executive

student needs to know and be able to do at each educational level;

- ▶ Raising the quality of teachers through improved preparation and professional development; and
- ▶ Increasing the number and diversity of students attending college by stressing programs that persuade parents and students to plan early for advanced education.

In addition to a state P–16 council, Kentucky also has 21 local councils that assess a specific region’s educational needs. These local councils also help implement P–16 initiatives at the local level; they hold network meetings and communicate via a P–16 listserv.

Rhode Island

In contrast to Kentucky’s model, Rhode Island’s PK-16 Council is a creation of the state’s governor, Donald L. Carcieri, a former educator. In 2005, Carcieri, a Republican, launched a P–16 council without support or funding from the Democratic controlled legislature. The governor signed Executive Order 05-08, which established a statewide PK-16 system. Carcieri chairs meetings of the P–16 council and appoints its members. With only 10 members, it is one of the nation’s smallest P–16 councils.

Rhode Island’s council has been both lauded by supporters and panned by critics. The council does not include any members from the legislature, which the governor blames, in part, on a separation-of-powers amendment that prohibits the governor from appointing legislators to state offices, boards or commissions. While having strong support from the governor, the lack of legislative buy-in has resulted in no funding and little policymaking authority.

Rhode Island Rep. Joe McNamara, who chairs the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee, has criticized the governor for not including legislators on the state’s PK-16 council. Although he says he agrees with the concept behind the council, he is not pleased with the lack of legislative involvement in the process.

“Articulating curriculum from PK-16 is critically important,” he said. “But I also believe that the composition of those councils include elected members of the General Assembly. ... I find it’s always better to include people as you’re deliberating than to call them in at the last minute and say, ‘Hey, we’ve decided to go in this direction.’”

The governor and legislature have a long history of battles over education. In 2007, the legislature rejected the governor’s proposed 3 percent K–12 budget increase for the 2008 fiscal year, overriding his veto and freezing state aid to schools instead. When Carcieri leaves office in 2011, the sustainability of the council will be in the hands of the next governor. Carcieri said in *Diplomas Count*, a publication of the nonprofit Editorial Projects in Education, that he supports legislation to formalize the council, including having legislators holding nonvoting seats.

“It’s tricky,” he’s quoted as saying. “You don’t want to politicize (the council) and yet on the other hand, the reality is that sometimes we need to get some legislation passed.”

Shulock of the Institution for Higher Education Leadership and Policy studied Rhode Island’s PK-16 Council and agrees the lack of legislative involvement has all but doomed the effort. It’s like the council is part of the governor’s cabinet, she said. “So even if they came up with a policy agenda, it would be dead on arrival because the legislature is (angry) at the governor.”

A study of Rhode Island’s PK-16 system, prepared for The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education in April 2009, states, “(the council) suffers from legislative hostility. ... To the extent that the legislature pursues policy reforms, it does so on its own track, with little regard for the Council’s agenda.”

Nevertheless, Linn, from NGA, considers the state’s PK-16 Council a national model. “They have really as a council defined what college readiness means,” he said. “There’s been a real increase in the number of high school students who take dual enrollment courses, and Rhode Island is one of the first states to work out a way for the council to monitor the quality of those courses and make sure that they’re not just college courses in title only, but the content matches the title.”

Oregon

While nearly all P–16/20 councils function in advisory roles and lack the authority to enact and implement policies, Oregon’s Joint Boards of Education stands out as an exception. While its roots date prior to 1998, its current authority stems from a unique structure created by the Oregon legislature in 2007. Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 348.890 requires the State Board of Higher Education and the State Board of Education to

meet at least once annually as the Joint Boards, a unique P–16 council. A separate act from 2007, ORS 340.085, requires the Joint Boards to report annually to the House and Senate Education committees and specifies what the report must include.

The Joint Boards is comprised of the governing bodies for K–12, community colleges and the seven public universities in Oregon. Together, they work together on curriculum alignment standards and other issues common to all education regulatory agencies. Because decisions are made jointly by the combined regulatory boards, Oregon’s P–16 system has the power to create policies that affect all areas of education, a feature no other P–16 system has.

Connie Green, senior policy adviser for the state’s Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, said the boards must work together to reach a consensus on issues that affect both K–12, community colleges and higher education. “One board can’t tell the other board what to do, but together they can jointly agree what to do,” she explained.

Board members are recommended by the governor and approved by the legislature. The Joint Boards includes a working group, the Unified Education Enterprise comprised of three members from the Board of Higher Education and three from the Board of Education who are responsible for implementing legislation and executive orders. With the exception of the Unified Education Enterprise, however, the Joint Boards does not have any staff members who work exclusively for it and it does not receive funding beyond what the legislature appropriates to each individual board.

Joe Holliday, assistant vice chancellor for student success initiatives in the Oregon University System, said the Joint Boards has taken action to provide students with dual enrollment and Advanced Placement credit and is working to provide credit at state universities for International Baccalaureate credits.

The Joint Boards also has placed a high priority to align curriculum standards between high school, community colleges and universities, and created a credit transfer system between community colleges and four-year universities. “We are constantly moving in that direction of seamlessness,” he said. “Do we have seamless (transitions) from K–12 to community college to

university? No. Are we moving toward it through collaboration? Yes.”

The Issue of Sustainability

One potential problem that results from creating P–16/20 councils through executive order is that subsequent governors can easily change the council’s focus and makeup, or even whether the council will continue to exist through a new executive order. The councils’ potential lack of sustainability from one administration to the next is an issue that Michael Usdan, senior fellow at the Institute for Educational Leadership, said should be addressed through legislation. He said he doesn’t believe states will see the kind of effective P–16/20 councils that have been envisioned until legislators and business leaders become involved.

An example of changes in a P–20 council’s focus can be seen in Arizona, which had an exemplary P–20 Council under former Gov. Janet Napolitano, according to Shulock, of the Institution for Higher Education Leadership and Policy. She praised the council as being “highly structured into committees and subcommittees and serve(d) as a vehicle for generating broad-based recommendations to the governor.”

In December 2006, the council presented 32 recommendations to Napolitano. Since then, the council has been working to implement those recommendations through committee work, development of public will, collaboration with business and education partners, as well as through legislative and policymaking efforts. In 2008, the council adopted 23 separate recommendations focusing on early childhood educational programs.

In July 2009, the state’s new governor, Jan Brewer, issued an executive order reconstituting the P–20 council. Although Brewer’s executive order does not appear to weaken the state’s P–20 Council (in fact Arizona’s P–20 Director Debra Raeder contends it is now stronger), the council has received a new focus. The new P–20 Coordinating Council, as it is now known, places the executive directors of four governing boards on the P–20 council, hoping that their involvement will improve coordination between various levels of education.

Now, the leaders of the state Board of Education, Board of Regents, Community College Council and Early Childhood Health and Development Board will serve on the Coordinating Council. The

theory is that by having the executive directors of these agencies serve on the P–20 Council, the issues brought before the council will be considered by each agency.

“We can assure now that all of the policymaking boards will be focusing on those issues that come before the P–20 Council. Coordinating is the key to it,” Raeder explained.

Additionally, Brewer said in her announcement creating a new P–20 council in Arizona the council will provide a statewide forum that will, in turn, provide recommendations to the governor on specific education reforms outlined in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

“Our entire educational continuum must have a forum where they can coordinate policies and discuss the future,” Brewer said in a news release.

Still, Arizona’s modifications to its P–20 council illustrate that councils created by executive order can easily be altered by subsequent administrations, either for better or for worse, making them susceptible to unsettled sustainability.

Qualities of Effective P–16/20 Councils

As previously mentioned, many school governance models exist and no one-size-fits-all approach has so far emerged as a preferred policy. Many states have created local councils that are attached to specific universities in addition to a centralized state council. Some set performance goals; others do not. In most states, the council is required to meet at least quarterly. The composition of councils also varies greatly from state to state. According to the Education Commission of the States, in 23 states, a representative from the governor’s office is a member of the council. Legislators are members of councils in 20 states. Additional appointees most often come from the business community.

In nearly all states, P–16/20 councils are only able to recommend policy changes. Councils have some authority to set policies in only three states, according to the Education Commission of the States. Councils in North Carolina and Tennessee have limited powers to make changes. Only in Oregon are K–12 and postsecondary governing agencies required to accept actions taken by the P–20 Council.

The wide variance in models of P–16/20 councils leaves policymakers without clear-cut guidelines to know the best strategies to use in creating councils or improving the efficacy of existing ones. Patrick Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and

Higher Education, said many states have developed “pieces of the puzzle,” but adds no state has created a model that combines all the pieces needed for a P–16/20 council to be effective. For that reason, he said, the seamless transition between high school and college has not yet been achieved.

“I view them as a huge experiment—interesting and important—but nevertheless just an experiment to see if we can leave the governance and finance and all that as it is, and just put something on top that will coordinate it better and that can operate the system in an efficacious way to create this seamless experience,” Callan said.

Even the NGA’s Linn, a strong supporter of the P–16/20 movement, admits it hasn’t achieved its full potential. “I think we have great unevenness of the effectiveness of P–20 councils across the country,” he said. “And the reason for that is because few states have thought about creating a state policy, either through regulation or legislation, that sustains the P–20 council.”

The report, *The Governance Divide*, from Partnerships for Student Success, analyzed P–16/20 governance and policies at state levels, including organizational structures, leadership, finance, curricula and assessment, accountability and data systems. The report’s findings included four policy levers that states can use to create change:

- ▶ Alignment of courses and assessments to make sure what students are asked to know and do in high school correlates to postsecondary expectations;
- ▶ K–16 finance systems, rather than separate finance systems for K–12 and higher education;
- ▶ Data systems that span the P–16/20 continuum; and
- ▶ Accountability systems to span K–12 and postsecondary education. The report criticizes current practices of creating separate accountability systems for K–12 and higher education.

Shulock said in order for a P–16/20 council to be effective, some mechanism for influencing policy needs to be in place. “It needs to have buy-in from the legislative and executive branches,” she said. She also said councils need a staff and resources that enable members to carry out functions that would be well-received by legislative and executive branches.

Some observers believe one of the failings of P–16/20 councils is the failure to set measurable and achievable goals. But some states have set these goals, according to the Education Commission of the States. Arizona set a goal to increase the state’s high school graduation rate by 12 percent by 2012; Louisi-

ana set a goal for a 5 percent increase in the number of students scoring 18 or higher on the ACT English or math sections by 2015; and Arizona and Kentucky have stated they intend to double the number of bachelor's degrees awarded by 2020, according to the commission.

Callan said to make the councils work, the substantive work done jointly by the public school system and the colleges needs to be defined. "You can't just patch it together by pulling this test off the shelf or by having interesting meetings where you can tell legislative committees that we talk all the time and we didn't used to know one another," he said.

Policymakers should consider several "landmines" in creating P-16/20 councils, according to an Education Commission of the States policy brief. It lists several barriers that have prevented P-16/20 councils from carrying out their missions successfully. Specifically, some of the policy challenges include:

- ▶ Having too few, too many or not the right group of people at the table;
- ▶ Having an agenda that is either too broad or too vague, difficulty agreeing on an agenda, not having

specific, measurable goals or not having a mechanism to measure progress or hold individuals accountable;

- ▶ Lack of funding and staff;
- ▶ No public awareness of or support for the council's work; and
- ▶ Lack of continuity when state leadership changes.

States that can successfully avoid these "landmines" are more likely to achieve success in meeting their goals, according to the Education Commission of the States.

Conclusion

P-16/20 councils have emerged over the past decade as popular policy options to achieve greater equity in education, increase college readiness and, ultimately, improve access to postsecondary education. Educational experts who have reviewed these policies seem to agree they have so far fallen short of creating seamless transitions from high school to college. Still, even the harshest critics agree the existence of



"Regardless of one's vantage point—from higher education looking downward, from K-12 education looking upward, or from policymakers looking at both—it is almost immediately obvious that the problems in one sector cannot be solved without the cooperation of the other sector."

—Kati Haycock, director, The Education Trust

these councils, when structured and operated efficiently, can be useful policy tools.

"Some people are skeptical of these councils. They feel they're kind of worthless," Usdan said. "I don't. It's a starting point. You have to begin to talk." And even in many states where P-16/20 councils lack authority to enact policies, the talking Usdan refers to is leading to reforms, either through legislation, executive orders or actions by K-12 boards of education and/or postsecondary councils.

If P-16/20 councils are an experiment, as Callan suggested, it is possible that with time, policymakers will find the right combination of elements that will allow them to become effective policy tools to meet the challenges of preparing the 21st century work force. In short, although the process of building bridges to link the isolated islands of learning referred to earlier in this document is far from complete, educational experts agree those bridges are essential to span the educational divide that exists between different levels of education and different educational entities.

Resources

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- ▶ Haycock, Kati. Why is K-16 Collaboration Essential to Educational Equity? The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. (1998) Accessed at http://www.highereducation.org/reports/g_momentum/gmomentum8.shtml on July 23, 2009.
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