

Separation of K-12 and Postsecondary Education Governance and Policymaking: Evolution and Impact¹

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Over 80% of eighth graders want a postsecondary degree, and most realize there is an economic payoff to more years of schooling. But chance of degree completion (or vocational certificates) is much less than 50% for students who attend non-selective institutions. A profound organizational, political, and cultural chasm persists in most states between the systems of K-12 and higher education that helps create these problems. The two sectors continue to operate in separate orbits and to live apart in separate professional worlds, associations, and networks. These issues of poor preparation and low completion lack an immediate audience or constituency, and remain peripheral, *ad hoc*, and largely invisible because they fall between the cracks of separate governance and policy systems (Kazis, Vargas, and Hoffman, 2004).

Within each state—and at the federal level as well— a division exists that is based on the historical and pervasive assumption that K-12 schools and colleges and universities should be guided by policies exclusive to each sector. As a result, the public policy “tools” that influence one sector—funding, accountability and governance systems, for instance—have little in common with the policy tools that influence the other (Timpone and White, 1998). Moreover, there are separate state boards of education for each level; separate legislative committees, and boards that coordinate one level (e.g. postsecondary education) without the other.

In recent years, a number of policymakers and educators have questioned the premise that the policies and governance guiding K-12 schools and higher education ought to be totally distinct (Kirst and Venezia, 2004). They consider this assumption to be anachronistic and an impediment to educational improvement at both levels. This paper will provide an overview of some K-16 problems and disjunctures, including their historical evolution. It will then address

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proposed solutions, and major research gaps.² This paper highlights organizational, governance, and operation issues that send K-12 students inadequate and confusing signals about what is needed to succeed at postsecondary education.

The Changing Imperative for System Alignment

Inadequate and inequitable preparation for college affects remediation and persistence rates – major problems in postsecondary institutions throughout the country. For example, 40 percent of students in non-selective four-year institutions take some remedial education as compared with 63 percent at two-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education). Remediation problems are the greatest in “broad access postsecondary institutions,” community colleges, or four-year institutions that admit almost every student who applies. These broad access institutions often use placement exams as their key standards. Broad access institutions comprise about 85 percent of all postsecondary schools and educate approximately 80 percent of the nation’s first-year college students. Most media and public attention, however, focuses upon the approximately 20 percent of students who attend the most selective four-year institutions that have the best prepared students, and have the most complicated methods to help sort and select applicants. Very few students at broad access institutions take AP classes that are articulated with collegiate standards.

Education issues critical to the nation, the states, and students remain on the margin of the policy agenda—and no one’s direct or primary responsibility. These issues include inadequate college preparation, high school redesign, career and technical education, and K-12 school reform itself for expanded college preparation.

Career and technical education needs more rational and coordinated policymaking structures and processes. Career pathways, so vital to a volatile information-based economy, suffer from a lack of direction and commitment to career and technical education. Control is frequently diffused

² There are many issues that affect student preparation for college. This research focuses solely on the role of policies and programs related to high school graduation, college admission, and college placement. We did not address issues related to financial aid or affordability. In addition, teacher preparation and professional development programs and policies play a major role in helping students transition successfully between high school and college. These issues warrant a separate study and, therefore, were not addressed by this project.

between and among institutions in both K-12 and higher education. The latter generally is disinterested in an educational area with relatively little prestige. The secondary schools, for their part, are preoccupied with traditional academics and pressures to increase test scores in the current assessment environment. Without coordinated governance, vocational-technical education will continue to float either uncontested, or consumed by turf wars in states.

There is growing disaffection with American high schools. For example, reports documenting the increasing dropout rate and the poor use of student time in the senior year have drawn attention to secondary school redesign. One new concept is early college that blends the 11th and 12th grades with the 13th or 14th grades into a coherent, accelerated learning opportunity. While early colleges have the potential to serve bright students as well as at-risk students, separate governing boards affecting high schools and community colleges create different fiscal, accountability, and personnel systems that limit the potential for early colleges to be a widely available alternative to high schools that fail to challenge and retain youth (Maeroff, Callan, and Usdan, 2001). Moreover, financial disincentives often inhibit dual enrollment programs that expose high school students to college courses and standards. Policymakers object that “double dipping” ensues where the same student is paid for twice.

IMPACT UPON STUDENT PREPARATION AND SUCCESS

Over the past few decades, parents, educators, policymakers, business leaders, community members, and researchers have told students that, in order to succeed in our society, they need to go to college. High school students have heard that message, and they are planning on attending college.

But numerous policies have created unnecessary and detrimental barriers between high school and college, barriers that are undermining these student aspirations. The current fractured systems send students, their parents, and K-12 educators conflicting and vague messages about what students need to know and be able to do to enter and succeed in college.

For example, high school assessments often stress different knowledge and skills than do college entrance and placement requirements. Similarly, the coursework between high school and

college is not connected; students graduate from high school under one set of standards and, three months later, are required to meet a whole new set of standards in college. Current data systems are not equipped to address issues across systems. Most states are not able to identify students' needs as they transition from one education system to another, or assess outcomes from K-16 reforms, because they do not have K-16 data systems. Also, no one is held accountable for lack of K-16 coherence.

Kirst and Venezia (2004) studied the transition from high school to college and found that disconnected K-12 and postsecondary systems cause major problems for students. Their findings include:

- *Inequalities in education systems.* Students who are in accelerated curricular tracks in high school receive clearer signals about college preparation than do their peers in other tracks. Many students in middle and lower level high school courses are not reached by postsecondary education outreach efforts, or by college counseling staff in their high schools. Many economically disadvantaged parents often lack experience and information concerning college preparation. There is also an unequal distribution of such resources as college centers on high school campuses, opportunities to make college visits, and visits from college recruiters on high school campuses.
- *Student knowledge of curricular requirements is sporadic and vague.* Less than 12 percent of the students surveyed in six states knew all the course requirements for the postsecondary institutions studied (Kirst and Venezia, 2004). Students do appear to have considerable partial knowledge of curricular requirements; slightly more than one-half of the students knew three or more course requirements.
- *Teachers play a major role in helping students prepare for college, yet they do not have the resources they need to give students accurate information.* Teachers often took a greater role in helping students prepare for college than did counselors, but teachers lack connections with broad access postsecondary institutions and up-to-date admission and placement information.
- *Students are generally unaware of the content of postsecondary course placement exams.* Across all the studied states, less than one-half of the sampled students knew the specific placement testing policies for the institutions in the study. But failure of placement

exams causes students to start in remedial non-credit college courses. A California high school student highlights a key issue:

“I think they should prepare us better for the placement tests so that we don’t get stuck in basic classes. I think we should have the opportunity to know, not necessarily what’s on the test, but to have a good idea of it so that we know what to expect” (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2003, p. 35).

- *The distribution of college preparation information to parents is inequitable.* Forty-two percent, 44 percent, and 47 percent of economically disadvantaged parents in Illinois, Maryland, and Oregon, respectively, stated that they had received college information, as compared with 74 percent, 71 percent, and 66 percent of their more economically well-off counterparts.

Neither Sector Claims the Senior Year

Policymakers and education leaders, in their efforts to improve public schools, have overlooked a key educational resource: the senior year of high school. Most high school seniors who will attend broad access institutions view their final months prior to graduation as an opportunity to take less demanding courses and enjoy nonacademic pursuits (Kirst, 2001).

The economic and social consequences of this "senior slump" are considerable. The de-emphasis on academic work in the senior year is reflected in:

the rising cost of remediation, as more college freshmen enroll in remedial writing, math, and science classes; the high drop-out rates among those college students who are unprepared for college-level work; and poor academic skills among those high school graduates who move into the workforce or the military.

Senior slump stems in large part from the failure of both the K-12 schools and the colleges and universities to provide incentives for high school seniors to work hard. Indeed, senior slump appears to be the rational response of students to several disjunctures between K-12 and postsecondary education systems, including: K-12 assessments that evaluate performance in grades 2-10 and some cases grade 11, but not the 12th grade (only New York's state K-12 assessment includes the senior year); a college admissions calendar that provides few incentives for high school seniors to take rigorous academic courses; a lack of coherence and sequencing between the curriculum of the senior year and general education courses in college; a "babble" of contradictory assessments and standards-in which the content of K-12 achievement tests differs significantly from the content of college placement tests; and the universal emphasis-by high school counselors, college recruiters, college admissions and financial aid officers, students and their parents-on access and admission to college, with far less attention to the academic preparation needed to complete a postsecondary certificate or degree.

From this perspective, senior slump appears to be the rational response of high school seniors to an education system in which no one claims the academic content of the senior year as a basis for further education. Neither the K-12 system nor the postsecondary system provide any

incentives for high school seniors to work hard. To understand this institutional disinterest in senior year, we must look at the almost total disjuncture between K–12 education and postsecondary education.

The Standards Movement and the K–16 Disjuncture

In recent years, the standards movement has swept across the United States. Forty-six states have created K–12 academic content standards in most academic subjects, and all but Iowa and Nebraska have statewide K–12 student achievement tests. These state-directed efforts have two interrelated goals: clarifying what students must know and be able to do in the K–12 grades and aligning standards, assessments, textbook selection, and accountability measures in those grades. These reforms, however, have ignored the lack of coherence in content and assessment standards between K–12 and higher education. Until educators address this issue, secondary schools and their students will have no clear sense of what knowledge and skills constitute an adequate preparation for higher education. The current scene is a babel of standards rather than a coherent strategy.

Colleges and universities rely on the SAT and ACT to provide some national assessment uniformity, but neither of these tests is well aligned with the recent reforms in K–12 standards. The relationship between K–12 standards and college placement tests is even more chaotic. In 1995, for example, universities in the southeastern United States devised 125 combinations of 75 different placement tests, with scant regard to secondary school standards.

Tests at each level—K–12 achievement tests, standardized college entrance exams, and college placement assessments—use different formats, emphasize different content, and are given under different conditions, for example:

High school assessments in Illinois and Florida rely heavily on written work, but ACT and some Florida college placement exams use multiple-choice tests to assess students' writing skills. Massachusetts's K–12 assessment also contains performance items that are dissimilar to the closed-end multiple-choice format of the SAT and ACT.

California's newly augmented STAR test includes math that is considerably more advanced and difficult than the SAT and ACT, but Alabama's high school assessment includes less

algebra and geometry than the SAT.

Some state K–12 assessments permit students to use calculators, but the college placement exams do not.

Texas has a statewide postsecondary placement test (TASP), but many Texas universities also use their own placement exams. High school students in Texas are either confused by or ignorant of college placement standards (Venezia, 2000).

In addition, many state assessments do not go beyond tenth grade and do not test every pupil (they use a matrix sample); such scores cannot be used for college admissions or placement. By contrast, Illinois is implementing a new state test given in grade 11 that combine a state standards-based assessment with ACT.

Universities provide some good arguments to explain why they pay little attention to K–12 standards or assessments. First, the universities emphasize that they are not involved in the creation or refinement of the K–12 standards. Second, the universities observe that both politics and technical problems effect frequent changes in state K–12 standards. Third, they note that the K–12 assessments have not been evaluated to see how well they predict freshman grades (although such evaluations are not difficult to conduct).

EVOLUTION OF THE DISJUNCTURE BETWEEN K-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The origin of the disjuncture between lower and higher education in the United States stems, in part, from the laudable way the nation created mass education systems for both K–12 and higher education. The American comprehensive high school was designed for many purposes, and did not focus primarily on college preparation. The comprehensive high school includes vocational education, the worthy use of leisure (e.g. jewelry making), home economics, driver education, and many elective courses. The American high school has conflicting principles within it – democratic, practical, and meritocratic. College preparation can be relegated to a minority of students that are in a track of challenging courses. In Europe, by contrast, the higher grades of secondary education were designed for an elite group who would be going on to universities, European universities have long played a major role in determining the content

of the secondary school curriculum, and both the content and format of secondary school examinations. For example, professors at British universities like Cambridge and Durham grade the A levels taken by students during their last year of secondary education, and these essay exams figure crucially in a student's chances for university admission.

Over time, the chasm between lower and high education in the United States has grown greater than that in many other industrialized nations (Clark, 1985), but at one time U.S. colleges and universities did play an important role in the high schools. In 1900, for example, the College Board set uniform standards for each academic subject and issued a syllabus to help students prepare for college entrance subject-matter examinations. (Prior to that, each college had its own entrance requirements and examinations.) Soon after, the University of California began to accredit high schools to make sure that their curriculums were adequate for university preparation.

In the postwar years, however, the notion of K–16 academic standards vanished. “Aptitude” tests like the SAT replaced subject-matter standards for college admission, and secondary schools added elective courses in nonacademic areas, including vocational education and life skills. Today, K–12 faculty and college faculty may belong to the same discipline-based professional organizations, but they rarely meet with one another. K–12 policymakers and higher education policymakers cross paths even less often. It was not until 1982 that the Carnegie Foundation organized the first national meeting ever held between K-12 state school superintendents and college presidents (Stocking, p. 258). The only nationally aligned K–16 standards effort is the Advanced Placement program—a stalactite that extends from universities, which dictate the course syllabus and exam. An exam score of 3 or higher out of 5 on an AP exam is one indicator of college preparation.

With the exception of the AP program, there are no major efforts to provide curricular coherence and sequencing between the senior year and postsecondary education, and the role of the senior year in high school as a forum for general education is rarely discussed. Nor has anyone proposed a conception of liberal education that relates the academic content of the secondary schools to the first two years of college. Instead, students face an “eclectic academic

muddle in Grades 10–14” (Orrill, 2000) until they select a college major. In Ernest Boyer’s metaphor, postsecondary general education is the “spare room” of the university, “the domain of no one in particular” whose many functions make it useless for any one purpose (Boyer and Levine, 1981). The functional “rooms,” those inhabited by faculty, are the departmental majors.

When attention is paid to general education, two contending theories predominate. One holds that the purpose of general education is to prepare students for a specialized major; the other, that the purpose of general education serves as an antidote to specialization, vocationalism, and majors. Clark (1993) hoped that somehow the specialized interests of the faculty could be arranged in interdisciplinary forms that would provide a framework for a coherent general education, but there is little evidence that this is happening.

In sum, the high school curriculum is unmoored from the freshman and sophomore college curriculum and from any continuous vision of liberal education. In California, “literature” is the focus of high school English course work for college preparation. But the initial community college courses focus upon grammar and writing, while the University of California stresses rhetoric (www.cal-pass.org). Policymakers for the secondary and postsecondary schools work in separate orbits that rarely interact, and the policy focus for K–16 has been more concerned with access to postsecondary education than with the academic preparation needed to complete a postsecondary degree or certificate. Access, rather than preparation, is also the theme of many of the professionals who mediate between the high schools and the colleges: high school counselors, college recruiters, and college admissions and financial aid officers. The model high school student does little homework, and has an outside job. Most students know they can attend postsecondary education with minimal preparation.

The number and influence of mediating groups, such as College Board, Education Testing Service, and ACT, is, for Stocking (1985, p. 263), an indicator of the “amount of disorder and confusion that has grown through the years in the relationship between the school and the university in America.” In addition to the mediating professionals employed by the high

schools and the colleges, “A major role is assumed by the major private testing organizations, whose tests have become powerful tools for allocating students to different types of universities and colleges. And increasingly prominent is the mediating influence of federal government as it has attempted to increase equity in American education and now . . . seeks to emphasize excellence” (ibid.). She concludes that secondary and higher education systems diverge, and are pulled apart by different agendas.

In the United States, the relationship between the school and the university is complex and ambiguous. The educational system is both decentralized and very large. The connections between these two levels of education vary from the public to the private sector, from one state to another, within states from one school district to another, and nationally from one type of college to another. It becomes a major enterprise to describe the variety that exists in student selection, training, certification, and ideology, the mechanisms through which the school is considered to shape the university (Stocking, 1985).

Some of the fastest growing courses are college courses in high school (e.g. advanced placement) and remedial education in postsecondary education. In some ways, the better high school students are becoming more closely aligned with higher education, but the weaker students are more disconnected.

The customary fragmented manner in which policy is made on issues that span the K-16 continuum – such as finance, curricula, assessments, accountability, teacher education, data collection, and data usage – suggests a need for a better understanding of the state governance structures that will permit improved planning and connections across the education sectors. In addition, the very structure and organization of Legislative committees traditionally serves to reinforce the divide between K-12 and postsecondary education. Georgia and New York have separate K-12 and higher education committees in both Houses, while Oregon and Florida have committees that oversee both (in both Houses). Florida has K-20 committees, and it will be important to learn from their work over time. Having separate bodies makes policymaking and appropriating funds across sectors very difficult. Appropriations Committees are of crucial importance, and they usually have different subcommittees, making it virtually impossible to

change the status quo. More work needs to be done to understand the inner-workings of these committees in relation to K-16 reform, but Legislative bodies must recognize the problems caused by continuing the disjunctures between K-12 and postsecondary education in their very structures.

Higher education governance structures, in general, can be a major impediment to K-16 reform. They are a reason why there is no one-size-fits-all model for reform. The variation in state higher education governance is quite large. Some states, such as California have three tiers, while Georgia has a single Board of Regents governing community colleges through research universities. In addition, almost every state has some form of coordinating board of higher education, and a K-12 state board of education. The ways these bodies interact with each other, and with K-12, depends on the history and culture of each state.

TEACHER PREPARATION: INTEGRATION WITH k-12 WEAKENS

Elementary teachers were originally prepared in two-year postsecondary normal schools – normal means rule, model, or patterns. In 1910, there were 264 normal schools enrolling 132,000 students (Dunham, 1969). The next development was from a normal school for elementary teachers to a teachers college to prepare secondary teachers as well as elementary schools. These institutions are linked to K-12 schools and interactions across K-16 levels is frequent.

But as demands for increasing higher education grows, the teachers colleges expand functions and enrollment to become a multipurpose state college. This causes recruitment of arts and sciences professors who seek higher academic prestige by offering Master's and Doctorate degrees. Education is viewed by these diverse faculties as low prestige. The final step is for the normal college to become a university that is not in close contact with K-12 teachers and students except in the education school. Normal and teachers' colleges were often part of the K-12 State Board of Education. As higher ed detaches from K-12, students receive unclear signals about placement exams, and what first-year university students need to know in order to be prepared. There is less high-level contact between new universities and K-12 schools.

Western Michigan University is an example of this institutional evolution. Founded in 1903 as a normal school, it becomes Western State Teachers College in 1927, Western Michigan College of Education in 1941, and then Western Michigan University in 1957 with 18,500 students in 1969 served by 900 faculty members. The first doctoral degrees are conferred in 1968. David Riesman describes academic pyramiding in this way:

The development, in other words, is from mass production of undergraduate degrees—or even less expensive dropout—toward class production of upper-division academic majors, specialist undergraduate programs, and fantastically expensive graduate programs, or handicraft production.

These trends in turn depend on what seems to me the basic strategy of pyramiding in American public education, comparable to the procedure by which holding companies used to operate prior to the New Deal. This pyramiding involves formulae for faculty-student loads calculated on the basis that those who teach graduate students have a span of control of about 1 to 4, whereas those who teach freshmen have a span of control closer to 1 to 20 (in Dunham, 1968, p. 169).

These former normal schools continue to exhibit competing political and cultural pressures between elitism and populism, selectivity and open door, and academic standards that imply exclusion. Consequently, many of them admit all qualified applicants, but use placement tests for first year students to preserve standards. Secondary school students know that it is easy to get in, but not about placement tests (Kirst and Venezia, 2004).

COMMUNITY COLLEGES DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM K-12

Community colleges are the point of entry into higher education for many students across the United States. Over 45% of undergraduates attend a community college, an increase of 10% in the last decade (Marcus, 2005). This number has been increasing because of the heavy use of community colleges in fast growing states like California, Texas, and Florida. California, for example, enrolls two-thirds of its college freshmen into the community college system (Hayward, Jones, McGuinness, and Timar, 2004).

Many of the students who enter community colleges fit the characteristics of those who are less likely to have access to college information and preparation. Community colleges serve a large proportion of low-income, ethnic minority, and first-generation college students (Tinto, 2004).

According to Stanford's Bridge Project, students from lower SES levels and ethnic minority students are less likely to receive college counseling, be placed in college-preparation courses, and obtain information about college admissions and placement (Kirst and Venezia, 2004).

The lack of college preparation and information possessed by students entering community college is reflected in low transfer and degree completion rates. Although 71 percent of beginning community college students plan to obtain a bachelor's degree, only about 25 percent transfer to a four-year school (Bradburn, & Hurst, 2001). Several studies demonstrate that students who enter community colleges and seek a four-year degree have much lower completion rates than students who proceed directly to a four-year school (Fry, 2004; Cabrera, 2004). Whereas 63 percent of students attending a four-year school earn a bachelor's degree, only 18 percent of those who begin at a community college do so (Wellman, 2002). [Wellman cites Adelman's 1999 study which found that 70% of the 26% of transfer students graduated from a four-year institute. I then calculated the overall percentage to be 18].

Despite low transfer and completion rates, community colleges continue to be an attractive option because of their proximity to students' residence, low enrollment fees, and "open door" policy that admits students with few entrance standards. Unfortunately, students often mistake the "open door" policy to mean that the college has few achievement standards. Students often believe that they are free to enter any courses, including college-level courses, they choose. (Rosenbaum, 2001). Community colleges, however, use placement exams to uphold their achievement standards. These exams are used to limit access to college-level courses to only those students who exhibit the skills required for success in these courses.

Stanford's Bridge Project found that most secondary school students going to community colleges were unaware of college placement standards, and thought their high school graduation standards were adequate preparation (Kirst, Venezia, Antonio, 2004). High school students view community college as a souped-up high school, even though community colleges must align their courses to four-year transfer standards. Most beginning students do not even learn that they need to take a placement exam until they enter the community college (Kirst and Venezia, 2004, Bueschel, 2004).

High school counseling for prospective community college students is particularly weak and students receive vague signals about the college's academic demands. According to Rosenbaum (2001), the level of high school achievement needed to succeed in the community college is not communicated to high school students. Students are told what it takes to enroll into a community college, but not what it takes to complete it. Since their high school achievement does not prevent their enrollment into a community college, students are led to believe that their high school achievement does not matter. They are not told that their high school achievement will affect the amount of time it will take for them to finish transfer requirements, thus decreasing their chances of ever completing college.

It is very difficult to make any generalizations about the community college's structure and operations. There is no typical community college, but after 1960 they became the primary institution for increasing college opportunity. Originally, community colleges were funded like public schools with mostly local support, state supplements, and no tuition. In California, community colleges originated as part of the local K-12 system and considered 13th and 14th grades. But four-year systems dictated much of their curricula in order to facilitate transfer (Callan, 1997). It was not until 1950, that community colleges across the nation began to have their own governing boards and were termed junior colleges.

Between 1950 and 1970, the number of community colleges more than doubled and enrollment increased from 217,000 to 1,630,000. Between 1969 and 1974, community college enrollment increased by 174 percent contracted to 47 percent for four-year institutions (Callan, 1997). Growth was accompanied by a much expanded mission, and a loss of interaction and focus with secondary education. Colleges expanded their mission to vocational education and community service. New and neglected populations were added, including displaced housewives, immigrants, older adults, and laid-off industrial workers. The comprehensive community college became detached from secondary education and sent fewer and less clear signals to high school students about necessary academic preparation and skills needed to obtain vocational certificates.

The impact of this detachment from secondary education has been profound. For example, 95 percent of first-time students enrolled in Baltimore City Community Colleges (BCCC) in the Fall of 2000 required remediation in math, English, and reading. At BCCC, nearly half of all entering students were assigned to the lowest level of remedial math. This placement requires a student to take as many as nine courses (27 units) before he or she can begin credit-level work in math (Abell Foundation, 2002).

Nationally, about 60 percent of students entering community colleges require remediation. Of all the English and math courses offered at the community college, 29 percent and 32 percent, respectively, are remedial (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The majority of the students enrolled in these remedial courses (60%) are of traditional college age and enter the college directly after high school. This implies that the high level of remediation is not just a result of having to refresh the skills of individuals who have been out of school for a while, but also of having to teach skills that were not received in high school.

Increasingly, four-year institutions transfer their remediation to community colleges. Ten states currently discourage four-year universities from offering remedial education by not providing state funding (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002). Two states that have gotten much attention for shifting the responsibility of remedial education over to the community colleges are New York and California. Both the City University of New York (CUNY) and California State University (CSU) began phasing out remedial education during the 1990s. Students who would have taken remedial courses in these systems are now being sent to the community colleges (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002). Remediation is a major risk factor for non-completion of degree or certificate programs (Adelman, 2001).

HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE NOT LINKED TO K-12

From 1950 to 1980, higher education grew so dramatically that the need for increased state coordination became a priority. In 1940, the majority of states did not have a higher education governing, coordinating, or planning agency with responsibility for all public higher education. By 1979 all states had such an agency (Richardson et al., 1999). In 1940, 70% of public campuses had their own board, but by 1976, only 30% did. State subsystems developed as

branch campuses of major public universities, and as a way to govern former normal schools that had been under state boards of education. But these postsecondary statewide agencies are not linked or coordinated with K-12 governance or policymaking. New higher education state bureaucracies operated in isolation from their K-12 counterparts as regulations grew from 1960 to 1980 at both levels. Richardson et al. (1998) summarize postsecondary governance this way:

By the early 1970s, the basic patterns of contemporary state governance for higher education were in place. Most states had either statewide coordinating boards or consolidated governing boards, with multi-campus systems as the dominant institutional form. Structures in different states were more alike than different, in part because they represented relatively common solutions to relatively common problems, but also because policy makers and educators tended to borrow from one another across state lines. A 1969 study of 12 large states found little political or budget conflict between K-12 and postsecondary education. The two levels basically ignored each other and proceeded in their separate ways (Richardson, Richard C., Kathy Bracco, Patrick Callan, and Joni Finney, 1999, p. 9).

In the 1970's, several states, including Idaho, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Virginia tried to bridge the K-16 gap through gubernatorial-appointed Secretaries of Education. The positions were created with the expectation that centralized, state-level leadership for K-12 and higher education could better coordinate and integrate education policy, including such areas as teacher education. After 25 years, however, none of these states' K-16 system goals and policies are as aligned as they were originally intended.

In **Idaho**, strong public concern for the quality of K-12 education has pulled the Secretary and Board's attention to K-12 issues, which has led to greater independence and less scrutiny of higher education.

In **Virginia**, compulsory 11th grade end-of-course exams contain relevant content to judge higher education readiness, but there has been no serious discussion of using Virginia K-12 standards of learning for postsecondary admission or placement. Similarly in **Pennsylvania**,

students' performance on the high-stakes high school exit exam does not relate to any postsecondary standards. In both states, tying performance on these exams to postsecondary admissions and/or placement would help address students' low motivation to perform well, as well provide clearer signals to students about the skills needed to do college work without remediation.

In **Massachusetts**, higher education leaders increased academic requirements and decreased remedial courses at public colleges. This policy, however, was initiated by the higher education system without significant involvement of the Secretary of Education or K-12 educators.

In **Oregon**, the state tried to improve K-14 educational pathways by placing the community colleges under the State Board of Education. But Oregon's state Board makes policy for K-12 schools and community colleges separately. Oregon's promising competency-based exit exam, the Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM) for 11th and 12th grade students, is not fully developed, and the community colleges have not been enthusiastic about incorporating CAM in placement decisions.ⁱ Once again, we find that more alignment of K-16 policy does not necessarily occur within a more consolidated governance structure.

The **Florida** 1999 legislature passed implementing legislation for the constitutional changes. The major thrust of the implementing law was the establishment of a "unified, seamless, K-120 education system." This included creating a new, single, statewide K-20 board of education. The mission of the board is to oversee the seamless education system which governs Florida's K-20 educational system. The state board of education has authority for system policy and goals, budgets, long-and-short-term planning, accountability standards, performance monitoring, technical assistance, and enforcement of accountability. A restructured Florida Department of Education currently is implementing a unified K-20 accountability system, which holds each education delivery sector responsible for high student achievement; seamless articulation and access; a skilled workforce, and quality, efficient services. The state is also integrating its extensive K-12 and postsecondary education student unit record systems. Policy analysis has improved in Florida since this unified system was created. With centralized student-unit records, the state board identified school districts where a disproportionately low number of students were enrolling in the state's 4-year colleges or needed remedial education

upon enrollment. The state analyzed high school and middle college course-taking patterns and recognized that students in these districts were not enrolling in a rigorous sequence of high school courses.

A 2003 review of higher education restructuring in five states, including Florida's creation of a K-20 super board, compared the main explanatory cause in each case (Leslie and Nobak, 2003). The authors contrasted "instrumental factors" for improving the effectiveness or efficiency of state-level governance with "political factors" that stem from some explicit or implicit need of political elites to consolidate power or thwart interests counter to their own. They concluded that political factors were the primary motivation and cause, and instrumental goals were prevalent, but secondary. The Florida K-12 governance restructuring was "skewed the furthest along the continuum toward political motives for change" (Leslie and Novak, 2003, p. 116).

VOLUNTARY K-16 COLLABORATION

The disappointing results from the 1970's attempts to integrate K-12 and postsecondary policymaking through structural governance changes was followed by the 1990's attempts to provide less formal and more voluntary K-16 linkages. These initiatives have made some incremental progress, but they depend for longevity on the next generation of committed leaders from both levels.

The most ambitious of these efforts are the Georgia and Maryland P-16 councils. The goal of these councils is to profoundly change the ways in which schools and colleges operate, not just to add new "early intervention-style" programs. In order to bring separately governed and financed systems together on issues of mutual interest, a voluntary P-16 council must have access to key leaders – including policymakers, communities, business and labor – and state policy levers (e.g., accountability provisions or shared student level data). While still evolving, Maryland and Georgia's P-16 councils have put much more effort into improving teacher education than improving student pathways from secondary to postsecondary education. Recently, the Georgia statewide P-16 council is developing academic content standards for the first two years of college that are linked to the state's K-12 standards.

It is too early to reach a final verdict on these voluntary K-16 educator alliances in Maryland and Georgia. A major question is whether they will survive the unusual statewide leaders who instigated them—Governor Roy Barnes of Georgia, and University of Maryland Chancellor, Donald Langenberg. Will *ad hoc*, voluntarily adopted institutional policies for admissions and placement lead to sustained changes and improved rates of postsecondary success? Richardson et al. raise the essential issue about whether governance structures matter:

Does it really matter how a state structures its system of higher education? Those who have studied this question, while rejecting the notion that any one arrangement is best under all circumstances, nonetheless agree that governance is important. Our case studies suggest that the level of importance is often understated. Certainly, leadership matters, but even good leaders should not be expected to achieve consistent results in the presence of a system design that inhibits institutional collaboration and system synergy. Leadership can make a system perform better or worse than its structural design, but it cannot compensate for badly designed systems or mismatched policy environments (Richardson, Bracco, Callan, and Finney, 1999, p. 17).

A key research issue concerns what types of state and regional structures or arrangements enhance K-16 deliberations, interaction, policy integration, and student outcomes. Policymakers, faculty, students, and parents across the K-16 spectrum need to be brought together. Given these lofty objectives, it is useful to examine the evolution of the most integrated policy structure in the United States – the New York Regents.

THE NEW YORK REGENTS: THE ORIGINAL K-16 SUPER BOARD

The New York Regents were designed in 1784 to provide K-16 integration, and is the broadest educational governance body in the nation. The Regents' scope of authority includes public and private elementary, secondary and higher education; the licensed professions, including medicine, nursing, law and accounting; libraries, museums, historical societies; and public television and radio stations. The New York Regents' exams began in the 19th Century, and have exerted a

powerful K-16 influence. Regents are selected by the legislature for five-year terms with each legislator having one vote. Consequently, the Regents are not an integral part of the Governor's executive branch and lack independent fiscal powers. The legislative selection method provides some political insulation, but also a remoteness and inaccessibility from the rest of state government. In many ways, the Regents are a fourth branch of New York State government.

However, the birth of the State of New York (SUNY) system in the 1960s led to a dramatic decline in the Regents' attention to, and impact on, higher education. All colleges and universities outside of New York City—public, non-profit independent, and for-profit proprietary – are members of the SUNY system; SUNY has budget authority over the state's higher education appropriations. Every eight years, the Regents develop a Higher Education Plan that is subject to the Governor's approval, but recently it is not viewed as a K-16 policy that links the levels much more tightly. SUNY and CUNY are not tightly linked by the Regents plan (Bracco, 1997, pp. 198-228).

With its current disproportionate focus on K-12 issues, the Regents have retained one mechanism that aligns secondary and postsecondary education: the Regents exams. When first conceived, student performance on these high school end-of-course-based exams was a factor in university admission and financial aid eligibility. But most New York financial aid is now need based. As the Regents exams' purpose evolved to certify minimum standards for high school completion – and the SUNY system's independence increased – Regents were used less frequently for SUNY admissions decisions. SUNY uses SAT as an admissions factor. The Regents exams do still, however, provide high school students information about postsecondary academic content standards. Regents' syllabi also provide a higher education oriented underpinning to high school course content in New York. Regents' exams include essays and open-ended questions that are closer to higher education standards than all multiple-choice exams. Moreover, the City University of New York (CUNY) uses the K-12 Regents exams as its own placement exam, a policy that can reduce remediation by sending clear signals about college standards to high school students.

The lesson from New York's experience is that a consolidated K-16 governance structure can help align K-16 academic content standards, but does not lead to the policy development that aligns all key components of K-12 and postsecondary education (Callan, Kirst, Usdan and Venezia, 2005).

In particular, states need to pay attention to the authorities, particularly the budget authority, given to a K-16 consolidated structure in order to reach common goals of higher enrollment rates, lower remediation rates, and higher persistence rates.

RESEARCH TO IMPROVE CURRENT K-16 DISJUNCTURES

The preceding review provides data on our K-16 fractures and the resulting problems. Current research does not provide a lot of guidance, however, on effective K-16 structure, policymaking, or outcomes. There are several studies indicating that different organizational and governance forms do have an impact upon higher education politics and policy (Nicholson-Crotty and Meier, 2003; Knott and Payne, 2002). However, this research has not been extended to K-16 issues (McLendon and Heller, 2003).

One of the most important, and difficult, issues that states must tackle is creating the motivation and pay-off for systems, institutions, and people to change. Incentives must be developed for both systems, and in ways that tie the systems together. As Haycock (2002) wrote, there are two basic ways to create incentives:

The first, and probably the most popular, is to put dollars on the table for joint K-16 work. Those dollars can be made conditional on the creation of a K-16 governance structure and/or on the willingness to undertake particular actions... This approach has the advantage of getting lots of activity underway quickly. But it has several disadvantages as well, not the least of which is that these activities tend to remain at the fringes of institutional life and institutional priorities. And when the dollars dry up . . . the activity goes away. The alternative is to approach this issue through the lens of accountability. The core idea is simple: policymakers should design their accountability systems for both K-12 and higher education to include outcomes that each system cannot possibly deliver alone. K-12, for example, might be held accountable not only for improving student achievement and closing gaps between groups, but also for assuring that all of its secondary teachers have deep and substantial knowledge in the subject areas they are teaching. Similarly, higher education can be held accountable for decreasing the number of minority freshmen requiring remediation (Haycock, 2002).

While money helps motivate, the key is avoid the type of programmatic allocations that keeps K-16 reform on the edges of institutions and systems. There is little incentive, for example, for an institution to work with K-12 to reduce the number of students who require remediation

because those students bring with them valuable funds. One strategy is to, “use the ‘push’ of a reconstructed accountability system together with the ‘pull’ of recaptured funding for institutional or departmental priorities” (Haycock, 2004).

Several governance-related policy levers appear to have great potential to create positive change for students, either directly or indirectly. These include finance, assessment and curricula, accountability, and data systems. Finance is a mechanism that can reduce territorialism and competition. K-16 finance can be used to draw systems together in ways that reduce systems’ self-preservation efforts and benefit students. Assessment and curricula directly affect students’ lives; currently high school and postsecondary curricula and assessment are not connected. This is confusing and impedes students’ abilities to prepare, successfully, for college. While every state either has, or is working to develop, a K-12 accountability system, and some have postsecondary accountability systems or indicators, there are rarely connected K-16 accountability systems. For example, schools need to be accountable for providing high quality college preparation opportunities for all their students. Four-year postsecondary institutions should be accountable for ensuring that all students have the support and information they need to graduate in six years or less. Finally, data systems seem far-removed from students, but, in fact, they can provide the information states must have to address student needs and learn where, and which, students are falling through the cracks. In addition, data systems can help states understand if their reforms are having the intended effects.

Currently, many states have grade 10-level benchmarks for the final state-level test administered in high school. It is difficult to connect grade 10 tests to college expectations. Consequently, there is a large hole in the nation’s current education assessment strategy. Students are left believing that their 10th grade assessments and curricular standards are what they need to know and be able to do to graduate from high school and enter college.

Ewell (2004) wrote that, from a K-16 accountability perspective, current incentives are not effective. One reasonable objective of a K-16 system would be to ensure that a greater percentage of traditionally under-represented students persist throughout the education systems

and complete some form of postsecondary education. For postsecondary institutions, however, two ways to improve completion rates are to be highly selective and diminish access or to reduce both standards and the worth of a credential. A good K-16 accountability system might counteract those responses. In addition, it would not replicate additional problems currently found in many states' accountability systems, such as a focus on a single institution at the expense of systemic problems, a lack of a specific change agenda, and a lack of urgency. Ewell notes that there are three typical state policy mechanisms regarding accountability: direct regulation, performance reporting, and performance funding (Ewell, 2004)

Governance sets the framework through which the systems—i.e., system leaders, policy leaders, and elected officials—interact within each state. It is dependent upon the overall context and the political and educational cultures of each state. Governance can and does matter, but no independent effect of governance will carry the day. There is no perfect, one-size-fits-all, model or structural panacea for K-16 reform.

The overall structure governing education can drive the types of policies developed, and the implementation and institutionalization strategies utilized. For example, a state with a K-16 structure in statute, and with a Governor leading the charge, might have a greater ability to develop and implement necessary reforms than a state with ad hoc, grant-funded, K-16 projects. In Georgia, Governors Miller and Barnes successfully used the bully pulpit and other public means to create state and regional P-16 councils, and charge them with specific duties. On the flip side, states with more entrepreneurial, project-based, environments such as Oregon might be able to achieve more substantial changes than states that focus mostly on governance per se.

In sum, a profound organizational, political, and cultural chasm persists in most states between the governance systems of K-12 and higher education. The two sectors continue to operate in separate orbits and to live apart in separate professional worlds, associations, and networks. These issues also lack an immediate audience or constituency, and remain peripheral, *ad hoc*, and largely invisible because they fall between the cracks of separate governance systems. An overarching governance entity might help to strengthen the multiple pathways to and through

postsecondary education, and improve college success rates for a larger segment of the population. But more powerful interventions are needed that address core incentives and the cultural separation of the sectors.

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