



PATHWAYS
TO COLLEGE
NETWORK

Pathways to College Network Summary Report of P-16 Policy Roundtable in Washington

Purpose and Goals

On December 4, 2001, the Governor's Office, the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) and the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) co-sponsored a Pathways to College P-16 Policy Roundtable to create an understanding of P-16 education among state leaders and launch a dialogue leading to action focused on linkages across levels, easing transitions, and closing the achievement gap in Washington State. Participants included 158 K-12, postsecondary, legislative and executive leaders. (For an agenda, list of participants and program materials go to www.hecb.wa.gov, click on "Policy and Programs," then "P-16 Roundtable.")

Discussion and Outcomes

The day was designed to provide both state and national perspectives on partnerships, learner-centered approaches, access to higher education and P-16. HECB Executive Director Marc Gaspard opened the meeting and set the tone for the day by stressing the need to focus on learners, building better linkages across education levels and supporting the new Certificate of Mastery approach. Superintendent of Public Instruction Terry Bergeson strongly endorsed the need for a P-16 approach and bluntly noted that, despite the rhetoric, Washington leaders are not "doing P-16." Her remarks were followed by a panel providing brief descriptions of existing partnerships in Washington State that raised numerous questions about coherence, coordination, policy gaps and appropriate roles for leaders at various levels.

In a luncheon keynote, Washington Governor Gary Locke laid out his reasons for supporting a P-16 approach. He emphasized the need to have high expectations for all learners, create smoother transitions at key points (e.g., early learning to elementary school, high school to college), close achievement gaps and develop P-16 data systems. Governor Locke suggested that a P-16 Council might be the best way to approach these issues and also chided his legislative colleagues to work more closely together on these issues and serve as models for educators. "A seamless P-16 system is the logical next step in the standards-based reform movement," Governor Locke concluded.

The post-luncheon session on defining P-16 issues, moderated by KIRO radio host Dave Ross, highlighted the fact that Washingtonians do not yet agree on what it means to pursue a P-16 agenda and will require future opportunities to share ideas and find common ground. Disagreements centered on whether or not all K-12 students should pursue a college preparation curriculum and whether or not Washington's K-12 assessment

program is supportive of or a barrier to collaboration across system boundaries.

Against this backdrop, the next panel offered insight into what other states have done as they have moved toward a P-16 system of education. Jan Somerville, director of the National Association of System Heads and a long-time P-16 advocate, noted that higher education must come to a consensus about what students are expected to know and be able to do, both when they enter the system and when they leave it. She also stressed the need for getting, understanding and using data on student achievement. Neil Kleiman, director of the Center for an Urban Future in New York City, focused on the importance of leadership and the need to create alternative approaches, such as Middle College High Schools, to open new opportunities for at-risk students and reduce remediation levels. Christine Tell, director of Oregon's Proficiency-Based Admissions Standards System (PASS), noted that Washington already has many of the pieces of a P-16 system but must get beyond individual turf issues and look at the big picture including improved collaborative processes, aligned standards and assessments, and a cross-level data system. Her advice: Hang in! It's a long, difficult process but worth the effort. Karen Paulson, NCHEMS Senior Associate, advised Washingtonians to concentrate on developing a clear, shared vision and then conducting a policy audit to identify the gaps between the vision and the current reality. She also stressed the central importance of having, sharing and using data to determine needs and measure progress toward goals.

The legislative panel featured four state representatives and two state senators responding to the day's sessions. Four of the panel members were supportive of the nature and direction of the P-16 discussions. Two raised questions about the costs involved and whether or not such an approach was right for all students. The tenor of their remarks indicated a general willingness to further explore P-16 as a means of improving student achievement in Washington.

Finally, participants were asked to provide their written responses to a series of questions posed by the HECB. All responses were posted to the HECB Web site. Some highlights:

- a) Which were the most important questions raised today?
 - "How can we create a P-16 Council?"
 - "How will P-16 impact the plight of historically struggling students?"
 - "How will we put aside our individual advocacies and look at the bigger picture?"
 - "How can we close the achievement gap?"
- b) Should P-16 efforts . . . be a high priority in Washington now?
 - "Yes." (a majority of responses contained this single word)
 - "It should be a high priority."
 - "Align now and you will dumb down higher education."
- c) Are other issues more pressing?
 - "Funding formulas."
 - "At least two things are higher priority – funding and adequately serving an incredibly diverse population. In fact, I doubt if P-16 can succeed as long as those two problems remain as ill-addressed as they are."

d) What should next steps be?

- "Create an Office of P-16 under the Governor **with teeth** to get the work done."
- "We need a structure/mechanism to start this important work. Who will spearhead it?"
- "Audit the two systems (K-12 and 13-16) and see the roadblocks. Build a framework that allows it to be flexible to meet the needs of students who all have different paths."
- "Definition of skills and competencies at each articulation point."

The momentum generated at the meeting provided the impetus for the introduction of a governance bill that would have stimulated substantial debate on P-16 issues. Unfortunately, budget issues pushed this effort to the background and the bill died without a hearing. Governor Locke still has education governance, including a P-16 Council, on his policy agenda, and new recommendations are expected prior to the 2003 legislative session.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) has demonstrated its interest in building strong connections between the K-12 and higher education systems through its commitment to reviewing the minimum admission requirements for four-year colleges and universities. This examination will include a review of the balance between grades and standardized test scores, core course requirements, alternative admissions, community college transfers, competency-based admissions, discussion about using K-12 reform efforts in admissions and other topics.

HECB is also pushing the importance of completing a rigorous high school curriculum, a message delivered by several speakers at the December Pathways Roundtable

In a possible precursor to a P-16 Council, an informal group from all sectors met throughout the spring and summer looking at ways to connect K-12 reform efforts to higher education. The group examined the use of the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) instrument in lieu of the placement tests at community colleges and/or as a supplement to, or in lieu of, the traditional standardized tests like the ACT or SAT for the public four-year colleges. Additional discussion about the use of portfolios in the college application process has been discussed.

As one observer noted, these activities reflect the fact that "the P-16 conference was a loud wake up call."

(1) Focus of the Meeting.

Agreeing on the focus and outcomes of a Roundtable session is critical to the design of the meeting including who and how many are invited and what should be expected following the meeting. In this case, the decision was to use the Roundtable as a primary means of nudging a new issue onto the state's policy agenda and informing a broad array of leaders from the K-12, postsecondary and political communities about the need to address this issue. Once this decision was made, it became reasonable to expand the range of invitees and design the day to deliver information rather than to concentrate on seeking commitments to action strategies. One hundred fifty eight leaders from across the state responded to the invitation and attended the Roundtable. This response required a change of venue for the meeting and a new meeting design – difficult at the time but successful in the end.

For Further Information

October, 2002

(2) Meeting Design.

An information meeting seeks to maximize the amount of relevant information provided to attendees. In retrospect, Pathways partners attending the meeting thought the sessions sought to push too much information onto the audience. For example, while it was interesting to hear about the many different programs that exist across Washington, this portion of the program did little to advance understanding of how a P-16 system might benefit the state except to underscore the message that Washington is program rich and policy poor.

(3) State Co-sponsor.

The importance of having an in-state co-sponsor was evident again in the Washington Roundtable. While political decisions dictated some aspects of program design and invitations, the support provided by HECB in outlining an agenda, handling invitations, adjusting site requirements and gathering materials was essential to the day's success.

(4) Follow-up.

While roundtables are designed to raise awareness of new issues, they do not always result in identifiable actions. The Washington leaders have done an excellent job of taking the messages delivered during the Roundtable and using them to organize follow-up activities.

The Pathways to College Network is an alliance of major foundations, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and the U.S. Department of Education, working together to improve college access and success for underserved youth, including low-income, minority, and first-generation students. Within Pathways, the policy component strives to achieve Pathways goals through activities that better inform policy makers and policy shapers on the issues around student achievement and college access and success. The primary partners in this work are The College Board, Education Commission of the States (ECS), State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

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FUNDERS

Occidental College
Daniels Fund
Ford Foundation
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
GE Fund
The James Irvine Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
KnowledgeWorks Foundation
Lucent Technologies Foundation
Lumina Foundation for Education
U.S. Department of Education

Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education

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