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Improving the High School-to-College Transition Through Leadership and Governance

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Summary

Governors are united in their commitment to improve America's high schools. Nationwide, only 71 percent of students graduate from high school, and only 18 percent of high school freshmen go on to complete a college degree on time. Deficits in basic skills cost colleges, businesses, and underprepared high school graduates as much as \$16 billion annually in lost productivity and remedial costs.¹ The 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools, cohosted by the National Governors Association (NGA) and Achieve, Inc., unveiled *An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools* to help governors address this problem. One of the *Action Agenda's* recommendations is to improve statewide education leadership and governance.

Currently, statewide education governance is fragmented. In almost every state, state boards and agencies for K–12 and postsecondary education operate independently and are not held accountable for common goals or education outcomes. Most states also lack a way to coordinate policies for high schools with those for public two- and four-year postsecondary institutions. Consequently, high school students, their parents, and educators receive conflicting and vague messages about what students need to know and be able to do to transition to the next education level.

Governors can pursue three strategies to improve statewide education leadership and governance.

- *Create a single governance system for kindergarten (or early childhood) through postsecondary education.* Governors recognize that education is a single system in which higher education institutions train the teachers and leaders for schools that educate the future student bodies of these colleges and universities. A single education governance system with authority over the entire system can improve the coherence of policy development and implementation across and within all levels.
- *Create a permanent statewide education commission.* Political or cultural circumstances in a state may prevent consolidating education governance. However, governors can create a permanent commission that brings together educators, policymakers, and business leaders to develop common goals, performance benchmarks, and education policies for the state's entire education system.
- *Strengthen statewide governance or coordination of higher education.* In addition to creating a statewide education roundtable representing the different levels of education, governors can strengthen the state's capacity to coordinate the policies of individual colleges and universities with state-level governing or coordinating boards that have budgeting, policymaking, and data collection authority.

States need their separate K–12 and higher education systems to work together more effectively to improve the entire education system, but the high school-to-college transition is of special concern. Streamlined statewide education governance can unify K–12 and higher education goals, data and accountability systems, and strategies for improving the college-ready high school graduation rate.

A Statewide Response to a National Problem Is Needed

High schools play a central role in helping the United States sustain long-term economic growth. An ample supply of educated workers is needed to maintain the nation’s competitiveness. Several school- and district-level efforts are underway to redesign high schools and create new high school designs, but the one-district-at-a-time or one-school-at-a-time approach is too slow to create major improvements for all students. Low high school graduation and college-readiness rates, particularly among the fastest-growing segments of the population—Hispanic youth and low-income youth—demand a swifter response.

America’s high school graduation rate trails that of most developed countries, ranking 16th of 20 nations surveyed.² High school graduation rates are particularly low for black and Hispanic students, with just 56 percent and 52 percent, respectively, of students graduating with a regular diploma after four years.³ There is also wide disparity in the percentage of students who leave high school eligible for college admission. Approximately 40 percent of white students graduated college-ready in 2002, compared to 20 percent of Hispanic students.⁴ Without significant changes in the average educational attainment of these student populations, the share of the U.S. workforce with post-high school education will increase only 4 percent during the next 20 years, compared with a 19-percent rise between 1980 and 2000.⁵ This rate of growth will be inadequate to meet the skill demands of future jobs. During the next 10 years, 80 percent of all new jobs will require postsecondary skills.⁶ These jobs, if not filled by Americans, will be filled by or outsourced to skilled adults trained in China, India, and the major countries of the industrialized world.

Governors, business executives, and education leaders must develop a comprehensive plan for their state to improve high schools. NGA and Achieve, Inc., offer this comprehensive plan in *An Action Agenda for Improving America’s High Schools*. It calls for restoring value to the high school diploma; redesigning high schools; giving students the excellent teachers and principals they need; setting goals, measuring progress, and holding high schools and colleges accountable; and streamlining and improving education governance. Currently, most states have separate state boards for each education level, separate governing boards for public systems of postsecondary education and for individual institutions, and separate legislative committees. In many states, this fragmentation is codified in the state constitution. As a result, the public policy tools that influence high schools—funding, accountability, and governance systems, for example—have little in common with the policy tools that influence colleges and universities. Education governance must be improved for all other high school redesign strategies to take root.⁷

Lessons Can Be Learned from Voluntary Efforts to Improve Education Governance

Until now, most states have tried to improve education governance through well-meaning collaborations of high schools and colleges and occasional meetings of K–12 and higher education leaders. These voluntary efforts have helped improve college readiness for some students, strengthen some teacher preparation strategies, and improved communication among education leaders. They have fallen short, however, in changing statewide policies that affect the high school-to-college transition for all students.

An Action Agenda for Improving High Schools incorporates lessons learned from voluntary school-college partnerships into a state policy agenda that can impact all students. The most successful partnerships show the value of providing long-term interventions, sound instruction coupled with challenging curriculum, positive peer support, and financial assistance and incentives to students.⁸ Good school-college partnerships seek to fill the gaps caused by fragmented education governance by

helping students understand the value of education and the college admissions and financial aid application processes. Yet these partnerships do not have the capacity or authority to change state policies.

During the past decade, states have tried to improve on school-college partnerships by creating voluntary statewide councils of early childhood, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educators. These councils demonstrate the powerful potential of bringing together K–12 and higher education leaders—and sometimes even early childhood leaders—to communicate regularly and develop a common agenda for improving student transitions between education levels, including the high school-to-college transition. The uneven and slow progress of these councils also explains why all states need a more permanent entity with stronger authority to improve education governance.

The statewide education councils, operating in more than 20 states, are widely credited with improving communication. In several states, voluntary councils have made only limited progress on policy coordination, particularly on aligning teacher preparation policies with the demands of the state’s K–12 standards and accountability systems. Substantial policy alignment has been hindered by several inherent weaknesses of these councils. The councils depend highly on the voluntary commitment of key policymakers and education leaders, and they often lack business and civic leadership to balance educational interests. In addition, the councils lack staff and financial resources to support collaborative policy development. Most importantly, the councils lack explicit authority to advise the governor and legislature on education policy.

Council efforts in **Maryland** and **Ohio** reveal the strengths and limitations of bringing policymakers and educators together voluntarily. Maryland’s K–16 council is jointly led by the heads of the K–12 and higher education systems. After federal and philanthropic grants expired, the University System of Maryland contributes staff leadership and annual operative expenses, and the state department of education contributes one full-time staff person, to support the Council’s work.. The council has made some progress on improving the state’s teacher preparation policies. It also has made positive strides on using data on recent high school graduates to identify ways the high school curriculum, including career and technical education courses, can be changed to better prepare students for success as college freshmen.

Ohio’s P–16 Joint Council, composed of three members each from the board of regents and the state board of education, has met for more than five years to discuss how the elementary and secondary system and the postsecondary education system can collaborate more effectively. During this period, the council has surveyed colleges on their placement standards, supported the creation of the Ohio College Access Network to promote public-private college awareness partnerships, and jointly administered several federal grants. However, in 2004 the Governor’s Commission on Higher Education and the Economy called for an executive order creating a permanent council with broader membership and a clear mandate to accomplish three tasks. The three tasks are to develop remediation-free college entrance standards; communicate these standards to all school districts; and publicly report on the percentage of students completing high school with some college-level credit and on the impact of policy coordination, such as changes in enrollment and remediation rates. A subsequent commission focusing specifically on high schools called for a sweeping high school redesign agenda that cannot be implemented solely through voluntary efforts.⁹¹⁰

Evidence of Fragmented Education Governance Abounds

The effects of fragmented education governance are confirmed by the public’s perception of the education system, the significant costs incurred, and the numerous policies that do not work together to improve the high school-to-college transition. The public recognizes that education policy decisions are made separately by statewide K–12 and higher education governing boards. In a 2003 public opinion survey of 1,000 Americans, more than half agreed that “the system does not work well and better coordination is needed to help students go from high school to college and succeed once they are there.”¹¹

Such fragmentation is costly. Nationwide, just one in five black and Hispanic ninth-grade students completes high school four years later with the academic qualifications for admission at a four-year college.¹² Underprepared college students are more likely to take remedial classes, which drives up costs for students, institutions, and states. Approximately 40 percent of students in four-year institutions take at least one remedial math or reading course; 63 percent of community college students enroll in a remedial class.¹³ States spend, on average, \$100,000 for every student's education. However, 32 out of every 100 young people fail to complete the most basic educational credential, the high school diploma, and only 18 out of every 100 students graduate from college on time.¹⁴

Several existing policies hinder greater coordination between high schools and colleges.

- Multiple and confusing assessments provide inadequate information about college and work readiness.
- Most high school students are not required to complete a college- and work-ready curriculum to graduate from high school.
- State data systems cannot measure the effectiveness of high school improvement efforts.
- Separate accountability systems do not encourage different education levels to coordinate their policies.

Multiple and Confusing Assessments Provide Inadequate Information About College and Work Readiness

Students today undergo multiple assessments that together provide little information about readiness for college and work. High school students should face fewer assessments, but these assessments should reflect a more common understanding of the skills that students must demonstrate for college and work readiness.

Multiple assessments, with different standards and different stakes, confuse and complicate the work of students, parents, counselors, and teachers. In a six-year national study, researchers learned that postsecondary admissions and placement officials were unaware of K–12 standards and assessments, and K–12 educators were usually unaware of specific postsecondary admissions and placement policies. Both K–12 and postsecondary students, teachers, and administrators consistently reported that no one asked them to participate in devising the others' standards and assessments.¹⁵ Moreover, a recent study found that state-required high school tests typically measure eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-grade skills—only a subset of the skills that students will ultimately need.¹⁶ In a study of 20 states, a consortium of research university faculty evaluated 66 state high school exams in mathematics and English and language arts. The standards for reading and comprehension were aligned well with standards for college success in only 12 states, and no state math exam was aligned well.¹⁷

Most High School Students Are Not Required to Complete a College- and Work-Ready Curriculum To Graduate from High School

Fragmented education governance reinforces different expectations for high school students, and it makes governors' efforts to improve the college and work preparation of all students more difficult. During the past decade, state K–12 education boards and agencies looked *down* from high school to the early grades when setting standards and defining exit requirements. They did not look *up* to expectations for postsecondary education and workplace success. Without knowing that completing a rigorous high school curriculum is the best way to prepare for success, fewer than 6 in 10 of ACT-tested graduates in the class of 2004 completed a college-preparatory curriculum. This statistic has changed very little during the past decade. Low-income, black, and Hispanic students are less likely to finish high school having completed the sequence of classes that prepare them best for subsequent success.¹⁸

A national initiative, the Center for State Scholars, is working with business coalitions in 15 states to encourage students to take a recommended college-preparatory curriculum. States need to ensure that students have access to the courses they require. They also need to ensure that the curriculum for

these courses consistently teaches students the depth of material they must know to be successful in college and work. This new state leadership role can be more effectively exercised if the separately governed systems of K–12 and higher education work together on a more regular, permanent basis.

State Data Systems Cannot Measure the Effectiveness of High School Improvement Efforts

Without the means to track individual student progress, governors cannot know how their high school improvement efforts are working. Currently, no states can answer these questions completely: “What percentage of students who enrolled in an early childhood education program entered college? What percent graduated from college?” Few states can accurately determine their high school dropout rates, and the ability to disaggregate any of these data is weak.

Many states have the technical ability to collect longitudinal student data, but only a few, such as Florida and Tennessee, have begun to link records across the K–12 and postsecondary education systems. Linked data systems should collect student-level high school course completion information from transcripts, as does Texas’ system. They also should collect SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement student-level data, as does Illinois’ system.¹⁹ Stronger statewide education leadership and governance can improve the political will to link and use student performance data for coordinated K–12 and higher education planning, budgeting, and goal-setting.

Separate Accountability Systems Do Not Encourage Different Education Levels to Coordinate Their Policies

Just as schools and districts are accountable for closing the achievement gap among white, black, and Hispanic students, colleges and universities should be held accountable for closing the gaps in college enrollment, retention, and completion among their students. Stronger statewide education leadership and governance will occur when K–12 and higher education accountability systems share some common performance measures, such as the high school graduation rate, the number of high school students who complete college-level courses, and the college enrollment rate.

States are at different stages of developing high school and higher education accountability systems that include disaggregated performance measures (see Sample Statewide Benchmarks for School, College, and Work Readiness). No state has a comprehensive K–16 accountability system that includes shared responsibility for college readiness, retention, and graduation. Moreover, few states’ higher education systems report comparable institution-level performance on indicators measuring students’ preparation for college.²⁰

Sample Statewide Benchmarks for School, College, and Work Readiness

By 2005, increase to 82 percent the proportion of adults ages 25 and older with a high school diploma.

By 2006, increase to 600 per 1,000 juniors and seniors the number of college-level classes taken by high school students.

By 2010, double the number of high school students earning an industry-recognized, work-ready certificate or credential.

Three Strategies Can Improve Statewide Education Leadership and Governance

Governors are uniquely qualified to provide statewide leadership for the entire education system and to bring fragmented governance systems together. Their leadership can help break down the historical and pervasive assumption that K–12 schools and colleges and universities should be guided by policies exclusive to each sector. Governors can pursue three strategies to improve statewide education leadership and governance.

- *Create a single governance system for kindergarten (or early childhood) through postsecondary education.* A single education governance system with authority over the entire system can improve the coherence of policy development and implementation across and within all levels.
- *Create a permanent statewide education commission.* If a governor cannot make significant changes to education governance, he or she can create a permanent commission that brings together key stakeholders to define and monitor a common education agenda for the state.
- *Strengthen statewide governance or coordination of higher education.* In addition to creating a statewide education commission representing the different levels of education, governors can strengthen state-level governing or coordinating boards by giving them broader budgeting, policymaking, and data collection authority.

A Single Governance System for Education Can Bring Coherence

Governors can permanently remove barriers between K–12 and postsecondary education by creating a single statewide governing board and agency for the entire education system. Currently, **Florida**, **Idaho**, and **New York** are the only three states that have a single governance system for education. None of them has comprehensively implemented *An Action Agenda for Improving America’s High Schools*, but each has the statewide leadership and governance capacity that will be needed to move forward aggressively to improve the high school-to-college transition.

New York: Statewide Governance for the Entire Education System. The New York Board of Regents, created in 1784, is the oldest and broadest education governance body in the nation. The regents’ scope of authority includes public and private elementary, secondary, and higher education; the licensed professions, including law, nursing, medicine, and accounting; libraries, museums, and historical societies; and public television and radio stations.

The birth of the State University of New York (SUNY) system in the 1960s led to a dramatic decline in the regents’ attention to, and impact on, higher education. SUNY’s budget authority over the state’s higher education appropriations is one main reason the regents have diminished capacity to align higher education and high school policies. Every eight years, the regents develop a Higher Education Plan that is subject to the governor’s approval. However, the plan is not viewed as a document that tries to bridge the K–12 and higher education systems or smooth the high school-to-college transition.

With a disproportionate focus on K–12 issues, the regents have retained one mechanism that aligns secondary and postsecondary education, the New York Board of Regents exams. When first conceived, student performance on these end-of-course exams was a factor in university admissions and financial aid eligibility. As the exams’ purpose evolved to certify minimum standards for high school completion—and the SUNY system’s clout increased—they have been used less frequently for admissions and financial aid decisions. The exams do still provide high school students with information about postsecondary academic content standards. Moreover, the City University of New York system uses students’ scores on these exams for admissions decisions.

Florida: Recent Constitutional Changes to Streamline Education Governance. More recently, Florida made constitutional and statutory changes to streamline education governance. In November 1998, voters made several changes to the state’s constitution. The most significant change gave the governor the authority to appoint the statewide commissioner of education and other members of a single governing board, which was given authority for the kindergarten through postsecondary education systems. The state board of education has authority for system budgets, policy and goals, long- and short-term planning, accountability standards, performance monitoring, technical assistance, and enforcement of accountability. The constitutional changes also included creating under this single board of education a statewide governing board for all community colleges and a

statewide governing board for public four-year colleges and universities. In 2001 the Florida legislature passed legislation to implement the constitutional changes.²¹

The restructured department of education is now implementing a unified education accountability system that holds each level of education responsible for high student achievement, seamless articulation and access, a skilled workforce, and quality, efficient services. The state also is integrating its extensive K–12 and postsecondary education student-unit record systems.

It is too early to evaluate the full impact on policy coordination of Florida’s centralized education governance structure, but progress is discernible.²² With a unified student-unit record system and centralized authority, the board of education was able to identify school districts where a disproportionately low number of students were enrolling in the state’s four-year colleges or needed remedial education upon enrollment. The board analyzed high school and middle college course-taking patterns and teacher qualifications and launched a statewide initiative to improve students’ access to rigorous high school classes and well-trained faculty.

This statewide initiative, the Florida Partnership, is a collaboration between the department of education and the College Board. The partnership offers universal PSAT testing, uses data to identify at-risk students who can benefit from more rigorous courses, expands Advanced Placement (AP) courses statewide, and trains middle and high school faculty to teach the standards necessary for students to succeed in the college-level AP courses. The initiative is credited with improving AP scores and participation. Compared with students in other states, a higher proportion of students in Florida scores at least a 3 on an AP exam—the minimum proficiency to earn college credit. Today, nearly one in five students leaves high school having earned a score of 3 or higher on an AP exam. African American students’ participation in AP courses has increased 133 percent and Hispanic students’ participation has increased 138 percent since 1999. Moreover, Hispanic students are now no longer underrepresented in Florida’s AP classrooms.²³

A Statewide Education Commission Can Define a Shared Education Agenda

In many states, streamlining education governance requires constitutional changes that may not be immediately feasible. Governors who want to implement a statewide high school redesign agenda should not be deterred, however. They can create a statewide education commission. A successful commission tends to be a permanent entity that is created and supported by an executive order or a statute and that meets at least once per calendar quarter. It will have a permanent staff, an operating budget, and a clear mission, including the development of statewide benchmarks for school, college, and work readiness as well as for postsecondary attainment. Focusing on common performance indicators enables governors to monitor how the separate systems’ policies, resources, and interventions are working to meet the state’s overall goals for high school redesign.

State commissions effect change by a state involving the most powerful education, business, and civic leaders in efforts to define a shared education agenda. Successful commissions have a membership that includes the state’s top leaders with the ability to make—or stop—education policy changes. Their membership changes at regular intervals, which helps new governors and legislators buy into the ongoing work of the permanent group. It is important for the governor to chair or co-chair the commission to signal his or her commitment to its mission. The governor’s regular attendance and active leadership also are the most effective ways to regularly convene and engage key policymakers.

Indiana: Sustained Statewide Education Leadership for the Entire Education System. Indiana's progress on developing college-readiness and college-success indicators demonstrates how a statewide education commission can foster continuity and consensus in education leadership without fundamental changes in education governance. The Indiana Education Roundtable was created in 1998 to focus on important issues in education, reach consensus on the policies and strategies needed to address the education challenges facing the state, and set and maintain a vision for educational change and student success in Indiana.

Authority for the roundtable was formalized in legislation in 1999 with the enactment of Public Law 146.²⁴ The legislation requires the roundtable's membership to include both education and business, with additional legislative appointments representing both political parties. The group is charged with ensuring the state's academic standards, assessments, and accountability systems are among the best in the nation and with making recommendations on improving student achievement to the governor, superintendent of public instruction, general assembly, and Indiana State Board of Education. The roundtable has continued its leadership through three gubernatorial administrations and a change in the political party of the governor. The governor and superintendent of public instruction serve as co-chairs.

The roundtable has representatives from the K–12 education system; the higher education system; business, industry, and labor; parents and communities; and the Indiana General Assembly. Roundtable members are appointed for their commitment to improving the state of education in Indiana and for their leadership in their respective field. The group sometimes enlists the help of nationally renowned experts and always seeks the perspectives of stakeholders throughout the state. Additional input is sought through open public meetings and the public comment section of the roundtable's web site.

Most recently, the roundtable convened stakeholders to focus on ensuring all students succeed at every level of Indiana's education system—prekindergarten, K–12, and higher education. The result is the state's systemwide Plan for Improving Student Achievement, known as the P–16 Plan. The P–16 Plan is a comprehensive blueprint for education in Indiana. It addresses such issues as standards, assessments, and accountability; teaching and learning; early learning and school readiness; dropout prevention; and higher education and continued learning. Providing all children with the academic foundation they need to succeed in the world today is the basis for this strategic framework that was adopted in October 2003. The roundtable is now working on implementation details.

Indiana appropriates \$3 million annually to conduct the roundtable's work, including evaluation and development of state standards, the statewide high school assessment program, and standards-based instructional resources for teachers. Approximately \$240,000 of this appropriation pays for the roundtable's operational expenses, which include a staff person. The roundtable also has used resources from national organizations such as the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. Indiana's department of education, commission for higher education, and governor's office all contribute in-kind staff time or office space to support the group's efforts.

Working in conjunction with the state board of education, the education roundtable has raised Indiana's academic standards to be among the best in the nation. More rigorous statewide assessments and passing scores are used to help measure student achievement against the standards. The state also has developed and distributed resources to help teachers with aligning instruction to the new standards. A new system will help hold schools accountable for continuous improvement. Today, 6 out of every 10 Indiana high school students take the recommended college-preparatory curriculum, up from 33 percent less than a decade ago. In that time, Indiana has gone from 40th to 17th nationwide in measures of college attendance. The state is poised to move further ahead in its measures of college attainment as more students enter postsecondary education prepared. Indiana's Education Roundtable has even spawned a related cross-stakeholder group, the Alliance for Indiana's Future, which successfully advocated for tax reform to reduce property tax rates and increase investment in the entire education system.

Statewide Governance of Higher Education Must Be Strengthened

Governors can further improve the high school-to-college transition by supporting stronger statewide governance of higher education. When colleges and universities set their own admissions requirements and placement standards, it is difficult to send students, parents, high school teachers, and guidance counselors clear messages about what it takes to prepare for college success. Similarly, statewide high school redesign will be difficult without a single set of statewide goals for college access, retention, and completion, a way to comparably report institutional performance, and a common set of incentives for colleges to support high school improvement.

Unlike K–12 education, higher education operates in a more autonomous environment, with less state control over standards, curriculum, assessments, personnel, and finances. States with a strong statewide governing or coordinating board have the greatest success in managing separately governed colleges and universities to meet common statewide objectives, such as increased college attendance and retention rates. States with central agencies, whether coordinating or governing, are more likely than systems with multiple governing boards to make policy innovations.²⁵ A seven-state study supports this conclusion. Elected leaders in states with central coordinating or governing entities were perceived to be more responsive to public priorities than were elected leaders in states with no effective state agency.²⁶ Another study suggests that states with decentralized higher education governance systems tend to push public higher education to a private university model that relies more on tuition revenue and research dollars than on state appropriations. This decentralization complicates efforts to motivate postsecondary institutions to coordinate their policies with the state's K–12 system and promote a more effective and efficient education pipeline.²⁷

Governors can pursue three strategies to support stronger statewide governance of higher education. They can create a single governing board for the state's public colleges and universities; strengthen the statutory authority of the statewide coordinating board for statewide leadership, policy development, budgeting, and strategic planning; and/or consolidate public campuses in a sector (e.g., public four-year regional and teaching colleges) under a single governing board. Two states, California and Kentucky, illustrate how states can coordinate institutional efforts and foster the statewide higher education leadership that is needed for comprehensive high school redesign.

California Relies on a Strong System of Public Four-Year Institutions

California does not have a strong, statewide coordinating agency for postsecondary education. However, it organizes its public four-year campuses into large segments with centralized governing authority. The largest public four-year college segment is the California State University (CSU), which operates 23 campuses. CSU serves the top 30 percent of California's high school graduating class, enrolls 70 percent of the state's four-year college population, and educates 80 percent of the state's elementary and secondary school teachers.

CSU's remediation rates have risen during the past few decades, along with concerns among state policymakers and taxpayers about the high number of poorly prepared students entering CSU from California public high schools. High remediation rates raise questions on the quality of public schools and on the K–12 content standards and accompanying state tests developed by the California State Board of Education. Moreover, the high level of CSU remediation is expensive for students, institutions, and the state, with approximately 25,000 of 40,000 first-time CSU students needing some remediation.

In the mid-1990s, the problem prompted CSU's governing board to vote to eliminate remedial courses by 2001. In the late 1990s, CSU began to discuss the remediation problem with California's Intersegmental Coordinating Committee (ICC). ICC is a subcommittee of the California Education Roundtable, which voluntarily brings together representatives of all levels of education in the state. It consists of the state's elected K–12 chief state school officer, a representative from the state's private colleges, and the heads of the three California public higher education systems (the University of

California, California State University, and California Community Colleges). After consulting with ICC, California State University decided to try several new strategies to reduce the need for remediation. These initially focused on communicating better with K–12 schools about higher education placement standards and assessments, encouraging high school juniors to take the CSU placement exam

This approach proved insufficient, however. The state already required so many K–12 assessments that schools and students resisted taking CSU’s placement test. Rather than administer another exam to high school students, CSU negotiated directly with K–12 policymakers to merge CSU placement standards into the existing California Standards Tests, which are end-of-course exams given to all high school students. After reviewing test items, the state board of education negotiated with CSU to enhance these high school tests to meet CSU placement standards. For example, as CSU requested, a writing sample was added to the existing K–12 multiple-choice language arts test. The math test was revised to include an increased focus on Algebra II. In 2003 CSU set the scores that high school juniors would need to achieve to be exempt from its placement exams, and the state sent test results to rising seniors by August 1. Low-scoring students and their teachers can now use the senior year for intensive preparation to meet CSU placement standards.²⁸

Kentucky Has a Strong Statewide Coordinating Board

Kentucky has a strong statewide coordinating board and a good record of improving college readiness and success. House Bill 1 changed the structure of statewide postsecondary education.²⁹ Under the previous Council on Higher Education, Kentucky essentially had a weak coordinating body with a regulatory role. The reform legislation transformed this statewide entity and renamed it the Council on Postsecondary Education. Moreover, the legislation substantially strengthened the council’s role. It charged the council with establishing and promoting a statewide strategic agenda to further the reform’s long-term goals. The council also was asked to submit to the legislature, on behalf of the public higher education institutions, a single statewide budget that aligns campus budgets and priorities with statewide goals and sets aside council-controlled performance funding.

The council’s first responsibility was to develop a strategic agenda to accomplish the legislation’s objectives. Vision 2020, the strategic agenda, and the companion Action Agenda identify the leadership required to realize a better quality of life for Kentuckians. Individual campus agendas have been developed with enrollment, retention, and graduation targets matched by comprehensive campus initiatives.

Today, all of Kentucky’s public colleges and universities share the goal of graduating more high school students ready for postsecondary education. Along with measures of enrollment, persistence, and learning, the higher education institutions must report to the public, legislature, and governor the number of students who enroll in college-preparatory courses and the average ACT scores of college graduates. Since the council set statewide performance benchmarks based on this shared goal, the number of high school juniors and seniors taking college-level courses in high school (e.g., AP classes or classes at a community college) has increased 76 percent. In addition, ACT scores are improving and college participation has increased 24 percent. To further coordinate K–12 and higher education policies, the council is exploring ways to tie financial incentives for institutions to performance measures of college preparation. Despite having a strong statewide coordinating agency and a voluntary early childhood through postsecondary education council, Kentucky still perceives a need to have a more permanent, high-profile entity that can remove barriers to aligning high school graduation standards and assessments with the requirements for college admissions and placement without remediation.

Conclusion

The international marketplace demands workers with higher skills, which puts added pressure on state education systems to ensure students graduate high school ready for college and work. Governors recognize that accomplishing this new state goal requires the entire education pipeline to function more as a single, cohesive system. Separate and fragmented K–12 and higher education governance

systems cause great inefficiencies, including persistently low high school completion rates among the nation's fastest-growing population segments—Hispanic youth and low-income youth and Hispanic youth—as well as high college remediation and dropout rates.

Previous state efforts to voluntarily coordinate education policymaking have helped improve the preparation of some students and teachers, but significant disjunctions remain, particularly at the critical intersection between high school and college. Governors are uniquely qualified to bring statewide leadership to education and to bring fragmented governance systems together by:

- creating a permanent statewide education commission;
- strengthening statewide governance or coordination of higher education; and/or
- creating a single governance system for kindergarten (or early childhood) through postsecondary education.

Pursuing any or all of these options will not inevitably lead to policies that align K–12 and postsecondary education. However, without stronger statewide leadership and streamlined education governance, it is unlikely that states can make positive changes in the academic experiences and performance of all high school students.

¹ Jay P. Greene, *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates: 1991–2002* (New York, N.Y.: Manhattan Institute, 2005), at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08.htm.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Education at a Glance 2004* (Paris, France, 2004), Indicator A2, Table A2.1: Upper Secondary Graduation Rates (2002).

³ Greene.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Steve Murdock, *Population Change in the United States: Implications for Human and Socioeconomic Resources in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association, forthcoming).

⁶ Anthony P. Carnevale and Donna M. Desrochers, *Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K–16 Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Educational Testing Service, 2004), 17.

⁷ Achieve, Inc., and National Governors Association, *An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc., and National Governors Association, 2005), at <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/0502ACTIONAGENDA.pdf>.

⁸ Patricia Gandra, *Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education: K–12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth* (Washington, D.C.: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, Working Group on Access to Postsecondary Education, 2001). A separate publication calls for expanding the scale and scope of these voluntary partnerships. See Kristin D. Conklin, Scott Joftus, and Robin Chait, *Getting It Done: Ten Steps to a State Action Agenda* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2005), at <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/05warnerguide.pdf>.

⁹ See Governor's Commission on Higher Education and the Economy, at <http://www.chee.ohio.gov/index.asp?p=0&text=0> and the Ohio State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools for a Lifetime of Opportunities, at <http://www.edpartner.org/pdfs/OBOE-HighQualitySchools.pdf#search='ohio%20high%20school%20task%20force'>. Ohio's senate has passed legislation creating a permanent education commission with authority and membership recommended in this Issue Brief. Its house of representatives is scheduled to vote on the legislation in mid-April.

¹¹ Lake Snell Perry & Associates, *Leaks in the Postsecondary Pipeline: A Survey of Americans* (Boston, Mass.: Jobs for the Future, 2003), at <http://www.jff.org/jff/PDFDocuments/LeakSurvey.pdf>.

¹² Greene.

¹³ U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Education, Indicator 18: Remediation and Degree Completion* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2004), at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2004/pdf/18_2004.pdf.

¹⁴ National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Policy Alert: The Educational Pipeline: Big Investments, Big Returns* (San Jose, Calif.: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004), at <http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pipeline/pipeline.pdf>.

¹⁵ Andrea Venezia, Michael W. Kirst, and Anthony L. Antonio, *Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K–12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University, 2003), at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/bridgeproject/betrayingthecollegedream.pdf>.

¹⁶ Achieve, Inc., *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up? A Closer Look at High School Exit Exams* (Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc., 2004), at [http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/TestGraduation-FinalReport/\\$file/TestGraduation-FinalReport.pdf](http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/TestGraduation-FinalReport/$file/TestGraduation-FinalReport.pdf).

¹⁷ David Conley, *Mixed Messages: What State High School Tests Communicate About Student Readiness for College* (Portland, Ore.: University of Oregon, 2003).

¹⁸ ACT, *Crisis at the Core* (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, 2004), at http://www.act.org/path/policy/pdf/crisis_report.pdf#search='crisis%20at%20the%20core.

¹⁹ National Center for Education Accountability, “Minimum Requirements for a Student Achievement Information System” (Austin, Texas: National Center for Education Accountability, 2003), at <http://www.nc4ea.org/index.cfm?pg=surveyresults>.

²⁰ Joseph C. Burke, “The New Accountability,” in *Funding Public Colleges and Universities for Performance: Popularity, Problems and Prospects*, ed. Joseph C. Burke and Associates (Albany, N.Y.: The Rockefeller Institute Press, 2002).

²¹ *Florida Education Governance Reorganization and Improvement Act*, at http://www.leg.state.fl.us/cgi-bin/view_page.pl?Tab=session&Submenu=1&FT=D&File=sb1162er.html&Directory=session/2001/Senate/bills/billtext/html/.

²² In 2002 Florida voters reestablished autonomy for higher education with another constitutional amendment. The authority of the board of governors is being challenged in state courts.

²³ For more information, see Conklin, Joftus, and Chaitt.

²⁴ See <http://www.edroundtable.state.in.us/pdf/PL146.pdf>.

²⁵ James C. Hearn and C. Griswold, “State-Level Certification and Policy Innovation in U.S. Postsecondary Education,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 16, no. 2 (summer 1994): 161–190.

²⁶ Richard C. Richardson, Kathy Reeves Bracco, Patrick M. Callan, and Joni E. Finney, *Designing State Higher Education Systems* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education Oryx Press, 1999).

²⁷ Jack H. Knott and A. Abigail Payne, “Impact of State Governance Structures on Management and Performance of Public Organizations: A Study of Higher Education Institutions,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 23, no. 1 (March 2004): 13–30.

²⁸ Michael W. Kirst, “Using a K–12 Assessment for College Placement,” in *Double the Numbers: Increasing Postsecondary Credentials for Underrepresented Youth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Education Press, 2004).

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²⁹ *Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997*, at <http://www.lrc.state.ky.us/recarch/97ss/HB1/bill.doc>.