*Kati Haycock*

*The author traces the recent history of school/college partnerships, and argues that today's needs demand a very different form of collaboration: one that promotes "K-16" reform. Reform activity focused only on K-12 will not succeed because the two systems are so intertwined that substantial change in one cannot occur without changes in the other. Based on experiences with six "Community Compacts" cities, the AAHE Education Trust is urging the creation of local "K-16 Councils" in metropolitan areas, bringing together leaders from higher education, K-12, and the broader community.*

# Higher Education and the Schools:

## *A Call to Action and Strategy for Change*

### The Historical Context

The history of higher education's involvement with elementary and secondary education in this country is long and deep. For much of the 19th century, higher educators not only prepared the teachers for pre-collegiate schools, but they also dictated the curriculum, issued the tests, approved secondary school courses, and, of course, decided who would be allowed to proceed into postsecondary education.

Over time, though, the two systems pulled away from each other. Higher education retained the right to prepare teachers and, in some states, to approve courses of study for college entry. Indeed, to this day, when college faculty perceive major omissions in the preparation of entering students, they often add new requirements for admission--another year of mathematics, for example--and schools dutifully respond by offering such course work. However, decisions about curriculum more generally, about what to teach to different students, and about graduation requirements increasingly have been made by local citizen boards or state policy makers.

### A Wave of New Partnership Programs

The movement toward separation--indeed toward virtual neglect--began to reverse during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Under pressure to increase enrollments of minority students, higher educators turned to the only place those potential college students could be found in large numbers: the schools. This time, however, the initiatives implemented by higher educators had a different character from past relationships with the schools.

There were, by and large, no curricular or instructional edicts from education schools; no changes in admissions standards; no modifications of training programs for teachers or counselors--in short, no changes in regular institutional practice. Instead, special programs were created and tacked on to the outside of both systems--programs staffed by special employees, usually considered more "like" the students themselves, who would provide special tutoring, advising, or compensatory instruction. The students even entered into college by "special" admission.

This first wave of college/school "partnership" programs often made big differences in the lives of participating students: college education became a reality for many young people who would never have even considered college. The programs, however, were collaborative in name only. While school people generally identified students they deemed to have college potential and provided an occasional bus to transport students to college campuses, the rest was done by college employees in after-school, Saturday, or summer programs. Neither college- nor school-level educators seemed to want to explore deeper roots to the problems of under-represented minority students, especially those embedded in the education systems.

## A Second Wave of Partnership Programs

By the late 1970s, declining scores on the SAT and rapid increases in the number of college freshmen being held for remedial course work prompted a second wave of school-focused activity from higher education. In various reports and analyses, higher educators pointed their fingers at K-12 colleagues for "grade inflation" and declining standards that left large numbers of college freshmen unprepared for college-level work. By 1983, when the National Commission chaired by University of Utah president David Gardner released *A Nation at Risk*, these charges had reached a near feverish pitch.

Once again, however, the eventual response by higher educators to the National Commission's call to action was essentially programmatic, rather than systemic. With a few exceptions, most colleges and universities did not help to reverse the tide toward lower standards by increasing their admissions requirements: they were too worried about losing enrollments. Similarly, no major changes were made in the content or quality of teacher training programs. Rather, handfuls of interested faculty members here and there reached out to create new linkages with teachers in their same fields--linkages that they hoped would stimulate improved teaching.

Some of these initiatives--like the Academic Alliances which now dot the entire country--have been quite informal, with little structure other than a monthly meeting. These are mostly meeting places for teachers at both levels who share a common love of their disciplines and of teaching. Other initiatives have been much more highly structured--like California's highly regarded Subject Matter Projects and other spin-offs from the Bay Area Writing Project--with lengthy summer institutes for teachers and regular follow-up during the year. All, though, have tended to promote a sense of colleagueship and shared mission between faculty members in schools and colleges, as well as a deep connection to the discipline itself.

Like many of the equity programs, which provide wonderful experiences for individual students, many of these new teacher-focused efforts have been quite wonderful for individual teachers. They have enjoyed exploring literature and new developments in their fields with college and university faculty members who have treated them as colleagues; they have treasured opportunities to have serious discussions about teaching with peers who are committed to the profession. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these experiences have kept many teachers from leaving the

profession entirely. Again, however, these projects have rarely touched enough teachers within a school or school system to result in across-the-board improvements in teaching and learning, nor have they often addressed problems within the school or district as a whole that impede the ability of teachers to teach in new ways.

## Criticisms Persist

When asked about cooperation with the schools, most college and university presidents have pointed with some pride to a long list of partnership programs of both sorts--student- and teacher-focused. And indeed, almost all campuses in the nation, particularly those in urban and metropolitan areas, house numerous of these engagements with the schools.

Despite all this activity, however, there is a perception that higher education is "sitting on the sidelines" in the current school reform effort. Governors and business leaders have been especially harsh in their observations about the relative non-engagement of higher education, but there is growing animosity in K-12 as well. In fact, at meetings where K-12 leaders gather with political and business leaders to chart the course of reform, it has become almost ritualistic to ask, "Where in the world is higher education?"

Why such a mismatch in perceptions? There are at least three reasons.

• First, though individual colleges and universities have mounted many programs of involvement with the schools, higher education as a whole has played little or no role in reform policy discussions to date. Even on issues where colleges and universities have a clear stake and much to add--like the content of new national subject-matter standards, for example--higher education has not found a voice. While individual faculty and staff members are engaged with the schools, higher education's engagements have rarely included institution-wide leaders and certainly not institutional leaders acting collectively. This absence is all the more noticeable because of the energetic presence of leaders from business and government.

• Second, although colleges and universities offer a great deal to schools, there is often a mismatch between what they offer and what schools need. Today's teachers and administrators are caught in an increasingly tight vise between policy makers who press them for ever better results and students who have ever more complex needs. These professionals say that they need help as they have never needed it before--and that higher education has a virtual monopoly on many of the resources they need, including physicists to help with the physics curriculum, geographers to help prepare teachers to teach geography, and researchers who can help them weigh alternative instructional approaches. But when these professionals turn to higher education, they too often have found a series of small, unconnected programs, offered hit and miss, that are not easily accessible (especially to professionals in the most troubled schools). In addition, the research produced by college and university faculty, some teachers claim, too often fails to address the day-to-day questions and realities they face. And even when it does, they say, the resulting papers are often dreadfully dense--hardly the stuff they relish reading after seven hours in a classroom. Complicating the relationship even further is the perception that the cultures of the two systems are vastly different--making difficult almost any conversation between the two--as well as the disturbing tendency of many university faculty members to ignore the vast pedagogical knowledge of many classroom teachers, acting not as colleagues but as experts come to fill empty vessels.

• Finally, as the nation gets further into the K-12 reform effort, it is becoming increasingly apparent to many observers who are looking at reform's future that all

of their efforts will not make much of a difference without certain reforms in the way higher education goes about its own business. K-12 and higher education are in fundamental ways "all one system," with countless interdependencies. Many K-12 reformers believe, for example, that the new national standards and assessments won't make a difference unless colleges and universities use the results in the admissions process. Others maintain that the curricular reforms into which such energy is being poured will implode without much better prepared teachers than the ones being produced today. Reformers believe they have nowhere to turn on these matters but to colleagues in higher education, and they grow frustrated.

## Thinking Differently About School/College Connections

If this gulf – between systems and between colleagues – is not bridged, there is great danger that the current education reform effort will unravel before making any headway on the serious underachievement problems among American students. There is also great danger that the anger and frustration among governors, business leaders, and K-12 educators will further undermine public confidence in institutions of higher education. If colleges and universities are to make a serious contribution to the current reform effort, they need to think differently about the connections they are making with K-12 schools. Unlike their most recent engagements with K-12, new collaborative efforts by colleges and universities must be rooted in new ideas.

Leaders from higher education, and particularly from urban and metropolitan universities, have an opportunity in the mid-1990s to invite their K-12 counterparts to join in a new effort to make both systems work better--and work together--for the nation's young people. Such an effort can best be organized around three basic principles:

- First, just as the business community realized that its adopt-a-school programs were insufficient to bring about significant change, so too must higher education institutions understand that "partnership" programs with local schools--however energetic--are simply not enough. K-12 and higher education must work together toward more systemic reforms.
- Second, no matter how hard reform minded leaders try, it is impossible to bring about significant change in elementary and secondary education without changes in the way that higher education does business--including how teachers are prepared, students admitted, and services to schools organized.
- Third, although much has been written about the high international standing of the nation's system of higher education in comparison to that of its K-12 system, the fact is that *both* systems need improvement. Through mutual efforts, each sector can learn much from the other about the enhancement of teaching and learning.

## Moving Forward at the Local Level

Since early 1992, university, college, and school district leaders in six urban and metropolitan communities – Birmingham, El Paso, Hartford, Philadelphia, Providence, and Pueblo – have worked together, with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), to fashion their own answers to these questions. The specifics of their work to develop "Community Compacts for Student Success" are described in greater detail in the following article by Nevin Brown.

The work in these communities is beginning to provide important insights into both the "hows" and the "whats" of the local, "bottom-up" education reform effort

needed to complement the national emphasis on new standards for student achievement. Perhaps most important, the experience in these communities is pointing to an urgent need for leaders in other local communities--university, college, school district, business and other--to come together to develop new *structures* to guide and support systems change efforts, kindergarten through graduate school. Although the terminology for such structures can vary widely from place to place, the name "K-16 council" seems to capture best the spirit and content of this approach to education reform.

A K-16 council is, quite simply, a vehicle to pull together disparate reform impulses--kindergarten through college--into a more coherent whole. Composed of university and college presidents, school superintendents, business and community leaders in a given city, a K-16 council can help communities work together over time to:

- analyze student achievement patterns, pre-kindergarten through post-gradu ate;
- develop a comprehensive systems change plan to improve student outcomes; and,
- report to the public annually on student achievement patterns, what is being done to improve them, and what parents and others can do to help.

## Key Tasks for Local Action

Four tasks seem to be especially promising for attention by a local K-16 council during the mid-1990s.

### *Analysis*

While most communities *produce* reams of data on student achievement at both the K-12 and college levels, rarely do the leaders in those communities *use* the data to help bring about--or refocus--change efforts. Yet data--properly used--can be a powerful lever for change:

- data, *properly displayed*, are more effective than almost anything else in mobilizing community concern and action;
- data, *properly analyzed*, help focus attention and action on real, rather than imagined problems; and,
- data, *properly reported*, are essential in monitoring the effects of various interventions and in attaining internal and public accountability.

A local K-16 council offers an ideal focus point for pulling together available data on what happens to local young people as they take the journey from pre-kindergarten up through the grades and into college--who achieves at what levels, what else is going on in children's lives, who drops out, who takes college preparatory courses, and who leaves college and why. By analyzing patterns for different groups of students, and by sharing these data widely and probing for explanations, a local council can begin to establish a foundation for developing a broad-based change strategy.

### *Setting Clear Expectations and Developing Assessment Strategies*

Within the K-12 sector, there is widespread agreement on the need to move toward clearer specification of the knowledge and skills that students should master at particular milestones and to develop new, more "authentic" methods to assess student performance, including portfolios of student work. Indeed, at the national

level, groups of teachers and higher education faculty members have been hard at work to develop national standards within each of the major disciplines. Within higher education, there has also been movement toward new forms of assessment and more clarity about desired student outcomes, albeit more slowly.

There are compelling reasons to draw these standards and assessments efforts together. Students, for example, would clearly benefit from consistent signals from both educational sectors about what knowledge is important and how it will be measured. Local, state and national policy makers, too, yearn for clearer and more consistent understandings of the outcomes K-12 and postsecondary educators both value.

Yet there currently are few ties between these quite parallel efforts in both systems. Moreover, there are few ties between the *national* standard setting efforts and *local* efforts to improve teaching and learning. This is particularly unfortunate. If the nation has learned anything from past reform efforts it is this: substantial progress in academic achievement and success is much more likely if there is agreement in advance on goals and standards. The national and state work on standards can become both the guiding framework for and the means of assessing the impact of local efforts to improve teaching and learning.

A local K-16 council can be the vehicle for a community to wrestle with choices about what it wants local young people to learn. A council can establish committees in which faculty members from both educational sectors, together with community representatives, develop clear statements of goals for student learning--incorporating national standards, but going beyond. These bodies can also design assessment strategies. Over time, then, the outcome statements and new assessments can replace current "seat-time" standards.

## *Building Support Systems for Teachers and Schools*

Most states and school districts are moving rapidly to decentralize authority to the school building level. The idea is to give teachers and schools responsibility for deciding how to get students to newly-defined outcome goals. In effect, schools are being given flexibility more like that historically granted to professors and to colleges and universities; at both levels, though, professionals will now be held more clearly accountable for results.

At the K-12 level, teachers – and principals and counselors, too – will need considerable support in order to make this transition successfully. Many teachers, for example, do not themselves meet the new subject-matter standards for student achievement; they will need help in deepening their content knowledge. Others may have adequate knowledge of their disciplines but be unprepared to engage effectively diverse groups of students in the subject; these teachers will need support to learn new instructional strategies. Principals, teachers, counselors, and parent leaders will also need help in responding to the challenge of site-based decision-making.

Higher education faculty will also need help in improving teaching and learning. This is important not only to the effort to improve student outcomes but also because higher education faculty serve as powerful models to future teachers. Such future teachers learn to teach not just in education classes, but in college classrooms from their professors of mathematics, biology, and English.

At the very least, this means that a local K-16 council would need to help its community:

• assure that the teachers produced by participating postsecondary institutions themselves meet the highest standards for student performance – and know their

subjects deeply enough to teach them successfully to all learners; and

• design support systems – including informal Academic Alliances, more formal "subject matter projects" and/or Centers for Teaching and Learning – of sufficient size and scope to enable teachers at both levels to explore better ways to communicate and assess core ideas in their fields – and, where necessary, to deepen their knowledge of the subjects they teach.

### *Improving Incentive Systems*

There is widespread agreement that current reward systems do not always send the right messages. In higher education, there is a sense that research is overemphasized to the near exclusion of other forms of scholarship, such as teaching and professional service. In K-12, reward structures are even more perverse: schools that receive federal funds to provide educational services to poor children, for example, actually lose funds if they improve student achievement.

A local K-16 council can create forums for considering changes in reward systems. What changes might help to encourage professionals in new directions? What is known from other fields about the *kinds* of rewards that work?

Another important role for a local council is to grapple with the question of consequences for students. While higher education may not yet be thinking along these lines, many political and education leaders believe that new subject matter and assessment standards *must* be used in college admissions in order to have the desired effect on student academic effort. This raises important substantive issues at both the local and national level. Should higher education deny admission to students who do not meet the standards? If so, under what conditions? Should high-stakes usage be conditioned on the provision of adequate or equal opportunity to learn? This matter also raises procedural issues. How can colleges evaluate student portfolios? Should admissions requirements be recast in outcomes terms? Does this mean abandoning traditional measures like the SAT/ACT battery?

If the nation is to move ahead toward improving the academic achievement and success of its children and youth, particularly in urban and metropolitan areas, its cities and communities need vehicles for K-12 and higher educators to honestly engage these questions--and each other. Local K-16 councils or similar structures hold much promise as such vehicles for education reform.

# Metropolitan Universities: Who Are We?

Metropolitan universities are defined by the following characteristics:

**We are** located in or near the urban center of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) with a population of at least 250,000.

**We are** universities, public and private, whose mission includes teaching, research, and professional service. We offer both graduate and undergraduate education in the liberal arts and two or more professional fields. The latter programs are strongly practice-oriented and make extensive use of clinical sites in the metropolitan area.

**The majority of our students** comes from our metropolitan regions. Our students are highly diverse in age, ethnic and racial identity, and socio-economic background, reflecting the demographic characteristics of their region. Many come to us by transfer from community colleges and other baccalaureate institutions, many are place-bound employees and commuters, and many require substantially longer than the traditional time to graduate, for financial and other personal reasons.

**We are** oriented toward and identify with our regions, proudly and by deliberate design. Our programs respond to regional needs while striving for national excellence.

**We are** strongly interactive. We are dedicated to serve as intellectual and creative resources to our metropolitan regions in order to contribute to their economic development, social health, and cultural vitality, through education, research, and professional outreach. We are committed to collaborate and cooperate with the many communities and clienteles in our metropolitan regions and to help bridge the socio-economic, cultural, and political barriers among them.

**We are** shaping and adapting our own structures, policies, and practices to enhance our effectiveness as key institutions in the lives of our metropolitan regions and their citizens.