

FOCUS ON MORE STUDENT SUCCESS

In This Issue

...*Network News* provides an adaptation of the Executive Summary to a new SHEEO publication, *More Student Success*. The Executive Summary was written by Paul Lingenfelter, SHEEO President, and provides some contextual background to the issue of student success as well as a very brief introduction to the six essays that comprise the publication. *More Student Success* is an updated and expanded successor to a 2003 SHEEO publication, *Student Success: Statewide P-16 Systems*. The updated publication introduced here reflects progress since 2003 and includes a new chapter by George Kuh on increasing the rate of student achievement in postsecondary education.

The publication's preface notes that many initiatives have been launched to help our nation become better educated in order to meet the needs of the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century. But no single program, no "silver bullet" can increase educational success to the level required. It will take a systemic solution, the coordinated efforts of many people and educational services, all focused on student success. *More Student Success* presents some of those efforts and the ideas of some of our leading thinkers on this issue. The full publication, including the essays in their entirety can be found on the SHEEO web site at <http://www.sheeo.org/k16/StudSucc2.pdf>.

An Adaptation of the Executive Summary of *More Student Success*

Original Executive Summary by Paul Lingenfelter

The educational aspirations of Americans have never been higher, and they continue to grow.

According to a 2002 survey by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 80 percent of 10th graders say they expect to earn at least a bachelor's degree, and half this group, 40 percent of all students, expect to earn a graduate or professional degree. Of the remaining students, 12 percent expect to get some postsecondary education, including vocational or technical credentials. Only eight percent plan to forgo postsecondary education entirely.

Such aspirations did not emerge spontaneously. They were produced by changes in the world economy and overwhelming evidence that, in the next generation, only those with postsecondary education will be able to get and keep good jobs. Nor is it just workers who have a stake in advanced education: no business or society can compete in the global economy with workers or citizens who lack advanced knowledge and skill. In effect, the educational system of the twenty-first century is being asked to double the

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1 Adaptation of the Executive Summary from *More Student Success*

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More Student Success takes the perspective that achieving the educational goals of the next generation will require policymakers and educators to view education as an integrated system.

degree production rate of the twentieth century – with no compromise on quality. The enormity of this challenge should not be underestimated. Without dramatic changes in policy and practice, it will not be met.

In response, policymakers and educators across the country have been hard at work. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, renamed *No Child Left Behind*, added powerful rhetoric and ambitious reform initiatives to the national preoccupation with educational reform that has persisted since *A Nation at Risk* appeared in 1983. In the past three years, four major national reports have called for improving enrollment, degree completion, and student learning in higher education:

- *Public Accountability for Student Learning: Issues and Options*, Business-Higher Education Forum, Washington, D.C. February, 2004;
- *Accountability for Better Results: A National Imperative for Higher Education*, National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, SHEEO, Boulder, Colorado, March, 2005;
- *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, Commission, Appointed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC, September, 2006; and
- *Transforming Higher Education: National Imperative – State Responsibility*, National Conference of State Legislatures, Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education, Denver, Colorado, October, 2006.

But reports, and even laws, are not action. The necessary work is far from finished. *More Student Success* describes how state and institutional leaders have developed and implemented strategies to help many more students become successful.

More Student Success, however, is more than a collection of "best practices"; it takes the perspective that achieving the educational goals of the next generation will require policymakers and educators to view education as an integrated system, from birth through adulthood. Each individual element of an education system must be excellent in its own right, and must interact effectively with other components if students are to learn at the highest possible levels and continue learning throughout their lives. If any part of the system at any level is inadequate or disconnected, the whole system will under-perform.

Although a few states have aligned high school achievement standards with college-level skills, no state has fully developed a well-integrated educational system from birth through postsecondary education, focused relentlessly on student success. A common vision of such a system, a common commitment to the vision, and a venue for collaboration are all essential. While governance and structure matter, shared vision and commitment are far more important than either. States with many different structures have made progress toward integrating and improving their educational systems by focusing on substance, sharing leadership, and developing a working consensus.

At this point, what must be done to build on promising beginnings, sustain momentum, and ensure that most Americans participate and succeed in postsecondary education? The essays found in *More Student Success* suggest answers to that question:

1. Early outreach programs – encourage parents and students to have high aspirations and learn what is required for postsecondary success;
2. Curriculum and assessment systems – specify the knowledge and skills that students need and assess their progress;
3. High quality teaching – enhance learning at every level of education;

4. Student financial assistance – enable and encourage postsecondary enrollment;
5. Data and accountability systems – monitor progress and chart paths for improving achievement; and
6. Postsecondary policies, programs, and practices intentionally *designed* to increase students' chances for success.

More Student Success also explains the interrelationships among these components and argues that educators at every level from pre-school to postsecondary education need to work at common purposes to assure the success of the entire system.

Highlights and recommendations from each of the essays are summarized below:

Early Outreach

Original Essay by Andrea Venezia and Therese Rainwater

Social scientists have long observed that the strongest predictor of participation in higher education is the education of one's parents. Children whose parents have participated in postsecondary education are automatically enrolled in a "program" that, early in life, exposes them to the advantages of higher education and the path to success. Children whose parents have not succeeded in postsecondary education need another way to get this information.

A variety of successful early outreach programs advance this objective. The most successful:

- Focus on individual students, and on what motivates and sustains their learning;
- Engage young people in the context of their own culture and the community of their peers;
- Make clear to young people the importance of postsecondary education to their future, and convince them that, no matter their backgrounds or their parents', it is possible to succeed if they do the right things, take the right courses, and work at their studies;
- Make required academic standards very clear, beginning especially in the middle grades when the courses taken and a student's academic performance create or reduce future opportunities;
- Give students regular feedback on academic strengths and areas needing improvement;
- Provide high quality teaching and coaching to help students improve; and
- Provide convincing assurance (in several states, a guarantee) that the cost of postsecondary education will be within reach if a student takes the right courses and adequately demonstrates that he or she can succeed in college.

Early outreach programs must be well informed about the high school curriculum required for postsecondary success. They must also provide early information and assurance about affordability, actively involve excellent teachers, and draw on data and accountability systems for supportive diagnostic information.

Our most important observation about early outreach programs, however, is that the special, "add-on" programs that have helped many students are not sufficient. Vast numbers of students require early information and on-going coaching and assistance about postsecondary education. The key components of effective early outreach programs need to be completely embedded in the educational system. Every teacher

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in every classroom needs to be equipped to provide guidance and support to every student. Every teacher needs to have high expectations for student achievement. And every teacher and counselor needs to have the information and diagnostic resources necessary to help students succeed.

Curriculum and Assessment Systems

Original Essay by Sharmila Basu Conger and Christine Tell

For more than twenty years, research has made it clear that the courses students take in high school are very important to their success in college. In fact, a rigorous college preparatory curriculum in high school has been a better predictor of college success than test scores or high school grades.

Despite the evidence, many states have not required or encouraged students who aspire to college to take rigorous courses in high school. Also, many colleges have been lax in informing high schools and prospective students that the high school curriculum is crucial to college preparation and success. Even worse, some students have been "steered away" from rigorous courses because of stereotypes about their ability to succeed or because they have had some difficulty in the past. All too often the educational system has taken the expedient route, lowering students' expectations rather than helping students rise to the challenge of greater achievement. In too many cases a shortage of qualified teachers for college preparatory courses has contributed to this problem.

Fortunately, however, the accumulation of knowledge about this issue is beginning to overwhelm complacency and accelerate change. In 2005, a National Education Summit on High Schools, sponsored by Achieve and the National Governor's Association, outlined "An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools." The "American high school is obsolete," declared Bill Gates in a keynote speech at the summit, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, joined by other donors, has provided direct support for reform initiatives in 22 states as well as for organizations that support state secondary education policy improvement.

The first item on the "Action Agenda" focused on restoring value to the high school diploma by aligning standards to the requirements for success in work and postsecondary education, upgrading high school coursework, and developing appropriate assessments for college and work readiness. A number of states are making significant progress on this issue. The most promising state efforts have:

- Made the college preparatory curriculum the "default" curriculum rather than the "honors" curriculum for high school graduation;
- Made the college preparatory curriculum a condition of eligibility for basic scholarship assistance or for merit scholarships;
- Forged agreements between K-12 and postsecondary institutions about the requirements for college-level study;
- Clearly aligned high school assessments of student ability with the qualifying examinations used by colleges and universities – particularly in the critical areas of mathematics and English language skills; and
- Integrated end-of-course assessments to help assure consistent rigor and essential content across classrooms.

Twenty-nine states have joined Achieve's American Diploma Project (ADP) Network, which aims to strengthen high school standards, curricula, assessments, and data and accountability systems. Twenty-four states (16 of which are also ADP states) are par-

ticipating in the State Scholars Initiative, a partnership between business and states to motivate high school students to take a rigorous curriculum. The California State University system developed, in collaboration with K-12 leaders, an Early Assessment Program that builds on existing high school assessments to help students close any gaps in their preparation for college work while in high school. Nine states are collaborating to develop and use a common Algebra II exam to improve instruction and give students a valid indicator of their preparation for additional work in mathematics. Other states and assessment organizations are working to design and implement end-of-course exams and other assessments to encourage students to aspire to meaningful learning standards and that teachers provide the necessary instructional support. These efforts, when fully implemented in the states, should go a long way toward preparing high school graduates for work and postsecondary education.

The most common objections to such policies are: (1) More students will drop out of high school if all are forced to take difficult courses or pass high-stakes, end-of-course tests. (2) Students who are interested in technical or vocational postsecondary education may not need the college-preparatory curriculum. (3) It is not possible to recruit enough qualified teachers for widespread enrollment in college-preparatory courses. (4) High-stakes exams are discriminatory and punitive, especially when many students have had inadequate opportunity to learn.

While these worries are discounted by many analysts, such concerns clearly must be addressed. The bottom line, however, is even clearer: stronger curriculum and assessment policies must be implemented – and implemented widely – to achieve necessary levels of educational opportunity and achievement.

High Quality Teaching

Original Essay by Edward Crowe

Widely accepted research now indicates that good teaching is perhaps the most important factor in increasing student learning. Most states are concerned with this issue, both because they want to increase the capacities of their teachers and because many will face a serious shortage of teachers in the near future.

All of the usual reasons for being concerned about teaching capacity are compounded by the higher educational aspirations we have for the next generation. We have no reason to expect that the next generation of students will have greater academic aptitude than earlier generations – they will almost surely resemble their parents. But we want and need them to be better educated. This cannot happen without more effective, more engaging teaching.

Good teaching is a particularly salient P-20 issue because it is a joint product of the elementary-secondary and postsecondary systems. Postsecondary institutions are responsible for assuring that teachers: know the content they are responsible for teaching, know the research on effective teaching, understand the connection between curriculum and assessment, can use assessment to improve learning, and have acquired the basic skills required for effective teaching. Postsecondary and K-12 systems should be jointly responsible for giving prospective teachers an extensive period of well-supervised practice to help them hone their skills in real classroom settings and for continuing the professional development of teachers.

No state has done all it needs to do in this area, but the most effective state policies and practices:

- Bring arts and sciences faculty, education faculty, and practicing teachers together to define curricular standards for student learning and teacher preparation;

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- Prepare K-12 teachers in the subject matter they will teach as well as in basic principles of pedagogy and children's cognitive development;
- Give prospective K-12 teachers substantial apprenticeship teaching and mentoring opportunities to prepare them for challenges they will encounter in their own classrooms;
- Provide adequate funding to ensure that apprenticeship – like the clinical training of medical practitioners – is a core component of the training program rather than a weakly-funded afterthought;
- Use assessment data to gauge student learning, and use feedback to improve teaching, teacher education, and curriculum;
- Incorporate technology into curriculum and instructional practices on university campuses, helping ensure that future K-12 teachers experience directly the capacity of such tools to enhance teaching and learning;
- Often use "soft money" for start-up initiatives that lead to sustained progress in building a culture of quality teaching in a state; and
- Align key policies and practices with prevailing standards for students and teachers.

The success of early outreach, the definition and implementation of curricular standards, and the success of students in meeting those standards depend fundamentally on the quality, capacities, and practices of teachers in the classroom.

Student Financial Assistance

Original Essay by David Longanecker and Cheryl Blanco

Unlike K-12 education in the United States, postsecondary education is not free, and the price has been rising. We will not be able to increase participation in postsecondary education successfully and substantially if low-income students cannot afford to attend. Nor will participation increase if students with limited financial resources do not believe, early in their school career, that college is affordable. Unless low-income students know well in advance that adequate aid is available, we cannot expect them to put forth the effort required to prepare for postsecondary education.

The federal government provides grants and loans for students, but without a state commitment, federal student aid does not assure affordability. Some states have attempted to assure affordability by keeping tuition and fees low, but this strategy is becoming less and less viable as enrollments and costs rise faster than state revenues.

Many states are experimenting with student assistance programs, often quite creatively. In addition to removing economic barriers facing poor students, they have used student assistance to motivate and reward academic achievement, to encourage able students to enroll in state institutions, and to encourage stronger academic preparation for college. All of these are legitimate goals, and targeted student assistance may help advance them. But given the many goals and the expense of student financial assistance programs, states need to be certain that they are effectively and efficiently advancing the goals of greater participation and success in higher education.

The best examples of student assistance programs:

- Motivate students in grades K-12 to set high achievement goals and choose challenging courses;

- Are well-funded and highly visible – particularly to low-income students and their parents, who are most likely to be discouraged by the perception that a college education is beyond their means;
- Are well integrated with and complement federal and private aid programs;
- Reliably receive additional appropriations to cover increases in student costs;
- Fit the financial circumstances and educational goals of a wide range of students, including the most needy;
- Describe clearly the kinds of support that they provide students as well as the information that students and their parents will need to supply during the application process;
- Allow students reasonable freedom of choice and enable them to transfer from one institution to another without major impediments; and
- Are accountable and appropriate to the goals they serve and can be evaluated by policy goals that are clearly defined and well understood among state policymakers.

Some states have approached student assistance by creating many small programs with complex rules. These usually fail to add up to the total need, and they also are expensive to administer and confusing to parents and students. Such approaches are likely to hinder rather than help states reach the goals of greater participation and success in postsecondary education.

Recently a number of states have created or expanded programs that consider high school academic achievement and taking a college preparatory curriculum as criteria for receiving financial aid. The federal government has reinforced these efforts by providing additional aid to Pell Grant recipients who have taken a rigorous high school curriculum. Such efforts to stress the importance of academic effort and achievement can play a very useful role in building the foundation for a successful P-16 system. It is vitally important to recognize, however, that both affordability and adequate preparation for college must be widespread in order to meet the educational aspirations of the American people. States will need to strike a balance among their investments in different types of student assistance, their investments in the quality of educational programs, and their financial capacity.

Success in College

Original Essay by George D. Kuh

The surest pathway toward student success begins early and covers all the bases – early aspirations for college, familiarity with college “folkways,” solid academic preparation, adequate financial support, and a single-minded focus on academic success. But many students who *can* succeed don’t have all the bases covered. Many first generation students find college an unfamiliar world, where it is easy to lose one’s way. Adult students encounter obstacles in the form of inflexible institutional policies and practices that make it difficult to get in and stay “engaged” as they struggle to balance work and family responsibilities with the demands of an academic program. Other students have to overcome inadequate academic preparation in order to do college-level work.

Every year thousands of students withdraw from postsecondary education without completing a degree or certificate program. Many more of them would persist and succeed if colleges and universities deliberately and strategically redesigned themselves to promote greater student success. The key components of a campus geared for student success include:

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The strongest state systems for data and accountability now give leaders better tools for monitoring student progress over time and improving system performance.

- Making student success a prominent feature of the institutional mission;
- Setting performance standards at high but attainable levels, and helping students reach them;
- Teaching first-year students how to use college resources, without delay;
- Building “communities of learners” that are organized around the classroom;
- Developing networks and early warning systems to support students needing help;
- Connecting every student to meaningful activities and positive role models;
- Finding and removing obstacles to student success; and
- Making successful practices widely available, rather than “boutique” programs which help just a few students.

While each of these practices can help more students succeed, their potential will be unfulfilled unless they become integral parts of a campus culture focused on successful student learning. Campus reward systems and policies must value undergraduate education and support student achievement. Residual attitudes and beliefs that dampen academic expectations and discount student potential must be replaced with high aspirations for all students and a commitment to experimenting with teaching approaches and policies that promise to yield better learning outcomes.

In the end, more student success depends both on a system that better prepares students for postsecondary education and a postsecondary system that serves more effectively those students who enroll.

Data And Accountability Systems

Original Essay by Hans P. L’Orange

In many states, the data and accountability systems for both K-12 and postsecondary education are poorly designed for the challenges of the twenty-first century. For most of the twentieth century, student achievement was optional from the state perspective – those who achieved moved on to higher education, and those who did not found reasonably well-paying, lower-skilled jobs. Consequently, states rarely collected information about students and student achievement; that was left to the individual efforts of schools and colleges.

As educational aspirations grew late in the twentieth century, the K-12 standards movement and postsecondary education performance reporting substantially increased state-level data collection. Most states began by collecting aggregate information about students enrolled in particular schools. Aggregate information has been used to identify issues and problems, but it has not been very successful in improving performance. The strongest state systems for data and accountability now give leaders better tools for monitoring student progress over time and improving system performance. With the help of various national initiatives, especially the Data Quality Campaign (DQC), more and more states are measuring their own capabilities against desirable benchmarks and improving their data systems.

Exemplary state data and accountability systems have the following characteristics:

- Establish standards for K-12 achievement that lead naturally and seamlessly toward the standards required for admission and success in postsecondary education.
- Track the performance of individual students throughout their educational career (including into postsecondary education) in ways that:

- Permit teachers to diagnose and address learning gaps;
 - Enable school leaders to assess the performance of a school in terms of the later success of its students;
 - Enable school leaders to identify especially successful teaching techniques that merit broader use;
 - Enable postsecondary leaders to assess their effectiveness in preparing teachers and school leaders; and
 - Enable policymakers to assess system-wide performance in order to find paths for improvement.
- Increase the commitment among stakeholders to collect, analyze, and use information on student performance.

The best accountability systems are much more than reporting mechanisms. Good systems assess and improve K-12 and postsecondary achievement and lead to more students meeting the standards of admission and success in postsecondary education. They can also help K-12 and postsecondary partners align learning goals and educational strategies at each stage of the educational system.

Conclusion

These essays articulate what state educational systems can do, and perhaps what they must do, to enable the next generation of American youth to reach their educational goals. Collectively, they argue what is perhaps obvious: success in postsecondary education can become widespread only if the entire educational system – from early childhood through elementary school, high school, and postsecondary education – is geared toward preparing and enabling students to become successful learners and workers at a high level of achievement.

Although these essays encourage systemic thinking and integration, they do not suggest a single "model" for each state situation. Effective state systems exhibit enormous variation in structure and detail, and bureaucratic uniformity has rarely produced educational excellence. If P-16 educators and policymakers agree on fundamental, substantive issues, states will be able to make real progress within their own traditions and structures.

These essays do challenge states to make significant changes in policy and practice. But they do not suggest the impossible. Every state has the capacity to provide high quality educational opportunities to every child and young person. We owe them no less.

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