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STEPPING UP EFFORTS TO ALIGN CALIFORNIA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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“The time to invest in long-term P-16 planning is now, beginning with the creation of a permanent state P-16 group that can fully focus on intersegmental coordination and alignment.”

California's economic crisis is forcing unprecedented budget cuts in all segments of the state's educational system. As a result of the budget reductions, the University of California (UC) is cutting enrollment for 2009–2010 year by 2,300 students¹ and the California State University (CSU) is reducing its enrollment by 40,000 for the years 2009–2011. In the past few years, the California Community Colleges (CCC) have seen enrollments increase 15.9%,² and this year finds itself turning away thousands of students. The impact of the economic crisis is equally painful for the state's K–12 public schools as 17,000 teachers, nurses, school librarians, and counselors were laid off, class sizes increased, and funding for special programs were reduced or eliminated.³

The timing could not be worse for the California Department of Education. After several years of working with schools and districts to increase student achievement and improve the passing rate on the California High School Exit Exam, statewide efforts at closing the achievement gap that exists among racially-identified student groups and making more students college-ready are in jeopardy. With the defeat of Proposition 1D in May 2009, early childhood programs in the state were saved from having a

large percentage of their Proposition 10 funds⁴ redirected to the state's general fund to help balance the budget. Funds generated from this tobacco tax, however, are less than \$500 million annually and minimally address the need for more high-quality, accessible preschool education for California's 3- to 5-year-olds.

The current budgetary situation points not only to how critical it is to understand the responsibilities and obligations of each segment of the state's educational system but also how these different segments link together to provide the educational opportunities promised all Californians. It is California's educational pipeline, so to speak, the state's provision of a sequence of schooling from early childhood through college and career that is discussed here in the context of the work already started to align the different systems of education in the state and the loss of access and opportunity to high-quality education resulting from the state's economic downturn.

ALIGNING SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION

Guided by the principle that success in college begins in pre-kindergarten a nationwide effort has been taking place to create state systems of

¹ University of California: <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/budget/?s=graduate+school+education>

² California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office: http://www.cccco.edu/Portals/4/News/press_releases/2009/Enrollment_Surge_CCCs_%20Duncan_Release_9-3-09.pdf

³ California Teachers Association: http://www.cta.org/issues/current/Budget_Crisis.htm

⁴ The California Children and Families First Act of 1998 (Proposition 10): <http://www.ccfca.gov/PDF/ccfcaact.pdf>

education, referred to as P–16 systems, that link and coordinate each education level or segment into an integrated, seamless system of schooling. The move toward P–16 systems of education was fueled by the absence of coherence and alignment from preschool through college, the failure of independent segments of education to coordinate goals and objectives, policies and practices with one another, and the costs to states when the educational segments are not held accountable for student outcomes.⁵

In California, the notion of aligning educational systems is not a new idea. The Master Plan for Higher Education did just that in 1960. Also known as the Donahue Higher Education Act, the legislation differentiated the primary missions of the state’s postsecondary institutions and initiated intersegmental coordination and collaboration for statewide planning of postsecondary education, meeting the higher education needs of geographic regions across the state, facilitating students’ preparation for transferring from one segment to another, and achieving goals of educational equity.⁶ The Master Plan for Higher Education is widely known for establishing California’s hierarchical, three-tiered system of postsecondary education – the CCC, the CSU, and the UC. With the exception of the 2005 legislation that authorized the CSU to confer an independent professional doctorate in educational leadership (SB 724⁷), legislative reviews over the years have left the major tenets of the Master Plan for Higher Education intact and reaffirmed its goal to make postsecondary education available to the broadest possible range of Californians.

Over time, researchers began to identify a lack of access to college for California’s students of color and from low-income families. A number of reports focused attention on bridging the gap between K–12 education and higher education as one way to address the persistent inequities in college access for historically underrepresented students.⁸ Moreover, the economic instability of the 1990s made clear

that California could no longer rely on the economic prosperity of years past to finance its disconnected systems of education that were collectively failing to fulfill the promise of educational equity and access for its students. A long-term plan that aligned the state’s educational institutions into a coherent and accountable system of schooling was needed to protect the public’s investment in education and improve access and success for its students.

WORK BEGINS ON A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

In 1999, California’s Senate Education Committee convened a joint Senate and Assembly task force to propose a new California Master Plan for Education that would identify the P–16 educational needs of the state’s students. Work groups were formed to guide the development of a comprehensive P–16 Master Plan as well as consider how recommendations included in a new Master Plan for Education might complement or conflict with the aging Master Plan for Higher Education. The Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education issued its 2002 report, *The California Master Plan for Education*,⁹ and proposed an ambitious agenda for constructing a coherent state education system.

Four themes—access, achievement, accountability, and affordability—framed the 177 recommendations outlined in the report, most of which covered the wide range of issues that must be addressed in pre-collegiate settings in order to accomplish full intersegmental alignment. The report included over a dozen recommendations reinforcing or modifying the Master Plan for Higher Education. Some legislation was written based on the report’s recommendations, and the Governor took action on other recommendations (notably the 2004 *Williams v. California* settlement laws). With the extensive work of the Joint Committee completed and the Senate and Assembly lead-

⁵ Education Commission of the States: <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=76>

⁶ University of California Office of the President: <http://www.ucop.edu/acadinit/mastplan/mp.htm>

⁷ Senate Bill 724 (2005). California Education Code, Chapter 2, Section 40, Article 4.5. Retrieved from: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>

⁸ Venezia, A., Kirst, M.W., & Antonio, A. (2003). *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K–12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations*. The Bridge Project, Stanford University Institute for Higher Education Research, Palo Alto, CA.

⁹ California Postsecondary Education Commission: http://www.cpec.ca.gov/CompleteReports/ExternalDocuments/2002_FINAL_COMPLETEMASTERPLAN_2.PDF

ers exited from the legislature by term limits, the California Master Plan for Education, today, serves mostly as a legislative reference.

The Joint Committee intended that the report serve as template for future educational legislation and, once the California Master Plan for Education was implemented, that it be reviewed comprehensively every 10 years. The alignment that the California Master Plan for Education proposed did not happen. Clearly it is quite a different policy challenge to align all education segments into one master plan than it was to align the state's higher education institutions with the Master Plan for Higher Education.

It has been 10 years since the Joint Committee was convened, and California is once again experiencing an economic crisis. Not acting to better coordinate and integrate education across all segments when the state had the opportunity to do so may result in more serious consequences this time. The last of the large high school cohorts from the student population boom that the state experienced are currently in 9th and 10th grades.¹⁰ They will be preparing for and applying to postsecondary education at a time when enrollments have been reduced, resources depleted in all segments of education, and a dramatically changed workforce may not have jobs for them when they graduate. Those lucky enough to have access to teachers, counselors, family members, and friends who know how to guide them through the transition from high school to college or career education may successfully navigate their way through postsecondary schooling. Many others likely will not.

P-16 COUNCILS

Recommending policies and practices that help students manage the transition from high school to college is usu-

ally first on the agenda of the nation's state-level councils formed to address P-16 issues. A 2008 publication¹¹ by *Education Week* featured a review of P-16 councils in 40 states showing the variation in council membership, structure, and agendas across different states. The common areas on which most councils focus are rigorous high school curriculum and graduation requirements, stronger teacher preparation, and P-16 data tracking systems. Other than a couple of instances of successful state and local P-16 councils that show the potential of system alignment, researchers studying P-16 councils do not have much to say about the movement's major accomplishments so far.¹² Instead, they point out that councils often are convened by well-meaning elected officials who then leave office creating a leadership vacuum, are given little discretionary authority, are dominated by higher education institutions, and find it difficult to get teachers and faculty to make time for or find interest in intersegmental collaboration and coordination. Early childhood and career and vocational organizations, and in many cases, K-12 institutions, rarely take a leadership role on councils, and are not represented proportionately among council membership. There is limited participation of community groups beyond the business community.¹³ In a paper prepared for the Education Commission of the States (ECS), Dounay¹⁴ points out that the problems many councils encounter are the result of setting agendas that are either too narrow or too broad and inappropriate funding to get things done.

California's P-16 Council was established by State Superintendent O'Connell in 2005 and charged with examining ways to improve student achievement at all levels; link preschool, elementary, middle, high school, and higher education to create a comprehensive, integrated system of student learning; ensure that all students have access to caring and qualified teachers; and increase public awareness of the link between an educated citizenry and a healthy

¹⁰ Education Data Partnership: <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%2Fprofile%2Easp%3Flevel%3D04%26reportNumber%3D16>

¹¹ *Education Week* (June 5, 2008). School to college: Can state P-16 councils ease the transition? *Education Week Diplomas Count 2008*, Vol 27(4).

¹² Hess, F.M. (2008). Making sense of the P-16 push. *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol 89 (7), 511-14. Kirst, M.W. (2008). Connecting schools and colleges: More rhetoric than reality. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol 55 (7), A40.

¹³ Callan, P.M. & Kirst, M.W. (2008). Righting a troublesome 'disjuncture': A push-pull strategy for P-16 cooperation. *Education Week: Diplomas Count 2008*, Vol 27(4), 22-25.

¹⁴ Dounay, J. (2008). Landmines P-16/P-20 councils encounter — and how they can be addressed (or avoided altogether). Retrieved from Education Commission of the States: <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/78/86/7886.pdf>

economy.¹⁵ Although it has the largest council membership among the states, the council's representation, organizing structure, and goals are in line with many other states' efforts. Bringing together the expertise needed to conduct reviews, produce reports, and make recommendations for California's educational system necessitates that the council form subcommittees with additional external participants, further increasing segmental representation. To date, the California P-16 Council has issued reports on high school reform, teacher recruitment, pre-service and in-service, and closing the achievement gap as well as reviewed a state-contracted plan proposing a framework for a comprehensive statewide educational data system.

Many of the problems and critiques noted by P-16 scholars are applicable to California's P-16 Council. For example, there is minimal representation of early childhood agencies and community-based organizations, the council focuses on the critically important but highly complex agenda of closing the achievement gap, has limited authority to take action, and was created by an elected state leader subject to term limits at the end of 2010.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the P-16 Council, with its geographically balanced membership that mixes high-level leaders in education and the business community with local school educators, may be the only state group primed and positioned to take up the task of aligning preschool, K-12, and postsecondary education into a comprehensive and integrated system.

P-16 Councils across the nation are finding that the work of intersegmental alignment cannot be accomplished by top-down mandates alone but instead require local partnerships and exploration of effective strategies. California's P-16 Council should be given support to develop a means by which small, local P-16 councils are established to do the on-the-ground work necessary for learning how to make intersegmental collaboration and coordination actually happen. Certainly the state budget shortfall will place

constraints on how to fund these local efforts, but there is no reason to believe that local commitments to collaborating and coordinating educational services will subside. Indeed, it is more likely that interests in partnerships will grow as budget scenarios worsen. For example, the California Education Round Table Intersegmental Coordinating Committee in a joint initiative with the California Academic Partnership Program is supporting voluntary collaboratives that address student achievement, opportunity, and equity through the Alliance for Regional Collaboration to Heighten Educational Success¹⁷ (ARCHES). Established in 2005, ARCHES assists regional groups in developing and sustaining collaboratives.

Extending the work of California's P-16 Council into local communities can also bring forward the knowledge, expertise, and perspectives of early childhood and career and vocational agencies that are currently missing on the state-level council. Organizations such as First 5 California¹⁸ and its network to assist families and support school readiness and the Career Pathways¹⁹ program that links high school to early career training have experience at the local level working with families and schools, students, and postsecondary institutions. They, along with community-based organizations working in educational contexts, can provide useful and relevant information on how to (and how not to) attempt coordination and collaboration across and within educational segments.

A NEED FOR QUICK AND STRATEGIC ACTION

The alignment efforts that so far have been organized primarily by California's higher education institutions to help students be prepared for the transition to postsecondary education are important but not enough. The people closest to students in all education segments must become more actively engaged in helping to coordinate and align educational segments, sharing institutional and organiza-

¹⁵ California Department of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr05/yr05rel42.asp>

¹⁶ Dounay, J. (2008). The 'three A's' of successful P-16 reform: Design elements that help maintain momentum. *Education Week: Diplomas Count 2008*, Vol 27(4), 23-26.

¹⁷ Alliance for Regional Collaboration to Heighten Educational Success: <http://www.arches-cal.org/>

¹⁸ First 5 California: <http://www.ccfc.ca.gov/default.asp>

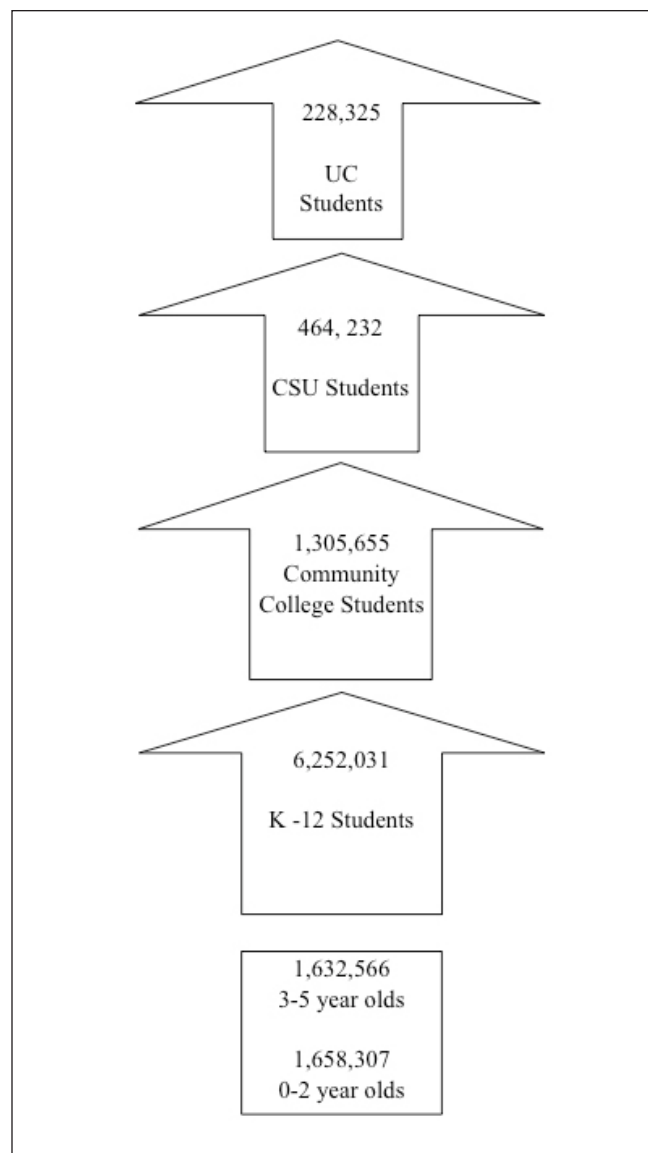
¹⁹ Statewide Career Pathways: <http://www.statewidepathways.org/index.html>

tional practices broadly so that knowledge about how to negotiate access and success throughout the educational pipeline is embedded in school communities. Yet, it is important to raise a caution here because local communities can unintentionally exacerbate inequities through the ways in which and to whom they share knowledge about navigating educational systems. The competitive admissions climate of universities is showing up in K–12 schooling as a result of public school choice policies and current postsecondary enrollment reductions can only make matters worse. Parents, who themselves attended college or have family, friends, and coworkers who went to college or have children who attended college, increasingly know to seek information from local networks on how to get their children into the state’s best schools (across all educational segments). The absence of intersegmental alignment and coordination leaves open the possibility that only the better-informed students and families will be able to take advantage of the educational opportunities that should be available for all.

California does not develop its educational leaders with P–16 schooling in mind – few professional educators learn how to bring a P–16 consciousness to their work in their respective segments. Therefore there is a strong need for educational leaders who understand and can work across and within P–16 contexts, guiding local implementation of alignment strategies and ensuring that new practices do, in fact, create access and foster success for all students. Because the early childhood, K–12, and community college segments have less experience working with the constructs of intersegmental alignment and master plans than do the UC and CSU, leadership development focused on P–16 is especially important in preschool, K–12, and community college systems. A state this large justifiably may have a need to engage in separate master planning for different educational segments, but developing leadership knowledge and skills for weaving together the components of different segmental plans is crucial. Leaders knowledgeable and skilled in P–16 collaboration and coordination can help inform legislative review and future policymaking and provide the leadership stability needed for accomplishing P–16 alignment, particularly since term limits for legislators have made sustained support for intersegmental coordination difficult.

As Figure 1 shows, in the 2008–2009 school year, there were over 8 ¼ million students enrolled in the California educational system. The state has reached a point where it can no longer keep its promise of access for all who seek postsecondary education. It may soon lose its ability to offer high-quality education to the children in our K–12 schools.

Figure 1. Students Enrolled in California’s Educational Systems 2008-2009



Sources: Department of Finance <http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/reports/projections/postsecondary/>; UCOP Institutional Research (2009). University of California Systemwide Enrollment by Level, 2008-09, University of California Enrollment Reports <http://www.ucop.edu/ir/welcome.html>; California State University <http://www.cal-state.edu/as/cyr/cyr08-09/table01.shtml>; California Community Colleges https://misweb.cccco.edu/mis/onlinestat/ftes_rpt.cfm; California Department of Education <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/StateEnr.asp?cChoice=StEnrGrd&cYear=2008-09&cLevel=State&cTopic=Enrollment&myTimeFrame=S&submit1=Submit>; Kidsdata.org <http://www.kidsdata.org/data/topic/table.aspx?ind=34&ch=a&ch=a&ch=79&loc=2&pf=1>

Our K–12 and higher education institutions have been seriously wounded by the severe budget cuts. Perhaps they may withdraw into themselves to recover, further hindering efforts to create a coherent coordinated education system. The state cannot allow this to occur nor can it afford the social and economic costs incurred when students – all ages and interests – are not successful in meeting educational goals. If P–16 alignment and reform stall again, as they did after the completion of the California Master Plan for Education, the impact will be felt by the millions of students and their families seeking a high-quality, accessible education.

Recent discussions in the media about the higher education funding crisis along with a report by the Legislative Analyst’s Office²⁰ are keeping a focus on the goals and objectives of the Master Plan for Higher Education. However, there has been limited discussion on intersegmental alignment as a complementary strategy for restoring California’s educational system to the prominence it once held. The time to invest in long-term P–16 planning is now, beginning with the creation of a permanent state P–16 group that can fully focus on intersegmental coordination and alignment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Pass legislation establishing a permanent P–16 council or committee whose mission is to support intersegmental alignment from early childhood to college and career education. For continuity, the committee could remain a part of the California Department of Education and each Superintendent of Public Instruction would oversee the work of the committee.
2. Task the new committee with reviewing the California Master Plan for Education and consolidating and preserving the extensive work of both the P–16 Council and the former Joint Committee. Require the

committee to issue a report on the ways in which a coherent and coordinated state system of education can be accomplished.

3. Provide the committee with the resources necessary to encourage and facilitate regional P–16 councils that can guide local planning and implementation of alignment efforts, foster intersegmental partnerships and collaboration, and disseminate accurate and useful information about California’s education system to families and students at all levels of education.
4. Direct the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing to include P–16 content elements in the standards requirements for credentials for teachers, counselors, and school administrators. This will build the capacity of K–12 educators to lead intersegmental curricular and instructional reform to better support student learning and success.
5. Encourage and support leadership development in P–16 education so that the state builds a cadre of leaders whose visions for access and equity encompass all California students – preschoolers to high schoolers, vocational/career education students to college and university students – and who possess the knowledge and skills to lead as well as sustain intersegmental alignment, collaboration, and cooperation.

²⁰ Legislative Analyst’s Office (December 2009). The Master Plan at 50: Improving state oversight of academic expansion. Retrieved from: <http://www.lao.ca.gov/laoapp/main.aspx>