

Chapter Five
Kentucky's P-16 Council

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Only our institutions of higher education can equip our people with the knowledge and skills which will make us productive in this new economy. . . I challenge you to articulate a new vision, propose a new method, show me a system more devoted to innovation than it is to turf, more concerned about the big picture than it is about its own place in that picture, and I'll work with you to find the money to do the job. We must have a system of higher education which is more responsive, more efficient, and more relevant to today's realities and tomorrow's needs. Our people deserve no less, and I will accept no less.

—Former Governor Paul Patton of Kentucky
Inaugural Address, December 12, 1995

Kentucky is a state of fierce regional loyalties, and the regional universities are a major part of that feeling of loyalty.

—Dick Wilson, Former Capital Bureau Chief
Louisville Courier-Journal

The tension between state needs and regional prerogatives has shaped Kentucky's pioneering efforts in education reform and its nine-year experience with its P-16 Council. This chapter, based on a case study of Kentucky,¹ begins by describing the political and policy context for the establishment of the Kentucky P-16 Council, including the educational reform initiatives that were adopted prior to the council's

¹ The case study research was conducted by a team of five individuals, under the leadership of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. The team interviewed 14 individuals in a site visit conducted March 10–11, 2008. Interviewees included legislators and representatives of the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Education Cabinet, the Council on Postsecondary Education, the Education Professional Standards Board, and the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce. The author, a member of the team, supplemented interview data with an extensive review of available reports and documents. The information reflects a snapshot in time. Except as otherwise noted, all information and activities are presented as of the time of the research.

creation in 1999. It describes current education performance issues and challenges facing Kentucky, and identifies emergent outcomes of the ambitious reform efforts. In the remainder of the chapter, I examine the role of the P-16 Council in contributing to those outcomes and, more generally, to the development of an efficient education system that meets state needs, consistent with former Governor Paul Patton's vision. Topics include the structure and operation of the council, its priorities, its accomplishments, and shortcomings, as assessed by council participants. Finally, I offer conclusions about the capacity of Kentucky's council mechanism to integrate its various reform efforts and align the education sectors to help produce a more competitive state economy.

THE CONTEXT OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION REFORM

Governor Patton took office in 1995 committed to an agenda of education reform. To that end he created a Task Force on Higher Education, which engaged the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to assess higher education performance in the state and assist the Task Force in making its recommendations. Among the findings reported by NCHEMS were the following challenges facing the state in designing an efficient and responsive education system:

- Low educational attainment and high levels of adult illiteracy;
- High dropout rates from high school that contribute to the adult illiteracy problem;
- Low college-going rates out of high school;
- Low rates of retention, transfer, and degree completion among college attendees;
- Low degree production in specialties critical to the new economy;
- A highly fragmented and underfunded network of community colleges, technical institutes, and university two-year programs that is largely disconnected from regional educational and economic priorities;
- No clearly defined mission for community or technical colleges to serve the undereducated adult population; and
- Unproductive competition among universities and poor research performance in areas critical to the new economy (McGuinness 2002).

The NCHEMS report cited some major barriers to improving these conditions. Among these are two factors that are very relevant to an examination of the Kentucky P-16 Council:

- A system driven by the interests of institutions and "plagued by political and turf battles" rather than guided by the needs of the people and the state's economy; and

- The lack of an effective structure for statewide policy leadership to coordinate efforts of diverse institutions.

As referenced in the quotation at the start of this chapter by Dick Wilson, former capital bureau chief of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Kentucky has a strong culture of place—of region—which contributes to the challenge of harnessing institutions around statewide goals. Moreover, the economic and regional diversity of the state is reflected in huge discrepancies across regions in measures of preparation for, participation in, and success in postsecondary education. Efforts to build a system around state needs have proceeded with careful consideration of regional differences.

Governor Patton sought no less than a conversion of an economy that had been based on tobacco, coal mining, bourbon, and horse racing to one with medical, pharmaceutical, and other high-tech industries. More so than many other states working to increase college graduates, Kentucky needed to create the kinds of jobs that would keep college-educated individuals from moving out of state. Its challenge was to increase both the supply of, and the demand for, individuals with postsecondary credentials in fields demanded by the new economy.

Patton, a Democrat, took office when K–12 reform was in full swing. In the early 1980s, a group of concerned business leaders, parents, and advocates came together to form the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a nonprofit citizens' advocacy organization that still exists today. Their purpose was to advocate for the improvement of an educational system that was performing toward the bottom of the 50 states. Their efforts, along with a ruling by the Kentucky Supreme Court that the public schools were offering inequitable educational opportunities, led to the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) by the state General Assembly in 1990. This sweeping legislation revamped Kentucky's education system in the areas of finance, governance, and curriculum in an attempt to provide equal educational opportunities for all of Kentucky's children regardless of the property wealth of the district in which they lived. It raised educational standards, introduced new approaches to statewide assessment, and created additional support systems for teachers, families, and students.

Earlier efforts to reform postsecondary education during this period had been unsuccessful. The successful passage of K–12 reform legislation set the stage for the ambitious postsecondary education reform legislation that followed seven years later. Governor Patton assumed office in 1995, declaring that reform in postsecondary education would be his top priority. In 1997 he won bipartisan support in the Legislature for major reforms to help Kentucky increase educational attainment in the interest of moving the state toward a more modern and competitive economy. House Bill 1 (HB 1), also known as the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act, made key organizational and governance changes, established several trust funds to finance various reforms, and set performance goals to be achieved by 2020. The key governance provisions were as follows:

- The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) was created to replace the Council on Higher Education and was charged with developing a strategic agenda to achieve the goals of HB 1 and developing and submitting a biennial budget request for postsecondary education that would align resources with goals.
- A new Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) was created by removing all but one of the 14 community colleges from control of the University of Kentucky, removing the 15 technical colleges from the state bureaucracy, and merging them.
- The Strategic Committee on Postsecondary Education (SCOPE) was created, consisting of representatives from the governor’s office, the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the CPE, to serve as a public forum to exchange ideas about the future of higher education and to advise the CPE in the discharge of its new responsibilities.

Through his support for this major structural reform, Governor Patton signaled his willingness to use some political capital to bring more centralized focus to postsecondary education. The battle to remove the community colleges from university control was politically charged and ultimately led to the departure of the university president, Charles Wethington, who had opposed a number of the governor’s key reforms. Wethington was replaced by a supporter of the reform agenda. In addition, the governor made strong appointments to key posts, including making strategic appointments to the CPE and selecting Gordon Davies as its first president. The CPE was created to have considerable authority and to report directly to the governor (outside of the education cabinet).

Another major reform followed shortly thereafter. In 2000, the Kentucky Adult Education Act placed adult education within the CPE. The purpose of this shift was to elevate the priority of adult education and the importance of its students in meeting the goals of HB 1.

In the decade from 1990 to 2000, then, the Kentucky Legislature enacted three major reforms—in K–12, postsecondary, and adult education. Each reform was ambitious. Together they created a major challenge for the state’s leaders to pursue the goals of each reform within the context of building a seamless K–16 education system to increase education levels and spur economic growth.

The next several years saw tremendous activity in implementing the reform agenda—activity that spanned three different governors as well as transitions in leadership of the newly created CPE. Democratic Governor Patton served a second term, until 2003. Higher education spending increased substantially in the first few years of the reforms, but in 2001 the economy soured and higher education budgets were cut three years in a row. The most notable of his investments was in the “Bucks for Brains” initiative, which channeled significant new money into endowed chairs and

professorships at the state's two research and six regional universities, thereby helping to attract talented faculty and increase research funding. In addition, HB 1 created several trust funds that directed increased funding to support a variety of reforms.

Another notable and nationally lauded initiative was the establishment of a public agenda for higher education that encouraged the institutions to work together toward the common purpose of improving educational attainment levels and the quality of life of Kentuckians. The public agenda is focused on five simple questions that direct attention to assessing the extent to which Kentucky is providing its citizens with accessible, affordable higher education that leads to degree completion and the attendant benefits for both individuals and the state as a whole. The state identified a set of indicators to measure progress toward the goals set within each of the questions, and began publishing annual reports summarizing that progress. A specific goal has been set to double the number of Kentuckians with baccalaureate degrees from 400,000 in 2000 to 800,000 by 2020. The state's strategies to achieve that goal are focused on raising high school graduation rates, increasing college enrollment and completion among both recent high school graduates and adults, and attracting college-educated workers to the state.

After the initial reforms were begun, the state launched the "Education Pays" campaign, which included public service announcements on radio and television, as well as the dissemination of bumper stickers and posters promoting the "Education Pays" theme statewide. Changing public attitudes about education is seen as an important factor in ultimately meeting the ambitious goals.

The reforms were fundamentally about superimposing statewide planning and a state public agenda within a state that had a strong culture of regionalism and postsecondary education politics characterized by competition among college presidents for resources. This process proved especially challenging when the resource distribution advocated by the CPE to implement a statewide public agenda was at odds with traditional resource allocation patterns. One casualty of this challenge was the tenure of the first president of the CPE, Gordon Davies, whose contract was not renewed in 2002. Davies was replaced by Tom Layzell, formerly the commissioner of higher education in Mississippi, who retired in 2007 and has been succeeded by two interim presidents as the search continues for a permanent replacement.

Governor Patton was succeeded by Republican Ernie Fletcher, whose single term in office, from 2003 to 2007, encompassed several important education reform initiatives. His tenure, however, was colored by a scandal and his eventual indictment for his administration's practices regarding the state merit system. Kentucky was one of 13 states that formed a new coalition under the American Diploma Project (ADP) network to improve high schools. The state's participation in that project helped shape a number of initiatives involving the alignment of curricula and assessments across high school and college during Fletcher's term:

- In 2004, the CPE approved a statewide student placement policy for public postsecondary institutions based on the American Diploma Project’s standards of college readiness.
- The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) convened groups of P–12 and postsecondary faculty, that, with input from business and other external stakeholders, developed competency standards in literacy and mathematics as a means to reduce remediation in college. The Board of Education approved these revised core standards in 2006.
- In 2006, the Board of Education approved an increase in high school graduation requirements, which it characterized as a college preparatory curriculum for all students. Effective for the class of 2012, students must take mathematics each year, including algebra II, and science coursework must incorporate laboratory components.
- In 2006, the General Assembly passed House Bill 197 to establish a pilot program in end-of-course testing for algebra I, algebra II, and geometry. These exams will report on student performance in relation to the commonwealth core standards.
- Also in 2006, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 130 which required, beginning in 2006–07: diagnostic assessment of all eighth and tenth graders using the ACT Educational Progress Assessment System; and the administration of the ACT college admissions and placement examination to all students in grade eleven to assess English, reading, mathematics, and science proficiency.

Democratic Governor Steve Beshear was elected in November 2007, and has experienced challenging budget conditions as he has sought to advance education reform. His agenda faced a midyear budget cut in his first year and a three percent cut in the 2008–09 state budget. The extent to which he will be a strong advocate of education reform is as yet unknown.

EDUCATION LANDSCAPE TODAY

Much has been written about the ambitious Kentucky education reform agenda, with the assessments falling into the “glass-half-full” or “glass-half-empty” categories. Generally, however, most assessments acknowledge the progress made amid great challenges. Major accomplishments attributed to the reform efforts include: (1) improvement in 8th grade performance on some national assessments; (2) huge increases in higher education enrollments, especially in the community and technical colleges and in adult basic education; (3) a much stronger and more responsive role of the two-year sector under the new Kentucky Community and Technical College System; (4) large gains in associate

degree completion and in the number of certificates conferred; (5) a decline in the adult illiteracy rate; and (6) a major increase in the percentage of adults who have a bachelor's degree (although the percentage remains low relative to other states).

Despite these improvements, Kentucky continues to perform poorly on most indicators used to compare state higher education performance in the National Center's report card, *Measuring Up* (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2008). Indicators of student preparation for college remain low relative to other states, despite some improvement. The high school graduation rate has declined over the last decade, even as a higher percentage of those graduates are enrolling in college. While one-year retention rates of college students compare well with other states, the percentage of first-time, full-time students who complete a bachelor's degree within six years is low. The production of bachelor's degrees has declined relative to the number enrolled, though this may be a result of increased enrollments in four-year institutions and an increased emphasis on the award of certificates. Overall performance on strengthening the pipeline from high school to college completion remains very problematic: about 18 out of every 100 ninth graders in the state complete high school, go directly college, and attain an associate degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years. The national average is about 20 (NCHEMS 2006b).

Efforts to keep college affordable, which are especially important for a low-wealth state like Kentucky, have been impeded by budget shortfalls, as is happening generally across the country. Kentucky higher education institutions are raising tuition and fees in an effort to compensate for budget cuts. Tuition increases over the past ten years have averaged eight percent per year in the state's four-year colleges and universities, and nine percent per year in the two-year sector (NCES 2008). As tuition increased at three to four times the rate of inflation, increases in family income were less than the rate of inflation. Families in Kentucky devote a comparatively large share of income after financial aid to attend public institutions, even community colleges. The state's investment in need-based aid is low compared with other states, and students in Kentucky take out larger loans than their peers in other states (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2008).

One aspect of the reform agenda that has been particularly troublesome and political for years is the mechanism to assess K–12 performance and to use those assessments to determine college readiness. Triggered by concerns about flat reading scores on national assessments, the General Assembly replaced the existing assessment system with the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) in 1999. CATS, a high-stakes test used to assess school performance, has itself been controversial, with concerns that the new system lowered academic standards. Continuing concerns about low school performance on national assessments has led to efforts to once again change the assessment regimen.

The issue has partisan dimensions, with Republicans (who control the Senate) favoring pending legislation (Senate Bill 1) to replace CATS with a system that would track individual student performance over time and be referenced to national standards. Democrats (who control the House) voted against SB 1 and generally favor assessments designed to more closely reflect performance on courses in relation to state standards rather than nationally-normed grade-level exams.² The teachers' union fears changing to any new system that could be used as a means to evaluate teachers. The legislative action in 2006 to require ACT testing and to pilot end-of-year exams has added more complexity to the assessment debate. A CPE official noted that some in the K–12 community fear that ACT scores, when they are released, will show lower rates of proficiency than CATS scores show, revealing CATS standards as too low. Jon Draud, in one of his first major actions as state commissioner of K–12 education, announced in March 2008 that he will convene a task force at the end of the 2008 General Assembly session to try to achieve consensus among the parties on the choice of assessment and accountability systems. Clearly, the state continues to search for the right combination of tools to understand and improve educational performance.

A report released by the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce (2007) provides a “glass-half-empty” perspective on the current education landscape after so much expended effort on reform. The report acknowledges the progress that has been made but cites the continued poor performance at most stages along the education pipeline. It notes that the state has made little progress with respect to the national average in increasing educational attainment and per capita income, and expresses concern about the state’s ability to produce, attract, and retain the college-educated individuals who are crucial to the development of a more competitive state economy.

The chamber report cites a number of barriers to further progress. Among them are two that are relevant to our purpose in studying the operation and impact of the P–16 Council. One is the lack of structures and leadership to provide policy coordination and combat the institutional and regional competition that characterizes the state. The report asserts that “the state policy leadership and coordinating structure established in HB 1 is not working as intended,” citing widespread agreement among those interviewed in preparing the report that “the reestablishment of the CPE as an effective entity is essential to the future of postsecondary reform.”

Seemingly in response to the concern that the CPE needs to play a stronger coordinating role, Governor Beshear issued an executive order in August 2008 reversing an action by his predecessor and moving the CPE from the education cabinet to a direct

² Subsequent to the completion of the case study research, Senate Bill 1 was enacted into law, reflecting a major compromise between parties and philosophies of assessment. It calls for a blend of national assessments and assessments based directly on Kentucky’s educational standards. Despite enactment of the compromise legislation, assessment remains a politically contentious issue and there are many questions about the implementation of this aspect of SB 1.

reporting relationship to his office. This move returns the CPE to the original structure envisioned by the 1997 reform. The executive order cites the chamber report and claims that the change will emphasize “the importance of higher education in the Commonwealth and promote greater efficiency and economy.” A political news watcher quoted the governor as saying of the interim status of the CPE leadership: “To recruit the kind of national educational leader we need as the new CPE president, he or she must be a close advisor to the governor.”

Another barrier cited is lack of alignment. The chamber’s report states that the appropriate connections among all levels of education that would ensure student success do not exist, noting in particular the misalignment of the CATS system with expectations for postsecondary-level study. As evidence of this lack of alignment, the report notes that over 50% of college freshmen need remediation in at least one subject.

The report offers a number of recommendations to the governor and General Assembly, including that the goals set forth in HB 1 be reaffirmed and that they redefine the goal “to establish a comprehensive, integrated strategy to develop a seamless (P–20) education system. . .” This recommendation raises the question of the role that the existing P–16 Council has played in this history and whether it can be an effective mechanism in furthering the ambitious goals of education reform and alignment in Kentucky.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE P–16 COUNCIL

It may be a surprise to learn that the P–16 Council was established in 1999, given its absence from the discussion of the extensive reform agenda recounted above. But the P–16 Council is rarely, if ever, mentioned in all the materials that were reviewed to understand these ten years of reform. Those materials include published reports, news articles, and government documents. During our on-site interviews as well, we found that mention of “the council” was usually interpreted to mean the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) before we clarified the subject of our inquiry. But the public record notwithstanding, we learned through interviews that the P–16 Council is viewed by many as a valuable piece of the story.

The CPE initiated the P–16 Council in 1999 in collaboration with the State Board of Education. It was viewed as a means for both sectors to obtain advice from each other, and other participants, as they carried out their expanded responsibilities under the reform agendas for K–12, postsecondary, and adult education. As stated on the CPE website:

“The State P–16 Council was formed to help Kentucky achieve its ambitious goals for education reform by improving cooperation and communication among elementary, secondary, and postsecondary teachers and administrators. Kentucky trails national averages for percentages of its population that go to college, persist, and graduate. The State P–16 Council champions initiatives

that motivate Kentuckians to complete high school and postsecondary education.”

Helen Mountjoy, the governor’s cabinet secretary for education and workforce development, described the motivation for the P–16 Council’s formation in terms of trying to get people talking instead of finger pointing:

“When the people at the Council on Postsecondary Education started talking about [how] they’re not sending us qualified students, people over here responded with, ‘they’re not sending us qualified teachers.’ And off you go to the races. And conducting that kind of information exchange through the media was probably not the most effective way to actually benefit the people involved—those students at all levels. And so the notion was that reasonable people could actually sit around a table together and put some of this stuff on there without coming to blows, and that this would be a good thing for the state. Frankly, when we started I’m not sure that we looked a whole lot farther than that, than trying to eliminate some of the finger-pointing and to realize that we were all in this together.”

These discussions were intended to provide advice to the Board of Education, the CPE, and the council’s other partner agencies on the preparation and professional development of teachers, the alignment of competency standards, and the elimination of barriers impeding student transition from preschool through the baccalaureate.

Reflecting the regionalism of the state’s culture, the state P–16 Council was created to be part of a network of regional councils. According to one current member, the intent was for the statewide council to set priorities and have much of the work done at the regional level. In 2001, the General Assembly enacted legislation authorizing the CPE to encourage establishment of local P–16 councils. In the next session, the General Assembly appropriated funding to serve as seed money to support local councils. There are now 22 local councils in place. No state funding, however, has been provided to support the local councils since the original seed money was allocated.

COUNCIL STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

The council is a voluntary effort among state agencies; it has no basis in state statute and no line-item budget. According to the CPE website, there are 18 members representing a variety of state agencies, with the Board of Education and the CPE having the largest representation:

- Kentucky Board of Education (3 members);
- Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (3 members);
- State Commissioner of Education;

- President of the Council on Postsecondary Education;
- Educational Professional Standards Board (2 members);
- Kentucky Department of Education Director of Early Childhood Development;
- CPE Vice President for Adult Education;
- Executive Director of Technical Education;
- Commissioner of Workforce Investment;
- Executive Director of the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority;
- A business representative;
- A labor representative designated by the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board; and
- The Secretary of the Education Cabinet.

Notably absent from council membership are legislators—reflecting the fact that the council was created as a mechanism to increase conversation among state agencies with responsibilities in advancing the P–16 education agenda. There is no formal role for the governor and none of the three governors who have served during the council’s existence has played a key role. In fact, one member commented that he wasn’t sure that the current governor even knew the council existed. While the governor’s education cabinet secretary is a member, the council is clearly not intended to be run as an extension of the governor’s cabinet. Rather, it is a collaborative effort among state agencies with clear lead roles for the CPE and the State Board of Education.

Respondents concurred that the council, *as a council*, does not take policy positions, does not lobby for legislation, and does not engage in action to implement the matters that it considers. Instead, it depends on the constituent agencies to act, each according to its mission with respect to the P–16 agenda. Diane Bazell, assistant vice president for academic affairs at CPE, explained that rather than set its own policies or take collective policy positions, the council is a vehicle for getting departments and agencies to revise their policies. Cabinet Secretary Mountjoy agreed:

“It is not so much a matter of trying to formulate legislation as it is trying to maximize the ability of the two levels to work together effectively and to do things that are of mutual benefit for the students of Kentucky. It was not perceived as something that was going to set a legislative agenda.”

Elaine Ferris, the new deputy commissioner of education, provided her view on the council’s lack of authority, having recently joined it. “You put the idea out there and if the other agencies buy into it . . . well they’ll take it and . . . create some kind of statute or regulation. . . .” Jeanne Ferguson, member of the Board of Education and current council chair, said the council does not “spearhead” P–16 agenda but “works with”

agencies on it. Phillip Rogers, executive director of the Education Professional Standards Board, agreed that the council is a mechanism for bringing agencies together but not for telling them what to do. When asked about how the council dealt with a controversial issue on assessment and whether it came to a vote, he said there was no vote because it was clear to council members whose call it was and that “the department is going to do what the department is going to do.”

The council meets quarterly for a full day. The chair of the council alternates annually between the Department of Education and the CPE, as does the staffing of the council. In practice, the CPE plays a large role regardless of who is the official chair and staff. Said Bazell, “I’ve been a key driver for sure, but no one person or organization can do it alone.” Some respondents did note a bit of imbalance between the two sectors, citing a stronger role played by the CPE, but others said that participation and leadership by the CPE and the Department of Education is “mostly equal.” One member noted that “were it not for the CPE, we wouldn’t have the council we have today. They’re the catalyst that’s made it work.” Both the Department of Education and the CPE carry information about the council on their respective websites. The information from the Department of Education includes links to meeting materials (minutes and agendas) from 2004 to 2007, while the CPE covers meetings from 2001 to 2007.

CPE’s Bazell said it was a conscious decision not to have staff assigned specifically to the council so as not to “ghettoize” anyone with a P–16 title. That would create a new silo, which was not the intent of the council, she said. Partly for the same reason, the council has no general fund budget or direct authority.

Another reason for the lack of funding is the assumption that the local P–16 councils would perform much of the “real work” of P–16 reform. Perhaps as a result of the strong political culture of regionalism in Kentucky, the state-local council model seems to reflect the belief that policy change does not occur with “top-down” edicts from the state. Said one respondent:

“It took me 15 years on the state board to really appreciate the fact that because you change policy at the state level does not mean you change practice at the local level. If we really want to change practice at the local level, I think there need to be more local initiatives.”

Councilmember Philip Rogers of the Educational Professional Standards Board offered an example of the importance of local implementation. He stressed that if Kentucky is to shape its teacher and principal training programs to be truly collaborative and “highly clinical” so as to improve student learning and college readiness, “it’s going to take regional groups to make that happen.”

There are differences of opinion on the desired relationship between the state and local councils, as well as on the balance between the need for “top-down” and “bottom-up” initiatives. However, it is clear that the local councils were always intended to play a

key role. Most interviewees explained that the state council sets priorities for the local councils to work on—perhaps developing pilot programs that can be tested before major statewide policy changes are made. But some respondents cited some difficulty with this model. Jon Draud, state commissioner of education, noted that the local councils have tended to be driven by local agendas rather than coalescing around a few issues of statewide concern. Bazell said that the state council cannot impose requirements without providing funding for local councils, which most people hope will be forthcoming.

Several respondents noted the huge variation in capacity and output across the 22 local councils, with only one—in northern Kentucky—regularly cited as having much capacity to act. Although the state body intends to request state funding to support the local councils, most feel that the capacity of local councils will depend on their ability to raise outside funding—something that the Northern Kentucky Council has done successfully.

The statewide P–16 Council is one of a long list of committees that the CPE staffs and works with, according to the CPE website. Some of those committees have jurisdiction over topics central to P–16 alignment, including committees on college access, developmental education, transfer, STEM, faculty development, adult learners, and quality and accountability. This structure signals the breadth of the role of the CPE, consistent with the 1997 reform vision. It also indicates that as well as not having the authority to develop or implement policy, the P–16 Council in Kentucky competes with many other advisory bodies for the attention of the state bureaucracy.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The website for the Council on Postsecondary Education has a “frequently asked questions” section about the P–16 council. In response to the question “What objectives is the council pursuing,” the website lists three priorities:

- Aligning the curricula and requirements between high schools and colleges to make clear what every student needs to know and be able to do at each educational level;
- Raising the quality of teachers through improved preparation and professional development; and
- Increasing the number and diversity of students attending college by stressing programs that persuade parents and students to plan early for advanced education.

Our interviews with council members confirmed the top two priorities, although we heard much more about efforts to agree upon and align assessments than about aligning curricula. The overriding priority we heard in our interviews was reducing the need for

remedial instruction in postsecondary education, which the council is attempting to address through the three priority areas above.

Another priority we heard regards the development of a P–20 database that would enable the tracking of individual student progress across education sectors and over time. On the data front, the council is also working with member agencies to develop a set of indicators of progress in meeting the state’s goals, from early childhood through college and the workplace.

Improving the transfer of credit—from the Community and Technical College System to universities and from high schools to postsecondary institutions—is another priority of the council. This has directed attention to issues such as dual enrollment, advanced placement, and the transferability of technical credits toward degree attainment.

Securing funding for the local councils is also a priority. This is seen as a prerequisite for achieving most of the P–16 alignment agenda. Representative Frank Rasche, chair of the Education Committee, explained that there are legislative efforts to codify and fund local councils but not the state council, because of the belief that more happens locally. As one example of local efforts, Commissioner Draud commended the steps taken in one region to smooth the transfer of credit and voiced hope that other regions would take similar actions. He did not indicate that there was any priority on developing statewide policies or guidelines around transfer of credit. As another example, Secretary Mountjoy spoke of a regional council she had served on that succeeded in getting local businesses, workforce representatives, schools, and colleges together to determine how best to fashion the region’s fourth year mathematics curriculum once the state’s high school graduation requirements are changed—and to align the curriculum with local community and technical colleges. She noted that these alignments are easier to accomplish at the local level but cannot be achieved without staff for the regional councils.

COUNCIL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Identifying the accomplishments of the P–16 Council is difficult, because its role is advisory and because many other groups and individuals have had a major influence on P–16 reform activity in Kentucky. I will address council members’ perceptions of the value added by the council in the next section. Here I report official pronouncements of council accomplishments, along with areas where interviewees cited the council playing a key role in a particular outcome.

The website for the CPE offers the following answer to the question, “what has the council done so far?”:

- Sponsored Kentucky’s participation in the American Diploma Project to help align high school graduation standards with specified postsecondary and employment needs;

- Sponsored statewide teams of P–12 teachers and postsecondary faculty in mathematics and literacy who recommended consistent expectations for student learning to reduce the need for postsecondary remediation;
- Endorsed large-scale projects to improve mathematics and science teaching in the middle schools;
- Promoted diagnostic testing in mathematics to help high school students identify academic deficiencies that they should correct before entering college;
- Promoted funding proposals for innovative approaches to teacher education and endorsed statewide symposia of chief academic officers and deans of arts and sciences and education to improve the preparation and teaching effectiveness of P–12 teachers;
- Endorsed a large-scale statewide survey of high school age youth about their attitudes toward postsecondary education;
- Endorsed a statewide public communication campaign to promote postsecondary education for all Kentuckians;
- Coordinated involvement of the Kentucky Virtual University in projects to extend the access of education to students of all ages and to expand professional development opportunities for teachers;
- Sponsored a \$20+ million statewide GEAR UP grant to prepare economically disadvantaged middle school students for college; and
- Oversaw the formation of local P–16 councils across the commonwealth.

Interviewees concurred that joining the America Diploma Project (ADP) helped to spur many following achievements, and they credited the council with bringing ADP to Kentucky. The move to increase graduation requirements, although officially accomplished by the Board of Education, was also credited in part to the council, because it was a direct result of ADP involvement. Business became more involved in the graduation requirement issue due to the council and, through that participation, business representatives successfully made the case that students need the same level of rigor in high school whether they go on to postsecondary education or go directly into the workforce.

Some interviewees credited the council with advancing discussions about standards and with progress on assessment and action on statewide placement exams and benchmarks. Some, however, countered that the council has not played a substantial role in the ongoing assessment debates. Several people mentioned council accomplishments that can be directly attributable to the interactions across stakeholder communities that the council provides. For example, Secretary Mountjoy said the council helped expand communication with the business community and private universities concerning

admissions and other issues. Councilmember Rogers said the Educational Professional Standards Board strengthened its relationship with the CPE because of the council and helped improve educational leadership programs. Another respondent cited as an accomplishment the council's efforts to engage the public around its efforts to increase standards and expectations around college-going.

The council was also credited with getting student identifiers added to high school transcripts, giving colleges a means to track and report back to schools on the performance of their students. One member saw this as an example of how having an item repeatedly appear on the council agenda can eventually lead to action.

Some respondents also identified accomplishments of the local councils. As noted, the Northern Kentucky Council was regularly mentioned as the most effective local council. With the help of money from Toyota, that council has made some inroads into its goal of improving mathematics instruction in K–12 schools. Other local councils have reportedly made progress in getting the business sector to help identify the kinds of skills that need to be emphasized in high school to ensure that students are ready for the workplace. Progress at the local level is seen as highly contingent upon the ability to attract outside funding—leading Dave Adkisson, a statewide councilmember and president of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, to characterize the local P–16 councils as a “patchwork” situation with “spotty” results.

VALUE ADDED BY THE P–16 COUNCIL

An important purpose of this study of P–16 and P–20 councils is to understand if and how the council mechanism adds value to the work that would occur whether or not the council existed. This is a key question because these councils are typically superimposed on existing agency structures and do not themselves hold the power to legislate or even to implement legislative or executive directives. The value of the Kentucky P–16 Council, and similar councils of which we are aware, comes from its ability to influence the work of existing agencies and organizations. In this case, that includes its ability to influence the network of 22 local P–16 councils.

There is a significant difference between the Kentucky council and many others, including those in Rhode Island and Arizona, which were also subjects of our study. The Kentucky council has no specified mandate to provide recommendations to the governor. Rather, it is merely a structure for agencies to advise one another. As such, its ability to influence agency agendas is likely more constrained because it cannot depend on the power and influence of the governor to endorse or act upon its recommendations. Instead, its value stems on the willingness of agencies—primarily the CPE and the Department of Education—to take action. The glass-half-empty perception of this model is reflected in the Chamber of Commerce's report (2007), which said, “The perception of some is that

the P–16 Council has served more as a debating and discussion forum than as an effective means to address critical, cross-agency issues.”

Our interviews, however, revealed much support for the glass-half-full view that such “debating and discussion” is indeed valuable for two related reasons: it enhances communication across agencies and, by so doing, it influences each agency’s agenda. Interviewees also found value in the council’s influence over the local P–16 councils.

The Council Enhances Communication

Councilmember Phillip Rogers explained how lack of authority does not preclude the value of communication:

“They don’t have any authority, but when you have the commissioner and the president of the Council on Postsecondary Education, you have the secretary of education sitting there, you have the developmental-ed folks there . . . you have the vocational-ed folks there, you’ve got the workforce development folks sitting at the table . . . if you just walked in a room and put those folks at a table and locked the door and walked out . . . something’s going to happen. . .”

Cabinet Secretary Mountjoy strongly echoed this view, commenting that “if you’re going to break down the silo you have to know what’s happening inside the other silo.” She added that this kind of cross-agency learning would not have happened without the council. Bazell, of the CPE, shared her view that the council is “the invisible magnet pulling these forces together” and that, without it, people would not be talking to one another. Commissioner Draud confirmed that people wouldn’t be communicating with each other without the council. Several others described the council as a place to share information. This is confirmed by a review of the meeting minutes which document a wide variety of informational reports made to the council over its nine-year history.

Even Chamber of Commerce President Adkisson, who favors more authority for the CPE and the council, sees the communication fostered by the council as a “good first step.” And somewhat surprisingly, since the Legislature lacks a formal place at the table, Representative Winters acknowledged the value of communication: “I think the greatest role at the P–16 Council is to bring all the stakeholders to the table and discuss the major issues.”

Through Communication, the Council Influences Agency Agendas

Bazell described the council as a vehicle for getting partner agencies to revise their policies. A prime example of this is the increase in graduation requirements. Other examples include the addition of the student ID on transcripts, mentioned above, and efforts by the Educational Professional Standards Board to reshape their masters and principal training programs to better prepare professionals to implement the P–16 reform

agenda. Said Rogers of these efforts to change policies and practices, “I am a small agency so I benefit from using the council as leverage.”

Representative Winters provided an example of how the council affected legislation that will, in turn, affect the agency agendas. He credited the council’s persistent attention to STEM issues with helping him get legislation adopted that would establish a STEM Initiative Task Force, administratively housed in the CPE, to develop a statewide strategic and business plan to include goals and measurable benchmarks for improving education and outcomes in STEM fields. He agreed that by having many stakeholders present at meetings, the council can bring pressure on agencies to take actions they otherwise may not take.

An interesting contrast in perspective was provided by two members with respect to the overall agenda facing the partner agencies in the council: integrating the three major reforms of the 1990s (in K–12, postsecondary, and adult education). Bazell said that those reforms were never intended to be part of a whole, integrated agenda and credited the council with bringing them together so that each partner agency would implement reform in a more comprehensive manner. Adkisson of the Chamber of Commerce had a different view, saying that while each reform is good, the council had not yet succeeded in bringing them together into coordinated P–16 reform.

The Council Influences Local Approaches to P–16 Alignment

As noted previously, there is a strong view among many stakeholders that much of the real work of P–16 alignment necessarily occurs at the local level. Respondents lauded the benefits of communication across parties at the local level, just as they did for the state arena. Mountjoy, who had previously served on a local council, offered that without a local council structure there would not be any emphasis on people interacting effectively across organizational boundaries. As an example she cited that people responsible for curricula in the different counties within one region did not know each other well until the council structure brought them together. These interactions made a significant difference in the sharing of professional development opportunities and in their dealing with issues of college admissions. Even more valuable, she said, was the “real communication with the business community” which is missing at the state council level. For example, business leaders in one region arranged for faculty to go on field trips to local businesses to better identify what business is looking for in graduates and to agree on what business might offer in mentorships and internships for students.

While many respondents found value in local council activity, there is less agreement on the extent to which the state council has been able to integrate local activities or align local council priorities with state priorities. Adkisson, and the Chamber of Commerce as reflected in its 2007 report, find statewide coordination lacking. But Mountjoy gave examples of how the state council affected the agenda of the local council on which she served—directing its attention to issues, such as dual credit, that would

likely not have gotten much attention had it not been raised at the state level. Charles McGrew, director for information and research, cited another form of coordination between state and local councils. He said that the local councils are the most important users of the data that are generated by the CPE and shared with the state council.

BARRIERS TO GREATER SUCCESS

Perhaps it is not surprising, given the enormity of the reform task facing the P-16 Council, that respondents had more to say about barriers and shortcomings to council achievements than they did about accomplishments and value added by the council. At the same time, the Kentucky council was one of the first in the nation and one might expect a more sanguine assessment of its accomplishments by now. Certainly it was puzzling to hear K-12 Commissioner Draud say that the state council is “just now really starting to get their teeth into these issues,” even though he added “I might be wrong about that.”

There were four major explanations offered for the lack of sufficient progress made by the state P-16 Council.

Lack of Authority

Even among those members who found much to commend in the value of communicating across agencies, there was recognition that the council is hamstrung by its lack of authority. Said one member, trying “to put feet on these recommendations” is tough, since the council can only make suggestions. Representative Rasche cited as the “biggest weakness” the lack of accountability to anyone since there is no mandate and no direct involvement by the governor. If the council were charged to make recommendations to the governor, as is the case with other state councils, the lack of statutory authority would not be as problematic. Rasche added that the governor’s involvement could help move the council from studying issues to accomplishing things.

Adkisson described the council as “stuck without a mandate in the middle of K-12 and higher education,” lacking the ability to make things happen. Another member was more specific about the authority needed. He said he would like to see the General Assembly require the council to bring forward reports to the Legislature as a united front. As it is, the Legislature hears only from each agency separately. When asked what is preventing the council from doing that, he implied that they have no reason or legitimacy now to do so, since the Legislature does not invite, or expect, the council to report out as a council. Lack of statutory authority also means lack of an identified budget. Many members feel strongly that, at the very least, a budget is needed to support local councils.

Insufficient Participation

The lack of formal participation by the Legislature is seen as a barrier, as is lack of involvement by the governor. Some members believe that having the governor's cabinet secretary is sufficient participation from the governor. However, the recent order by Governor Beshear to restore the CPE to an independent status reporting directly to the governor might be cause to reconsider whether the cabinet secretary can effectively represent the governor. The role played by the CPE is itself an issue raised by some members, with some feeling that the agenda is driven too much by the CPE. In addition to calls for a greater voice by K-12 to balance that of the CPE, there are also calls for more seats on the council for business and labor so that the council can hear directly from these groups. The Chamber of Commerce would like to see a stronger role for the Cabinet for Economic Development.

Lack of Effective Leadership

A number of responses pointed to the need for more effective leadership, even if not stated precisely in those terms. Observing that the council is not likely to, nor should, get much legal authority, one member said the council just needs to be more effective. Another suggested that this might be done by narrowing the vision and becoming more focused on specific goals. Yet another member suggested that one of these goals should be to seek greater public support for the work of the council.

Representative Winters pointed more directly to leadership issues in saying that when he attends the meetings he does not “sense the kind of urgency that ought to be existing there, and I think that all relates to the leadership.” And Adkisson expressed one of the main themes of the Chamber of Commerce report, which found that the leadership exercised by the CPE had been unable to prevent university presidents from pursuing their own objectives. He cited leadership as the biggest lever for moving forward—and lack of leadership as the biggest obstacle.

Lack of State-Regional Coordination Concerning Policy

It is fair to say that Kentucky is still seeking the right balance between the state and local P-16 councils. All agree that local action is needed to implement change and that local councils seem to be an effective mechanism for that, if they have resources. But there seems to be a lack of agreement on how the state-local relationship should work. Some want the state council to set priorities for the locals so that all parts of the state are working on the same issues. Others see the locals as raising issues to bubble up to the state. No one seems sure how policy change is to occur either way. Past experience has convinced some that state policy edicts don't translate to local policy implementation. But with local councils largely setting their own agendas, it is unclear how local priorities might, collectively, result in consensus for state policy change.

A good example of the quandary is found in the dual enrollment issue. Dual enrollment has been identified as a strategy for increasing college readiness and college-going but there are no statewide eligibility criteria for dual enrollment. Local councils and institutions develop their own criteria, posing a severe challenge to any statewide effort to make concurrent enrollment an effective part of the state's alignment strategy. The council has not been in a position to craft statewide policy from disparate local policies and practices. Lack of authority and funding at the state level prevent the council from taking even small steps toward statewide policy development such as requiring local councils to submit reports. Bazell summed up the issue by agreeing that the state-local dynamic is "not where we want it to be."

Inability to Apply Policy Levers

In addition to these structural and organizational barriers, respondents mentioned three specific areas where the council has failed, thus far, to accomplish some tasks viewed as necessary to achieving P-16 alignment. Interestingly, these address three of the four policy levers that the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, in its policy report, *Claiming Common Ground*, advised states to use to achieve P-16 alignment (Callan et al. 2006).

1. Unresolved Issues with Assessment

Despite considerable work and policy initiatives over the last decade, Kentucky is still struggling to align assessments across high school and college. While the state is not alone in this struggle, several respondents mentioned the continued lack of alignment between CATS and college readiness standards as a failed endeavor. Lack of alignment between the adult and postsecondary sectors, with the GED not signaling college readiness, is another major problem, particularly in light of the priority placed on addressing the need for adult education in the state. Debates over CATS, ACT, and end-of-course exams continue, debates which, according to the Chamber of Commerce report, "are sending mixed signals to schools and students and are seriously undermining the efforts of schools to improve the preparation of students for postsecondary education."

2. Lack of a Data System

Despite the council's success in adding a student identifier to high school transcripts, the council has not made much progress in developing a longitudinal student data system, which is needed to track and improve outcomes in line with state goals.

3. Lack of Financial Incentives for Collaboration

As noted earlier, the council and the CPE continue to struggle within a statewide culture in which postsecondary institutions compete for resources and students. Without authority over resources, the council has no mechanism to provide financial incentives to

spur collaboration among institutions. Similarly, lack of funding for core staff at the regional councils rules out the state council's use of fiscal incentives to bring faculty together or otherwise promote collaboration.

SUSTAINABILITY

As with the half-full and half-empty perspectives identified above, there is good news and bad news on the issue of sustainability. The good news is that the viability of the state P-16 Council is not linked to any particular politician or office, as is the case in other states. This council has already spanned three gubernatorial administrations—across political parties from Democrat to Republican and back to Democrat. As a voluntary effort largely between the Council on Postsecondary Education and the state Department of Education, the P-16 Council has survived several changes in the top leadership of those agencies. Additionally, the council in Kentucky does not face hostility from legislators (as is the case in Rhode Island, for example), even though the Legislature is not part of the council's formal structure. Legislative leaders attend the meetings, even though they are not members.

The bad news is that the lack of ownership by the governor or other elected officials of either party could mean that while the council survives, it does so with limited impact. In fact, it may be that the council has survived because it has stayed on the sidelines of some of the battles over contentious issues like CATS. As one member noted, the council was able “to fly under the radar screen” due to its lack of statutory authority and visibility.

Observers are looking for more than survival, however, and many have considered structural changes. Representative Rasche thinks it might be time to give the council some legislative authority and a budget—and hold it accountable for results. He believes that the governor needs to become more involved. Bazell agrees that statutory authority is needed because of continual turnover of key individuals, but is not certain how much specificity such a statute should have.

A few models were described by interviewees, but there is no real movement afoot to go forth with any of them. Under one model the council would become a “super policy entity” with the ability to have a role in state policymaking independent of its constituent agencies. This model was termed a “train wreck” by one member, likening it to “tearing down the house to build a fence.” A second model would be to formalize its role as supporting local council initiatives and providing a forum for ideas without granting the state council a formal role in state policymaking. This model would hardly seem to provide leadership over the three-part reform agenda. A third option would be to stop short of creating a super agency but have the Legislature authorize or require the council to bring forward collective reports and recommendations.

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce has probably put the most thought into new models, since the chamber is convinced that the current model is not capable of imposing statewide order on the centrifugal forces of regionalism and institutional competition. Chamber President Adkisson said that the chamber, instead of recommending that the council have new mandates, is calling on the governor and leaders of the General Assembly to form a high-level policy group—with legislative and executive branch representation—to consider what structures might best allow the state to move more rapidly in achieving P–16 alignment. Adkisson believes that Governor Beshear will address the chamber’s recommendation soon.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The lesson from Kentucky’s nine years of experience with the statewide P–16 Council may well be that there is a trade-off between longevity and influence. The council has been in existence nearly ten years but appears to play more of a peripheral role than the other state councils we studied. Mention of the council is notably absent in most of the research and news reports about the implementation of Kentucky’s policy reforms. And, surprisingly, at the time of our visit, several interviewees commented that they knew little about the council because they had only recently joined or had attended only a few meetings. When turnover does change council membership, one would expect high-level officials to know something substantive about the council even before serving on it. Yet one prominent new member had “no idea” about the council’s priorities in advance of that member’s first meeting. Another prominent member described the state council as “just now getting active.” It is hard to escape the conclusion that the council has not been a huge factor in the great strides Kentucky has made in its reform agenda.

Kentucky has indeed been a national model for education reformers. The state seems to have all of the substantive components of a reform agenda in place but has not found the mechanism to best carry it out. It has made excellent use of national policy experts and has responded to their advice, as much as any state has, to try to guide the priorities of individual institutions around a statewide agenda for educational attainment and economic development. The “five questions” accountability system is the best example of setting an education agenda around statewide needs. Each of the three major reforms was an attempt to improve statewide outcomes with respect to the five questions. But the collective activities of the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), the Department of Education, their partner agencies on the statewide P–16 Council, and the regional councils have not brought the pieces together as well and as quickly as many would have hoped or expected.

The CPE is viewed by at least the business stakeholders represented by the Chamber of Commerce as ineffective. The Strategic Committee on Postsecondary Education (SCOPE) that was set up to advise the CPE has cancelled its last several

meetings and its status is unclear. The local councils have the legitimacy but not the resources to take action. Even with resources, however, the local councils could not, through their independent actions, create state policies to further state goals. And the statewide council is searching for ways to have more influence over policy agendas and over local councils. The conclusion of the Chamber of Commerce report that “the next step is to establish a comprehensive, integrated P–20 framework for reform” should raise serious questions about the adequacy of current structures.

Use of Policy Levers to Close the Divide

A central purpose of this project is to determine whether the P–16 and P–20 council mechanism is, or can be, an effective means of bridging the divide between K–12 and postsecondary education governance structures. This divide was described in the National Center’s report *The Governance Divide* (Venezia et al. 2005). In its follow-up report, *Claiming Common Ground*, the National Center recommended that states use four policy levers to close the divide and achieve better results: alignment of curricula and assessments; fiscal incentives; linked data systems; and accountability that reaches across sectors (Callan et al. 2006).

All of these levers have received attention in Kentucky—perhaps because the state has sought and used the advice of the National Center and other policy experts who promote their use. But these are *policy* levers and the P–16 Council is not itself playing a major role in policy development. The council has had an impact on curriculum alignment, through its sponsorship of statewide teams of school and college faculty to develop common expectations in mathematics and language arts, and its endorsement of those teams’ recommendations. It has played a smaller role on the more contentious issue of aligning assessments, on which the reform efforts have largely stalled pending the outcome of the K–12 commissioner’s new task force.

Responsibility for using finance policy to align budgets with strategic state goals was delegated primarily to the CPE rather than to the council. According to the Chamber of Commerce report, the CPE has not been able to resist traditional institution-based approaches to resource allocation. State budget shortfalls have thwarted Governor Patton’s original intent to establish performance incentives through the use of various trust funds. In addition, the P–16 Council is making little progress on developing a common data system. The council has encountered many issues regarding agency turf which it is not designed to mediate or resolve.

Kentucky’s accountability system provides an excellent opportunity for the state’s leaders to monitor its progress in educational performance across the P–16 divide. More than most states, the system can track statewide, not just institutional, outcomes. In addition, the system includes measures of readiness *for college* and contributions to the economy *after college*, as well as traditional measures of performance *in college*. The accountability system, however, is an initiative of the CPE, rather than the P–16 Council,

raising the question of whether this component of reform and alignment can be implemented effectively.

With no immediate threats to the P-16 Council's existence, and with a strong foundation on which to build an aligned system of education, the "glass-half-full" perspective suggests that, spurred by the Chamber of Commerce recommendation to go back to the drawing board on P-16 or P-20 structures, the state's leaders may devise an approach that builds on the strengths of the existing P-16 Council and gives it the influence to effect real policy change.