

convening a commission and holding cross-system discussions may be helpful, but is not sufficient for creating meaningful and lasting K–16 reform. To be lasting and effective, the deliberations must be anchored in policy and finance reform and must reflect each state’s culture and history. Policies like the ones noted above must drive the type of governance structure that is needed, not vice versa.

The responsibility for reform cannot be carried by one sector, but must be shared across systems to reach common ground, focusing on improving K–12 and post-secondary education for all students. Moreover, these reforms cannot be effective if they are simply grafted onto existing policies that divide education systems by level. Traditionally, states, systems, schools and colleges have responded to student needs by adding new policies and programs while maintaining existing policy struc-

tures. In order for all students to be affected, however, states must move beyond limited approaches and adopt more lasting and ambitious changes to their underlying policy structures.

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What Does It Mean to Be “College Ready”?

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Many young people see the chief benefit of a college education as preparation for a career or perhaps increased earning power. But being “college-ready” means looking beyond the dollar signs and experiencing learning beyond required readings, papers and exams.

To really learn in college, students must be prepared to experience professors and peers who continually challenge their present understanding of the world. Instead of thinking about college as a place where professors are responsible for “teaching” them new information, students should see themselves as partners in the learning process. True learning will involve more than mere collection and absorption—and more than doing the minimum amount of work.

Openness to change is a critical component of college preparedness. For students making the transition to college, this means rethinking attitudes toward learning. If they have the motivation and the humility to reflect upon their attitudes, they will be able to function more effectively in their new environment, adapting and affecting change where appropriate.

Once students are immersed in their new environment, they can be guided effectively by the many people at every institution of higher education who are interested in student success. Most campuses offer a range of programs to help students make necessary adjustments. These include first-year experience programs connecting students to one another and familiarizing them with the college, academic success centers offering tutoring or learning skills assistance and academic advising programs.

The majority of college and universities offer some type of first-year success course. Too often, the focus is aimed at teaching students “how to” manage their time, keep up on their reading, and prepare for exams. Effective courses must go beyond the “how to” approach. Instead, the course should be intentionally designed to help students to think about how they think, including their understanding of the role and responsibilities of a college student. These courses must convince students that an open mind and willingness to change is as necessary as hard work. Pedagogy should consist of strategies designed to help students reflect on their thoughts and feelings about their role as students and how those may either negatively or positively influence their ability to meet the new demands of college life.

Developing the ability to adapt in the face of new roles and responsibilities, and understanding the importance of change and self-reflection are habits of mind that will serve students not only during their first year of college, but also well into their careers. After all, it’s not only knowing “how to” do whatever skill we have learned, but is also following through and actually applying it that counts.

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