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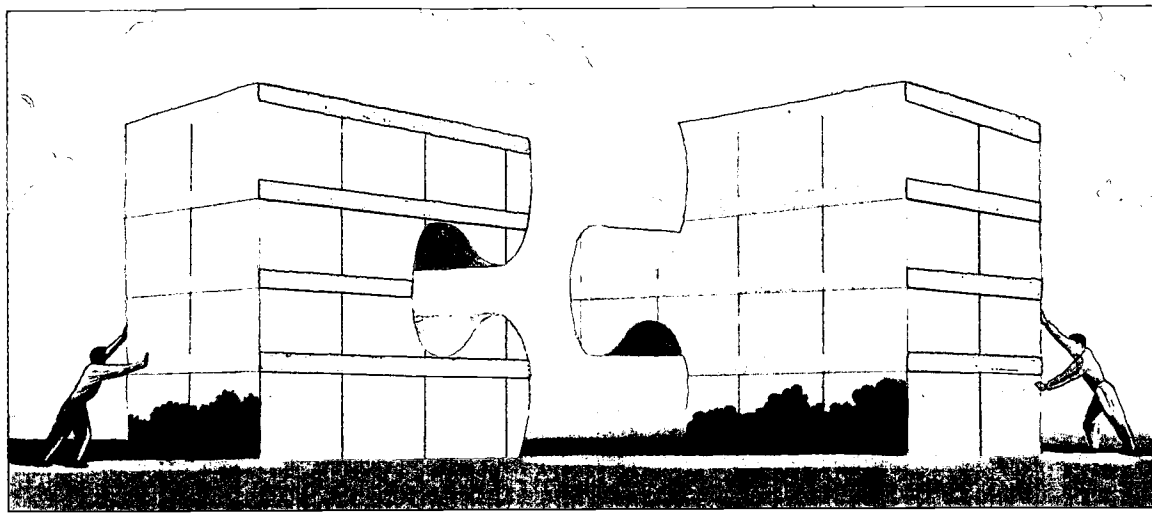
ABSTRACT

This report reviews the status of K-12 reform, noting implications for higher education and examining the growing and infrequently noted parallels between the issues faced by K-12 school reformers and higher education. After an introduction, the first section, "Status of School Reform," discusses goals and standards, school-level learning, the professionalism imperative for preservice and inservice training, urban school reform, actual developments in K-12 reform, and school choice and market mechanisms as a countervailing force. The second section, "A New Compact," discusses how higher education and K-12 education can begin to reconsider the nature of their relationship. The third section, "A Modest Proposal," discusses what must be done to improve the relationships between higher education and K-12 education so that they can handle shared issues more effectively and strengthen the programs, policies, and politics of education at every level. (SM)

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOLS

By P. Michael Timpane



IEL ★ SHEEO

A Report from The Institute for Educational Leadership,
The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education,
and The State Higher Education Executive Officers

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CONNECTING HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Foreword

Higher Education and the Schools is a key addition to "Perspectives in Public Policy: Connecting Higher Education and the Public Schools," a series of reports co-sponsored by The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) and The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. This series, which is directed to policymakers, business and civic leaders, and educators, seeks to strengthen linkages between higher education and the schools.

The State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) commissioned the initial version of this paper and made it possible for us to publish it in this series. We are pleased that SHEEO has joined us as a co-sponsor of this report. We extend our appreciation to SHEEO, and particularly to its executive director, Jim Mingle.

The author of this report, Michael Timpane, is well known for his expertise in and contributions to education policy. His experience negotiating the "borders" of K–12 and higher education serves him well in this analysis, for it provides him with first-hand knowledge of the most significant trends in school reform now underway, while enabling him to see past the deep divides that currently separate K–12 and higher education.

On behalf of IEL, the National Center, and SHEEO, we extend our thanks to Michael Timpane for this insightful and stimulating report, and we welcome the responses of readers.

Patrick M. Callan
President
The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

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Introduction

My perspective is that of a border ranger, someone who has given considerable time and attention to the areas where precollegiate education meets its neighbors—notably business organizations, community development and social service agencies, and, of course, higher education. In traveling these borders, I have been, at various times, a school board chairman, college president, federal agency head, and foundation official. In each of these capacities, the picture has been basically the same, namely:

- all these borders are rather clearly drawn and reasonably well fortified; and
- sustained diplomatic statescraft will be needed to alter historic and entrenched definitions of territory and responsibility.

My objective here is to review for you the status of K–12 reform, and in the process to: (1) point out implications for higher education, as it can influence and will itself be influenced by school reforms, and (2) draw out the growing and infrequently noted parallels between the issues faced by school reformers and by higher education. I shall then examine briefly the web of historical circumstance that surrounds current relationships between pre-collegiate and higher education. I conclude with a modest proposal to start changing and improving these relationships so that shared issues may be dealt with more effectively and every level of education strengthened in programs, policies, and politics.[1]

Status of School Reform

After 15 years of the most extensive policy activity in the history of American education, involving every state in extended periods of policy change, we have reached the point where the policy rhetoric of reform has become the mainstream. The policy agenda that scarcely existed before 1983 is today's conventional wisdom. The closest analogy may be in higher education policy before and after the Carnegie Commission's work in the 1960s and 1970s. Key elements in school reform include creating goals and standards, establishing a school-wide learning environment, enhancing teacher training, and focusing on improving urban schools.

The policy agenda that scarcely existed before 1983 is today's conventional wisdom.

Goals and Standards

Goals and standards are predicated on high levels of achievement for all students, reinforced by a steady focus on student learning outcomes (rather than traditional inputs) and accountable performance by schools and teachers. This formula has become the structure of education policy in almost every state: new educational objectives implemented through new requirements for curriculum and teachers, new assessment instruments, and new levels of state activity (especially in terms of state willingness to establish and enforce requirements that intrude upon the long-treasured local control of schools). There is also a new sense of national perspective, brought on by 15 years of governors struggling together on these issues: the adoption of explicit national goals by the governors and former President Bush at the turn of the decade and reinforced by Clinton administration initiatives creating the Goals 2000 legislation; redesigned federal programs to complement the national goals efforts; and most recently, the "voluntary national test" now under development.

Many issues remain to be resolved:

- Content standards: what should be learned in each subject and skill area?
- Performance standards: how much must be learned?
- Opportunity-to-learn standards: what education program must be in place before students can be held to the standards?
- Validity of assessments: do our tests tell us what we need to know about accomplishment of standards?
- Equity: will these measures, which are religiously touted to apply to

all students, accelerate the performance of poor and minority children?

How does this involve higher education? In two ways, at least:

1. Will higher education help in the continuing development of the reforms? Higher education has not been consistently involved so far. Many persons from higher education have helped spearhead the reforms, but systems and institutions have not been heavily involved. Efforts to change admissions policies and adjust curricula to support and respond to new K–12 policies and programs have been scattered at best. Without such changes, the credibility of the reforms is weakened.
2. To what extent should or will the K–12 policy paradigm be applied to higher education? We hear about K–16 and can observe many successful local partnerships around this theme, as well as some impressive efforts in a few states (such as Georgia and Oregon), but we do not know whether most institutions and most states will proceed in such inter-level policy activity—or if they should!

Efforts to change admissions policies and adjust curricula to support and respond to new K–12 policies and programs have been scattered at best.

School-Level Learning

There is a growing conviction that the school building is the critical level where learning happens, for better or worse. No matter how talented the individual teacher, the individual classroom is too fragile an environment to be sustained without support throughout the school. School district and higher jurisdictions are too remote and regulatory; they can support improved learning but cannot bring it about. This focus has several components:

- Autonomy for a school comprised of cooperating professionals, rather than the traditionally isolated classroom teacher in a hierarchically managed school.
- Solid (though varied) models for school-level educational programs, based on promising new research and program designs. These programs have been developed and supported through many national networks and coalitions (such as New American Schools, the Coalition for Essential Schools, and Success for All Schools), or developed in urban school districts (through the Annenberg Challenge grants and other means). Although these programs are increasingly numerous, they are not yet generally diffused to all schools. No one has discovered the policy incentives

to accomplish this. Does this not sound like the experience in higher education thus far regarding institutional change?

- New pedagogies that are—in shorthand—student-centered and content-rich. In the parlance of the trade, instruction is moving from "The Sage on the Stage" to "The Guide on the Side." Will this change come to higher education, as well? My colleague David Cohen believes it must—teachers will learn to teach differently only by the example of those who teach them—but he can see no reason to suppose that it will occur, given the norms and incentives facing most university faculty, who are not often rewarded for good teaching and are, in fact, sometimes punished for giving it too much of their time and attention![2]

The Professionalism Imperative

Education reform demands a radical overhaul of both pre-service and in-service training, to dovetail with the foregoing tenets. Teachers should be seen, primarily, not so much as workers or union members or bureaucrats, but as autonomous, self-regulating professionals working in the public good, with all the rights and privileges that society accords such persons. For in-service training, this means abandoning unfocused course-taking to achieve a pay enhancement and visiting fireperson events arranged for a few professional development days, and, instead developing training opportunities created and executed by teachers and staff and integrated with the growth and development of the school's instructional program. Such developments will lessen considerably higher education's influence on and income from such school programs, probably to the ultimate benefit of both sectors.

In recent years, school reform policymakers have come up against the hard reality that the pace of progress cannot increase unless better teaching occurs in all classrooms.

For pre-service training, the proposed changes will engage higher education much more fundamentally—namely, through a comprehensive review of teacher preparation programs, as well as broader university functions. In recent years, school reform policymakers have come up against the hard reality that the pace of progress cannot increase unless better teaching occurs in all classrooms. We have tried everything else: goals, standards, assessments, school-level initiative. They may all be necessary, but they are not sufficient. Teaching is, as a recent report sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation put it, "what matters most."[3]

Over the next decade, the demand for new teachers and the demands placed on them will be great. In quantity alone, as many as two million classroom teachers will retire, at just the time when more children will be

entering school in most states. The challenge will be the greater in that these children will be more diverse by race, ethnicity, and income, and this diversity will vary by state. Unfortunately, unless something changes quickly among the career choices of young college students, minority teachers—already underrepresented in our teaching force—will be an even rarer species in our classrooms in 10 years. This is a time bomb ticking in our midst.

Securing a high quality teaching force will be another problem. Nowadays, prospective teachers (especially women and minorities) have other opportunities. Education is competing in an open labor market for the first time in history. Even in this more competitive world, though, teaching is gaining some relative advantage. Teacher pay, while not munificent, has improved and the attractiveness of the field has risen as education has again become an important societal imperative. The job—offering tenure, pensions, summers off, and union protections—is seen to be more worthy, attractive, stable, and secure than many others. As a result, the caliber of college students entering teaching is rising gradually.

At the same time, the perceived requirements for a well-educated teacher are rising—more and better liberal arts preparation, more appropriate and challenging education courses, greater clinical experience, more early career assistance, and greater zest and opportunity for continuous learning and improvement of craft.

The implications for higher education are broad and direct and can be summed up by two related questions: Are schools of education ready to handle this challenge? Are colleges and universities ready to give this challenge appropriate priority?

Year in and year out, schools of education produce the 250,000 to 300,000 graduates who staff the great majority of our nation's classrooms, usually with significant prowess. At the same time, schools of education are assigned much of the blame for all that is imperfect or lacking in K–12. Common sense suggests that there is plenty of blame to go around and that schools of education can only do what their profession and their universities permit them to do. That said, much stands in the way of their becoming what they must be to produce uniformly excellent teachers for reformed high-performance schools.

Common sense suggests that there is plenty of blame to go around and that schools of education can only do what their profession and their universities permit them to do.

Schools of education are neither uniformly strong nor uniformly well regarded by the profession they serve. They are tolerated but not honored by other schools and faculties on campus. They are often not well supported by campuses, systems, or political leadership. Rather, they are that wonderful combination—low-cost cash machines. They make few strident demands for either attention or resources. They can only change if they have leadership,

encouragement, and support of a kind they have rarely experienced. They need institutional presidents who insist that they establish and sustain high standards and who go to bat for them with both internal and external constituencies. And they need policy structures that provide incentives and rewards for such initiatives.

Under the aegis of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, chaired by North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt, a few states are starting to move in this direction, but we have a long way to go—state-by-state and institution-by-institution—to achieve greater professionalism, an imperative that is essential to the success of school reform and to the future of higher education itself.

The overriding issue is: Shouldn't every institution's objective be the production of highly educated professional persons who will themselves educate? Must we now rediscover the ancient conviction that the noblest reason for learning something is to teach it to someone else?

Urban School Reform

Much of the most notable, even heroic, work in school reform has been carried out in the most daunting of circumstances in the schools of our largest cities: New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Memphis, Boston, San Francisco, and many others. It is here that the call for high expectations and standards for all students has been most valiantly proclaimed and struggled for. We should be both humble and hopeful in the presence of these efforts.

We should further note that some of the most intensive university involvements in school reform are also found in cities. One thinks of the University of Illinois (Chicago Circle), Indiana University/Purdue University, Portland State, University of Texas at El Paso, and many other metropolitan universities. Are they receiving sufficient encouragement and support in these efforts? More fundamentally, are we discovering ways in which colleges and universities must themselves become markedly different, and certainly more focused, if they are to be educationally effective in contemporary urban settings?

We are seeing some returns from our labors in K–12 reform.

Modest but Real Outcomes

We are seeing some returns from our labors in K–12 reform. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the SAT, and other prominent national tests, we are seeing slight but sustained year-to-year improvements—

and this at a time of growing diversity by race, ethnicity, and income among our students. By international comparisons, we continue to improve more in reading skills (where we have placed our emphasis) than in mathematics (where we have not). We somehow allow relatively high levels of early learning to dissipate as students move through the elementary and secondary grades. Interestingly and often overlooked, achievement levels are vastly different by state. Some of our highest achieving states rank near the legendary Singapore, while others are nestled near the bottom of participating nations.

We all think but dare not ask: will such comparisons be made about higher education in the years ahead?

Two other outcomes should be noted for their possible eventual significance to higher education. K–12 has a new and seemingly durable policymaking context, with governors and business leadership having prominent seats at the table where they were formerly absent, and with researchers (a figurative world away) beginning to discover the slow and painful process by which classroom teachers actually change the way they teach when confronted with new knowledge and expectations. We should take these to be signs that the old order will not return, but that the new order will not be here immediately.

A Countervailing Development

School choice and market mechanisms are a countervailing force. Despite the reforms just cited, many observers have concluded that K–12 schools have not, cannot, or do not want to change sufficiently to meet the nation's needs. They argue that only the forces of competition, either within the public system or more broadly, can produce the necessary pace of change and improvement. A whole new class of public school, the charter school, has been created in the past few years, and proposals for education vouchers enjoy growing popular and political support.

In part, these developments reflect broad policy shifts in realms far beyond education. "Leaving it to the market," or using market mechanisms within public service delivery systems, are the preferred policy (or non-policy) choices in housing, childcare, nutrition assistance, and many other realms. In fact, higher education's experience with student aid is touted as evidence that choice can work well in education. This comes at a time when higher education views with trepidation the likely onset of the stronger market forces foreshadowed by the University of Phoenix, the Western Governors University, and a host of for-profit educational vendors materializing almost daily.

A New Compact

Now, we get to the hard part. How do higher education and K–12 begin to reconsider the very nature of their relationship? It is a peculiar arrangement, both historically and comparatively.

Historically, the heart of the vision of Thomas Jefferson and other founders was an educated citizenry essential to successful democracy. Primary education was to teach the basic skills and virtues, and higher level institutions were to provide for political leadership, the advance of knowledge, and the persons who would thus educate citizens. That vision existed most fully in Jefferson's mind when he designed the University of Virginia, and perhaps in some of the early land grant institutions that assumed responsibilities for shaping the then-emerging secondary schools. In our century, the divergence in interests and perspective has been relentless: conflicts over curriculum and professional organization (with a subtext of sexism) drove the first large wedge between university leaders and upstart "educationists," with the Carnegie unit surviving, strangely, as the universities' line in the sand. After World War II, the rise of the research university, and its attendant ever-more-specialized disciplines, drew higher education still further away, as the schools struggled with the enormous new challenges of providing equal educational opportunity to increasingly diverse student populations.

In governance terms, separate structures ruled higher education and K–12. It may have been a friendly divorce, but it was quite complete. Over time, communications became less adequate and often more strained in the competition for public regard and support.

In no other country is public, especially secondary, education so distant from higher education.

Compared to other nations, the resulting arrangements are without parallel. In no other country is public, especially secondary, education so distant from higher education. In every other country there is a ministry of education, to be sure, but there is also an unquestioned assumption that the universities are deeply involved in and responsible for the evolution of secondary education (to the point that in France university academic officials are in charge of many secondary schools).

Thus, it is disappointing but not surprising that American higher education has been so little involved in the formulation or execution of contemporary school reform. To be sure, many reformers from the faculties and a few brave public-spirited presidents entered the fray, but not much else occurred at the outset. Subsequently, programmatic partnerships have sprouted impressively, in and beyond schools of education. But there have been only scattered examples of extensive academic articulation, and even less realization that

higher education might need to make substantial changes in its requirements or practices, academic or otherwise. The conventional admissions regime of Carnegie units, ACT/SAT, GPA, and class rank are more and more obviously a straight jacket on high school reform, threatening the credibility of the whole of school reform, as well as the credibility of new performance-based admissions plans.

Similarly, traditional, unvarying teaching styles throughout the professoriate do nothing to encourage new learner-centered pedagogies in the lower schools. And presidential leadership seems to be waning rather than growing, at least among the more nationally prominent institutions and organizations. It has been reported, for example, that the presidents of the Association of American Universities have more than once declined the honor when it was proposed that they make teacher preparation a top priority at their institutions.

There are still few instances in which the existing institutional arrangements include strategic dimensions that would make the arrangements enduring as institutional priorities. There are even fewer instances of established patterns of policy coordination and mutual political initiative—a state of affairs that implicates K–12 leaders too.

Notwithstanding numerous specific cooperative projects, the basic relationship between higher education and the schools has not changed very much. The divorce may still be friendly, visiting rights may be expanding, but reconciliation does not seem imminent.

A Modest Proposal

What is to be done? This situation is hurting both systems, not to mention the students. Moreover, the systems share every single problem mentioned so far. Consider the list of the components of school reform—goals and standards and assessments, institutional performance and faculty roles, curriculum development, teaching effectiveness, programs serving poor and minority students, appropriate use of market forces and mechanisms. Each of these is a major issue for higher education as well. Yet it seems there is little sustained dialogue across the levels of education about any of these issues.

We should add other issues that are just emerging at both levels: responding to technologically driven change, dealing with impending demographic change, and emphasizing the role of each educational institution in fostering citizenship and democracy.

Can we start to give a higher priority to talking about these issues among higher education and K–12 systems, as a necessary prelude to cooperative policy development and action?

My proposal is modest. Can we start to give a higher priority to talking about these issues among higher education and K–12 systems, as a necessary prelude to cooperative policy development and action?

State-sponsored leadership forums designed to promote regular discussion of these issues could avoid needless conflict and misunderstanding while fostering cooperation and collaboration in programs, policies and politics. Such discussions might lead in time to substantive developments: the continued amalgamation of grade 11–14 programs through advanced placements, joint enrollments, and other ventures; university research priorities focused more on the development of children and youth; and expanded definitions of scholarship along the lines urged by Gene Rice, the late Ernest Boyer, and others.[4] This might lead to the perception and reality that higher education has added a new dimension to its expression of the public interest—that is, a commitment to high levels of learning, at all levels of schooling, for the children who are its future.

Somebody has to take the first step. You? If not you, then who?

ENDNOTES

[1] Much of my analysis is drawn from the several contributed essays in P. Michael Timpane and Lori White, editors, *Higher Education and School Reform* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

[2] David K. Cohen, "School Improvement and Higher Education," Chapter 5 in Timpane and White, editors, *Higher Education and School Reform.*

[3] *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (New York: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

[4] See for example Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1994).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

P. Michael Timpane, senior advisor for education policy at RAND, is well known for his contributions to education policy, from pre-K to post-graduate studies. He is former vice president and senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and former president of Teachers College, Columbia University, where he is a professor of education. Mr. Timpane has published numerous articles on educational policy, and has edited and published several books on education and social policy. As an advisor to state and federal policymakers, he has been involved in the development of new perspectives on national goals and standards in education, comprehensive services for young children, higher education, youth policy, education and work, learning and technology, and the democratic purposes of schooling. He is a member of the Pew Forum on Education Reform and serves on several boards related to youth and education.

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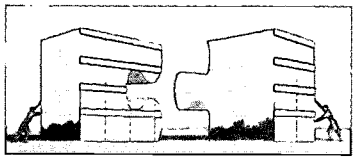

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K–16 99-02 *Higher Education and the Schools*, by P. Michael Timpane (December 1999). This report, in reviewing the status of K–12 school reform, explores the implications of critical school reform issues for the future of higher education. The author proposes that higher education must forge dynamic partnerships with K–12 schools aimed at increasing student achievement levels and ensuring student access to and success in postsecondary education.

K–16 99-03 *Doing Comparatively Well: Why the Public Loves Higher Education and Criticizes K–12*, by John Immerwahr (October 1999). The author explores public attitudes about K–12 and higher education, and identifies trends that suggest that higher education's "honeymoon" with the public may be waning. The report is based on a wide range of public opinion surveys and focus groups conducted by Public Agenda during the past five years.

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The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education was established in 1998 to promote opportunity, affordability and quality in American higher education. As an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, the National Center provides action-oriented analyses of state and federal policies affecting education beyond high school. The National Center receives financial support from national philanthropic organizations; it is not affiliated with any institution of higher education or with any government agency.

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