

Transforming Urban Education:  
**Implications for State Policymakers**



Laura Lefkowitz, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning  
Barbara Diamond, KnowledgeWorks Foundation

## About the Authors

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Laura Lefkowitz is vice president for policy and planning services at McREL, where she serves as a liaison between McREL and policymakers, associations, policy organizations, and other education constituencies. She also informs and advises policymakers and McREL staff on important emerging issues in education reform.

Barbara Diamond is senior advisor at KnowledgeWorks Foundation, where she has overseen the development of the *2006–2016 Map of Future Forces Affecting Education*. She has also been responsible for the Foundation's work on Communities and School Facilities and public policy.

## Acknowledgements

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The authors wish to acknowledge the Ohio 8 Coalition and Working Group for their dedication to urban education in Ohio and their creative and thoughtful participation in the scenario planning process upon which this brief is based. Thanks in particular go to Dr. Sylvester Small and Ms. Rhonda Johnson, co-chairs, and Mr. Bill Wendling, executive director of the Ohio 8 during the project period. The authors also extend their deep appreciation to Jill Conrad and Carolyn Woempner of McREL who provided research assistance, as well as to Independent Consultant, Peggy Siegel, who authored the original scenarios.

## Urban Education in 2020

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What if, in 2020. . . a new generation of leaders ends the war in Iraq and turns its attention to pressing domestic issues, eventually resulting in a healthier economy and renewed investments in the urban core? One previously struggling inner city in Ohio now boasts a full-service platform, known as the “Hub,” for addressing education, community, and healthcare needs in an efficient, effective manner. The Hub has eliminated the achievement gap plaguing this city during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and cities across the nation are now replicating this model, replacing the dead-end futures associated with 20th century urban education with the full spectrum of life opportunities for America’s urban students.

What if, in 2020 . . . having tried and failed at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to improve urban education with prescriptive, high-stakes accountability measures, policymakers turn to alternative solutions once considered anathema within the public arena? NCLB now supports student vouchers and, although a few new school models emerge in response to market demand, inner cities splinter and people separate themselves ideologically, politically, and socio-economically. A fortunate few neighborhoods turn inward, becoming more self-reliant and entrepreneurial in the process, thus “surviving in the cracks,” but the bulk of the urban core decays and the majority of inner city dwellers languish in poverty with no jobs, absentee property owners, empty lots, crumbling schools, and few opportunities.

What if, in 2020. . . the widespread availability of free Wi-Fi and other innovative technologies, reinforced by federal and state policies, encourage grassroots solutions, fueling local ingenuity and productivity? Leaders from K–12 education, higher education, social services, the arts, and economic/workforce development collaborate to offer lifelong learning options delivered 24/7, and solutions become feasible now that school funding issues have been creatively resolved. Skyrocketing fuel costs prompt state and local leaders to develop more efficient public transportation options and offer economic incentives to live and work in the core city.

What if, in 2020. . . states’ inability to provide sustainable funding for urban districts, combines with the global economic crisis, environmental disasters, and a prolonged war in the Middle East to dramatically diminish available school resources? Urban schools become the site of last resort, serving only the poor and most vulnerable students. The federal government offers states an affordable, but one-size-fits-all, system of national standards and assessments as an alternative to the locally defined systems. The feds also create the General Issue (GI) Teacher program, deploying soldiers on leave from the wars in the Middle East to teach mathematics and science while maintaining order in the schools and surrounding cities.

## Introduction

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Could any of these possible scenarios become reality in our nation's urban centers in 2020? Are there indications of these future worlds already evident today? And, depending upon how events unfold in real time, how should urban education leaders respond?

A group of stakeholders from eight Ohio urban districts tackled these questions. They began by exploring trends of the future likely to impact education and created four plausible but divergent scenarios for education in the year 2020. After analyzing the implications of the scenarios for the future of urban education in Ohio, they developed recommendations for actions that the districts could take today in order to position themselves for success in any possible future.

In this brief, we explain the context and process for this work and discuss the implications for state-level policymakers interested in supporting such a transformation of urban education as envisioned by this group in Ohio. We suggest possible approaches policymakers could take to implement these recommendations and prepare not only to survive, but also to thrive in the challenging and uncertain times ahead.

## Background and Process

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Since 2001, superintendents and teacher union presidents from the eight largest urban school districts in Ohio—Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown—have worked together in a strategic alliance known as the “Ohio 8 Coalition.” Their mission is to work with policymakers to improve academic performance and close the achievement gap for urban children throughout the state.

In the fall of 2007, the Ohio 8 Leadership Council sought support to reinforce its long-term vision and develop a strategic plan. With help from the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, a national philanthropy dedicated to collaboratively solving national education problems, and Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), an organization with expertise in future-focused strategic planning, the Council moved forward. Council members explored trends depicted in KnowledgeWorks' *Map of Future Forces Affecting Education* (the *Map*), designed future scenarios for the year 2020, and analyzed the implications for urban education in Ohio beginning in 2008.

## **Scenario Planning**

Scenario planning is the process of creating stories about possible futures in order to anticipate and prepare for changes beyond one's control. Scenarios do not predict the future, but they do provide a way to identify and manage uncertainties. Scenario planning challenges the current mode of thinking, prompting new insights that drive transformation in organizations and institutions. The goal of scenario planning is to envision multiple plausible futures in order to prepare for the uncertainties ahead.

The process begins with the formulation of a key strategic question, known as the focal issue. In this case, one question guided all subsequent work on the project: *How can urban public education in Ohio transform to become a high-demand, high-performing system in 2020?* The focal issue deliberately included three key terms that best expressed the concerns driving this project: 1) “transform” to indicate the comprehensiveness of the change implied; 2) “high-demand” to indicate that success depended at least in part upon consumers (parents and students) wanting to attend urban schools; and 3) “high-performing” rather than any concrete measure of success to indicate that, in the future, success might be determined differently than it is today.

The group used the *Map* to explore trends of the future and their implications for education as the starting point for answering the focal issue. They then created and wrote four possible future scenarios for urban education as outlined briefly at the beginning of this paper. To read the complete scenarios, visit [www.mcrel.org/future](http://www.mcrel.org/future) or [www.kwfdn.org](http://www.kwfdn.org). These scenarios were used to analyze implications for urban education and develop possible strategic options that could be implemented today by the coalition in an effort to “transform urban education in Ohio to become a high-demand, high-performing system in 2020.”

## **Implications for State-Level Policy**

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In the remainder of this brief, we review the primary recommendations derived from the work of the Ohio 8 scenario planning process and offer guidance to state- and district-level policymakers interested in moving forward a reform agenda based on the ideas envisioned in the scenarios. Specifically, we address the following three policy options, which have the broadest application for readers: 1) Develop a comprehensive approach to urban schooling—the Hub, 2) Prioritize service-learning for urban schools, and 3) Prepare urban students to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Recommendation I**

### **Develop a comprehensive approach to urban schooling—the Hub**

One of the most visionary concepts to emerge from the scenario process is that of a new kind of full-service school—the Hub—an educational center for multi-generational learning and other community-building activities. These Hubs manage data and coordinate a whole variety of educational, health, and social services from one epicenter within the community. Most actual learning activities, however, take place out in the community.

The fundamental purpose of a Hub is to create a fully aligned P–20 education system, from early childhood education through college and workforce development, along with lifelong learning opportunities for everyone in the community. The design includes universal health care and early childhood education, family-friendly workplaces, service learning opportunities, and parent engagement in their children’s education. In this scenario, the walls between school and community break down, and old-fashioned learning mechanisms such as apprenticeships are renewed. Most learning takes place in real-world settings, where its relevance is readily apparent. The Hub serves the community as a whole by providing economic growth and anti-poverty initiatives through coordinated economic, workforce, and community development programs.

Is the concept of the Hub simply a “pie-in-the-sky” notion built on wishful thinking, or could it become reality? In fact, the *Map*<sup>1</sup> and other data explored by the scenario-planning group provide supporting evidence for such an idea. For example, the *Map* describes the development of “urban learning commons,” where “educational and learning resources are treated as critical common-pool resources (much like clean water, healthy oceans, and fertile land) necessary for sustainability in an innovation-driven economy.”<sup>2</sup> New technologies of connection also contribute to the effectiveness of the Hub. The Hub, moreover, benefits from the emergence of new kinds of “learning agents,” both inside and outside schools, as a “learning economy” expands capitalizing on the value placed on learning by the market.<sup>3</sup>

The Hub, in addition, responds to more dangerous trends, such as the rise of VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) communities. The most effective responses to a VUCA world require the Vision of a new level of collaboration; the Understanding of opportunities and threats; Clarity about what communities and children need to thrive; and, the Agility to take advantage of emerging trends,<sup>4</sup> which are capacities supported by the Hub.

## **Existing Examples**

A major obstacle to the creation of full-service schools has been the lack of a policy framework encouraging or even permitting this approach. Each group must start from scratch and work within existing laws and regulations to create the agreements for agencies to share buildings and information. Collaborating on learning plans simply is not doable. Given the scope of the Hub model, this obstacle looms large.

Nonetheless, there are instances in Ohio and across the United States where various elements of the Hub exist in “community schools” or “schools as centers of community.” Examples include those in Chicago, Portland (OR), Cincinnati, New York, and Providence. There are several organizations that have conducted research, issued videos and publications, published planning guides, advocated this design, coordinated community services at schools, and honored and highlighted exemplary schools:

- Coalition for Community Schools<sup>5</sup>
- Communities in Schools<sup>6</sup>
- Annie E. Casey Foundation<sup>7</sup>
- KnowledgeWorks Foundation<sup>8</sup>
- American Architectural Foundation<sup>9</sup>

The oldest and best-known examples of full-service schools embedded in the community are in New York City. The Children’s Aid Society,<sup>10</sup> dating from the mid-nineteenth century, has been widely studied. It addresses the whole range of services for children of poverty that surround school—after school and weekend care, foster care, adoption, the arts, summer camps, early childhood programs, family support, health and counseling, juvenile justice, legal advocacy, nutrition, sports and recreation, and youth development. More than 2,000 sites around the United States are replicating The Children’s Aid Society model, which includes the following elements:

- Extended-day programs that offer educational enrichment before school, after school, weekends, and summers
- Medical, dental, mental health, and social services
- A comprehensive parent involvement program
- Early childhood education
- Adult education
- Communitywide events<sup>11</sup>

A similar model, the Harlem Children's Zone, has provided an intense mix of similar services to a designated area of Harlem, recently expanded to include 100 full city blocks. In addition, the Harlem Children's Zone has moved beyond supplementary education into the center of education, with the establishment of two Promise Academy Charter Schools, which are in the process of expanding grade by grade into K–12 schools.<sup>12</sup>

To begin the pilot program recommended, state education agencies (SEA) might first waive existing laws and regulations that currently stand in the way. For example, the SEA might approve alternative methods of demonstrating progress toward the ultimate credential of graduation. These would be in lieu of required seat time to accumulate Carnegie units in prescribed courses. Similarly, given the real world emphasis of the curriculum in the Hub, the SEA might support the development of and/or approve alternative measures of achievement.

State and local governments, including school districts, will need the authority to work together and to spend funds on collaborative projects. States like Minnesota, where there are “joint powers” acts are in a better position to work out the collaborative arrangements envisioned in the Hub. A joint powers act gives local governments the authority to do together whatever they already can do separately.

Many of the state policies recommended for community schools also apply to the Hub. Besides joint powers, these include the following:

- State criteria for site selection, planning, and development of Hubs
- State policies that encourage and facilitate the sharing of schools and other facilities
- A state-established process to support joint development between school districts and other public entities such as libraries, parks, senior centers, health clinics and public charter schools
- State policies that support the planning, design, and construction or modification of buildings for the ongoing shared use of public school facilities with other public government entities
- A statement of the duties and responsibilities of the state board of education, local boards of education, local development authorities, and county commissioners
- Authority for jurisdictions to establish community schools advisory councils
- Authority to employ and fund Hub coordinators
- Authority to enter into agreements and to set fees and conditions



- Authority to establish special funding and/or direct funding or incentives to support planning and implementation of co-location or joint use of school and other facilities<sup>13</sup>

## **Recommendation 2**

### **Prioritize service-learning for urban schools**

Two scenarios brought renewed interest in the concept of “service learning” as an innovative teaching and learning strategy that combines relevant, community- and service-focused “hands-on” learning with academic content. This strategy aims to both improve student learning by making it more meaningful and engaging, and improve the local community by mobilizing urban youth (and others) to participate in community development and economic revitalization of the urban core.

#### ***Existing Examples***

To support the implementation of this option, policymakers can begin by making service learning an “official” part of the curriculum. A set of K–12 Standards and Indicators for Quality Service-Learning Practice guides the field toward consistency and quality service-learning programs.<sup>14</sup> The standards include indicators related to duration and intensity, link to the curriculum, partnerships, meaningful service, youth voice, diversity, reflection, and progress monitoring. State leaders can promote and reinforce these quality standards by evaluating and recognizing programs within states that adhere to them. Additionally, leaders can ensure the integration of service-learning with content standards, thereby helping teachers connect service projects with academic learning. Many districts and states encourage or require service-learning as part of students’ graduation requirements.

Another way to support service-learning is to create expectations for capstone service-learning projects at key transition points (elementary, middle, and high school) that align with state standards. In Maine, the legislature recently added service-learning as a means of satisfying content standards for application of preK–12 social studies learning.<sup>15</sup> The Florida SEA provides tools for educators to link service-learning to the state standards.<sup>16</sup> While many school districts require a certain number of service-learning hours in order for students to graduate, Maryland remains the only state to have mandated service with a 75-hour graduation requirement for all students.<sup>18</sup>

States also can provide incentives for school districts to develop and sustain service-learning initiatives. For example, every state education agency receives

federal formula-based funding to support service-learning through the Learn and Serve America program<sup>18</sup>, which can be leveraged and aligned with other strategic priorities such as those identified in NCLB.<sup>19</sup> Expanding the pool of financial support available through private foundations, partnerships, and allocating additional state resources toward service-learning also is a key strategy that states should consider.

As districts and schools work toward improvement within state accountability and accreditation frameworks, they can promote service-learning by including it as an optional or required component of the improvement plan. New Mexico, for example, currently requires its school districts to provide students with opportunities to perform service-learning and offers incentives for them to do so.<sup>20</sup>

Increasingly, service-learning is a key strategy incorporated into teacher and principal preparation and professional development programs.<sup>21</sup> Minors and certificate programs in service-learning are becoming popular on college campuses as a way to prepare future educators and community leaders in the practice of service-learning.<sup>22</sup> Minnesota, for example, is creating an interdisciplinary teaching license to promote teachers' use of innovative schools and programs, including service-learning.<sup>23</sup> In Encinitas Union School District in California, principals consider teachers' experiences with service-learning when hiring for new positions.<sup>24</sup> In Marion, South Carolina, service-learning is part of every principal's professional growth plan.<sup>25</sup>

Implementing a comprehensive service-learning initiative in a school will often require organizing time, staff, curriculum, and other elements in non-traditional ways. Research has found that schools benefiting from increased levels of autonomy to make such operational decisions yield more sustainable and more successful service-learning programs.<sup>26</sup>

Building a cadre of well-trained practitioners who can implement service-learning effectively should be a key strategy of any approach to state support. Many states and districts have begun to organize statewide, regional, and local networks of professional developers who can provide on-site support for teachers to implement service-learning.<sup>27</sup>

Some states have extended the support for service-learning beyond education and schools. Promoting community partnerships and tapping into volunteer networks can be a tremendous support for schools and districts in organizing and implementing meaningful service-learning projects while teachers can concentrate on the academic components. For example, in 2007, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick created the Commonwealth Corps to engage residents of all ages and backgrounds in direct service to rebuild communities.<sup>28</sup>

### **Recommendation 3**

#### **Prepare urban students to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

After reflecting upon all four scenarios, an overarching goal of the Ohio 8 Coalition was to become the leaders in moving urban education in Ohio toward true “21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning.” This entails building a strong collective understanding of what 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning *means*, as well as developing the systemwide capacity to execute needed changes.

Many states and organizations are approaching the problem of defining 21<sup>st</sup> century readiness. Some have accepted the recommendations of national organizations such as the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills or the American Diploma Project. Others prefer a local contextual definition, either as a strategic step to secure early interest and support for later reforms or as a means to understand and tailor reform to a unique local context. Either approach is viable; adopting a common definition on which future policy efforts can build is the critical outcome.

#### ***Existing Examples***

The following state-level models illustrate two approaches that support the recommendation to prepare urban students to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **Model 1: Partnering with an organization whose focus is state-level education reform**

The issue of education reform for 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning has attracted the attention and energies of national reform organizations. These organizations have already done much of the legwork to support policy, provided state stakeholders agree with the premises and direction of the organization’s work.

*Achieve, Inc.:* Achieve, Inc.<sup>29</sup> is well known for its American Diploma Project (ADP) initiative to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the necessary skills to be successful in work or higher education. This initiative focuses on aligning high school standards with expectations in higher education and the workforce; increasing the rigor and relevance of high school coursework; and aligning assessments among high school, higher education admission, and workforce certification. Achieve currently partners with 34 states, including Ohio, to form the ADP Network, to accomplish initiative goals at the state level. Achieve offers tools for building public understanding and support of state efforts, for evaluating and reforming state standards and assessments, and for identifying financial and technical resources.

In addition to its ADP work, Achieve has recently joined with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) to construct a roadmap that will allow states to benchmark their K–12 system metrics against international systems. International benchmarking broadens the ability of state leaders to evaluate K–12 education in a global context.

*The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills:* This organization partners with businesses, education leaders, and policymakers to articulate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and the educational and policy mechanisms necessary to change curriculum and assessment systems in order to provide instruction in those skills. States can work directly with the Partnership to develop the necessary policy and delivery elements of a successful statewide 21<sup>st</sup> century skills framework. States currently doing so include Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas and New Jersey. Published resources that outline specific policy actions to support a 21<sup>st</sup> century skills initiative are available on the Partnership’s Web site.<sup>30</sup>

### **Model 2: State-directed initiatives as stand-alone elements**

Some states have elected to design and implement their own 21<sup>st</sup> century initiatives, often customizing the services of one of the above organizations to support their own designs.

- In 2006–2007, the NGA focused its Chair’s Initiative on Innovation America, an effort to raise awareness among governors of the importance of improving K–12 education in mathematics and science, and on statewide strategies to enhance innovation in these areas. The final report of this initiative offers many state-level examples of promising approaches to address mathematics and science education reform, preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce, and regional economic development.<sup>31</sup>
- As part of a more comprehensive education reform vision, Colorado recently passed legislation mandating a review of state standards to ensure the standards reflect “skills critical to preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce and active citizenship.”<sup>32</sup>
- Mississippi has a Redesigning Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce initiative that includes components to revise standards, enhance career and technical education, and revise the curriculum with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.<sup>33</sup>

Policymakers may elect to participate in a national partnership or network effort, develop their own initiative, or both.

## Conclusion

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By creating and reflecting on four likely scenarios in response to its focal issue, the Ohio 8 has begun to position itself for ongoing success on behalf of the children they serve now and in the future. The Coalition also provides an example of how to develop realistic responses to ambitious goals and future uncertainties.

By learning about future trends, analyzing the implications of the trends for their own students and school districts, developing stories about the way the world might look a decade from now, and then considering what it will take to succeed in those worlds, Ohio is poised to step into a future of its own making. We encourage other state and local policy leaders to consider the trends likely to impact their own educational systems in the future and to take the steps necessary to prepare for the uncertainties ahead.

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This brief is part of a series produced under a partnership agreement between KnowledgeWorks and McREL. The partnership aims to promote greater understanding among the national education community about the external forces impacting learning today and in the future in areas such as demographics, technology, economics, globalization, and policy. It also aims to engage leaders in co-creating the future of learning, resulting in high academic achievement and improved life outcomes for all students and transforming the world of schooling into a world of learning.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>KnowledgeWorks Foundation. (2006). *Map of future forces affecting education, 2006–2016*. Available: <http://www.kwfdn.org/map>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>“Learning agents” are defined in the *Map of Future Forces Affecting Education, 2006–2016* as “new roles, processes, and relationships in the learning economy [which] spawn new career paths in education, [such as] content experts, learning coaches, network navigators, classroom managers, and cognitive specialists.” Available: <http://www.kwfdn.org/map/>

<sup>4</sup>Found in many military and business strategy references; here, taken primarily from Johansen, B. (2007). *Get there early: Sensing the future to compete in the present*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

<sup>5</sup><http://www.communityschools.org>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.cisnet.org>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.aecf.org>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.kwfdn.org>

<sup>9</sup><http://www.archfoundation.org>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/>

<sup>11</sup><http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/communityschools/faq>

<sup>12</sup><http://www.hcz.org/>

<sup>13</sup>Model policies in support of high-performance buildings for all children. (2006, October). *BEST*, [http://www.bestfacilities.org/best-home/docuploads/pub/173\\_BESTModelPolicies5\\_7\\_07\\_2.3\\_Final2.pdf](http://www.bestfacilities.org/best-home/docuploads/pub/173_BESTModelPolicies5_7_07_2.3_Final2.pdf), p.13, 14

<sup>14</sup>A copy of these standards available: [http://www.nylc.org/pages-newsevents-news-K\\_12\\_Service\\_Learning\\_Standards\\_for\\_Quality\\_Practice?oid=6091](http://www.nylc.org/pages-newsevents-news-K_12_Service_Learning_Standards_for_Quality_Practice?oid=6091).

<sup>15</sup>See *The Generator* (2007, December), <http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/pei/ss102207.pdf>

<sup>16</sup>See <http://www.fsu.edu/~flserve/sl/standards.html>.

<sup>17</sup>Leeper, T. J. (2008). Service-learning in the United States: Recent policy developments. In National Youth Leadership Council’s *Growing to greatness: The state of service-learning project*, p. 100.

<sup>18</sup>Learn and Serve America Program. [http://www.learnandserve.org/about/programs/school\\_based.asp](http://www.learnandserve.org/about/programs/school_based.asp)

<sup>19</sup>Billig, S., & Brown, S. (2002). *Opportunities for service-learning in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Denver, CO: RMC Research Corporation. Available: <http://www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/27/nochild.pdf>

- <sup>20</sup>New Mexico Commission for Community Volunteerism. (2006). *New Mexico blueprint for civic engagement*. Available: <http://newmexicoserve.org/docs/FinalBlueprint.pdf>
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- <sup>25</sup>Ibid, p. 10.
- <sup>26</sup>Schroeder, J. (2008). Supporting service-learning through policy. In National Youth Leadership Council's *Growing to greatness: The state of service-learning project*. Available: [http://www.nylc.org/pages-resourcecenter-downloads-Growing\\_to\\_Greatness\\_2008?emoid=14:801](http://www.nylc.org/pages-resourcecenter-downloads-Growing_to_Greatness_2008?emoid=14:801).
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- <sup>29</sup>Information at <http://www.achieve.org/>
- <sup>30</sup><http://www.21stcenturyskills.org>
- <sup>31</sup><http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/m.751b186f65e10b568a278110501010a0/?vgnextoid=e34e2bad2b6dd010VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=92ebc7df618a2010VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD>
- <sup>32</sup>Colorado State Statutes, Title 22, Article 7, Part 10 Preschool to Postsecondary Education Alignment. Available: <http://www.michie.com/colorado/lpext.dll?f=templates&fn=main-h.htm&cp=>
- <sup>33</sup><http://redesign.rcu.msstate.edu/>



1 West 4th Street, Suite 200  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202  
513.929.4777

4601 DTC Blvd., Suite 500  
Denver, CO 80237  
303.337.0990