



## **P-20 Education Policy: School to College Transition Policy in Washington State<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This study examines Washington State's attempt to move toward an integrated, P-20 system of education that enhances student transitions from high school to college. In analyzing Washington as a single case study, a profile of the state is developed on key access related characteristics. Data for this study were gathered utilizing fundamental case study methods. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with Washington State legislators, legislative staff, key state education agency officials, and college and university representatives. Document analyses of agency records, public hearings, testimonies, position papers, reports, and public meeting records were also conducted. This study found that Washington has many key programs in place to enhance student transitions between the K-12 system and the higher education, but the state's current approach lacks coherence and cohesion. This study also found that the state has developed a new and innovative model with the potential to solve many transition-related issues, but assessment is required to determine its actual effectiveness.

**Keywords:** secondary education; postsecondary education; state policy; Washington State; politics of education; policy implementation.

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### **Política educativa del sistema P-20: Políticas de transición entre escuelas y universidades en el Estado de Washington**

**Resumen:** Este estudio examina el intento del Estado de Washington de avanzar hacia un sistema integrado (de la escuela inicial al grado 20) de educación que fortalezca la transición de la escuela secundaria a la universidad. En este análisis del estado de Washington como un estudio de caso, se desarrolló un perfil del estado con las principales características relacionadas a la cuestión de acceso educativo. Los datos para este estudio se recogieron utilizando métodos fundamentados en los estudios de casos. Se realizaron entrevistas cualitativas en profundidad con los legisladores del Estado de Washington, personal legislativo, funcionarios importantes de la agencia estatal de educación, y representantes de las universidades. Se realizaron también análisis documentales de registros de agencias, audiencias públicas, testimonios, propuestas de políticas, informes y registros de reuniones públicas. Este estudio encontró que Washington tiene muchos programas importantes, para mejorar las transiciones entre los estudiantes del sistema secundario y el sistema de educación superior, pero el enfoque actual carece de coherencia y consistencia. Este estudio también encontró que el estado ha desarrollado un modelo de innovación que tiene el potencial de resolver muchas de las cuestiones de transición, pero requerirá una evaluación para determinar su eficacia real.

**Palabras-clave:** educación secundaria; educación superior; política estatal; Estado de Washington; política educativa; implementación de políticas

### **Sistema educacional da política P-20: Política de transição entre escolas e universidades no Estado de Washington**

**Resumo:** Este estudo analisa a tentativa do Estado de Washington de avançar para um sistema integrado (escolas de educação infantil até a universidade, P-20) no sentido de fortalecer a transição da escola para universidade. Nesta análise sobre o estudo de caso do estado de Washington, desenvolvemos um perfil do estado sobre as principais características relacionadas com a questão da acesso à educação. Os dados para este estudo foram coletados usando métodos baseados em estudos de casos como entrevistas qualitativas conduzidas com os legisladores do estado de Washington, o funcionários do poder legislativo, altos funcionários da agência estadual de educação e representantes de universidades. Também foram realizados análise documental dos registros da agência, audiências declarações públicas, propostas de políticas, relatórios e registros das reuniões públicas. Este estudo descobriu que Washington tem muitos programas importante para melhorar a transição do estudante sistema secundário e o sistema de ensino superior, mas o desenho atual precisa de coerência e consistência. Este estudo também constatou que o estado tem desenvolvido um modelo inovador que tem o potencial para resolver muitas das questões da transição, mas exigem uma avaliação para determinar a sua eficácia.

**Palabras-clave:** ensino médio, educação superior, política estadual; Estado de Washington (Estado); política da educação; implementação de políticas

## **Introduction**

If properly implemented, new policy approaches to simplifying the transition from school to college have the potential to expand access for all students. These new initiatives are especially important to students from racial/ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students who have traditionally experienced barriers to academic success and educational attainment. Over the past decade, many states have moved toward implementing P-20 education policy to

provide greater access to higher education. By standardizing the transition processes students experience, P-20 education policy provides the means to achieve this end. Policies, programs, and practices aimed at easing the strain that all students experience in mapping the course from high school to college are at the core of P-20 education. On the one hand, the notion of P-20 education addresses early childhood learning, student transitions at various key points within the K-12 system, the continuity in the school curriculum, connecting the school curriculum to the college curriculum, and teacher preparation and training; still, the ultimate goal of P-20 education is the standardization of college attendance, academic success, and degree attainment. Many states have adopted various forms of P-20 education policy aimed at increasing college attendance. These efforts have met with varying levels of success. In part this is due to varying levels of commitment given P-20 related initiatives in state level policy arenas (Lutz & Chance, 2005). Not much has been written or studied with respect to the transition-related focus of policy initiatives in the state of Washington. This study analyzes the state's efforts to enhance student transitions from school to college.

In the recent past, issues related to students' transitions from school to college were a key agenda item in educational policy arenas nationwide, with many states moving toward improving access to higher education through the implementation of P-20 education policy. More recently, the nation's fiscal crisis has moved budgetary considerations to the top of the educational agenda. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has received less attention more recently, but over the past eight years standards and accountability have become priority items on national and state level education agendas. The state of Washington is no exception, with its legislature working to figure out how to fill the gap left by a multi-billion dollar budget shortfall, while focusing on student success on the state assessment, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)—now called the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP) and the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE).

Mintrop and Trujillo (2005) write that under NCLB, many states and their school districts face additional burdens due to the inability of schools to improve the standards-related profiles of their student populations. Even after undergoing probationary periods and school improvement related sanctions under the new federal policy, many schools fall short. There is another consequence of the NCLB legislation, intended or unintended. Many teachers are struggling with the new focus on testing that also shapes the curriculum, what they teach, and how they teach (Mabry & Margolis, 2006). This is a clear indication that there is a need for more, and not less, of the type of collaboration between K-12 and higher education addressed by P-20 education policies. These policies seek to close the loop on academic achievement and focus on key indicators of academic success. Partnership and collaboration between education agencies and organizations is an important ingredient to this formula. A starting point and initial focus of these partnerships, shaped by P-20 education policy, should center on developing solutions to persistent academic achievement issues left uncovered by the NCLB policy. Additionally, partnerships should work to eliminate unintended consequences and other issues instigated by NCLB itself.

In working to establish effective partnerships that improve academic achievement, it is important that recruiting, training, and nurturing new teachers—and raising the profile of the teaching profession—be at the forefront of these partnership efforts. According to Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003), policy that seeks to improve the supply of highly qualified teachers is not only a key to the success of NCLB, it is a crucial part of a systemic approach to improving education. Increased collaboration within and between educational organizations creates a potential benefit to both K-12 and higher education collectively and individually. An intensified focus on raising the academic profile of a broader spectrum of the college age population will improve the success of the K-12 system, while adding value to postsecondary education. What these authors fail to mention is the need for tightly coupled, collaborative initiatives between K-12 and higher education systems to facilitate the type of growth

and change that is desired. Depending on the K-12 system to produce a new pool of highly qualified graduating seniors each year, colleges and universities have an inextricable connection to schools (Pitre, 2004). Similarly, schools depend on colleges and universities to return to them a pool of teachers with the skills necessary to teach a student who is immersed in the age of technology and globalization.

The state of Washington provides an interesting case study in P-20 education policy for several reasons. First, Washington ranks 48th in higher education participation at the four-year public institution level (Office of Financial Management, 2009). This is a clear indication that the state needs to improve its ability to transition students from school to college. In addition, it has a small but growing minority population. The Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (2008) has projected a decline in high school graduates in Washington that might continue through the 2014–15 academic year. The result is that even a moderately-growing minority population of high school graduates will form a larger part of the state's pool of "college ready" students. Because it has a smaller population of minority students than many other states, perhaps Washington can be more effective at transitioning this increasingly important segment of the student population to college.

The third reason Washington makes an interesting case study is that it has only recently begun to move forward on its P-20 approach to improving the transition to college. According to an Education Commission of the States report 30 states have similar initiatives underway, some of them started as early as 1998 (Kruger, 2006). As a late entrant into the P-20 policy arena, Washington is also late in analyzing the effectiveness of its educational system and the ability of the system to act as an integrated whole. One advantage the state stands to gain as a late entrant is an opportunity to learn from the successes and mistakes of other states that have moved toward P-20 education systems. What is not clear is the state of Washington's commitment to and capacity for integrating its system of education to enhance the college transitions of its K-12 student population.

This study examines Washington State's attempt to move toward an integrated system of education that enhances student transitions from high school to college. In doing so, the study paints a picture of the Washington context as it relates to programs and policies that seek to enhance student transitions. This study also presents a profile of Washington, both regionally and nationally, on key access related characteristics. Findings and lessons learned from the state of Washington and its unique environment are presented. This study concludes with an overview of key considerations for policy makers and stake holders in P-20 education policy initiatives to consider.

## Washington in Context

In 1998 voters in Washington State passed Initiative 200, which brought an end to the use of affirmative action in college and university admission decisions. Five years after the passage of I-200, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a narrow definition of affirmative action in college admission and upheld its compelling governmental interest (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003), confirming that race does play a significant role in American society. These legal and political developments have put the state of Washington in an interesting position considering that the higher education system is growing and affirmative action has been banned through the ballot initiative process, while the federal Supreme Court has ruled that a narrowly defined use of affirmative action policy is constitutional.

Prior to the passage of I-200, more than half of all students in the state, including racial and ethnic minority students, continued on to some form of postsecondary education. After the passage of I-200, only Asian American students increased their postsecondary enrollment and White students remained stable, while African American, Hispanic, and Native American students

lost ground (Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2006). As of the 2002–3 academic year, racial and ethnic minority students were beginning to make up lost ground with respect to postsecondary enrollments (Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2006). Even so, young adult college students who were either Hispanic or Black represent a lower proportion of their age cohorts' college populations than the general cohort populations in either the state of Washington or nationally. In part as a consequence, the same lower proportions hold true for minority students in graduate education.

The need to bolster academic success and educational attainment of racial and ethnic minority students is nationwide (Kruger, 2006). In spite of the stumbles the state of Washington has experienced due to the elimination of affirmative action, opportunities may exist for enhanced access to higher education and improving the educational attainment of underrepresented minority students and students in the general population. Washington has shown strength on some key indicators of educational attainment. While this study is not intended to focus on the issue of affirmative action or the aftereffects of I-200, it is discussed here to provide a better sense of the Washington context.

One of the key challenges facing Washington in its attempt to broaden access to higher education is that the state has long resisted strong coordination at the college and university level of education. According to Zumeta's (2006) historical account of the development of what is now known as the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HEC Board) in Washington, political actors in the state have purposely resisted providing the state's coordinating body broad ranging authority:

...this body and its successors—now called the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB)—have not been terribly influential in higher education policymaking or financing decisions, largely because the major players have not truly wanted them to be. (p. 299)

Zumeta found that Washington State has resisted providing a coherent and focused approach to higher education and thus access to higher education. Without a strong coordinating body, the implementation of meaningful P-20 education policy, which is based on the premise that cohesion, coherence, and integration within educational systems is a key to improving access to higher education, could prove to be difficult. Washington's historical reluctance to empower a coordinating body for its higher education system is also an important background variable in this study.

Washington also suffers from a gap between in-state baccalaureate degree production and adult residents' educational attainment. This issue has become a talking point in policy conversations. As one Washington state higher education official explained in an interview, "What's happening is that a lot of people are coming here with a bachelor's degree in hand" (state agency official, interview). A Prosperity Partnership (2006) report concluded, "The Puget Sound region has one of the highest educational attainment levels in the nation, yet Washington's university system ranks 36<sup>th</sup> in the nation in bachelor's degree production" (p. 3).<sup>2</sup> The same agency official who discussed the fact that many people come to Washington with a bachelor's degree from another state added,

This gap in educational attainment amongst the population of native Washingtonians has caused concern. Some people are saying 'well that's great. We are not investing as a state for our educated population.' There are other folks who are worried about that because that means Washington is not doing a good job of providing opportunities for the communities who live here. (state agency official, interview)

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<sup>2</sup> The Prosperity Partnership is a group of more than 300 organizations including business & industry, labor, government, and community based groups aimed at developing Washington's competitiveness in the Pacific Northwest.

As mentioned above, the concerns about Washington's dismal access record at the four-year level is echoed by the Office of Financial Management (2009) report that shows the state is 48<sup>th</sup> in four-year public college participation. Another official explained the concern in reference to opportunities for young adults in the science and mathematics sectors of Washington's economy: "Individuals who are from the state of Washington aren't getting the prestigious high paying jobs" (state agency official, interview). The Prosperity Partnership (2006) report emphasized the need for Washington State to become more focused on meeting the needs of the native population: "If we don't fill the gap, thousands of new jobs will go elsewhere or be filled by non-residents" (p. 3). The conclusion by many in state policy discussions is that Washington State has major challenges to creating an effective P-20 system that increases the number and diversity of students who move into higher education.

## Methods

This article is based on qualitative case study data collection. In depth qualitative interviews were conducted with Washington State legislators, legislative staff, key state education agency officials, and college and university representatives. An initial sample of five participants was identified for this study. Interviewees were identified using purposeful sampling to discover potential interview participants that could provide information that is both valid and relevant given the focus of this study. Snowball sampling was also used to leverage the connectedness of key political insiders to identify additional study participants who could provide rich data. A total of 22 potential participants were identified and 14 participants were interviewed.

An interview protocol was developed to unearth pertinent information from officials knowledgeable of Washington's focus on improving students' transitions from high school to college. Interviews were structured and questions were open-ended. Participants were questioned about their involvement in access and transition related initiatives in Washington and their knowledge of activities, partnerships, and programs aimed at enhancing college access and transition for students. They were also asked about their knowledge of active policy and/or policy initiatives aimed at enhancing student access and transition to college. All interviews were tape recorded. Field notes were taken during each interview and reviewed after the interview concluded. Codes and themes were developed as a method of data reduction. Final categories were developed based on interview coding and information gathered through document analysis. After all interviews were conducted, each interview was reviewed again for accuracy and confirmation of initial categories. The interview process and data analysis was conducted simultaneously as each interview was reviewed for content.

Document analyses of agency records, public hearings, testimonies, position papers, reports, and public meeting records were also conducted. A key document in this study was a report by the HEC Board on House Bill 3103 (discussed later in this article). The websites of educational organizations were searched for documents related to college access and student transitions. Additionally, study participants were asked for key documents and other information sources related to P-20 education policy.

This study aims to dissect the Washington case to provide state officials, policymakers, researchers, and other interested parties and stakeholders a sense of the scope of issues involved in a P-20 initiative that was recently launched and to reinforce the need for adopting partnerships and collaboration as a core value. The question this study seeks to answer is whether the state of Washington has sufficient commitment and capacity to implement effective P-20 education policies

and programs and, more generally, what type of commitment and capacity is needed for effective P-20 programs.

## **Key Findings in Washington**

As argued earlier, there is a need for a clearer focus on providing access to higher education in the state of Washington. The following section outlines key findings related to the state's ability to answer some of the lingering questions linked to its capacity to successfully implement P-20 education policy and related transition programs. This study produced findings in three key areas: a failure to create and use collaborative P-20 infrastructure, curriculum integration, and systemic initiatives.

### **Lack of Coherence in P-20 Infrastructure**

A key piece of legislation introduced in Washington's 2004 legislative session was House Bill 3103 (HB 3103), meant by its sponsors to be a catalyst in Washington's move toward an integrated P-20 education system. The primary goal of HB 3103 was to clarify the responsibilities and scope of work for the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (HEC Board). The legislation also carried key transition related provisions that centered on improving access to higher education and providing students with a clearer path to attaining education beyond high school. The next year, a follow-up report on HB 3103 revealed that Washington has an array of programs and initiatives that can be leveraged to increase access to college, smooth transitions between K-12 and higher education, and increase overall educational attainment (HEC Board, 2005). But the implementation of HB 3103 requires the coordination of key state education agencies to facilitate student transitions, and this coordination presents some structural challenges. The structural issues stem from the array of loosely coupled programs, agencies, and services involved in student college transitions. Essentially, organizational politics and lack of coordination may stand in the way of effective implementation. Lutz and Chance's (2005) report found evidence that the operating structure of Washington's education system is a potential obstacle to implementing P-20 education policy as agencies and organizations operate separately, and a report on P-20 education policy from the Education Commission of the States (2001) referred to these types of obstructions as "turf issues" (p. 8). Effective implementation of P-20 education policy calls for integrated systems.

The ingredients of such an integrated system exists in Washington, with a landscape that appears to be rich with resources that have the ability to enhance student transitions. The state offers three types of college choice or transition-related programs: seven dual credit/dual enrollment programs; six early-outreach programs, and seven curriculum and instruction programs (HEC Board, 2005). While these programs provide great benefit to students and have enhanced the ability of students to move from high school to college, coordinating these programs for maximum effectiveness is a different matter. The HB 3103 (2005) follow up report's discussion of the state's access and transition policy status gives evidence that coordination problems exist:

Washington hosts a number of exemplary K-16 initiatives that serve thousands of students each year. In addition, hundreds of associated school and college professionals work in this arena. However, given the broad range of high-school-to-college connections and the different governance and funding systems for K-12 and higher education, this work continues to be a significant challenge (p. 19).

Other problems exist. For example, there is not a complete catalog of such programs. Some key programs that are supported by the state are not even mentioned in the HEC Board report, such as the Mathematics Engineering and Science Achievement Program (MESA). Moreover, the

legislation only calls for coordination of programs and provides no funding or additional oversight of key elements of the P-20 education policy continuum that the state has shown interest in developing. Issues related to cataloging key P-20 related information might be resolved by the state's new effort to develop a web portal that will house information on college, access-related opportunities, and program offerings (HEC Board, 2009). While the new web portal project could prove to be effective at cataloging information, it is not clear how effective it will be in helping to coordinate key programs in a way that maximizes student access and transition from high school to college.

The lack of focus on important programs such as MESA points to another issue. Gandara (2002) contends that both K-12 and higher education managed transition programs "suffer from a serious lack of rigorous program evaluation, in spite of the millions of dollars that are invested in them annually" (p. 97). There is no evidence that the transition programs funded and administered by the state of Washington, its higher education institutions, or its agencies are being rigorously evaluated. This is not to say that programs are not effective. However, currently Washington's transition-related programs often lack rigorous, effective evaluation. This is a common problem in education because evaluation is a complex undertaking for programs that may already suffer from chronic underfunding (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Tierney, 2002; Yonezowa, Jones, & Mehan, 2002). Essentially, many programs do not have the capacity to effectively gather and analyze data or cover the expense of regular external reviews (Swail & Perna, 2002). This lack of capacity also applies to transition related programs in Washington.

A primary problem that Washington faces in its attempt to implement tighter coordination between higher education and K-12 is the loose coupling that exists between key educational agencies currently operating like "silos" (Lutz & Chance, 2005, p. 2). As mentioned previously, P-20 education policy initiatives tend to push turf-related issues into the open. While Lutz and Chance suggest that Washington should consider several options for their P-20 approach, their suggestions are overly general. For example, Lutz and Chance (2005) suggest that Washington "Require inter-agency collaboration and time-sensitive reporting dates on specified transition issues" (p. 21), but fail to give any details as to what these transition issues are or what agencies should report on. Further, their suggestions do not discuss issues, concerns, and general problems that have affected similar P-20 education policy initiatives. For example, in Maryland, Mintrop, McClellan, and Pitre (2002) found that P-20 related decisions in Maryland were being made at too high a level in the political and organizational structures within the state educational system. The resulting problem was that information and initiatives either stalled or never got translated to the "street level" where policy has to be interpreted and carried out.

### **Lack of Coherence in P-20 Infrastructure**

The capacity for street-level work exists in Washington. This study uncovered one initiative in the state of Washington that operates at the street level in its collaborations with most sectors of education in the state. The Washington Council for High School College Relations is one of the earliest collaborative initiatives in the state. Yet there was no mention of the Washington Council in any of the interviews carried out in this study, and only the HEC Board (2005) report on HB 3103 mentioned the organization. The lack of focus on an existing collaborative structure is a stark demonstration of breakdown in P-20 strategic planning in the state.

The Council has members from nearly every public and private institution of higher education in the state and a representative from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction as well and is a "connector" organization. The Washington Council has been responsible for the coordination of the state's community and four-year colleges with respect to transfer articulation. Additionally, this organization is responsible for connecting both the two-year and four-

year institutions with school counselors for information exchange on changes in admissions requirements and procedures. The programs and collaborations already established by this organization might be a key to furthering P-20 related initiatives in Washington. Currently, it seems as though this organization is a “forgotten player” in the Washington education policy arena and could potentially assist in the development of a coherent P-20 system in the state (Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989).

### Curriculum Integration

While the college degree has become an increasingly important credential for students entering the workforce (Louie, 2007; Pitre, 2004), many schools do not have the capacity to assist students in making the transition to college due to financial concerns. “At its best, the national average high school of one guidance counselor to 325 public high school students does not allow for much personal attention” (McDonough, 1994, p. 433). At its worst, high school counselors have advising loads of double and sometimes triple the average 325 student load.

In addition to the crisis in individual access to guidance counseling and the capacity issues surrounding counseling, there is a mismatch between the college preparation curriculum, high school graduation requirements, college admission requirements, and labor force requirements (Louie, 2007). Essentially, these functions in the lives of students are not in sync. The impact of this crisis is most severe for racial/ethnic minorities and/or economically disadvantaged students who are more likely to be guided toward a vocational education (Gamoran, Porter, Smithson, & White 1997; Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner 2007). These are the same students who lack access to adequate college preparation counseling and programs (Bryk, Lee, & Smith, 1990; Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2007).

Due to the increasing demands on college counselors, the lack of coordination between the current school curriculum and how it relates to students’ futures beyond school, and the lack of adequate college preparation and counseling experienced by some of the neediest students, the school curriculum becomes an additional tool for assisting students in making the transition from high school to college (Pitre, 2004). Integrating transition-related information into the general school curriculum can be an organic means for introducing this information. Mintrop, McClellan, and Pitre (2002) found that students sought out teachers when they had questions about college attendance and college life. Washington State has started to implement an initiative that has many stakeholders in the education policy arena excited. The Navigation 101 project helps students to prepare for life after high school, and it was initially a pilot program in Washington recently extended statewide. Navigation 101 requires that college and career planning be integrated into a student’s curriculum, that a student meet with an educator-advisor to develop an academic and career plan, that a student take the time to explore both academic and career goals, and that a student meets with their academic advisor 2-3 times per month]. A key goal of Navigation 101 is academic planning. As one state agency official explained,

There’s a lot going on now that I think is going to be positive. I think the Navigation 101 project that’s been piloted over the last few years in 5 school districts is supposed to be widely disseminated. It is supposed to be introduced, in some form, to every school district.

This project was consistently mentioned by interviewees as having potential for both standardizing and advancing student transitions in Washington. Navigation 101 is a model developed in Washington by the Franklin Pierce School District (in Tacoma) that teaches students how to traverse the high school curriculum in a way that will lead them into higher education. This new model of guidance counseling offers students a map through a course of study to fulfilling their academic and career aspirations. Preparation for life after high

school is a key component. Students attend a Navigation 101 class twice a month to discuss their goals and to plan for their future beyond school. In contrast with the Washington Council, it is an initiative that interview participants consistently mentioned as having the potential to enhance student access to college in Washington.

Integrating college choice related information into the school curriculum has been cited as an essential component of moving toward standardizing college access (Pitre, 2004). Finding ways to provide students with the types of information and assistance that they need to prepare for college is a formidable task (McDonough, 1997; Mintrop, et al., 2002; Pitre, 2004). Navigation 101 stands as one of Washington's key P-20 strategies. The state is attempting to leverage the curriculum to establish an infrastructure to assist students in preparing for college. One legislator touted Navigation 101 as the state's premiere transition initiative:

We introduced a program and we're sort of ramping it in, reasonably quickly for a program, and it's Navigation 101 where we're going to make sure that every student in the state has an adult in the school building that spends a significant amount of time with them. This is not a counselor: this is a teacher, so we'll have about a 1/15 or a 1/20 student ratio with that advisor, and we'll have a curriculum for those kids to make sure that they prepared to go to college...or for whatever it is that they want to do. (state legislator, interview)

The support for Navigation 101 in Washington is evident. The 2007 legislature approved a new \$3.2 million allocation for Navigation 101 grants to schools and school districts across the state. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the state of Washington hosts a training conference for grantees during the summer, which further standardizes the operation of this new program.

Some questions still remain with respect to the implementation and standardization of Navigation 101. It is still primarily a pilot with school districts applying for grant funds to implement the program. Since the state of Washington has had a budget shortfall putting many educational programs in jeopardy, it is unclear as to whether Navigation 101 will expand to the entire K-12 system. As with the implementation of any new policy, there needs to be some continued monitoring of its implementation, standardization, and general effectiveness. Essentially, this program seems to lack the type of rigorous evaluation discussed earlier in this study. Additionally, there may be further questions related to how Navigation 101 leverages the services and resources of colleges and universities in the state to enhance the strength of its curriculum offerings. To date, there does not seem to be much collaboration with higher education in the delivery of this program. A focus on collaboration could also provide a savings to the state by eliminating duplicative programming.

Navigation 101 is developing into a program with broader implications and can potentially have an impact on how students prepare for their transition to college. The program's impact could grow beyond the state of Washington. This program also provides a snapshot of how the state of Washington continues to operate. As mentioned previously, Navigation 101 was mentioned frequently in the interviews conducted for this study. It clearly enjoys great support in the political arena. But without further assessment and critical evaluation, it will be impossible to ascertain the true effectiveness of Navigation 101.

### **State's Math Adversity: Systemic Opportunity**

In the introduction, this study mentions the primacy of the K-12 system and testing in the policy arena. Washington is in the process of trying to answer longstanding questions related to math testing. In 2006, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in the state of Washington came under fire because fewer than half of the tenth-grade students in the state passed the mathematics section of the high school proficiency exam—the WASL. Beyond the fact that

student test results were below expectation, the 2006 standardized testing results were high-stakes in that they were supposed to be the first to determine whether students graduate from high school. After the math results were made public Washington's K-12 system, the legislature, and the Governor's office began a concentrated public discussion of mathematics achievement.

The immediate outcome of the increased focus on low mathematics test scores was that the high stakes nature of the 2006 mathematics exam and its potential effect on student graduation was put on hold. Policymakers and key stakeholders in Washington changed the graduation requirements so that failing the mathematics portion of the WASL exam would not prevent a student from graduating. That initial delay in high-stakes consequences (for students seeking graduation) was followed by an active legislative session on the topic. In Washington's 2007 legislative session—the session immediately following the low mathematics score results—approximately 12 bills were introduced aimed at mathematics. When asked how the legislature was going to respond to the issues surrounding mathematics in the state, one agency official said that policymakers and key stakeholders are trying to figure out a course of action: “I think in one word they are confused.” Apparently, these legislators were confused by the incongruence of information that showed students in Washington scoring higher than ever on the SAT test in all areas including mathematics with more students in the SAT pool—including significant numbers of racial and ethnic minorities.

This public discussion of math provided an arena for discussing system expectations of students. The Transition Math Project (TMP) is a P-20 type initiative to enhance student math preparation for college, and according to a few interviewees, it provided a way to discuss expectations, since a key focus of TMP is articulation between K-12 and higher education on expectations for mathematics. According to one state agency official, TMP uncovered a misalignment between expectations of K-12 systems and higher education for what students know of mathematics.

I guess I was surprised, as we got into it, how little commonality there was in terms of what people thought math outcomes should be at the high school, or among different high schools for that matter...different teachers, different individuals in higher education.

TMP is an example of a program working to get the K-12, community college, and four-year college systems working collaboratively to address mathematics education in the state. As mentioned earlier, silos and turf issues may prevent such a program from reaching its potential and being effective at streamlining mathematics expectations within the state.

## **Conclusion**

The quest to improve access to higher education is an ongoing initiative throughout the country. As mentioned previously, no less than 30 states have implemented some type of P-20-related policy initiative (Kruger, 2006). More recently, President Obama encouraged U.S. citizens to seek one or more years of education beyond the high school diploma. It is no mystery that in the US, the high school diploma no longer guarantees a graduate a job that will provide the level of income needed to support a family. This study showed that Washington is a unique case study because its high-tech industry attracts an educated population, yet many of the state's natives do not seek education beyond high school.

This study analyzed the discussion within the state of Washington through case study methods and examined the state's attempt to move toward an integrated system of education that enhances student transitions from high school to college. Washington State has many of the pieces

necessary to build a P-20 education policy infrastructure to improve student transitions. Currently, these pieces function independently and there is a lack of clear connection and cohesion in the educational system. Washington's commitment and capacity has thus far been spotty for implementing a strong P-20 system that supports student transitions to college. Many of the key pieces are in place, but the state's P-20 capacity is hindered by a governance structure that does not allow effective centralization of efforts. Simply put, the decentralization of transition efforts discourages cohesion. Washington's history of shying away from a strong coordinating body for its higher education system is a road block to more effective coordination of transition efforts. The end result is a low ranking in four-year public higher-education participation. Many in Washington seem content with the benefits the state has received from a booming science and technology industry, employed by educated citizenry that came to the state already college-educated and not motivated to develop and use potential in-state talent.

This study presented three specific findings related to Washington's move toward creating greater alignment and cohesion within its educational system. The first area was *Lack of Coherence in P-20 Infrastructure*. This study revealed the state has approximately 20 programs aimed at assisting students in transitioning from school to college, but these programs have no central coordination. Even with the implementation of HB 3103, which is meant to enhance the HEC Board's ability to coordinate transition related activities between schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions, a lack of coordination of programs and opportunities for students still exists. Lutz and Chance (2005) contend that many education agencies in Washington act as "silos" and, essentially, resist collaboration. This can be a serious impediment to the implementation of P-20 educational policy, which thrives on coherent and collaborative efforts focused on student success. P-20 initiatives tend to bring "turf" issues out into the open.

This study also revealed an organization that this author refers to as a "connector" that can, potentially, act as a key conduit for P-20 policy in the state of Washington. The second finding in this study, *Forgotten Collaborative Players*, discusses the Washington Council, which has members from nearly every public and private institution of higher education in the state and a representative from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction as well. The Washington Council provides college preparation-related training and assistance to school counselors. While this organization will, more than likely, need additional capacity to expand its P-20 focus, by doing so, the state stands to gain by increasing its capacity to move students from school to college. The "street level" presence of the Washington Council makes it a key piece to the Washington P-20 education policy puzzle.

The college curriculum has been identified in the literature as an important focus of P-20 policy in that students first reach out to their teachers when they need information on college. The third finding in this study, *Curriculum Innovation in Need of Rigorous Assessment*, found that Washington has started to implement an initiative that has many key stakeholders. The new Navigation 101 program helps students to prepare for life after high school, by integrating with the school curriculum and leveraging the expertise of teachers who act as mentors and assist students in working toward meeting their academic and career aspirations. This program enjoys high salience and support in the policy arena and answers lingering questions related to the ability of guidance counselors to actually provide support to overwhelming caseloads of students. Even so, before money is poured into this initiative, policymakers must take care to gain a better understanding of the programs actual effectiveness and the nuances of how to best direct resources in this curriculum integration initiative. In other words, this program, which shows great promise and has secure backing, still needs rigorous review and assessment. Questions related to how Navigation 101 connects schools to community and four-year colleges still exist and need to be considered in order for this program to have implications for student transitions statewide and nationally.

The final finding outlined in this study, *State's Math Adversity: Systemic Opportunity*, found that potential solutions to the math problems in Washington exist, but continued system-wide support is needed to boost initiatives designed to solve the math question. The Transition Math Project (TMP) is studying the mathematics connections between the K-12 system, community colleges, and four-year universities. This project is clearly in line with the direction and needs of the state's education system. Two questions that remain unanswered when looking at TMP are: 1) does this initiative have enough influence to get the right people around the table to discuss math and, 2) will the programs and policies TMP designs be accepted as viable within the broader education community? These are important questions to be answered, particularly given the state of Washington's history of opting for a low level central coordination of its educational system generally and higher education specifically.

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