



Bridge to Postsecondary Success: *High Schools in the Knowledge Economy*

Prepared For
The Ohio State Board of Education Task Force on
Quality High Schools for a Lifetime of Opportunities

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Introduction

To thrive in the 21st century economy, all young people will need some education beyond high school. Whether in two- or four-year colleges or in programs granting credentials for employment in family-sustaining careers, obtaining postsecondary education and training has become imperative—all the more so in an era when employers now require the same kinds of skills as colleges.

For Ohio to increase dramatically the number of students prepared for and completing education beyond high school, it must treat high school reform as part of a pipeline to postsecondary learning, not an end in itself. The state should give priority to policies that increase the college preparedness of high school students, smooth the transition between high school and postsecondary education or training, and reconnect dropouts to education pathways toward postsecondary credentials. The purpose of the paper is to provide the Task Force with strategies to consider for achieving these goals.

Rationale

Over the past two decades, the U.S. economy has changed substantially. Education beyond high school is now a prerequisite for entering the middle class. About one out of three jobs today requires formal higher education. Moreover, while the United States currently has a surplus of workers with the education to obtain these jobs, retirements among the baby boom generation will turn this surplus into a shortage in the coming decades. By one estimate, we will need 14 million more workers with some college education than our educational systems have produced (Carnevale 2003).

Given the dramatic rise in the benefits of postsecondary attainment, the poor performance of our education pipeline is shocking. Only 67 out of every 100 students who enter the ninth grade graduate from high school; only 38 enter college, 26 remain enrolled in college after their sophomore year, and 18 graduate with at least an Associate's degree within six years of graduating from high school.¹ The numbers are even worse for low-income students and for African Americans and Hispanics, the fastest growing proportion of the youth cohort and those who traditionally have been least well served by our education system.

Ohio ranks slightly below the national average on these measures. Only 17 percent of its ninth graders graduate from high school on time, go directly to college, return for their second year, and graduate within 150 percent of program time.² Twenty-four percent of Ohio's adult population (ages 25 to 44) had a Bachelor's degree or higher in 2000, compared to the national average of 27 percent.

These trends suggest that education systems designed for Ohio's past ill suit its future. Part of the problem is that Ohio treats the secondary and postsecondary systems as separate "silos" rather than as interdependent. For example, in many urban centers, high school graduates enter local two- and four-year colleges with literacy and mathematics skills well below the levels necessary to begin college-level courses. Colleges respond to these students' academic needs with remedial courses, but many of the freshmen are so poorly skilled that one, two, or even three remedial courses do not work. Paradoxically, urban high school students cannot gain

¹ See the Web site for the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. The National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis. www.higheredinfo.org

² Ibid.

better access to more rigorous courses or highly qualified teachers while, nearby, college faculty are teaching high school-level courses.

Improving the performance of the K-16 pipeline would yield many economic and civic returns for Ohio. Individuals with college degrees earn nearly \$1 million more over their lifetimes than those with only high school degrees, and they are more likely to vote and to volunteer (Joftus 2002). Ten thousand additional students with four-year degrees would add as much as \$250 million a year to a state economy (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). And in a time of tight budgets, improving the pipeline would yield an additional benefit: a far more effective use of limited resources.

To improve its high schools and increase their ability to prepare students for today's economy, Ohio must concentrate on four critical parts of its education pipeline:

1. Improve the level of high school preparation so that more youth graduate “college ready.”
2. Improve the transitions between secondary and postsecondary education.
3. Reconnect dropouts to educational pathways toward postsecondary credentials.
4. Build a supportive systemic context enabling more communication and interaction across the secondary and postsecondary sectors.

Several general principles apply to all of these strategies:

- Make more demanding curricula available to all students.
- Provide supports to help students succeed in demanding curricula (e.g., small schools, extended learning time, intensive literacy and math instruction).
- Be innovative with the use of time and place in school design, engaging external partners.
- Ensure that strategies promote equity in outcomes for traditionally underserved and underperforming students, as well as promote improvements for all.

Strategies for Improving Postsecondary Success

1. Implement policies that promote college-level learning in high schools so that more students graduate “college ready.” (*see page 4*)

- Align standards and assessments.
- Increase the rigor of curricula.
- Implement “catch up” supports designed to accelerate progress for those falling behind.
- Promote more high-quality options for high school.

2. Improve the transitions between secondary and postsecondary education. (*see page 7*)

- Share data.
- Pursue dual enrollment or co-enrollment.
- Encourage partnerships between high schools and postsecondary institutions.
- Create middle colleges and early college high schools.

3. Reconnect dropouts. (*see page 10*)

- Count dropouts in accountability measures.
- Invest in and improve the alternative education system.
- Allow flexibility in the use of charters and new school funds for schools that address needs of dropouts effectively.
- Make connections to postsecondary education, particularly community colleges.

4. Create the systemic context to support these changes. (*see page 13*)

- Set a stretch goal.
- Integrate the K-12 and postsecondary data systems into a single system.
- Create governance mechanisms that improve secondary and postsecondary alignment of goals, planning, and budgets.

I. Implement policies that promote college-level learning in high schools so that more students graduate “college ready.”

Strategies:

- Align standards and assessments.
- Increase the rigor of curricula.
- Implement “catch up” supports designed to accelerate progress for those falling behind.
- Promote more high-quality options for high school.

For high schools to better prepare students for postsecondary credentials, Ohio must elaborate on its existing efforts to set educational standards, ensuring that those standards are calibrated with the skills needed to earn a postsecondary credential of value. To help all youth meet heightened expectations, however, struggling students need access to extra support systems and high-quality secondary school options.

Align standards and assessments.

Like most states, Ohio has made great progress in identifying what young people should know and be able to do at different points in their K-12 education, yet it has done so with little input from the two key “consumers” of its “products”: colleges and employers. As a result, the standards tested by high school exit exams are below those that public colleges use to determine admission and placement into non-remedial courses. Better aligning high school exit requirements with the expectations of colleges and employers is a powerful lever the state can use to improve the performance of its pipeline.

- The American Diploma Project report, “*Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts*” (2004), provides an example of benchmarks that states can use to align their K-12 standards with the expectations of the postsecondary sector. The benchmarks are based on interviews with college personnel and employers in high-growth career fields. States that have partnered with the American Diploma Project—Kentucky, Indiana, Texas, Nevada, and Massachusetts—are using the benchmarks to examine and realign their standards, high school curricula, and assessments.

Examples of realignment efforts can be found in other states as well.

- Oregon has been working on K-16 alignment since 1993 through its Proficiency-based Admission Standards System (PASS).
- The City University of New York system has announced that a math or English Regents exam score of 75 or higher will guarantee entrance to CUNY without the need for remedial coursework.
- The California State University system recommends that high schools administer the system’s placement exam to tenth graders so that the students and their teachers better understand the university’s expectations.

Increase the rigor of the core curriculum.

In concert with standards and assessments, states can use curriculum as a tool to help high schools promote better postsecondary preparation. A growing body of evidence suggests that students who take a rigorous curriculum in high school are more likely to enter and succeed in college than those do not (Adelman 1999). Yet the norm in comprehensive high schools is to permit some students (often minority and low-income) to take watered-down courses that do not meet postsecondary expectations. Based on such findings, a number of states have begun to strengthen curriculum requirements at the high school level, as Ohio is now doing.

- Over the past 15 years, Indiana has implemented policies and programs that have moved its college-going rate from 37 percent (ranked 40th in the country) to 60 percent (ranked 17th).³ At the center of Indiana’s strategies is a set of more rigorous courses known as the Core 40. The state has linked college financial aid to the Core 40 curriculum and implemented a marketing and information campaign to raise awareness among students and their families about the importance of the Core 40. More and more students are graduating having taken the Core 40 curriculum, and the state is considering making it the default high school curriculum (i.e., the courses students take unless they opt out of them).

To ratchet up curricular rigor, several states have created incentives and supports for local districts to expand their Advanced Placement offerings, particularly to students who test as low as the 65th percentile in reading. Local program findings show that, with support, average and low-achieving high school students can prepare for college and succeed in AP programs (Crist, Jacquart, and Shupe 2002). Initiatives in Minnesota and Texas have increased AP course offerings and enrollments for underrepresented students, in part by providing special professional development to teachers and financial incentives to schools and students.

Nevertheless, adding AP offerings has potential risks. It could pull the best educated teachers away from lower-performing students who most need them. Also, it could deny college credit if students do not pass the exam due to poor teaching. For these reasons, concurrent enrollment may be a more promising strategy for delivering college-level content to high school students (*see section 2*).

Implement “catch up” supports for students who lag behind.

Setting the bar higher for all students must be accompanied by supports for those who struggle, enabling acceleration rather than the escape routes of watered-down curricula. Schools that enable postsecondary success for such students provide timely and intensive intervention to help them stay on track. A study of higher performing high schools in Massachusetts found that the schools typically provided additional instruction in core subject areas through extended day programming (Jobs for the Future and the Center for Collaborative Education 2003). Hundreds of high schools across the country have adopted the AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) model of extra support and advisement as part of the school day in support of underrepresented students taking college preparatory curricula and AP courses.

States can encourage schools to provide these supports by offering enhanced resources and discretion over those resources so that they can create support programs that meet their students’ needs. With the advent of higher state standards, Illinois and Arkansas correspondingly made increased investments in summer school and other support programs (Martinez and Bray 2002). A recent Massachusetts report suggests that another effective strategy is to target state grants for districts to provide supplemental support services to students who are at risk of failing to meet standards (Mass Insight Education and Research Institute 2003).

Promote more learning options.

It is natural and commendable for states to focus on improving standards, assessments, and curricula. Yet these efforts will not succeed without a complementary focus on building better and new high schools because there is a glaring shortage of schools that help low-achieving high school students to graduate and prepare for postsecondary success. We must learn from what is already known about quality learning environments and the state policies that promote their successful practices and expansion.

Research by JFF, Pathways to College, and others has found that schools achieving outstanding results make it their mission to get their students to complete postsecondary credentials; they organize themselves accordingly, blending the best of cognitive challenge and youth development approaches. They also align

³ See St. John, Musoba, Simmons, and Chung (2002), based on compilation of data from *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, August 2000 (www.postsecondary.org).

their expectations, curricula, and assessments with those of postsecondary institutions. They place low-achieving students in advanced courses, giving them the help they need to succeed through tutors, advisory systems, and longer blocks of time for core courses. Further, these schools help connect students to the world beyond the high school walls by internships, community service, and work experience. And they set up data systems to track students over time, gathering information on how students do after graduation and using that data to improve instruction and advisory systems (Camblin, Gullatt, and Klopott 2003; Jobs for the Future and the Center for Collaborative Education 2003).

Another pattern emerges in the success of these schools: smaller is better. Whether in standalone schools of no more than 400 students or autonomous schools located within a larger education facility, the personalization of small schools can yield particular dividends for minority and low-income students, without necessarily costing the state more.

- A Massachusetts study found that seven of nine higher performing schools in the state had enrollments of 400 or less, while the other two large schools also tried to organize themselves into smaller learning environments (Jobs for the Future and the Center for Collaborative Education 2003). At University Park Campus School in Worcester, which spans the seventh through twelfth grades, almost all students come from low-income families and start with reading levels of fourth grade and below. Yet the school ranks in the top 12 high schools in the state on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, and all of its graduates go on to college. Notably, the school's per-pupil costs are comparable to larger schools in the Worcester school district.

Design financing strategies that promote new school models: Ohio already has a strong tradition of using small schools as part of its high school reform initiatives, utilizing partnerships with local and national foundations. It can further expand the supply of good public school options through financing strategies that stimulate and support new school models. These strategies should, for example, encourage multiple educational providers to operate schools that meet a range of needs and interests while preparing all students for postsecondary success. There are two possibilities for enhancing the variety of providers: broadening existing charter (community) school legislation and enabling school funds to follow at-risk, low-income students to alternative settings.

Explore how community school laws could create more high-quality high schools and promote links to postsecondary institutions: Charter (community) school laws are among the more promising, lower-cost ways for states to promote and finance an expansion of publicly funded learning options for high school-age youth. In several states, colleges and universities have a special status in applying for charters for new schools. If used to create new high schools, these provisions can strengthen the linkages between secondary and postsecondary institutions through geographic proximity, curricular support, and faculty interaction.

More effective state charter laws tend to include the following provisions:

- Multiple authorizing entities in addition to school districts, including universities, community-based organizations, and the state;
 - Autonomy in budgeting, staffing, and day-to-day operations in exchange for being held to the same accountability standards and expectations as all other schools; and
 - Access to startup capital and financing for facilities to help overcome the initial challenges of launching a new school.
- Minnesota's charter school legislation allows for authorizing entities in addition to school districts, including higher education institutions and nonprofit organizations. An appeals process exists for applicants who do not get approval from their school district. State per-pupil funding is at the same level that school districts receive. The state also makes funds available for leasing school facilities and for startup costs in the first two years.

Explore ways for education funds to follow the student: In an environment where funding flows primarily to districts, charter school financing has been one popular option for supplying learning alternatives. Another approach is to “let the dollars follow the student,” which can make it economically attractive for alternative providers to serve struggling students from low-performing schools. In urban communities, where there are simply too few effective high schools, this approach can expand effective schools interested in tapping a stable revenue source. Yet it is important that new providers be checked by accountability systems that are consistent with those under which existing schools operate.

The principle of letting the dollars follow the student should also be consistent with the principle of improving equity by making low-achieving, low-income youth more attractive to education providers and providing more money to schools with a high proportion of vulnerable youth. For example, states can limit this option to students who are clearly at risk of dropping out. They can also estimate the real costs of educating youth with learning disabilities or other risk factors and assign a higher “cost” to them because they are likely to require more intensive services. These policies would make lower-achieving students more attractive to serve and provide more equitable funding to schools with greater needs.

- **Wisconsin** and **Minnesota** allow state money to follow vulnerable youth through “children-at-risk” statutes enacted in the mid-1980s. The statutes enable public schools districts to contract with private, nonprofit, nonsectarian agencies to educate children who meet prescribed criteria for being “at risk.” Districts with large numbers of dropouts and youth who meet the at-risk criteria must let those students choose alternative education environments. In Milwaukee, contracted providers are considered Milwaukee Public School system “partnership schools” and receive per-pupil funding at 80 percent of the average per-pupil expenditure. In Minnesota, about 30 community-based alternative schools operate within the Minneapolis Public Schools system under similar legislation; they account for 20 percent of the state’s high school graduates (Smith and Thomases 2001).

At the far end of the “dollars follow the student” continuum of strategies is a more provocative idea for stimulating educational options. Most states’ school finance systems penalize those who drop out before the end of high school, because public per-student expenditures are not portable and thus go unused by these students. To address this, leading high school reformers have proposed individual learning accounts that enable public education resources to follow students (Schwartz forthcoming; Toft 2002). The accounts would receive deposits from various forms of federal, state, and local aid, and they would be self-directed by students and parents to maximize students’ learning experiences and choice of learning options.

2. Improve the transitions between secondary and postsecondary education.

Strategies:

- Share data.
- Pursue dual enrollment or co-enrollment.
- Encourage partnerships between high schools and postsecondary institutions.
- Create middle colleges and early college high schools.

If high schools are to prepare young people better for postsecondary education, they need to make stronger connections to postsecondary institutions and expose students early to college-level expectations and learning. Too many high school graduates subsequently wallow in remedial courses, with little conception of or access to the rigorous instruction and curriculum that are necessary for postsecondary success. High schools and the colleges that serve their graduates can no longer afford to operate in isolation, with standards that are uncoordinated and resources that are used inefficiently. The following strategies can forge stronger links between high school and college; they also raise provocative questions about the organization of the transition between secondary and postsecondary education.

Promote rigorous curricular alignment by sharing college performance data with sending high schools and giving college entrance exams to high school students for diagnostic purposes.

One way Ohio can make closer alignment take root locally is to encourage or mandate regular information-sharing between state colleges or universities and the high schools that send graduates to them. Some states' postsecondary data systems contain information on students' high school grade point averages, college credits, and other admissions data. Extracting this information has enabled states to develop feedback systems that give high schools information about their graduates' postsecondary performance. Moreover, administering college placement exams in the sophomore and junior years of high school helps convey information—or clearer “signals”—about the standards students must meet to do college work without remediation.

- In the early 1990s, **Minnesota** enacted legislation designed to provide better information to high schools on the college-readiness of their students. The law requires all public colleges and universities in the state to report to school districts on the developmental course-taking of their students within two years of graduation and on their performance on college placement tests and other performance measures used to determine college-readiness. Minnesota simultaneously amended the state's Government Data Practices Act. Colleges and universities can now report individually identifiable student data so school districts can make better use of the reported data for school improvement. A team of national researchers has found that institutionalizing this kind of feedback has two positive effects: it provides the high school with powerful information, and it increases the interaction between college and high school leadership (Venezia, Kirst, Antonio 2003).
- The **Oklahoma** State Regents for Higher Education pay for every public school student to participate in ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System, a comprehensive student information system. EPAS has a decade-long track record of improving course preparation and college participation among Oklahoma students. As a result, more Oklahoma students plan for college, complete a college “core” curriculum, and move out of the lower ACT score range, which reduces the need for remedial education (National Governors Association 2003).

Promote dual-enrollment programs that enable high school students to take college courses for credit.

Dual enrollment exposes students to college-level study and enables them to earn high school and college credits simultaneously. State-authorized dual/concurrent enrollment programs can widen the bridge from high school to college, eliminating the redundancy of remediation and motivating students to begin to see themselves as college material. It also may help motivate many college-aspiring students to avoid “wasting” senior year when they do not choose or are not mandated to take more rigorous courses in grade 12 (Kirst 2000).

Over 32 states have created dual enrollment statutes, and several others have postsecondary institution- or system-level dual enrollment policies (Michelau 2001; Education Commission of the States 2004). Participation is growing rapidly as families respond to rising college costs and rising expectations for high school course offerings and quality. The better-subscribed programs open participation to any student in the state who meets entry requirements, regardless of whether their district participates in the program.

Most dual enrollment programs are limited to students with a B average or better, but states could revise their program eligibility to expand underrepresented populations' access to college courses and institutions. The experiences of such programs such as CUNY's College Now and middle colleges suggest that co-enrolling even relatively weak minority high school students in college classes can encourage their enrollment and success in college. *(See below for more information on College Now and middle colleges.)*

- **Washington's** Running Start program began in the early 1990s. Qualified eleventh and twelfth graders can take college courses for free at the state's 34 community and technical colleges and three public universities. The school district pays the college tuition according to a state-set formula. In

2000-01, over 13,000 students took advantage of the program. Parents saved \$14 million in tuition, and taxpayers saved \$28.8 million in public education expenditures. Students performed well both in the program and after transferring to college (average GPA of 3.09 at the University of Washington, compared with a 3.18 GPA for community college transfers to the university). Running Start has to balance the sometimes competing goals of rigor and access. Also, at 16 percent, participation by African-American, Native-American, and Hispanic students is below their proportion in the total high school population (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges 2002).

- **In New York City**, the school district, in partnership with the City University of New York, is making connections between high school and postsecondary education on behalf of students and creating a range of high-quality learning environments in which young people can excel. In College Now (which currently risks budget cuts because of the city's fiscal crisis), CUNY gives its placement exams for credit-bearing courses to eleventh graders in schools participating in the program. Students who pass those exams can immediately enter a dual enrollment program and start taking credit-bearing courses at any CUNY institution. As a result, they leave high school much further along, reducing the time and money they will spend getting a postsecondary degree. Eleventh graders who fail the exam know this at the beginning of eleventh grade and can immediately start taking developmental, or remedial, education courses—not just in their high schools but also at the college level through the CUNY system. All 17 CUNY campuses and all 161 high schools in the city participate in College Now, which reaches 13,000 students, of whom over 10,000 are registered for dual-credit courses.

As is the case in Washington, in Ohio's dual enrollment program (the Postsecondary Options Enrollment Program—PSEO), Average Daily Membership funding for high school students follows them to pay for college courses while they are still high school students. This provides incentives for students to enroll concurrently, but high schools can perceive losses in having to surrender students and their ADM to colleges. An alternative approach to encouraging secondary-postsecondary cooperation would permit high schools and colleges to combine their respective per-pupil state reimbursements into a “K-16 Innovation Fund,” granting joint discretion for funding dual enrollment and other cooperative activities.

Encourage partnerships between high schools and postsecondary institutions.

Partnerships between local high schools and postsecondary institutions can play a powerful role in improving high school outcomes. Strong partnerships promote increased understanding among high school and college faculty about how the secondary and postsecondary systems can work better for students, and they encourage the sharing of valuable resources for both partners.

- At the University Park Campus School in Massachusetts, which sends 100 percent of its students to college, Clark University hosts the high school on its campus. Clark jointly sponsors teacher training programs and collaborative professional development, provides tutoring and other academic supports to students, and offers dual enrollment in college courses.

Ohio can encourage colleges and universities to engage in meaningful partnerships with local high school districts in a number of ways. Elected officials could enlist all local two- and four-year universities to engage in a significant partnership with a low-performing high school. The state could also provide supplemental funding for dual enrollment arrangements that involve low-income and minority students. Another possibility is to encourage teacher preparation programs to operate in conjunction with school-college partnerships based on successful practices, such as those in the University Park-Clark partnership.

Create new schools that blend high school and college.

A number of schools are trying even bolder interventions that combine high school and college to avert remediation and promote acceleration to a postsecondary degree. Early college high schools, middle college

high schools, and dropout recovery programs at community colleges enroll and support underrepresented, lower-performing students in college courses while they are in high school. Each involving students in grades 11 through 14, the schools create more flexible learning environments for struggling students by locating high schools on college campuses, introducing college-level curricula and expectations to students, and providing students with greater respect, independence, and personalized attention than they generally encounter in high school.

The over 30 middle colleges around the country are one example of these “blended institutions.” These small high schools, situated on community college campuses, target low-performing youth and offer a combination of rigorous course work, extensive supports and personalization, and community internships. Interim findings from an evaluation of five middle colleges show that students achieved nearly a 100 percent pass rate in their college courses. Another recent report found that students in two California middle colleges were outperforming peers in their respective districts on statewide assessments and standardized tests (Cavalluzzo, Corallo, Jordan 2002).

Early college high schools are designed so that all students have the opportunity to complete a high school diploma and an Associate’s Degree (or two years of transferable college credit) within five years. Through the Early College High School Initiative, over 135 schools following this model will be created nationally over the next five years. All early college high schools conduct outreach to middle school students to help them prepare for the college courses they will take in high school. They involve partnerships with a variety of institutions that can include district schools, charter schools, two- or four-year colleges, and both private and public universities. To enable acceleration for students, college courses supplant, rather than supplement high school courses – pushing the secondary and postsecondary partners to co-design and align their curricula. As singular institutions with one budget, these schools are co-governed by the secondary and postsecondary partners.

Ohio is a national leader in implementing early college high schools, leveraging partnerships with local and national foundations. Although the state and national initiative are fairly new, state policies favorable to these blended institutions are already becoming clear. The schools benefit from allowances for the flexible and innovative uses of funds across K-12 and postsecondary, articulated and transparent postsecondary credit transfer policies, and autonomy in budget, facilities, and the hiring of college instructors or adjunct personnel to teach dual credit courses.

3. Reconnect dropouts.

Strategies:

- Count dropouts in accountability measures.
- Invest in and improve the alternative education system.
- Allow flexibility in the use of charters and new school funds for schools that address needs of dropouts effectively.
- Make connections to postsecondary education, particularly community colleges.

Efforts to improve the educational pipeline are incomplete if they do not address the plight of youth who have dropped out of high school or are about to drop out. An added challenge is helping these students, who are the most disconnected from educational institutions, to regain their footing on a path toward a postsecondary credential that holds value.

The consequences of dropping out are devastating, both for the young people who fail to complete high school and for the state. In the old days, young people without education beyond high school could often get

family-sustaining work in service or manufacturing operations; today, they face lives of grinding economic struggle, virtually shut out from jobs that would allow them to build assets and support children of their own.

While a significant number of dropouts eventually complete a GED, this is a mixed blessing. Obtaining a GED is preferable to not earning any credential, but its benefits do not equal those of a regular high school diploma (National Research Council 2001). GED recipients fare less well than their diploma counterparts in postsecondary education and work. While many more GED recipients (30 percent) than dropouts (8 percent) obtain some postsecondary credits, less than 2 percent of GED holders compared to 36 percent of graduates complete four or more years of postsecondary education (National Research Council 2001). Similar patterns occur in labor market outcomes among dropouts, GED holders, and graduates (Sum, Mangum, Taggart 2002).

One of the most powerful things Ohio could do to improve the reach and equity of its high school reform efforts would be to address its dropout problem. Cleveland and Columbus are both among the nation's 35 largest cities with the lowest "promotion power" (lowest number of entering ninth graders who graduate four years later). High schools in these cities lose over 50 percent of their students (Balfanz and Letgers 2001).

Count dropouts in accountability measures.

A look at school practices and policies that produce such tragic outcomes suggests that these young people are as much "push-outs" as "dropouts." *The New York Times* put it this way in July 2003: "Many schools are trying to get rid of those who may tarnish the schools' statistics by failing to graduate on time. Even though state law gives students the right to stay in high school until they are 21, many students are being counseled, or even forced, to leave long before then." This could be an unintended consequence of No Child Left Behind's accountability provisions, and states must counteract it vigorously by ensuring that dropouts are counted accurately, that districts are held accountable for improving dropout outcomes, and that NCLB resources are used for after-school and year-round programming for older adolescents at risk of dropping out.

Few state accountability and data systems accurately track dropouts, but beginning to do so can be politically and technically complex. Pass rates on high-stakes graduation exams look worse if calculated as a percentage of ninth-graders who started high school in a given cohort rather than as a percentage of those who took the exam in twelfth grade. Yet counting dropouts accurately has both economic and educational benefits. Lower dropout rates are associated with an improved local economy.

- A recent study in Texas estimated the cost of school dropouts between 1987-1988 and 2001-2002 at \$488 billion in lost wages, decreased revenues, and increased public expenditures for welfare, unemployment, incarceration, and job training (Johnson 2002). Texas officials used this data to justify and build support for recent legislation that addresses the state's dropout problem.

Invest in and improve the alternative education system.

No state has an adequate system for dealing with its dropouts; Ohio is no exception. In general, two spheres of programming comprise what is generously called the "second chance" system. One sphere offers youth a reconnection to the education system through alternative schools where they can earn a diploma; the other offers more immediate help in entering the labor market through youth employment programs (e.g., Job Corps, YouthBuild), as well as programs designed for unemployed and low-wage adults.

Both alternative education and youth and adult employment/training programs have suffered from long-term under-investment, as well as marginalization from mainstream policy discussions and decisions—with predictable effects on the quality and quantity of their programming. As a result, programs serve many fewer than the numbers who need them. For example, in New York, a city with nearly half a million out-of-school youth, alternative programs have only about 2,500 slots (about 5 percent of the need) (DeJesus 2000). The

Workforce Investment Act serves less than 1 percent of eligible population (Sum et al. 2002), and funding for summer youth jobs has been completely eliminated.

Regardless of which parts of the second-chance “system” students enter, Ohio must ensure that students who are most behind get access to challenging academic content, intensive supports, engaging pedagogies, and connection to outside partners—including the community, employers, and postsecondary institutions. The more disconnected out-of-school youth require very targeted outreach and programming as well as more comprehensive services. Few schools focus specifically on serving this population, and those that do are often as marginalized as the youth they serve.

Fortunately, emerging, innovative efforts are involving these providers meaningfully in systemic improvement plans and enhancing their ability to connect youth to postsecondary credentials that have value in the labor market.

- At the community level, particularly in urban areas, some promising attempts link in-school and out-of-school resources and supports for older adolescents. For example, Chicago civic and community leaders have created After School Matters, an initiative to scale up out-of-school learning opportunities for older youth. The effort aims to reach more than half of Chicago’s teenagers by 2005, offering them supports and opportunities in the out-of-school hours. To deliver this programming, clusters of schools, parks, and libraries are linked together to form neighborhood “campuses” throughout the city. Currently, eighteen clusters (up from six in 2000) are home to the four After-School Matters programs, which focus on the arts (visual and performing), sports (playing and coaching), technology (Web design and robotics), and literacy (through storytelling). Each of these programs includes paid employment, apprenticeships with skilled adults, opportunities to teach others, and intentional skill building (Steinberg et al. 2003).

Allow flexibility in the use of charters and new school funds for schools that address needs of dropouts effectively.

At the institutional level, a robust number of impressive learning options have emerged with the help of flexible funding arrangements.

- High schools run by community-based organizations under contract with school districts, like YouthBuild or El Puente in Milwaukee, extend the school day by involving youth in community-development activities.
- “Flex” schools like Horizonte in Salt Lake City serve high school students, young parents, adults, and ESL students on a schedule that runs for twelve months a year, day and evening, with open entry and exit, advisory groups, and structured group activities to help students learn decision-making and teamwork skills.
- Participants in Jobs Corps and YouthBuild programs earn technical certificates and move on to community college career pathways, and Adult Basic Education programs recruit and provide supports to young adults as they attend community college.

Ohio has one of the best program models offering technical certification, a high school diploma, and up to one year of credit toward an Associate’s degree. ISUS Trade and Technology Prep, a community high school in Dayton, offers a program for high school dropouts that combines high school academics, college-level technical courses at a local community college, and hands-on skills practice.⁴ Students can earn a high school diploma and college credits and advance toward national construction certification or computer-related

⁴ ISUS is redesigning its postsecondary partnership to ensure that both the funding and the instructional practices support ISUS students’ success in postsecondary education.

certifications. Despite entering the school facing numerous challenges to success, 60 percent of ISUS students meet the graduation requirements, including passing statewide assessments and college courses—in two years.

Make connections to postsecondary education, particularly community colleges.

The success of ISUS is a reminder that community colleges are a key part of any strategy to re-engage and connect youth to postsecondary credential pathways. The accessibility and affordability of community colleges make them a potentially powerful bridge into the education system or labor market for older adolescents and young adults who have dropped out of high school.

At this point, however, community colleges do not have a strong track record serving students entering with serious skill deficiencies, significant financial needs, and family responsibilities. In part, this is because these students may not be prepared to enter a program leading to an Associate’s Degree or vocational certification without a GED, English language proficiency, or remedial courses. Many technical certificate training programs require reading and math skills at the ninth-grade level, and entering students with skills below that must first complete remedial or developmental courses, for which they usually do not receive credit.

Some community colleges are exploring ways to shorten the time it takes to develop the necessary skills and earn a credential, thereby creating more easily navigable pathways into credential programs. These colleges are redesigning traditional programs to better accommodate the support needs, time constraints, and employment imperatives of young adults. Their strategies include: contextualizing basic skills learning and speeding up progress towards credit by integrating developmental education or English language instruction into occupational or academic programs; breaking a single credential program into a sequence of modules that yield interim credentials recognized by local firms; and making scheduling more flexible by creating evening and weekend schedules and introducing on-line and self-paced course work.

- Such strategies in the context of a school have great promise for providing postsecondary success for youth least likely to achieve it. For example, **Portland Community College** enrolls over 2,000 high school-age students, making it the largest high school in Portland, Oregon. With multiple entry points, PCC Prep’s College Bound program allows students with as low as third-grade-level reading and math skills to enroll in non-credit and developmental education courses that link directly to credit-based career education programs. Eighty percent of the out-of-school youth who enter PCC’s high school completion program continue their education in the program, earn a diploma or a GED, return to a high school program, or obtain employment while simultaneously gaining college credits. As a dropout recovery and prevention program, PCC’s alternative pathway receives average daily attendance money for its students. When students move into college coursework, they become eligible for Pell grants as well.

Other policy approaches outlined elsewhere in this paper would have the added benefit of enabling Ohio to stimulate more successful efforts to serve dropouts. These include: permitting per-pupil funding to follow a dropout who reconnects to an alternative pathway toward a postsecondary credential, and creating weighted funding formulae that assign more value to these youth and encourage effective programming to serve them.

4. Create the systemic context to support these changes.

Strategies:

- Set a stretch goal.
- Integrate the K-12 and postsecondary data systems into a single system.
- Create governance mechanisms that improve secondary and postsecondary alignment of goals, planning, and budgets.

Achieving objectives 1 through 3 entails much greater coordination and incentives for cooperation than is the norm across the secondary and postsecondary sectors. In many respects, then, one of the more important roles Ohio can play is to act as a catalyst: set enhanced objectives for its education pipeline and put state-level systems into place that reflect and enable more formal interaction between its secondary and postsecondary sectors. The following three strategies support those aims.

Set a stretch goal.

Ohio can set a statewide numerical target for expanding the number of young people who complete both high school and a first postsecondary credential program. The goal should be ambitious but realistic, focused on completion not just access, and it should be disaggregated for the population groups least likely to succeed without attention and help: minorities, English language learners, low-income, and first-generation college goers. Ohio could, for example, commit to doubling the numbers of low-income young people who achieve a recognized postsecondary credential (AA, BA, Apprenticeship) by age 26. Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack called for just this earlier in the year when he declared that 90 percent of all Iowans should have a postsecondary credential.

To promote shared accountability, a visible campaign should inform the public about the state's goals and increase awareness about the value of higher education. Each year, state K-12 and higher education governing boards should submit to the governor and legislature progress reports on Ohio's secondary and postsecondary institutions. State leadership could go further by linking a percentage of any education budget increases to the implementation of strategies to achieve the state policy goals.

Integrate the K-12 and higher education data systems into a single system.

If Ohio wants to treat its educational institutions as a single pipeline, it needs to be able to view student progress along that pipeline as a single trajectory. This is impossible if the K-12 data system is incompatible with and disconnected from the higher education data system. States need to collect and report attainment and achievement outcome across K-12 and higher education for all youth over time. A unique identifier should be assigned to every student in the state upon entering a public institution. Outcomes should be tracked across institutions and across institutional levels. Florida and Illinois have gone the furthest in integrating their data systems.

Data from different systems should be warehoused and maintained together, not separately. The integrated data system should be housed in an entity beholden to neither the K-12 chief state school officer nor the state higher education executive officer. The system must also be committed to a careful presentation of evidence of state progress toward improvement goals. Regular disaggregated reporting of performance should be organized and presented in a form that is publicly accessible and easy to understand. (While student privacy issues are an important concern, states are developing ways to assign identifiers that protect privacy.)

Data systems should track each student's progress over time in school and in the labor market so both educational and economic success can be gauged. By linking education and employment data systems that are now separate, Ohio could know the attainment and achievement of students in all public education institutions that serve them—whether a public high school, a charter school, an alternative program in the second-chance or employment training system, or a college or university. It could also know the relationship between students' education and career outcomes.

Many states have the technical ability to collect longitudinal data on students through student records and unemployment insurance records, but only a few states (e.g., Florida, Illinois, Tennessee, and Texas) have begun to do so. Thirty-nine states have student unit record systems that monitor course progress in higher education, according to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Ohio, through the Board of Regents' management information system, is among them. These record systems cover as many as 70 percent of higher education enrollments nationwide. At least half of these systems are linked to other state

databases, such as high school records and wage data (Ewell, Schild, and Paulson 2003). Integrating these records more fully with K-12 data systems and with employment data systems is an achievable step.

Create governance mechanisms that improve the secondary and postsecondary alignment of goals, planning, and budgets.

To point high school reform toward improved postsecondary attainment, joint policymaking and communication between K-12 and postsecondary are needed on issues such as funding, accountability, data sharing, matriculation and transfer, student learning (curriculum, standards, and assessment), and teacher training and professional development.

Ohio's coordinating mechanism for the governance of K-12 and higher education could be a major asset in the preceding areas, if it is provided the statutory authority to allow it to work across sectors in four ways:

- *Managing an ongoing stakeholders' forum that calls for improved educational outcomes:* Only by mutual action can secondary and postsecondary education accomplish the policy goals recommended here. These could include reducing remediation, increasing postsecondary completion, and reducing enrollment and persistence gaps among white, minority, and low-income students.
- *Promoting and funding cross-institutional initiatives, implementing the kinds of initiatives that bring together institutions from all sectors:* For example, Ohio can increase its support for dual and concurrent enrollment. Broader student participation in these accelerated opportunities would compel secondary and postsecondary institutions to align curriculum, standards, assessments, and the transfer of academic credit.
- *Aligning performance goals and data and creating K-16 accountability systems:* Systems that share common goals and accountability systems will force K-12 and higher education governance bodies to look outward to linkages between the systems and the transitions students must make.
- *Creating more opportunities for integrated legislative policymaking:* These recommendations will be easier to accomplish, and more effective in their implementation, if there is an organizational base for K-16 policymaking and oversight.

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Jobs for the Future

Founded in 1983, Jobs for the Future is a leading innovator in strategies to accelerate education and career advancement for both young people and adults. Jobs for the Future provides research, consulting, and technical assistance on education and workforce development issues to public and private organizations throughout the United States and abroad. For more information on JFF, please visit the Web site at www.jff.org.