

Kentucky Case Study Report  
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Prepared for  
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*“Only our institutions of higher education can equip our people with the knowledge and skills which will make us productive in this new economy....I challenge you to articulate a new vision, propose a new method, show me a system more devoted to innovation than it is to turf, more concerned about the big picture than it is about its own place in that picture, and I'll work with you to find the money to do the job. We must have a system of higher education which is more responsive, more efficient, and more relevant to today's realities and tomorrow's needs. Our people deserve no less, and I will accept no less.”*

*Former Governor Paul Patton, Inaugural Address, December 12, 1995*

*“Kentucky is a state of fierce regional loyalties, and the regional universities are a major part of that feeling of loyalty.”*

*Dick Wilson, former capital bureau chief for Louisville Courier-Journal*

The tension between state needs and regional prerogatives has shaped Kentucky's pioneering efforts in education reform and its nine-year experience with the P-16 Council mechanism. In this case study we begin by describing the political and policy context for the establishment of the P-16 Council, including the educational reform initiatives that were adopted *prior to* the Council's creation in 1999. Following that we describe present-day education performance issues and challenges facing Kentucky and note apparent outcomes of the ambitious reform efforts. The remainder of the paper provides a basis for attempting to understand the role that the P-16 Council has played in those outcomes and, more generally, in the effort to build an efficient education system that meets state needs, consistent with former Governor Patton's vision. We cover the structure and operation of the Council, its priorities, its accomplishments and shortcomings, as assessed by council participants, and we offer our conclusions about the capacity of Kentucky's council mechanism to integrate its various reform efforts and align the education sectors to produce the competitive economy that the state desires.

### **The Context of Postsecondary Education Reform**

As evidenced by the opening citation from former Governor Patton's inaugural address, he took office in 1995 committed to an agenda of education reform. To that end he created a Task Force on Higher Education which engaged the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to assess higher education performance to assist the Task Force in making its recommendations. Among the findings reported by NCHEMS were the following challenges facing the state in designing an efficient and responsive education system:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As reported in October 15, 2002 NCHEMS paper by Aims McGuiness, *An Assessment of Postsecondary Education Reform in Kentucky*.

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- low educational attainment and high levels of adult illiteracy
- high dropout rates from high school that contribute to the adult illiteracy problem
- low college-going rates out of high school
- low rates of retention, transfer, and degree completion among college attendees
- low degree production in specialties critical to the new economy
- a highly fragmented and under-funded network of community colleges, technical institutes, and university two-year programs that is largely disconnected from regional educational and economic priorities
- no clearly defined mission for community or technical colleges to serve the under-educated adult population
- unproductive competition among universities and poor research performance in areas critical to the new economy.

The NCHEMS report cited some major barriers to improving these conditions. Among them are two factors that are very relevant to an examination of the P-16 Council:

- a system driven by the interests of institutions and “plagued by political and turf battles” – not by the needs of the people and the state’s economy
- a lack of an effective structure for statewide policy leadership to coordinate efforts of diverse institutions.

As referenced in the second quotation at the start of this paper, Kentucky has a strong culture of place – of region – which contributes to the challenge of harnessing institutions around statewide goals. Moreover, the economic and regional diversity of the state is reflected in huge discrepancies across regions in measures of preparation for, participation in, and success in, postsecondary education. Efforts to build a system around state needs had to proceed with careful consideration of regional differences.

Governor Patton sought no less than a total conversion of an economy that had been based on tobacco, coal mining, bourbon, and horse racing to one with medical, pharmaceutical, and other high tech industries. More so than other states that had begun working to increase numbers of college graduates, Kentucky faced the need to create the kinds of jobs that will keep college educated individuals from moving out of state. Its challenge was to increase both the supply of, and the demand for, individuals with postsecondary credentials in fields to compete in the new economy.

Patton, a Democrat, took office at a time when K-12 reform was in full swing. In the early 1980s, a group of concerned business leaders, parents and advocates came together to form the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a non-profit citizens advocacy organization that still exists today. Their purpose was to advocate for the improvement of an educational system that was performing toward the bottom of the fifty states. Their efforts, along with a ruling by the Kentucky Supreme Court that the public schools were offering inequitable educational opportunities, led to the passage by the Kentucky General Assembly in 1990 of a sweeping educational reform act, the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). The Act revamped Kentucky's education system in the areas of finance, governance, and curriculum in an attempt to provide equal educational opportunities for all of Kentucky's children regardless of the property wealth of the

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district in which they lived. It set higher educational standards, introduced new approaches to statewide assessment, and created additional support systems for teachers, families, and students.

Earlier efforts to reform postsecondary education during this period had been unsuccessful. The successful passage of K-12 reform legislation set the stage, then, for the ambitious postsecondary education reform legislation that followed seven years later. Governor Patton assumed office in 1995, declaring that reform in postsecondary education would be his top priority. In 1997 he won bipartisan support in the Legislature for major reforms to help Kentucky increase educational attainment in the interest of moving the state toward a more modern and competitive economy. House Bill 1 (HB1), also known as the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act, made key organizational and governance changes, established several trust funds to finance various reforms, and set performance goals to be achieved by 2020. The key governance provisions were as follows:

- The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) was created to replace the Council on Higher Education and was charged with developing a strategic agenda to achieve the goals of HB 1 and developing and submitting a biennial budget request for postsecondary education that would align resource with goals.
- A new Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) was created by removing all but one of the 14 community colleges from control of the University of Kentucky, removing the 15 technical colleges from the state bureaucracy, and merging them.
- The Strategic Committee on Postsecondary Education (SCOPE) was created, consisting of representatives from the Governor's office, the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the CPE, to serve as a public forum to exchange ideas about the future of higher education and to advise CTE in the discharge of its new responsibilities.

Through his support for this major structural reform, Governor Patton signaled his willingness to use some political capital to bring more centralized focus to postsecondary education. The battle to remove the community colleges from University control was politically charged and ultimately led to the departure of the university president Charles Wethington, who had opposed a number of the Governor's key reforms. Wethington was replaced by a supporter of the reform agenda. In addition, the Governor made strong appointments to key posts, including making strategic appointments to CPE and selecting Gordon Davies as its first president. CPE was created to have considerable authority and to report directly to the Governor, outside of the education cabinet.

One more major reform followed shortly thereafter. In 2000 the Kentucky Adult Education Act placed adult education within the Council on Postsecondary Education to elevate the priority of adult education and the importance of its students in meeting the goals of HB1. In the ten-year period from 1990 to 2000, then, the Kentucky legislature enacted three major reforms – in K-12, postsecondary, and adult education. Each reform was ambitious. Together they have created a major challenge for the state's leaders to

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pursue the goals of each reform in the context of building a seamless K-16 education system to increase education levels and spur economic growth.

The next several years saw tremendous activity in implementing the reform agenda – activity that spanned three different Governors as well as transitions in leadership of the newly created CPE. Democratic Governor Patton served a second term, until 2003. Higher education spending increased by forty percent in the first few years of the reforms but in 2001 the economy soured and higher education budgets were cut three years in a row. The most notable of his investments was the “Bucks for Brains” initiative which channeled significant sums of new money into endowed chairs and professorships at the state’s two research and six regional universities, helping to attract talented faculty and increase research funding. In addition, HB 1 created several trust funds that directed increased funding to the support of a variety of reform initiatives.

Another notable and nationally lauded initiative was the establishment of a public agenda for higher education that encouraged the institutions to work together toward the common purpose of improving educational attainment levels and the quality of life of Kentuckians. The public agenda is focused on five simple questions that direct attention to assessing the extent to which Kentucky is providing its citizens with accessible, affordable higher education that leads to degree completion and the attendant benefits for both individuals and the state as a whole. The state identified a set of indicators to measure progress toward the goals set within each of the questions, and began publishing annual reports summarizing that progress. A specific goal has been set to double the number of Kentuckians with baccalaureate degrees from 400,000 in 2000 to 800,000 by 2020, with strategies to achieve that goal focused on raising high school graduation rates, increasing college enrollment and completion among both recent high school graduates and adults, and attracting college-educated workers to the state.

After the initial reforms were begun, the state launched the “Education Pays” campaign, involving public service announcements on radio and television and the campaign slogan emblazoned on bumper stickers and posters across the state. Changing public attitudes about education is seen as an important factor in ultimately meeting the ambitious goals.

The reforms were fundamentally about superimposing statewide planning and a state public agenda onto a state with a strong culture of regionalism and postsecondary education politics characterized by competition among college presidents for resources. This proved especially challenging when the resource distribution advocated by CPE to implement a statewide public agenda was at odds with traditional resource allocation patterns that reflect history and politics. One casualty of this challenge was the tenure of the first president of CPE, Gordon Davies, whose contract was not renewed in 2002. Davies was replaced by Tom Layzell, formerly the commissioner of higher education in Mississippi, who retired in 2007 and has been succeeded by two interim presidents as the search continues for a permanent replacement.

Governor Patton was succeeded by Republican Ernie Fletcher, whose one term (2003-2007) encompassed several important education reform initiatives but was colored by a

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scandal and his eventual indictment for the administration's practices regarding the state merit system. Kentucky was one of 13 states that formed a new coalition under the American Diploma Project network (ADP) to improve high schools. That involvement helped shape a number of initiatives around the alignment of curriculum and assessments across high school and college during Fletcher's term.

- In 2004 CPE approved a statewide public postsecondary placement policy based on the ADP standards of college readiness.
- The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) convened groups of P-12 and postsecondary faculty, that, with input from business and other external stakeholders, developed competency standards in literacy and mathematics as a means to reduce remediation in college. The Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) approved these revised core standards in 2006.
- In 2006 the Board of Education approved an increase in high school graduation requirements which it characterized as a college preparatory curriculum for all students. Effective for the class of 2012, students must take mathematics each year, including Algebra II, and science coursework must incorporate laboratory components.
- In 2006 the General Assembly passed House Bill 197 to establish a pilot program in end-of-course testing for Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry. These exams will report on student performance in relation to the Commonwealth core standards.
- In 2006 the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 130 which required, beginning in 2006-07, diagnostic assessment of all eighth and tenth graders using the ACT Educational Progress Assessment System and the administration of the ACT college admissions and placement examination to all students in grade eleven to assess English, reading, mathematics, and science.

Democratic governor Steve Beshear was elected in November, 2007 and has faced challenging budget constraints in his efforts to advance education reform. His agenda faced a mid-year budget cut in his first year and a three percent cut in the 2008-09 state budget. The extent to which he will be a champion of education reform is as yet unknown.

### **Education Landscape Today**

Much has been written about the ambitious Kentucky education reform agenda with assessments falling into the "glass half full" or "glass half empty" categories but always acknowledging the progress made amid great challenges. Major accomplishments attributed to the reform efforts include (1) improvement in 8<sup>th</sup> grade performance on some national assessments, (2) huge increases in higher education enrollments, especially in the community and technical colleges and in adult basic education, (3) a much stronger and more responsive role of the two-year sector under the new KCTCS, (4) big gains in associate degree completion and in the number of certificates, (5) a drop in the adult

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illiteracy rate, and (6) a major increase in the percent of adults who have a bachelor's degree (although the percent remains low relative to other states).

Despite these improvements, Kentucky continues to perform poorly on most of the indicators used to compare state higher education performance in the National Center's report card, *Measuring Up*. While improved, indicators of middle and high school student preparation for college remain low relative to other states. The high school graduation rate has declined over the last decade, even as a higher percentage of those graduates are enrolling in college. While one-year retention rates of students compare well with other states, the percentage of first-time, full-time students who complete a bachelor's degree within six years is low. The production of bachelor's degrees has declined relative to the number enrolled, perhaps a result of the increased emphasis on the award of certificates or increased four-year enrollments. Overall performance on the pipeline from high school to college degree attainment remains very problematic: only 12 out of every 100 Kentucky ninth graders complete high school, go directly college, and attain an associate degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years. The national average is 18.

Efforts to keep college affordable, especially important for a low-wealth state like Kentucky, have been impeded by budget shortfalls, as is happening generally across the country. Kentucky higher education institutions are raising tuition and fees in an effort to compensate for budget cuts. Tuition in the state's public colleges and universities has increased by an average of 10 percent per year over the past 10 years, and by 12 percent per year over the past five. As tuition has increased at three to four times the rate of inflation, increases in family income have been less than the rate of inflation. Families in Kentucky devote a comparatively large share of income after financial aid to attend public institutions, even a community college. The state's investment in need-based aid is low compared to other states, and students take out larger loans.

One aspect of the reform agenda that has been particularly troublesome and political for years is the mechanism to assess K-12 performance and to use those assessments to determine college readiness. Triggered by concerns about flat reading scores on national assessments, the General Assembly replaced the existing assessment system with the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) in 1999. CATS, a high-stakes test used to assess school performance, has itself been controversial, with concerns that the new system had lowered academic standards. Continuing concerns about low school performance on national assessments has led to efforts to once again change the assessment regimen.

The issue has partisan dimensions with Republicans, who control the Senate, favoring pending legislation (Senate Bill 1) to replace CATS with a system that would track individual student performance over time and be referenced to national standards. Democrats, who control the House, voted against SB 1 and generally favor assessments designed to more closely reflect performance on courses in relation to state standards over nationally-normed grade-level exams. The teachers' union fears change to a new system that could be used as a means to evaluate teachers. The legislative action, in

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2006, to require ACT testing and to pilot end-of-year exams has added more complexity to the assessment debate. A CPE official noted that some in the K-12 community fear that ACT scores, when they are released, will show lower rates of proficiency than CATS scores show, revealing CATS standards as too low. Jon Draud, in one of his first major actions as Commissioner of K-12 Education, announced in March 2008 that he will convene a task force at the end of the 2008 General Assembly session to try to achieve consensus among the parties on the choice of assessment and accountability system. Clearly, the state continues to search for the right combination of tools to understand and improve educational performance.

A December 2007 report released by the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce provides a “glass half empty” perspective on the current education landscape after so much expended effort on reform. The report acknowledges the progress that has been made but cites the continued poor performance at most stages along the education pipeline. It notes that the state has made little progress with respect to the national average in increasing educational attainment and per capita income and expresses concerns about the state’s ability to produce, attract, and retain the college educated individuals that are critical to building a competitive economy.

The Chamber report cites a number of barriers to further progress. Among them are two that are highly relevant to our purpose in studying the operation and impact of the P-16 Council. One is the lack of structures and leadership to provide policy coordination and combat the institutional and regional competition that characterizes the state. The report bluntly states that “the state policy leadership and coordinating structure established in HB 1 is not working as intended,” citing widespread agreement among those interviewed in preparing the report that “the reestablishment of the CPE as an effective entity is essential to the future of postsecondary reform.”

Seemingly in response to the concern that CPE needs to play a stronger coordinating role, Governor Beshear issued an Executive Order in August 2008 reversing an action by his predecessor and moving CPE from the education cabinet to a direct reporting relationship to his office. This move returns the CPE to the original structure envisioned by the 1997 reform. The Executive Order cites the Chamber report and claims that change will “emphasis (sic) the importance of higher education in the Commonwealth and promote greater efficiency and economy.” A political news watcher quoted the Governor as saying of the interim status of CPE leadership, “to recruit the kind of national educational leader we need as the new CPE president, he or she must be a close advisor to the governor of the Commonwealth.”

Another barrier cited is lack of alignment. The Chamber’s report states that the appropriate connections among all levels of education that would ensure student success do not exist, noting in particular the misalignment of the CATS system with expectations for postsecondary-level study. As evidence of this lack of alignment, the report notes that over 50 percent of college freshmen need remediation in at least one subject.

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The report offers a number of recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly, including that the goals set forth in HB 1 be reaffirmed and that they redefine the goal “to establish a comprehensive, integrated strategy to develop a seamless (P-20) education system....” This recommendation raises the question of the role that the existing P-16 Council has played in all of this history and whether it can be an effective mechanism in furthering the ambitious goals of reform and alignment of Kentucky’s education systems.

### **Beginnings of the P-16 Council**

It may be a surprise to learn that the P-16 Council was established in 1999, given its absence from the discussion of the extensive reform agenda recounted above. But the P-16 Council is rarely, if ever, mentioned in all of the material we reviewed to provide the background on these ten years of reform. Those materials include published reports, news articles, and government documents. During our on-site interviews as well we found that mention of “the council” was usually interpreted to mean the Council for Postsecondary Education (CPE) before we clarified the subject of our inquiry. But the public record notwithstanding, we learned through interviews that the Council is viewed by many who participate as a valuable piece of the story.

CPE initiated the P-16 Council in 1999 in collaboration with the State Board of Education. It was viewed as a means for both sectors to obtain advice from each other, and other participants, as they carried out their expanded responsibilities under the reform agendas for K-12, postsecondary, and adult education. As stated on CPE’s website:

“The State P-16 Council was formed to help Kentucky achieve its ambitious goals for education reform by improving cooperation and communication among elementary, secondary, and postsecondary teachers and administrators. Kentucky trails national averages for percentages of its population that go to college, persist, and graduate. The State P-16 Council champions initiatives that motivate Kentuckians to complete high school and postsecondary education.”

Helen Mountjoy, the Governor’s cabinet secretary for education and workforce development, described the motivation for the P-16 Council’s formation in terms of the need to get people talking instead of finger pointing as they embraced the challenge of reforming education:

“...[W]hen the people at the Council on Postsecondary Education started talking about they’re not sending us qualified students, people over here responded with they’re not sending us qualified teachers. And off you go to the races. And conducting that kind of information exchange through the media was probably not the most effective way to actually benefit the people involved – those students at all levels. And so the notion was that reasonable people could actually sit around a table together and put some of this stuff on there without coming to blows, and that this would be a

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good thing for the state. Frankly, when we started I'm not sure that we looked a whole lot farther than that, than trying to eliminate some of the finger-pointing and to realize that we were all in this together."

These discussions were intended to provide advice to the Board of Education, the Council on Postsecondary Education, and the Council's other partner agencies on the preparation and professional development of teachers, the alignment of competency standards, and the elimination of barriers impeding student transition from preschool through the baccalaureate.

Reflecting the regionalism of the state's culture, the state P-16 Council was created to be part of a network of regional councils. According to one current member, the intent was for the statewide council to set priorities and have much of the work done at the regional level. In 2001 the General Assembly enacted legislation authorizing the CPE to encourage establishment of local P-16 councils. In the next session the General Assembly appropriated funding to serve as seed money to support local councils. There are now 22 local councils in place. No state funding, however, has been provided to support the local councils since the original seed money was allocated.

### **Council Structure and Operations**

The Council is a voluntary, cooperative effort among state agencies with no basis in state statute and no line item budget. According to the CPE website, there are 18 members representing a variety of state agencies with the Board of Education and the Council of Postsecondary Education having greater representation:

- Kentucky Board of Education (3 members)
- Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (3 members)
- State Commissioner of Education
- President of the Council on Postsecondary Education
- Educational Professional Standards Board (2 members)
- Kentucky Department of Education Director of Early Childhood Development
- CPE Vice President for Adult Education
- Executive Director of Technical Education
- Commissioner of Workforce Investment
- Executive Director of the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority
- A business representative
- A labor representative designated representative designated by the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board
- The Secretary of the Education Cabinet.

Notably absent from Council membership are legislators – reflecting the fact that the Council was created as a mechanism to increase conversation among state agencies with responsibilities in advancing the P-16 education agenda. There is no formal role for the Governor either and none of the three Governors who have served during the Council's

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existence has played a key role. In fact, one member commented that he wasn't sure that the current governor even knew the Council existed. The Governor's education cabinet secretary is a member; however, the Council is clearly not intended to be run as an extension of the Governor's cabinet. Rather, it is a collaborative effort among state agencies with clear lead roles for CPE and KBE.

Respondents all concurred that the Council, *as a Council*, does not take policy positions, does not lobby for legislation, and does not engage in action to implement the matters that it considers. Instead, it depends on the constituent agencies to act, consistent with each agency's mission with respect to the P-16 agenda. Diane Bazell, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs at CPE, explained that rather than set its own policies or take collective policy positions, the Council is a vehicle for getting departments and agencies to revise their policies. Cabinet secretary Mountjoy agreed:

“It is not so much a matter of trying to formulate legislation as it is trying to maximize the ability of the two levels to work together effectively and to do things that are of mutual benefit for the students of Kentucky. It was not perceived as something that was going to set a legislative agenda.”

Elaine Ferris, new Deputy Commissioner of Education, provided her take on the Council's lack of authority, having recently joined it: “...you put the idea out there and if the other agencies buy into it ...well they'll take it and ...create some kind of statute or regulation...” Jeanne Ferguson, member of KBE and current Council chair said the Council doesn't “spearhead” P-16 agenda but “works with” agencies on it. Phillip Rogers, executive director of the Education Professional Standards Board, agreed that the Council is a mechanism for bringing agencies together but not for telling them what to do. When asked about how the Council dealt with a controversial issue on assessment and whether it came to a vote, he said there was no vote because it was clear to Council members whose call it was and that “the department is going to do what the department is going to do...”

The Council meets quarterly for a full day. The chair of the council alternates annually between the Kentucky Board of Education and CPE, as does the staffing of the Council. In practice, CPE plays a large role regardless of who is the official chair and staff. Said Bazell, “I've been a key driver for sure, but no one person or organization can do it alone.” Some respondents did note a bit of imbalance between the two sectors, citing a stronger role played by CPE, but others said that participation and leadership by CPE and KDE is “mostly equal.” One member noted that “were it not for the CPE, we wouldn't have the council we have today. They're the catalyst that's made it work.” Both KDE and CPE maintain information on the Council on their respective websites; however, the KDE information only includes links to meeting materials (minutes and agendas) from 2004-2007 while CPE cover meetings that occurred from 2001-2007.

CPE vice president Bazell said it was a conscious decision not to have staff assigned specifically to the Council so as not to “ghettoize” anyone with a P-16 title. That would

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create a new silo which was not the intent of the Council, she said. In part for that same reason, the Council has no general fund budget or direct authority.

Another reason for the lack of funding is the assumption that the local P-16 councils would perform much of the “real work” of P-16 reform. Perhaps as a result of the strong political culture of regionalism in Kentucky, the state-local council model seems to reflect the belief that policy change does not occur with “top down” edicts from the state. Said one respondent:

“It took me 15 years on the State Board to really appreciate the fact that because you change policy at the state level does not mean you change practice at the local level. If we really want to change practice at the local level I think there need to be more local initiatives.”

Council member Philip Rogers of the Educational Professional Standards Board offered an example of the importance of local implementation. He stressed that if Kentucky is to shape its teacher and principal training programs to be really collaborative and “highly clinical” so as to improve student learning and college readiness, “it’s going to take regional groups to make that happen.”

Although there are differences of opinion on the desired relationship between the state Council and the locals, and the balance between “top down” and “bottom up” initiative, it is clear that the local councils were always intended to play a key role. Most describe the current relationship as one in which the state Council sets priorities for the local councils to work on – perhaps as pilots which would be tested before major statewide policy changes were made. But some respondents cited some difficulty with this model. Jon Draud, Commissioner of Education, noted that the local councils have tended to be driven by local agendas rather than coalescing around a few issues of statewide concern. Bazell noted that the state Council can’t impose requirements on local councils without providing the funding that most people hope will be forthcoming to support the local councils.

Several respondents noted the huge variation in capacity and output across the 22 local councils with only one – in Northern Kentucky – regularly cited as having much capacity to act. Although the state Council intends to request state funding to support the Councils, most feel that the capacity of local councils will depend on their ability to raise outside funding – something that the Northern Kentucky council has done successfully.

The statewide P-16 Council is just one on a long list of committees that CPE staffs and with which it works, according to the CPE website. Some of those committees have jurisdiction over topics central to P-16 alignment, such as the listed committees on college access, developmental education, transfer, STEM, faculty development, adult learners, and quality and accountability. This structure signals the breadth of the role of CPE, consistent with the 1997 reform vision, but also indicates that not only does the P-16 Council not have authority to develop or implement policy, it competes with many other advisory bodies for the ear of the main players in the state bureaucracy.

### **Council Priorities**

The CPE website has a “frequently asked questions” section about the Council. In response to the question “What objectives is the Council pursuing” is the listing of three priority items:

- Aligning the curriculum and requirements between high schools and colleges to make clear what every student needs to know and be able to do at each educational level
- Raising the quality of teachers through improved preparation and professional development
- Increasing the number and diversity of students attending college by stressing programs that persuade parents and students to plan early for advanced education.

Our interviews with Council members confirmed the top two priorities although we heard much more about efforts to decide upon, and align, assessments than about aligning curriculum. The overriding priority of which we heard mention was to reduce the need for remedial instruction in the postsecondary sector which the Council is attempting to address by the strategies of alignment of curriculum and assessments, improved teacher quality, and more attention among Kentuckians to preparing for college readiness.

Another priority is to develop a P-20 data base that will allow tracking individual student progress across sectors and over time. On the data front, the Council is also working with member agencies to develop a set of indicators of progress in meeting the state’s goals, from early childhood through college and the workplace.

Improving the transfer of credit from KCTCS institutions to universities and from high school to postsecondary is another priority of the council. This has directed attention to issues such as dual enrollment, advanced placement, and the transferability of technical credits toward degree attainment.

Securing funding for the local councils is another priority. This is seen as a prerequisite for achieving most of the P-16 alignment agenda since the focus seems to be less on statewide policy change than on fostering regional efforts. Representative Frank Rasche, Chair of the Education Committee, explained that there are legislative efforts to codify and fund local councils but not the state Council because of the belief that more happens locally. As one example of local efforts, K-12 Commissioner Draud commended the steps taken in one region to smooth the transfer of credit and voiced hope that other regions would take similar actions. He did not indicate that there was any priority on developing statewide policies or guidelines around transfer of credit. As another example, Mountjoy spoke of a regional council she had served on that succeeded in getting local business, workforce, schools, and colleges together to determine how best to fashion the region’s 4<sup>th</sup> year mathematics curriculum once the state’s high school

graduation requirements were changed – and to align the curriculum with local community and technical colleges. She noted that these things are easier to do at the local level but won't be accomplished without staff for the regional councils.

### **Council Accomplishments**

Identifying the accomplishments of the P-16 Council is difficult because its role is advisory and so many other players have had a major influence on P-16 reform activity. We will address Council members' perceptions of the value added by the Council in the next section. Here we report official pronouncements of Council accomplishments along with any areas where interviewees cited the Council playing a key role in a particular outcome.

The CPE website answer to the question of “what has the Council done so far” includes the following points:

- sponsored Kentucky's participation in The American Diploma Project to help align high school graduation standards with specified postsecondary and employment needs
- sponsored statewide teams of P-12 teachers and postsecondary faculty in mathematics and literacy who recommended consistent expectations for student learning to reduce the need for postsecondary remediation
- endorsed large-scale projects to improve mathematics and science teaching in the middle schools
- promoted diagnostic testing in mathematics to help high school students identify academic deficiencies that they should correct before entering college
- promoted funding proposals for innovative approaches to teacher education and endorsed statewide symposia of chief academic officers and deans of arts and sciences and education to improve the preparation and teaching effectiveness of P-12 teachers
- endorsed a large-scale statewide survey of high school age youth about their attitudes toward postsecondary education
- endorsed a statewide public communication campaign to promote postsecondary education for all Kentuckians
- coordinated involvement of the Kentucky Virtual University in projects to extend the access of education to students of all ages and to expand professional development opportunities for teachers
- sponsored a \$20+ million statewide GEAR UP grant to prepare economically disadvantaged middle school students for college
- oversaw the formation of local P-16 councils across the Commonwealth.

Interviewees strongly concurred that joining the America Diploma Project was a spur to many following achievements and they credited the Council with bringing ADP to Kentucky. The move to increase graduation requirements, although officially accomplished by the KBE, was also credited in part to the Council, because it was a

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direct result of ADP involvement. Business became more involved in the graduation requirement issue due to the Council and through that participation business representatives were able to successfully make the case that students need the same level of rigor in high school whether they go on to postsecondary education or go directly into the workforce.

Some interviewees credited the Council with advancing discussions about standards and with progress on assessment and action on statewide placement exams and benchmarks. Some, however, countered that the Council has not played that big a role in the ongoing assessment debates. Several people mentioned Council accomplishments that can be directly attributable to the interactions across stakeholder communities that the Council provides. For example, Mountjoy said the Council helped expand communication with the business community and private universities around admissions and other issues. Rogers said the Professional Standards Board strengthened its relationship with CPE because of the Council and helped improve educational leadership programs. Another respondent cited as an accomplishment the Council's efforts to engage the public around its efforts to increase standards and expectations around college going.

The Council was also credited with getting student identifiers added to their high school transcripts, giving colleges a means to track and report back to schools on the performance of their students. One member saw this as an example of how having an item repeatedly appear on the Council agenda can eventually lead to action.

Accomplishments of the local councils were cited by some respondents. As noted, the Northern Council was regularly mentioned as the most effective local council. With the help of money from Toyota, that council has made some inroads into its goal of improving mathematics instruction in K-12 schools. Other local councils have reportedly made progress in getting business sector involvement in helping understand the kinds of skills that need to be emphasized in high school to ensure that students are ready for the workplace. Progress at the local level is seen as highly contingent upon the ability to attract outside funding – leading Dave Adkisson, a statewide Council member and president of the Kentucky Chamber, to characterize the local P-16 councils as a “patchwork” situation with “spotty” results.

### **Value Added by the P-16 Council**

An important purpose of this study of P-16/P-20 councils is to understand if and how the council mechanism adds value to the work that would occur whether or not the council existed. This is a key question because a council is typically superimposed on existing agency structures and does not itself hold the power to legislate or even to implement legislative or executive directives. The value of the Kentucky P-16 Council, and most other councils, comes from the ability to influence the work of existing agencies and organizations. In this case, that includes its ability to influence the network of 22 local P-16 councils.

There is a significant difference between the Kentucky Council and many others, including those in Rhode Island and Arizona which were also subjects of our study. The Kentucky Council has no specified mandate to provide recommendations to the Governor. It is merely a structure for agencies to advise one another. As such, its ability to influence agency agendas is likely more constrained because it cannot depend on the power and influence of the Governor to endorse or act upon its recommendations. Instead, its value stems on the willingness of agencies – primarily CPE and the Department of Education – to take action. The glass half empty perception of this model is reflected in the Chamber’s 2007 report, which said, “The perception of some is that the P-16 Council has served more as a debating and discussion forum than as an effective means to address critical, cross-agency issues.”

But our interviews revealed much support for the glass half full view that such “debating and discussion” is indeed valuable for two related reasons – it enhances communication across agencies and, by so doing, it influences each agency’s agenda. Interviewees also found value in the Council’s influence over the local P-16 councils.

***The Council enhances communication***

Council member Phillip Rogers explained how lack of authority does not preclude the value of communication:

“They don’t have any authority, but when you have the Commissioner and the President of the Council on Postsecondary Education, you have the Secretary of Education sitting there, you have the developmental-ed folks there ... you have the vocational-ed folks there, you’ve got the workforce development folks sitting at the table... if you just walked in a room and put those folks at a table and locked the door and walked out... something’s going to happen....”

Cabinet secretary Mountjoy strongly echoed this view, commenting that “if you’re going to break down the silo you have to know what’s happening inside the other silo” and adding that this kind of cross-agency learning would not have happened without the Council. Bazell, of CPE, shared her view that the Council is “the invisible magnet pulling these forces together” and that without it, people would not be talking to one another. K-12 Commissioner Draud confirmed that people wouldn’t be communicating with each other without the Council. Several others described the Council as a place to share information. This is certainly confirmed by a review of the meeting minutes which document a wide variety of informational reports made to the Council over its nine-year existence.

Even Chamber President Adkisson, who favors more authority for CPE and the Council, sees the communication fostered by the Council as a “good first step.” And somewhat surprisingly with the Legislature lacking a formal place at the table, Representative Winters acknowledges the value of communication: “I think the greatest role at the P-16 Council is to bring all the stakeholders to the table and discuss the major issues.”

***Through communication, the Council influences agency agendas***

Bazell described the Council as a vehicle for getting partner agencies to revise their policies. A prime example of this is the increase in graduation requirements. Other examples include the addition of the student ID on transcripts, mentioned above, and efforts by the Educational Professional Standards Board to reshape their masters and principal training programs to better prepare professionals to implement the P-16 reform agenda. Said Rogers of these efforts to change policies and practices, “I am a small agency so I benefit from using the Council as leverage.”

Representative Winters provided an example of how the Council affected legislation which will, in turn, affect the agency agendas. He credited the Council’s persistent attention to STEM issues with helping him get legislation adopted that would establish a STEM Initiative Task Force, administratively housed in CPE, to develop a statewide strategic and business plan to include goals and measurable benchmarks for improving education and outcomes in STEM fields. He agreed that by having a lot of stakeholders present at meetings, the Council can bring pressure on agencies to take actions they may otherwise not take.

An interesting contrast in perspective was provided by two members with respect to the grand agenda facing the partner agencies in the Council – integrating the three major reforms of the 1990s – K-12, postsecondary, and adult education reform. Bazell said that those reforms were never intended to be part of a whole, integrated agenda and credited the Council with bringing them together so that each partner agency would implement reform in a more comprehensive manner. Adkisson of the Chamber had a different view, offering that while each reform is good, the Council had not yet succeeded in bringing them together into coordinated P-16 reform.

***The Council influences local approaches to P-16 alignment***

As noted previously, there is a strong view among the players that much of the real work of P-16 alignment necessarily occurs at the local level. Respondents lauded the benefits of communication across parties at the local level, just as they did for the state arena. Mountjoy, who had previously served on a local council, offered that without a local council structure there would not be any emphasis on people interacting effectively across organizational boundaries. As an example she cited that people responsible for curriculum in the different counties within one region did not know each other well until the council structure brought them together. These interactions made a significant difference in the sharing of professional development opportunities and in their dealing with issues of college admissions. Even more valuable, she said, was the “real communication with the business community” which for reasons she doesn’t understand, is missing at the state Council level. For example, business leaders in one region arranged for faculty to go on field trips to local businesses to gain an appreciation for what business was looking for in graduates and for the two to agree on what business could offer to do in terms of providing mentoring and internships for students.

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While many respondents found value in local council activity, there is less agreement on the extent to which the state Council has been able to integrate local activities or set priorities for the local councils to align with state priorities. Adkisson, and the Chamber as reflected in its 2007 report, find statewide coordination lacking. But Mountjoy gave examples of how the state Council affected the agenda of the local council on which she served – directing its attention to issues, such as dual credit, that would likely not have gotten much attention had it not been raised at the state level. Charles McGrew, Director for Information and Research, cited another form of coordination between state and local levels. He said that the local councils are the most important users of the data that are generated by CPE and shared with the state Council.

### **Barriers to Greater Success**

Perhaps it is not surprising, given the enormity of the reform task facing the P-16 Council, that respondents had more to say about barriers and shortcomings to Council achievements than they did about accomplishments and value added by the Council. At the same time, the Kentucky Council is one of the first in the nation and one might expect a more sanguine assessment of its accomplishments by now. Certainly it was puzzling to hear K-12 Commissioner Draud say that the state Council is “just now really starting to get their teeth into these issues,” even though he added “I might be wrong about that.”

There were four major explanations offered for the lack of sufficient progress made by the state P-16 Council.

#### ***Lack of authority***

Even among those members who found much to commend in the value of communicating across agencies, there was recognition that the Council is hamstrung by its lack of authority. Said one member, trying “to put feet on these recommendations” is tough, since the Council can only make suggestions. Representative Rasche cited as the “biggest weakness” the lack of accountability to anyone since there is no mandate and no direct involvement by the Governor. If the Council were charged to make recommendations to the Governor, as is the case with other state Councils, the lack of statutory authority would not be as problematic. Rasche added that the Governor’s involvement could help move the Council from studying issues to accomplishing things.

Adkisson described the Council as “stuck without a mandate in the middle of K-12 and higher education,” lacking the ability to make things happen. Another member was more specific about what more authority would look like. He said he would like to see the General Assembly require the Council to bring forward reports to the Legislature as a united front. As it is, the Legislature hears only from each agency separately. When asked what is preventing the Council from doing that, he implied that they have no reason or legitimacy now to do so, since the Legislature does not invite, or expect, the Council to report out as a Council. Lack of statutory authority also means lack of an identified

budget. Many members feel strongly that a budget is needed at least to support local councils.

***Insufficient participation***

The lack of formal participation by the Legislature is seen as a barrier, as is lack of involvement by the Governor. Some members believe that having the Governor's cabinet secretary is sufficient participation from the Governor. However, the recent order by Governor Beshear to restore CPE to an independent status reporting directly to the Governor might be cause to reconsider whether the Cabinet Secretary can effectively represent the Governor when CPE plays such a large role in the Council. The role played by CPE is itself an issue raised by some members, with some feeling that the agenda is driven too much by CPE. In addition to a greater voice by K-12 to balance CPE, there are calls for more seats on the Council for business and labor so that the Council can hear directly from these groups. The Chamber would like to see a stronger role for the Cabinet for Economic Development.

***Lack of effective leadership***

A number of responses pointed to the need for more effective leadership, even if not stated precisely in those terms. Observing that the Council is not likely to, nor should, get much legal authority, one member said the Council just needs to be more effective. Another suggested this might be done by narrowing the vision and becoming more focused on specific goals. Yet another called for one of these priorities to be seeking greater public support for the work of the Council.

Representative Winters pointed more directly to leadership issues saying that when he attends the meetings he does not “sense the kind of urgency that ought to be existing there, and I think that all relates to the leadership.” And Adkisson expressed one of the main themes of the Chamber's report in finding that the leadership exercised by CPE had been unable to prevent university presidents from pursuing their own objectives. He cited leadership as the biggest lever for moving forward and lack of leadership as the biggest obstacle.

***Lack of state-regional coordination around policy***

It is fair to say that Kentucky is still seeking the right balance between the state and local P-16 councils. All agree that local action is needed to implement change and that local councils seem to be an effective mechanism for that, if they have resources. But there seems to be a lack of agreement on how the state-local relationship is supposed to work. Some want the state Council to set priorities for the locals so that all parts of the state are working on the same issues. Others see the locals as raising issues to bubble up to the state. No one seems sure how policy change is to occur either way. Past experience has convinced some that state policy edicts don't translate to local policy implementation. But with local councils largely setting their own agendas, it is unclear how local priorities might, collectively, result in consensus for state policy change.

A good example of the quandary is found in the dual enrollment issue. Dual enrollment has been identified as a strategy for increasing college readiness and college going but

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there are no statewide eligibility criteria for dual enrollment. Local councils and institutions develop their own criteria, posing a severe challenge to any statewide effort to make concurrent enrollment an effective part of its alignment strategy. The Council has not been in a position to craft statewide policy from disparate local policies and practices. Lack of authority and funding at the state level prevent the Council from taking even small steps toward statewide policy development such as requiring local councils to submit reports. Bazell summed up the issue by agreeing that the state-local dynamic is “not where we want it to be.”

### ***Inability to Apply Policy Levers***

In addition to these structural and organizational barriers, respondents mentioned three specific areas where the Council has failed, thus far, to accomplish some tasks viewed necessary to achieving P-16 alignment. Interestingly, these address three of the four policy levers that the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education in its policy report, *Claiming Common Ground*, advised states to use to achieve P-16 alignment:

#### ***(1) Unresolved issues with assessment***

Despite considerable work and policy initiatives over the last decade, Kentucky is still struggling to align assessments across high school and college. While not alone in this struggle, several respondents mentioned the continued lack of alignment between CATS and college readiness standards as a failed endeavor. Lack of alignment between the adult and postsecondary sectors, with the GED not signaling college readiness, is another major problem in view of the priority placed on adult education in the state. Debates over CATS, ACT, and end-of-course exams continue, debates which, according to the Chamber’s report, “are sending mixed signals to schools and students and are seriously undermining the efforts of schools to improve the preparation of students for postsecondary education.”

#### ***(2) Lack of a data system***

Despite the step of adding a student identifier to high school transcripts, the Council has not made as much progress on developing a longitudinal student data system as observers know is needed to track and improve outcomes, consistent with state goals.

#### ***(3) Lack of financial incentives for collaboration***

As noted earlier, the Council and its main player CPE continue to struggle against the culture in which postsecondary institutions compete for resources and students. Without authority over resources there is no way to provide financial incentives to spur collaboration among these institutions. Similarly, lack of funding for core staff at the regional councils rules out the state Council’s use of fiscal incentives to bring faculty together or otherwise promote collaboration.

## **Sustainability**

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As with the half full/half empty perspectives above, there is good news and bad news on the issue of sustainability. The good news is that the viability of the state Council is not tied to any politician as is the case in other states. This council has already spanned three gubernatorial administrations – across political parties from Democrat to Republican and back to Democrat. And as a voluntary effort largely between CPE and KDE, it is noteworthy good news that the Council has survived several changes in the top leadership of those agencies. Additionally, there is nowhere near the legislative hostility at not being part of the formal structure, as there is in Rhode Island for example. Legislative leaders attend the meetings, even though they are not members.

The bad news is that the lack of ownership by the Governor or any other politicians or either party could mean that while it survives, it does so with only limited impact. In fact, it may be that the Council has survived because it has stayed on the sidelines on some of the battles over contentious issues like CATS. Or as one member noted, the Council was able “to fly under the radar screen” due to its lack of statutory authority and visibility.

Observers are looking for more than survival, though, and many have considered structural changes. Representative Rasche thinks it might be time to give the Council some legislative authority and a budget and hold it accountable for results. He believes that the Governor needs to become more involved. Bazell agrees that statutory authority is needed because of continual turnover of key players but is not certain how much specificity such a statute should have.

A few models were described by interviewees but there is no real movement afoot to go forth with any of them. Under one model the Council would become some type of “super policy entity” with the ability to have a role in state policy making independent of its constituent agencies. This model was termed a “train wreck” by one member, likening it to “tearing down the house to build a fence.” A second model would be to formalize its role as supporting local council initiatives and providing a forum for ideas without granting the state Council a formal role in state policy making. This model would hardly seem to provide leadership over the three-part reform agenda. A third option would be to stop short of creating a super agency but have the Legislature authorize or require the Council to bring forward collective reports and recommendations.

The Kentucky Chamber has probably put the most thought into new models, as it is convinced that the current model is not capable of imposing statewide order on the centrifugal forces of regionalism and institutional competition. Chamber President Adkisson said, rather than discuss what kind of mandate might increase the effectiveness of the Council, the Chamber is calling on the Governor and leaders of the General Assembly to form a high-level policy group – with legislative and executive branch representation – to consider what structures might best allow the state to move more rapidly in achieving P-16 alignment. He believes that Governor Beshear will address the Chamber’s recommendation soon.

## Observations and Conclusions

The lesson from Kentucky's nine years of experience with the statewide P-16 Council may well be that there is a trade-off between longevity and influence. The Council has been in existence nearly ten years but appears to play more of a peripheral role than the other state councils we studied. Mention of the Council is notably absent in most of the research and news reports about the implementation of Kentucky's policy reforms. And surprisingly at the time of our visit, several interviewees commented that they knew little about the Council because they had only recently joined or had attended only a few meetings. When turnover does change Council membership, one would expect high level officials to know something substantive about the Council even before serving on it. Yet one prominent new member had "no idea" about the Council's priorities in advance of that member's first meeting. Another prominent member described the state Council as "just now getting active." It is hard to escape the conclusion that the Council has not been a huge factor in the great strides Kentucky has made in its reform agenda.

Kentucky has indeed been a national model for education reformers. The state seems to have all of the substantive components of a reform agenda in place but has not found the mechanism to best carry it out. It has made excellent use of national policy experts and has responded to their advice, as much as any state has, to try to guide the priorities of individual institutions around a statewide agenda for educational attainment and economic development. The "five questions" accountability system is the best example of setting an education agenda around statewide needs. Each of the three major reforms was an attempt to improve statewide outcomes with respect to the five questions. But the collective activities of CPE, KDE, their partner agencies on the statewide P-16 Council, and the regional councils have not brought the pieces together as well and as quickly as many would have hoped or expected.

CPE is viewed by at least the business stakeholders represented by the Chamber as ineffective. The Strategic Committee on Postsecondary Education (SCOPE) that was set up to advise CPE has cancelled its last several meetings and its status is unclear. The local councils have the legitimacy but not the resources to take action. Even with resources the local councils could not, through their independent actions, create state policies to further state goals. And the statewide Council is searching for ways to have more influence over policy agendas and over local councils. The conclusion of the Chamber's report that "the next step is to establish a comprehensive, integrated P-20 framework for reform" should raise serious questions about the adequacy of current structures.

### *Use of policy levers to close the divide*

A central purpose of the project is to determine whether the P-16/P-20 council mechanism is, or can be, an effective means of bridging the divide between K-12 and postsecondary education governance structures that was described in the National Center's report *The Governance Divide*. In its follow-up report, *Claiming Common Ground*, the National Center recommended that states use four policy levers to close the

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divide and achieve better results: alignment of curriculum and assessments, fiscal incentives, linked data systems, and accountability that reaches across sectors.

All of these levers have received attention in Kentucky – perhaps because Kentucky has sought and used the advice of the National Center and other policy experts who promote their use. But these are *policy* levers and the P-16 Council is not itself playing a big role in policy development. It has had considerable impact on curriculum alignment, through its sponsorship of statewide teams of school and college faculty to develop common expectations in mathematics and language arts, and its endorsement of those teams’ recommendations. It has played a smaller role on the more contentious issue of aligning assessments, on which the reform efforts have largely stalled pending the outcome of the K-12 Commissioner’s new task force.

Responsibility to use finance policy to align budgets with strategic goals was largely delegated to CPE, not the Council, and at least according to the Chamber report, CPE has not been able to resist traditional institution-based approaches to resource allocation. State budget shortfalls have thwarted Governor Patton’s original intent to establish incentives through the various trust funds aimed at specific outcomes. The P-16 Council is making little progress on developing a common data system, as it encounters many issues regarding agency turf which it is not designed to mediate or resolve.

Kentucky’s accountability system provides an excellent opportunity for the state’s leaders to monitor its progress in educational performance across the P-16 divide. More than most states, it tracks statewide, not institutional, outcomes and includes measures of readiness *for college* and contributions to the economy *after college*, in addition to the traditional measures of performance *in college*. But the accountability system is an initiative of CPE, rather than the P-16 Council, raising the question of how this most hopeful component of reform and alignment can be implemented effectively.

With no immediate threats to the P-16 Council’s existence, and with such a strong foundation on which to build an aligned system of education, the “glass half-full” perspective here is to assume that, spurred by the Chamber’s recommendation to go back to the drawing board on P-16 or P-20 structures, the state’s leaders will devise an approach that builds on the strengths of the existing P-16 Council but gives it the influence to effect real policy change.