

Readiness in Brief

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With support from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, NEBHE has published two new briefing papers with its partners in the College Ready New England initiative spotlighting innovative practices, policies and key steps to increase educational attainment for underserved students.

NEBHE's 2007 summit on college readiness identified college readiness as a shared endeavor and responsibility of students and families, K-12 education and higher education. NEBHE's approach then and now is to: catalyze ongoing policy dialogue on what it means to be "college- and career-ready"; identify graduation pathways and "blended models" of youth transitions to postsecondary education for diverse learners and nontraditional (low-income, first-generation college attendees, underrepresented minority) students; and promote "model" early college commitment programs for replication throughout New England and nationwide.

One of the new NEBHE papers, "Readiness Revised: State Strategies and Innovations to Improve College and Career Success for Underrepresented Students," notes that philanthropic foundations, corporations, federal and state government and private individuals each play a critical role to ensure that students and families receive the financial and academic supports necessary to succeed in postsecondary education.

The paper lauds New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and schools Chancellor Joel Klein for their work in promoting the city's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation, and Maine

Gov. John Baldacci for his efforts to boost college readiness in Maine.

"Readiness Revised" urges the six New England states to foster ways to transform educational attainment and dramatically increase outcomes for underrepresented student populations.

These innovative steps would include requiring active collaboration between local departments of education and community-based organizations to combat the dropout crisis. They would also create levers to hold higher education departments and institutions accountable for their role in impacting college readiness for incoming freshmen and use projects supported by foundations as a resource to impact work within schools and districts statewide. To guide and prioritize school interventions, the paper urges governors and state legislators to set measurable goals for college and career success and create "community education boards" to oversee and align community resources and strategic planning for program development. And it calls for aligning financial aid and state budget policies to create a shared investment and responsibility to support college and career readiness.

The companion paper, "Aligned by Design," aims to build upon the work of NEBHE and its regional partners by featuring best practices and lessons learned from deliberate K-12 and higher education partnerships in which both "segments" join to align standards, assessments, course content and expectations. The paper draws on national and regional examples of successful collaborations among districts, institutions and education systems and provides models for

achieving alignment that are "replicable" and suitable for statewide "scaling."

"Aligned by Design" draws upon interviews with policy experts and academics and data to measure improvement. The paper focuses on early assessment programs between K-12 and higher education to promote postsecondary readiness and success and alignment of K-12 and higher education in terms of standards, course content and knowledge, professional development, expectations and graduation pathways, including, for example, early college and dual-enrollment programs.

The authors urge state leaders in business, government and education across the region to recognize the potential contributions of community and technical colleges and set measurable goals for college and career success and work toward aligning financial aid and state budget policies.

States need to develop financial incentives to catalyze K-12 and higher education collaboration, rather than exacerbate the divide between the sectors as most state finance systems do. In addition, high school leaders need to present diagnostic information to students through early assessments so that students can have an idea where they stand with respect to academic preparedness no later than 11th grade, well before entering college and the workplace.

In many ways, college readiness begins with collaboration.

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