

Coming Home

EVAN S. DOBELLE

You can't go home again.

Or so they say. I have the rare opportunity to come home to New England. Moreover, I have the high honor of leading an organization that I believe will have quite a bit to say about whether the future of New England will be marked by worsening social and economic polarization or by true commonwealth.

The polar route is too familiar. Punish school districts because they are poor. Allow privilege to dominate college admissions. Build a wall between the college campus and the surrounding community. View the world beyond our national borders as little more than a source of cheap labor. Go it alone.

The route to shared regional prosperity, in contrast, is marked by partnership: innovative pre-K-20 educational partnerships, seamless pathways between two-year and four-year colleges, and a shared international savvy that seeks to understand and engage the world's vibrant cultures and emerging markets.

I come to NEBHE knowing something about this business of partnership. As president of Middlesex Community College, I had the experience of building new collaborations in the very different communities of Bedford and of Lowell, Mass. At Trinity College, I had the privilege of forging a remarkable partnership that bound together a private liberal arts college and a complicated Hartford community. In San Francisco and Hawaii, we energized huge urban

institutions with initiatives that revived neighborhoods as we forged vital partnerships with business and labor.

Unfortunately, however, I return to a New England whose commitment to educational excellence is under siege in Washington and under strain here at home.

Our region's knowledge-driven economy depends upon successful, accessible higher education systems. Yet the recent higher education budget proposals from the administration in Washington, and its recent revision of Pell Grant eligibility formulas, represent an extraordinary assault on higher education access and affordability.

People everywhere exploit the name "New England" to convey an image of superior higher education. But we don't use it to our own advantage.

From the Morrill Act that created land-grant universities in the 1860s through the post-World War II GI Bill and the Pell Grant legislation of the 1970s, our nation's leaders have recognized that educational opportunity is the ticket to the American Dream—and the hallmark of an upwardly mobile society. Now, some in Washington would stand squarely in



the door of our colleges and universities and tell middle-class working people, single parents, poor, minorities and recent immigrants that they need not apply. We need to resist these efforts to privatize opportunity.

In addition, we need to be more innovative here in New England. That begins with *meaningful* early childhood education programs for all our children. Kids who had effective pre-K experiences whether at Boys Clubs, YMCAs, CYOs or Head Start centers, tend to thrive. Kids who didn't may be already left behind when they enter first grade, destined for a life of remediation at every successive level. Yet the Head Start program for lower-income families is always underfunded.

We also need to find new ways to keep students on track to college and the educated workforce. The youngster who is about to drop out of high school is usually bored and lacking not intelligence, but direction. These kids can and must be engaged and excited by "early college high schools" combining high school and college or skills training programs modeled after European apprenticeship systems.

We need to nurture interactive, real-time distance learning programs, always keeping an eye on quality, which means, among other things, limiting class sizes and paying faculty the same for distance learning courses as for classroom instruction.

Most importantly, it has been said that the regions that will succeed in tomorrow's economy will be those that most effectively turn immigrants

Best Practices for a Creative Economy

EVAN S. DOBELLE



For the past five years “creative economy” has been one of the more influential ideas in economic planning. More and more thinkers and policymakers are heralding the unexpected benefits that creative endeavors bring to economies as a whole. Popular writers such as Thomas Friedman, David Brooks and Daniel Pink have recently explored the impact creative culture and thought can have on the global marketplace.

Closer to home, the New England Council, the region’s oldest business group, has launched a Creative Economy Initiative to take a comprehensive look at the economic role of artists, designers, performers and related businesses. Its findings are startling: from 1997 to 2001, the number of jobs in the “creative cluster” of arts-related companies grew twice as fast as the New England economy as a whole. As of 2000, that cluster supported 245,000 jobs, or 3.5 percent of the total jobs in the region. That’s higher than the national average and a larger share than either of the better-known software or medical technology industries. The initiative has given us a clear picture of a tremendous, hitherto virtually invisible, economic engine.

This issue of CONNECTION includes three case studies of successful creative engagement. In Old Lyme, Conn., the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts has invigorated a town with a long tradition of support for the arts by teaching old methods for a new

era. In Providence, the Rhode Island School of Design has embraced a commitment to the city and helped transform a now-bustling downtown. And in North Adams, Mass., an old industrial complex now houses a world-class art museum with strong ties to the nearby Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

What these stories have in common is that a college in each case has taken the initiative and forged a new working relationship with the creative community in its area. From their examples, we can draw three lessons about how colleges can and should help foster the creative economy in New England.

Colleges first of all make excellent stewards of the arts. Museums such as the renowned Yale Center for British Art provide a stable home where cultural heritage can be safeguarded and shared. They also host visiting artists, hold symposia and attract touring exhibitions that would otherwise come only to major cities. This semester, the University of Maine brought Persian photography to Orono, Williams College finished construction of a cutting-edge theatre complex, and the University of Connecticut welcomed the “conceptual juggler” Michael Moschen.

Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and Smith colleges and the University of Massachusetts Amherst have gone the extra step of coordinating their museums’ programming and promotion through the Five Colleges

consortium. Their “Museums10” initiative extends to shared thematic exhibitions, the first of which will focus on Dutch culture.

That sort of collaboration could work anywhere with several colleges, or where colleges have a neighboring independent museum. The Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass., for example, has a spectacular collection of Asian art and artifacts, with a strong emphasis on the China trade. It represents a great opportunity for nearby schools and colleges to develop a comprehensive K-16 Asian studies program that would prepare students for the post-globalization economy.

Second, there’s the matter of real estate, because another element common to all of the stories in this issue is the importance of abundant, affordable *space* where artists can do their work. Lowell, Mass., and Manchester, N.H., had enormous industrial complexes just begging for new life; Providence had the benefit of an entire downtown district ready for a makeover. In Maine, Gov. John Baldacci sees the creative economy as a vehicle for reviving old mill towns and attracting new business. He has put real weight behind that vision, raising awareness through a conference and a task force and proposing state support for art education and policy in his latest budget.

When there is space available at a reasonable price, government and smart institutions can step in and plant the seed for renovation and



Thinking Globally, Acting Regionally

EVAN S. DOBELLE

This 50th anniversary of the New England Board of Higher Education offers an important opportunity to look forward. NEBHE's priorities over this next half century will evolve. But a few goals will always remain constant: to expand access and opportunities to a greater number of our citizens; to strengthen the bonds between campus and community; and to prepare the region for success in the global marketplace.

First, we must continue to open the doors of higher education to all students regardless of income. We know now that this challenge requires attention to students much earlier in their lives. In the '50s, families were not pre-occupied with planning for college, and not enough thought was given to connections between early childhood education and future success. If we want to expand educational opportunity to all our citizens, then we need to develop pre-K-to-16 pathways for every school district, rich and poor.

We also need to nurture our technology-based economy. Too many students, especially from disadvantaged minority groups, turn away from science careers before giving them serious consideration. Others start down the path but never complete their degrees because they lack resources, encouragement or support. With India and China producing engineers twice as fast as we do, this waste of talent is intolerable. NEBHE's Excellence through Diversity Program addresses these issues by bringing underrepresented students together with role models through its annual Science Network meeting and online clearinghouse, but a more sustained regional effort is needed.

Another important task before us is to strengthen the relationship between campuses and local communities. Colleges already offer their neighbors benefits like jobs, cultural amenities and continuing education. A conscious effort is required to expand those benefits. A good example may be found in Providence, where the Rhode Island School of Design, Johnson & Wales and Brown universities and others working through the Rhode Island Campus Compact have developed community service requirements for their undergraduates. These include initiatives to expand access to higher education and support professional development of teachers in the local community. That sort of program—combined with the colleges' reclamation of old downtown buildings—has been key to Providence's revitalization.

Healthy town-gown relations are more than just a feather in a college's cap. When the Ivory Tower comes down to the street, both win: the city gets more energy, revenue and support, while the college becomes more attractive to potential students and faculty, and better positioned to tap the wealth of real-world resources for "hands-on" learning in the community.

With regard to the global marketplace, we cannot predict the next big thing with precision. But we can prepare a highly educated, agile workforce that is able to adapt to new technologies and industries as they emerge. For example, as the content carried by our televisions, web sites, computer games and movies becomes dramatically more sophisticated and intertwined, a burgeoning digital media industry will demand creative technicians, producers, digital artists and programmers.

New England has all the pieces in place to be a leader in this industry. Our backbone of universities and IT companies have already spawned dozens of software firms throughout the region specializing in everything from special effects to "massively multiplayer" online universes. Worcester Polytechnic Institute's recently launched computer game design major combining technical programming with humanities study reflects the cultural roots of this new art form—a plus for our "Creative Region." We want New England to be the first place that comes to mind when people think of "digital media."

As we act regionally, more than ever before, we need to think globally. Our future depends upon global economic relationships and foreign immigration here at home. Cultural exchanges, such as the Yale-China Association, which recently celebrated its centennial, familiarize our students with the countries that will be our partners and competitors over the next several decades. We can do more by encouraging public and private colleges to require a year's study abroad. We need to build international cultural competency among graduates, so they can be ambassadors to the global community.

All this will require creative thinking. But that is nothing new for New England, where we live by reinventing ourselves. From textiles to biotech, clipper ships to the Internet, our fortunes have relied on our ingenuity. And they will continue to.

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Reform for College Readiness

EVAN S. DOBELLE

Most Americans see college as the Great Equalizer. If a student can only open those doors, the thinking goes, then a degree, a good job and a middle-class life will follow.

But before first-year students arrive on campus, they have already spent a dozen or so years in schools of uneven quality and grown up in homes with varying levels of interest in education and exposure to books, to art, to the world. Those prior experiences have a profound impact on how well they will adapt to postsecondary study.

In fact, “college readiness” correlates strongly with the wealth of home communities. Students from wealthier areas usually have parents who are themselves college graduates, and who expect their children to complete four-year degrees. They attend better-funded public schools that emphasize college preparation.

Students from lower-income backgrounds, on the other hand, are more likely to come from homes where neither parent attended college. They may need to take care of relatives or work part-time jobs to help support families, and are thus distracted at school. And rather than being encouraged to go to college, they may encounter teachers and school staff who have lowered expectations of success.

A few school finance reforms and some equitable admissions practices would go a long way in making New England a model for college readiness.

For example, the general difficulty of being poor is compounded by the fact that K-12 education is funded mostly through local property taxes, rather than through statewide levies. That means poorer communities with lower property values get underfunded schools. In these communities, school buildings themselves often resemble

warehouses. Elementary schools likely lack the kinds of preschool programs that are great predictors of later success. High schools offer no model of the sort of critical thinking that students need in order to go farther. The grim result is a college-readiness gap that is all about socioeconomic class.

Some states have expanded their role in school financing to smooth out inequities among communities. Massachusetts in particular passed the 1993 Education Reform Act that established a baseline funding level per student and allocated state monies to meet the need.

But by relying to any considerable extent on local communities to fund local schools, we condone unequal education by class and race. And that costs us dearly in the long run, as less-educated citizens incur higher health care costs than their college graduate neighbors, put more strain on public assistance and criminal justice programs and give back less in taxes and charitable donations.

A Columbia University symposium held in October reveals that if one third of all high school dropouts earned high school diplomas, the United States could save \$10.8 billion in food stamps, housing assistance, and spending on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. If 600,000 recent high school dropouts were to attain one more year of education, the United States could save nearly \$42 billion in health care costs. One more year of schooling on average would reduce murder and assault by almost 30 percent, motor vehicle theft by 20 percent, arson by 13 percent, and burglary and larceny by about 6 percent.

The question is: do we want to spend our state taxes on quality education at about \$13,000 per student-year, or on jails at \$27,000 per inmate-year?

There’s no getting around it: better education is a winning investment. We need to make sure every student in every community has a fair shot at the returns on that investment by ensuring that schools are funded equitably.

Meanwhile, college officials also have a clear role to play in better reaching young people. Too many just admit traditionally defined “college-ready” students and leave the rest behind. This is what increasingly popular merit-based financial aid programs do in effect. And why not? More accomplished and generally better-heeled entering classes mean more successful alumni and greater institutional prestige. Admitting wealthier students also increases tuition income and protects institutional student aid budgets because well-off kids on merit aid pay at least some of the freight.

But I trust no one works in education to just count beans. Educators, I believe, are idealists by nature, who want to improve society and the lives of their students. And society improves only if colleges take a chance on students who may not be college-ready by traditional definitions but are at least “ready to be college-ready” if afforded the right combination of remedial courses and academic support networks.

Today’s Knowledge Economy demands that college officials roll up their sleeves and work alongside governments, pre-K-12 educators and other partners to prepare more students for college success and, in doing so, to confront head-on the thorniest challenge of American life: creating equality of opportunity in an unequal society.

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Seeking New Measures of Higher Education's Health

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How do you measure the health of New England higher education? Each year, CONNECTION's "Trends and Indicators" issue tracks statistics like college enrollment and graduation rates, average tuition, demographic trends, and research funding, reflecting—and indeed shaping—a consensus on the important criteria for institutional and regional success.

As the economic and civic demands on higher education grow, however, we need new ways to measure our effectiveness. We need to promote how well our colleges and universities fulfill their obligations to their students, their graduates and their communities over the long term.

We know, for instance, that the average college graduate can expect to earn 80 percent more per year than the average high school graduate. She will also live longer and have a better overall quality of life.

That fact tells us little though about how well today's college graduates are doing compared with graduates 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Thanks to stagnant wages and exploding personal debt—much of it acquired to finance their education—more and more young New Englanders cannot afford to buy homes or start families. Many must forgo dream jobs in lower-paying fields like public service and the arts in order to meet loan payments. The burden falls especially hard on students from low- and middle-income families, threatening college's traditional role as a path to a better life.

We must get a better grasp on how the return-on-investment in a college education is changing over time. We should develop new indicators to move beyond popular college ranking systems,

which focus on admissions "inputs" data like SATs, and instead emphasize "outputs," like whether an institution's graduates find success and contribute to society in later life. Neither families nor policymakers and funders will continue to accept claims of higher education's benefits on good faith alone. But new, meaningful metrics could provide an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of our higher education system.

We need to know not only if graduates get their money's worth, but also if communities and employers do. How well are students learning, and how long do they retain what they have learned? When they accept their diplomas, are they ready to step into the world of work and civic responsibility? More to the point, which graduates are ready, which are not, and what accounts for the differences?

We should look at the benefits higher education brings to our local communities and to our region as a whole. How engaged are students with the towns and neighborhoods around them? What about with the world beyond our borders? Are spare hours filled with volunteering? What balance of civic and academic life do faculties model for their students?

Who is going to sustain a vibrant democratic society? Some colleges have begun to boast rightfully about how many of their students join the Peace Corps. Why not develop an indicator to measure community service locally and globally on every campus?

How well are we measuring demographic aspects of higher education? When graduates leave campus, do they stay in New England, or are they taking their skills and energy elsewhere? If

they stay in the region, how long do they remain? How many start families? We know that New England's future demands a well-educated workforce, but do we know how well the region's colleges and universities are supplying that needed talent?

Research and development (R&D) is another area that we know instinctively has an impact on the condition of New England higher education. But is every R&D dollar spent as good as the next? Which research is leading to new medical breakthroughs or creating new companies or enriching undergraduate experiences? It is one thing to track funding levels or the number of patents, but new indices are needed to gauge how well university research improves lives.

None of these measurements will be simple to develop. Most of the relevant information exists, but it is scattered among alumni relations and registrars' offices, department records and public sources. By identifying meaningful outcomes and applying the latest analytical tools, we will gain much needed understanding of not only the health of our higher education system, but also of the condition of our changing public mission.

The idea here is not to propose more onerous requirements for colleges and universities. Rather, by quantifying our effectiveness in these areas, we can better articulate our contributions, better understand our challenges and enhance the perception of higher education's economic impact.

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A Regional Plan for College Readiness

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The late urban activist Jane Jacobs knew well the connection between a vibrant city and a healthy economy. In her landmark work, *The Death and Life of Great Cities*, she observed, “Whenever and wherever societies have flourished and prospered rather than stagnated and decayed, creative and workable cities have been at the core of the phenomenon. ... Decaying cities, declining economies, and mounting social troubles travel together. The combination is not coincidental.”

The health of any city—or for that matter, any state or region—depends, in turn, upon the educational attainment of its residents. The more our New England students, urban and rural, earn college degrees and find good jobs, the better able they will be to build strong communities.

But recent studies suggest that New England is failing those students. Despite the quality of our colleges and universities, we lag behind the rest of the nation in making college available to minorities and students from working-class backgrounds. Our universities may be gateways to opportunity, but too many urban and rural youths and adults retooling for a new workplace cannot get in the door.

We delude ourselves if we imagine that this is not a serious problem, or if we think the welfare of New England will be ensured by the success of its most elite institutions, which educate only a small share of the region’s students. The global economy demands ever-increasing skills of all our workers, and the gaps in income and in quality of life continue to grow between those with college degrees and those without. Most good jobs formerly open to smart,

ambitious high school graduates now require a bachelor’s degree for entry. Each year, there are fewer avenues to success for those who have not attended college.

Some communities are suffering disproportionately under these pressures. Recent studies report unemployment as high as 50 percent among urban African-American men in their 20s without college degrees. Among those who didn’t finish high school, that number soars to 72 percent. With numbers like that, it is only a matter of time before a major crisis develops.

We must prepare and motivate our young people earlier and better for college so they will have a place in today’s economy. We need to listen to researchers who report that mandatory preschool for three-year-olds hugely enhances prospects for later success. We must celebrate and fully fund the mission of access and affordability of our community colleges in both occupational and transfer programs. And we must give our students the financial tools to afford a good education.

We also need to prepare for the approaching drop in our traditional high-school-age population. New England’s high school graduating class is projected to peak in 2008 and then begin a long decline. Meanwhile other parts of the country are getting younger; one of every four 18-year-olds lives in California. If New England is to stay economically competitive, we need more of our young people to succeed in college.

That is why the six New England states have joined forces with the New England Board of Higher Education to launch College Ready New England

(CRNE). The initiative marks the first time in history that all the region’s governors, state higher education executives and education commissioners have come together with the business community to increase college preparedness and success.

College Ready New England aims to “widen the pipeline” by increasing the number of students who graduate from high school prepared for college study and then go on to earn college degrees.

To achieve these goals, College Ready New England will develop a regional network of policymakers and educators, from pre-kindergarten through college, to share the best ideas and the most successful methods for reaching our common goals. Through active collaboration across the six states, we can make our schools more responsive to student needs and more aligned with the demands of higher learning—and we can point out who isn’t doing it.

College Ready New England will work with the states to develop marketing campaigns targeted at those students who face the most difficulty in entering and succeeding in college. The campaigns will impress upon these students and their parents the value of a college degree in today’s job market and provide them with the information and resources they need to successfully navigate the available options. Too many New Englanders think that college is a perk, an extra; it isn’t. More and more, it’s what allows you to sustain a vibrant life in the future.

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A Regional Strategy for Global Success

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Higher education is globalizing like everything else in today's world. New England's higher education enterprise has the resources and talent to compete in this new global student marketplace, but to be successful, we must have a plan. We must act quickly, and we must act together.

Not only did the 9/11 terror attacks and attendant visa complications chill enthusiasm for studying in the United States, but other factors raise questions about whether New England will continue to attract the best students the world has to offer. Many other nations now boast their own world-class higher education systems. And advances in distance learning bring quality higher education to students in far corners of the world. Moreover, some countries, such as Australia, have launched strategic national efforts to market their colleges to Asian students, more than doubling their foreign enrollments since 2001.

For New England colleges and universities, competing successfully in the global student marketplace will require a collaborative regional effort.

In the 1980s, New England's six states became indifferent to the fact that they were bound together by history, demography and economic reality. A dearth of traditional-age students resulting from the "Baby Bust" sparked unprecedented competition for students and resources among institutions and states. Regionalism was nearly swallowed up by budgetary concerns and separate ambitions. In today's world, New England's competitiveness will depend on how well we work together to share strategies and to "sell" the richness of New England higher education. No single state or institution can do that.

Realizing the power of collaboration, the nations of Europe have now overcome centuries of conflict and cultural differences to create a borderless higher education market. New England states and institutions should put aside competitive impulses and work collectively to:

- Make sure young and adult students in our six-state region learn about our global competitors and potential partners.
- Encourage innovative new ways to recruit more undergraduate and graduate international students to New England's college campuses, both private and public.
- Reinforce and redouble efforts to sell New England higher education's "brand" to a worldwide audience.

How can we accomplish this?

First, we must collaboratively promote all of New England's education resources. Students from China, Vietnam, Thailand and India, to name a few examples, want the quality and cachet of an American degree, particularly a New England degree. Yet, except for a handful of elite schools, few of our region's 270 higher education institutions have any name recognition among these young people. Fewer still have any strategy in place to change that. They offer quality programs of study and even have spaces available, but they lack a coherent means of marketing themselves overseas. It is critically important that the entire New England higher education community work collaboratively to promote *all* of our education resources to the world.

Secondly, we need to cultivate personal and professional contacts

with key partner countries. New England should develop relationships with higher education systems in ASEAN countries such as Vietnam, where large numbers of students seek improved higher education options. These relationships will lead to constructive agreements enabling New England students and faculty to interact with counterparts from around the globe, serve as ambassadors through study abroad and faculty exchange, and increase international awareness here at home.

Foreign students would benefit by studying at host campuses in New England and experiencing American culture (while contributing to the critically important global diversity of their host campuses). Many of these international students—potential future leaders of their countries—would form a bond with New England, leading to future global partnerships and business collaborations. New England institutions of higher education—small and large, public and private—would fill open seats. Partner institutions in Asia and elsewhere would directly experience American administrative and academic practices and adapt these practices to their campuses.

If New England is to survive and thrive in an interconnected world, our colleges and universities must redouble their efforts to promote the region's full range of education resources and commit themselves to nurturing relationships around the globe—and they can do that best by working together.

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The Empty Pipeline

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Perhaps the most disturbing data in this “Trends & Indicators” issue of CONNECTION concerns the “education pipeline.” For every 100 public high school ninth-graders nationally, only 69 will graduate from high school four years later, only 39 will enter college the fall after they graduate, only 27 will return to their college for sophomore year and only 18 of those original 100 will earn associate degrees within three years of enrolling in college or bachelor’s degrees within six years of enrolling.

The New England states perform a little better than the nation as a whole but not well enough to meet the challenges posed by today’s global knowledge economy and complex civic and political environment.

If you live in New England, chances are, you are just a few minute drive from sixth-graders who believe they have two choices in life: find a paycheck job (as opposed to a career) or join the military. College is not even part of the cultural equation for them or their parents.

The main reasons for this are by now familiar: inadequate preparation and lack of financial resources for too many New England families and communities.

Despite the best efforts of teachers and professionals, too many of our students—particularly in urban environments as well as rural parts of New England—either drop out of high school or are allowed to graduate without having learned what they need in order to succeed academically or socially in college.

Others work hard only to find out the resources society invests annually

in various student aid programs and educational tax benefits still do not provide them with a real chance to achieve the American Dream.

An American from the top quartile of family income is six times more likely to have completed a bachelor’s degree by age 24 than his counterpart from the bottom quartile, according to research by Iowa higher education analyst Tom Mortenson. This lopsided attainment, Mortenson observes, is “driven by disparities at each of the three hurdles along the path to a bachelor’s degree.”

He’s talking about high school graduation rates (93 percent for the top income quartile; 69 percent for the bottom quartile); college continuation among high school graduates (87 percent for the top; 59 percent for the bottom) and bachelor’s completion (90 percent for the top; 31 percent for the bottom).

Of course, this gap takes hold long before students enter high school. A benchmark University of Michigan study found that children in the highest socioeconomic group entered kindergarten with cognitive scores 60 percent higher than those of the lowest socioeconomic group.

These children—and their teachers—need our engagement. But it takes a region to raise a college-ready child. That’s why the New England Board of Higher Education is working in partnership with the Burlington, Vt., Boys and Girls Club to instill college aspirations and preparation among the young people who participate in activities at the venerable community organization. The idea would be to expand this partnership to Boys and Girls Clubs and other community

groups across New England that engage with students afternoons, weekends and summers.

We also need to stop making it easy for children to fail. One sensible step would be to adopt a policy like Indiana’s in which a rigorous college- and work-prep curriculum becomes the default high school course. If a student really wants to opt out of the college-prep curriculum, the student *and* his parents or guardian should have to explicitly choose that life-altering assignment.

Another step would be to encourage New England employers to pledge not to hire permanent workers who do not have a high school diploma unless they have a solid plan to earn a GED.

Finally, the region’s higher education institutions, many located in the very same urban and rural communities where college aspirations are lowest, have a keen self-interest in getting the pipeline flowing. They need to strategically deploy their students, faculty and facilities to provide the role models, mentors and support programs that give their young neighbors a real chance to enroll in the future.

There is much at stake. Our excellence as a nation and a society requires that we fight relentlessly to make sure our young people are prepared academically and financially to succeed. Unless the current pattern is altered, we will lose our collective capacity to sustain a vibrant democracy, let alone compete economically in a global marketplace.

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An Education Mandate for New England's Governors

EVAN S. DOBELLE

New England jobs that were once open to smart, ambitious high school graduates now require a college degree. But New Englanders face two daunting barriers to college success. One, many are simply not prepared for college academically or in other ways; at least 25 percent of those who enter ninth grade will not even graduate from high school. Two, many cannot afford the high price of college—or believe they can't.

Here are some regional strategies for the six New England governors to consider in tackling the twin problems of college readiness and affordability:

- Hold a summit meeting on how we finance public education. New England is failing its urban, rural, low-income and first-generation students from Bangor to Bridgeport. All our best intentions about making these students “college-ready” and closing the “education gap” are empty as long as tax-poor cities depend on local property taxes to finance schools.

- Create a regionwide forum for best practices in teaching. Some education reformers would put creative teachers in a straitjacket of curricular requirements and tests. If we want innovation, we need to give teachers and administrators financial incentives to try new ideas and to share information on what works.

- Expand kindergarten and make preschool mandatory for three-year-olds. This one's a no-brainer. The six states can invest in early childhood education now or spend the money in the criminal justice and social welfare systems later.

- Develop a regional network of policymakers and educators, from pre-kindergarten through college, to explore ways to make sure what our

schools teach is aligned appropriately with what colleges expect of freshmen. New England could create a regional exchange program enabling college professors to spend a semester working in K-12 schools and giving school teachers time off to undertake research projects at New England colleges.

- Develop marketing campaigns targeted at those groups of students who face the most difficulty in entering and succeeding in college. These campaigns should work in partnership with after-school and enrichment programs administered by community organizations. Their goal must be to impress upon students and their parents the value of a college degree in today's job market, and to direct them to one-stop web sites for the information they need to successfully navigate college options.

Some of these steps are already being undertaken by the New England Board of Higher Education's “College Ready New England” initiative. This effort marks the first time in history that the region's governors, state higher education executives and education commissioners have come together with the business community to increase college preparedness and success.

The region's governors and other key officials also need to step up to the plate to make higher education affordable.

According to federal estimates, in this decade, more than two million low- and moderate-income high school graduates who are college ready will not complete college due to financial barriers. Here are some ways New England can reverse this fortune:

- Use political leverage to lobby for strengthened Pell Grants. The recent Commission on the Future of Higher Education recommended raising the

purchasing power of the average Pell Grant to cover 70 percent of average in-state tuition at public four-year campuses, up from the current 48 percent. Five years of efforts to raise the maximum Pell Grant have failed. But Congress and the administration might now be ready to listen to New England's bipartisan delegation of governors if they went to D.C., unified, to argue for more need-based aid.

- Direct aid dollars to need, not merit. The recent history of student aid is marked by two trends: 1) a shift from grants to loans and tax breaks and 2) a shift away from aid based on student financial need to aid based on sometimes dubious measures of merit. Merit aid often benefits students who would go to college anyway. If we are serious about the value of higher education to our future, we need to use scarce resources to fund students who would not otherwise go to college.

- Create a regionwide corps of students, including nontraditional students, to address our teaching and nursing shortages by waiving tuition in exchange for a guarantee that they will practice their profession for four years in New England after graduation.

- Make community college free and ease transfer of credits to four-year institutions. Harry Truman suggested 60 years ago that education be tuition-free through “14th grade.” It's time to make this happen.

College readiness and affordability present a quagmire for too many New England students. Working together, the region's six governors have a brilliant opportunity to offer those students and their families new hope.

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Ed in '08: New England's Favorite Son

EVAN S. DOBELLE

As the New England Board of Higher Education proudly marks the transformation from 20 years of *Connection* to the new look of *THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION*, we also cast our attention toward a national campaign to raise the profile of education itself. Ed in '08 is a \$60 million campaign to engage everyday American citizens in the education debate. Check your tax bracket and political affiliation at the door.

The campaign, supported by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and chaired by former Colorado Governor and Los Angeles school Superintendent Roy Romer, is designed to raise education to the top of the country's domestic priorities. The campaign challenges the 2008 presidential candidates to begin a serious dialogue about how they will improve American schools.

Since New England will be sustained and grow on the strength of its education, Ed in '08 is surely among the region's favorite sons in this race. Like NEBHE's College Ready New England initiative, the Ed in '08 campaign, which opened its New England office in New Hampshire this month, uses creative media strategies to excite the public about educational success. Ed in '08 is asking communities and their members to join town meetings, PTA discussions and a national debate on education.

With this high-level push, it could be education's year. Just five years ago, the president and Congress gave

us the deepest federal involvement in schools in nearly 30 years with No Child Left Behind legislation.

But to be realistic, while NCLB has cast much-needed light on some of the challenges facing American schools, it has also underscored the problems of using one set of standards for students with multiple learning abilities, diverse learning styles and a range of demographics. Further, NCLB encourages school systems to "teach to the test," depriving youngsters of the best, *spontaneous* moments in their education.

Ed in '08's main platform is to promote sensible American education standards, offer incentives for effective teaching and provide students with more time for in-depth learning—all critical goals. New England voters will also have an interest in several other education planks. For example, they will look for leadership that:

- Demands higher achievement while valuing the "multiple intelligences" students bring with them.
- Helps property tax-poor school districts experiment with new teaching and learning methods.
- Reaches New England's fastest-growing new populations, including English-language learners.
- Directs limited student aid resources to the students who need them most.
- Promotes the region's higher education enterprise, with its 270 colleges, quarter-million employees and

\$20 billion annual budgets, as a crucial American industry—indeed, a major, but often overlooked, *export* industry.

And remember, a focus on education does not suggest a single-issue campaign. Far from it. Many students are remarkably unprepared for school every day the morning bell rings. An appalling number of elementary and secondary school students come to school without breakfast in their stomach, school materials or the peace of mind that comes from a stable home environment. Today's schools aren't just responsible for education. Teachers are asked to be social workers, identifying instances of abuse and neglect. Many schools in poor communities provide two-thirds of children's balanced meals each day. When a child hasn't had breakfast, feels unsafe or is totally unprepared, the classroom is a prison.

An "education president" will also be an anti-poverty president, a health care president, a science and technology president and a creative economy president. These are issues that deeply affect our College Ready program, and this national campaign provides a stage to spark real change. In 2008, we need answers from the candidates on these pressing needs and a platform that makes real learning possible for all.

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Debt Relief

EVAN S. DOBELLE



The aggressive tactics some private lenders use to encourage colleges and universities to offer loans to students have thrown light on a larger financial crisis facing many Americans: going to college increasingly means going into debt. We must introduce fairness and transparency into college financing, particularly in our student loan system.

College Board data suggest that the total volume of private student loans has grown at an average rate of 27 percent per year since 2001 to a total of \$17 billion, accounting for 20 percent of total student loan volume. While loans made through government student loan programs have interest rates under 7 percent, private lenders charge rates as high as 19 percent. To make matters worse, these private loans are often targeted to students and families with poor or no credit histories—the very families that should be receiving the most favorable loan conditions. Studies show that many students and families don't know which kind of loan they have.

U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) wants to shine the light a little brighter on how predatory practices exacerbate an already difficult situation for lower-income students. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act passed by the Senate in July includes key provisions from the “Student Loan Sunshine Act,” filed by Kennedy and Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.), banning lenders from offering gifts or other inducements to colleges and requiring full disclosure of the reasons why an institution of higher education has selected a lender as its “preferred lender.”

Said Kennedy in introducing his legislation, “At a time when students and families are turning to private and alternative loans more than ever, we need to make sure they’re being offered under the best terms possible, not because a lender has sought to make a sweetheart deal with a school.”

Other policymakers are also working to reduce student debt burdens.

In Maine, Gov. John Baldacci signed a new law allowing college graduates who continue to live and work in Maine to claim a tax credit equal to the amount of their student loan repayments (up to the level of tuition and fees for the University of Maine System or the Maine Community College System). University System of New Hampshire trustees approved expansion of the Affordable College Effort designed to help students with low expected family contributions meet the full direct cost of attending public institutions in New Hampshire without incurring loan debt. Congress recently approved raising the maximum Pell Grant, tying repayment of guaranteed student loans to borrowers’ incomes and forgiving loans for certain borrowers who take public service jobs.

Still, a new report from the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Higher Education Policy reveals that adults who are working but lacking financial security, and their children, must come up with an average of nearly \$4,000 a year out of their own pockets to continue their college educations. The report shows these families navigate a minefield of conflicting work and family demands, as well as confusing financial-aid policies that can penalize students for earning wages.

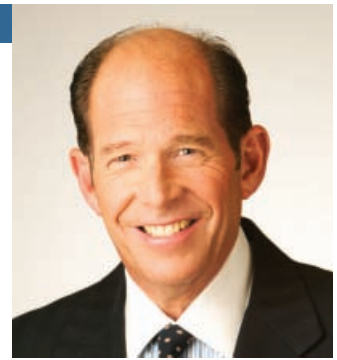
Little wonder that nearly half of working poor adult students who began a degree or certificate program in 1995–96 had left college six years later without obtaining a credential and only 28 percent had earned a bachelor’s degree, compared with 44 percent of higher-income students.

The institute wisely recommends allowing these students to claim expenses such as room, board and books under certain education tax credits and increasing the exempted amount that working independent students can earn under federal need analysis, thereby increasing their eligibility for Pell Grants.

New England’s leaders of education, government and business are working to help students overcome the obstacles of a class-based system of college access. Improving college readiness and preparation only to have less-advantaged students locked outside the college gates by the specter of unacceptably high debt is both cruel and economically self-destructive.

As Kennedy concludes: “No one should have to mortgage their future to afford college today. It’s vitally important that we increase need-based aid for students and give them new tools to manage their student debt.”

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A Half Century of Tuition Savings

EVAN S. DOBELLE

This year, the New England Board of Higher Education is celebrating a half century of tuition savings and interstate cooperation through the New England Regional Student Program, known also as NEBHE's "Tuition Break" program.

Fifty years ago, the six New England states and their land-grant university campuses recognized the wisdom of cooperating to benefit residents of their states and avoid duplication of expensive academic programs.

The six public New England land-grant universities agreed to admit out-of-state New England residents in specialized programs of study and charge them the much lower in-state tuition rate. The first year of enrollment of "regional students" was 1958-59.

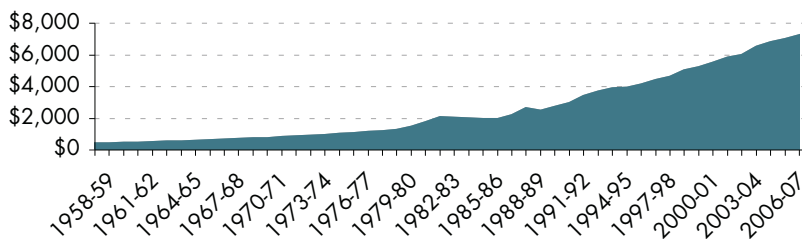
The specialized programs of study offered 50 years ago are going strong today. They include pharmacy, occupational therapy, hotel administration, textile chemistry, law, landscape architecture, turf management, food technology, forestry and marine biology.

Today all of New England's 81 public colleges and universities participate in the RSP, offering more than 700 undergraduate and graduate degree programs to regional students. The region's community colleges have been offering RSP-eligible programs since 1968 while the state colleges have participated since the 1970s.

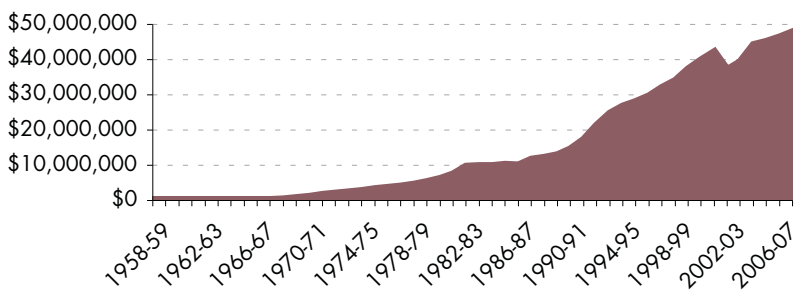
Most participating institutions now charge regional students a surcharge on top of the in-state tuition rate. Nevertheless, the tuition discount enjoyed by regional students has continued to grow significantly because of the growing gap between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates. The average tuition discount for an RSP student enrolled in 2006-07 was \$7,000.

50 Years of RSP Tuition Savings and Enrollment Growth

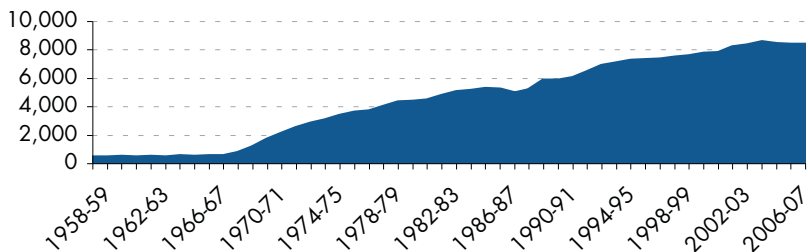
Average Tuition Savings Per RSP Student: 1958-2007



RSP Tuition Savings to New England Residents: 1958-2007



New England Residents Enrolled Through the RSP: 1958-2007



Source: 2007 NEBHE Regional Student Program Annual Report

Over the past 50 years, the RSP has provided tuition discounts to New England regional students on more than 200,000 annual tuition bills. In total, the RSP has provided an estimated \$740 million in tuition savings. When calculated in 2008 dollars, that equals \$1 billion worth of benefit to New England families.

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