Efforts to get schools and colleges to cooperate yield both fixes and frustration

A Tough Task for the States

By PETER SCHMIDT

MACON, GA.

THE MEETING at Macon State College looked as if it might be a waste of time, public money, and gasoline.

On hand were more than two dozen administrators from the University System of Georgia, the Georgia Department of Education, and public schools and colleges throughout the state. They had gathered to discuss how schools could improve science and mathematics instruction.

Soon after turning to one of the first tasks on the agenda—reaching agreement on a definition of "challenging courses and curricula"—the panel became mired in the sort of quibbling that makes people swear off serving on committees. The draft document said such courses should include "affective and conative components," but no one could come up with the meaning of "conative," and the term "affective" was rejected as obfuscatory jargon by some of the professors in the room.

The group forged ahead anyway, confident that its work from past meetings was already having an impact around the state. In fact, some of that impact would be felt the very next day.

MICHAEL SCHWARZ FOR THE CHRONICLE

Jan Kettlewell has kept Georgia's education-reform efforts moving despite "starts and stops . . . at the top leadership level."

GEORGIA is among 28 states that are pulling together elementary, secondary, and college educators and putting them through such exercises in hopes of finding ways to improve educational achievement.

The state endeavors are generally known as "K-16 initiatives," reflecting their focus on education from kindergarten through college, or as "P-16 initiatives," with the P meaning preschool. They operate on the assumption that education leaders at all levels, from colleges on down, must be at the table if states are to find effective ways to turn around troubled public schools and substantially increase high-school and college graduation rates.

Nancy S. Shapiro, who leads such an effort in Maryland as vice chancellor for academic affairs in the state's university system, says the collaborative work going on there has had enough of an effect that "K-16, or P-16, is no longer thought of as anything innovative anymore. It is more the way we do business."

But while some states' efforts appear to be producing results, others have shown little life beyond the news conferences announcing their creation.

"Some of them are pretty hollow shells," observes Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

"By and large," he says, "having a commission or council really does not do much unless you attach some sort of responsibility or accountability to it. Otherwise they just become places where people talk."

THE PEACH STATE'S P-16 initiative, under way since 1995, has indeed been bearing fruit.

A day after the Macon gathering, at a meeting held at the Georgia Institute of Technology, in Atlanta, the Macon group's past recommendations were translated into new approaches to mathematics instruction by enthusiastic teams of elementary-school teachers and professors from Georgia public colleges' mathematics and education departments.

That same week, business leaders met with Georgia education officials and school and college administrators to discuss the success of a statewide effort to improve the preparation of school principals. At yet another gathering, about 100 faculty members from public colleges discussed ways to adjust their own instructional practices to serve as better classroom role models for aspiring teachers.

Elsewhere around Georgia, professors and teachers worked together in various programs intended to improve teacher training, improve students' preparation for college, reduce dropout rates, and recruit more people—especially minority-group members—into the teaching force.

The various sectors of education also have jointly developed media campaigns intended to encourage middle- and high-school students to enroll in math and science classes and take the steps necessary to prepare themselves for college.

The University System of Georgia's office for P-16 initiatives now employs 50 people and has a budget of about $12.8-million, with about $3-million coming from the state and $9.8-million from federal and private grants. It has sought to make P-16 reform manageable by setting up panels and offices to tackle such tasks as improving teacher quality and finding ways to ensure that education agencies share information that will help them track students' progress.

As a result of Georgia's collaborative efforts, "we are not working in silos," says Martha Relchrath, executive director of Gov. Sonny Perdue's Office of Student Achievement. "Our time is well spent. Our work is not getting undone."

STATE OFFICIALS' INTEREST in such collaboratives has intensified as a result of recent efforts to reform the nation's high schools.

A little more than a year ago, a national summit meeting on improving high schools was held by the National Governors Association and Achieve Inc., a nonprofit group created by governors and business leaders. The two groups issued an "Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools" that called on states to, at a minimum, set up permanent commissions to help coordinate the work of the various sectors of public education. Or, the document said, states could create "a single education-governing board and state education agency with authority over early-childhood, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education."

The governors' association also announced that it would embark on a bipartisan, $42-million effort to overhaul high schools throughout the United States. The two leaders of the endeavor, Bob Taft, the Republican governor of Ohio, and Mark R. Warner, a Democrat who was then Virginia's governor, said state leaders would ask colleges to take such steps as defining their expectations for entering students more clearly and beefing up their schools of education to produce teachers who can work effectively in high schools.

Many colleges, said Governor Warner, "have taken a laissez-faire attitude toward the K-12 system. That has got to end."

In 2001 Achieve and three other groups had set up a program called the American Diploma Project "to restore value to the high-school diploma" by linking it to the acquisition of skills that would prepare students for college and work. At last year's summit on high schools, Achieve announced that it had joined with 13 states to form the American Diploma Project Network to bring about improvements in high-school education.

The group has since grown to 22 states, all of which have agreed to raise high-school standards to match the requirements of colleges and the work force, to require high-school students to take rigorous curricula, to develop tests of readiness for college and work that students would take in high school, and to hold high schools accountable for producing graduates who

can handle college, while holding colleges accountable for the success of the students whom they admit.

In July the governors' association announced that it had awarded two-year grants to improve high schools in four states—Arkansas, Maine, Minnesota, and Virginia—that had agreed to establish P-16 councils. Such panels also have been established by Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Ohio, and Rhode Island. Several prominent education groups, including the Education Trust, the Institute for Educational Leadership, and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, are promoting such councils and lending them guidance or technical support.

THE IDEA of statewide coordination of all levels of education is hardly new. In New York, it dates back almost to the nation's founding, with the establishment in 1784 of a Board of Regents in charge of all colleges and academies.

As a practical matter, however, New York's public colleges are largely under the control of the State University of New York and the City University of New York systems, which have not done much, at least at a statewide level, to coordinate their policies with those of the State Department of Education or local school districts.

In nearly every state, public schools and public colleges fall under the control of separate state agencies or departments. Moreover, most legislatures have placed separate committees in charge of higher education and of kindergarten through 12th grade, complicating efforts to bring the sectors together.

The gulf between schools and colleges widened in the four decades after World War II, as the GI Bill and the baby boom swelled enrollments, triggered a wave of college construction, and prompted lawmakers to establish university systems and higher-education-coordinating boards to manage the growth. In the 1970s, several states, including Idaho, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, established gubernatorially appointed secretary positions with authority over all sectors of public education. But those cabinet-level officials have dealt mainly with elementary and secondary schools.

Georgia and Maryland are generally regarded as having the oldest and most developed statewide efforts to bring the leaders of the various sectors together. Both Maryland's panel, called the K-16 Partnership for Teaching and Learning, and the Georgia P-16 Initiative have been around for 11 years.

The Maryland effort arose out of a voluntary alliance among the state's Department of Education, university system, and higher-education-coordinating board.

Georgia's initiative, by contrast, was established through executive order by the state's governor at the time, Zell Miller, a Democrat, at the urging of Stephen R. Portch, chancellor of the state university system. Both officials expressed hope that the panel would find ways to improve the low college-going rate and close the wide education disparities among students in the state, which was grappling with high levels of poverty, a painful transition from an agrarian economy, and the vestiges of racial segregation. The governor's executive order also established regional P-16 panels to wrestle with the issues at the local level.

Similar panels soon popped up in other states, including Missouri and Oklahoma. The concept was promoted by the Pew Charitable Trusts and by the Education Commission of the States, which counted 24 states with such panels in a report issued in August 2000.

Many of the panels, however, have had a narrow focus, like improving colleges of education or increasing the supply of preschool instructors. Several of the panels have ceased activity.

Florida is the only state that has adopted a law placing all sectors of education under a single governing board—its gubernatorially appointed Board of Education. But many experts on higher-education governance see that measure, passed in 2000, as motivated less by a vision of unified education governance than by lawmakers' desire to eliminate the state university system's governing board, which had often blocked legislators' efforts to improve the competitive positions of their alma maters or the universities in their districts.

Less than two years after the Florida Legislature abolished the university system's Board of Regents, the state's voters passed a constitutional amendment creating a Board of Governors to oversee the system. Just who is in control of Florida's public universities remains unclear. The Board of Governors relies on the Board of Education to provide its staff, but the two boards have clashed with each other and with state lawmakers over questions of power.

Carl Krueger, who tracks the progress of state P-16 and K-16 councils as an assistant policy analyst for the Education Commission of the States, says he has watched several efforts trail off in recent years as the governors who began them—and who served as the

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A Taste of College for Potential Dropouts

GEORGIA'S public schools have an average overall dropout rate of about 30 percent. In debating how to lower that figure, officials of the state's university system and the Department of Education had a thought: If the goal is to get young people into college, and they are having trouble staying in high school, why not try to move them into college sooner?

That notion gave rise to the Early College Initiative, which seeks to help students who are not being served well by traditional high schools. The initiative offers programs through which students can earn both high-school diplomas and associate degrees in just five years. Georgia State University and the Atlanta Public Schools teamed up to open the first such program, Carver Early College, in a high school in the city in August. Five more early-college programs are expected to get under way at other sites around the state in the 2006-7 school year.

Carver received about 250 applications for its first freshman class and selected 103 students who had average standardized-test scores and, on the basis of personal interviews, seemed likely to benefit. Once the students complete 10th grade, they will be able to take college courses in core subjects at Carver or Georgia State.

"All things are possible with appropriate help," says the school's principal, Marcene R. Thornton.

Although the program occupies the second floor of a public high school, its collegiate focus is unmistakable. Ms. Thornton goes by the title dean; the seven full-time teachers call themselves professors; and Georgia State faculty members help guide instruction. Carver students have access to Georgia State's facilities, and Georgia State students routinely visit Carver to serve as mentors and tutors. Cameryn J. Jackson, a 14-year-old freshman at Carver, says she likes the early-college program because it lets her "feel what it is like to be in college before I actually get there."

In its first semester, the Carver Early College program had an average daily attendance rate of 96 percent—exceptionally high for an urban public school—and retained 99 of its 103 students.

A similar program on the Clarkston campus of Georgia Perimeter College serves 16- to 20-year-old Dekalb County students who have dropped out of high school. It seeks to provide them with remediation in high-school courses and then ease them into college work, and it gives those who have failed a grade or more a chance to catch up in an environment where they will not feel embarrassed about being lumped in with younger classmates. Both it and Carver Early College are being financed partly with grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as part of its efforts to promote early-college programs around the nation.

Among the students in the Clarkston program, called Gateway to College Academy, is Cynthia J. Murray, 16, whose progress in high school was derailed as a result of repeatedly being moved from one foster home to another. Being on a college campus "is really cool," she says. "It's like, wow, I feel I am somewhere in my life."

Homegrown Teachers for Rural Areas

GEORGIA has a teacher shortage, especially in rural areas that often cannot offer much in terms of pay or a social life to young graduates of colleges of education. To help remedy that problem, the University System of Georgia is working with 37 public-school districts to find ways to help older adults move into teaching as a second career. As part of the project, called Destination: Teaching, the system has eliminated policies that had hindered colleges from developing special teacher-preparation programs for nontraditional students, and has set up an online career-counseling center to help connect people with teacher-education programs near their homes.

Along with helping to increase the number of teachers in the state, the project also appears to be helping Georgia diversify its teaching work force. Although members of racial and ethnic minority groups make up less than a quarter of the state's teachers, they account for about half of the more than 440 teacher candidates recruited through the project.

Among the nine alternative teacher-preparation programs produced by the project is Career Opportunities for Paraprofessional Educators, which involves four public colleges, two regional educational-service agencies, and 17 public-school districts in the southern part of Georgia. This program, for teaching assistants who wish to earn teaching certificates, provides participants with instruction at local sites, offers support from mentors and tutors, helps students cover their instructional costs, and gives them loans that will be forgiven once they earn their certificates and go to work in local classrooms. Participants are told that, should they stick with the five-year program and earn their teaching certificates, their annual pay will rise from about $11,000 to about $31,000, and they will be eligible for much more generous retirement benefits.

Among those in the program is Diane Mills, who has worked as a teaching assistant at Berrien Primary School, in Nashville, Ga., for six years, and is unable to travel far because her husband is ill. Forty credit hours into the program, she has a grade-point average of just over 3.0 and is thrilled at the prospect of being able to increase her earnings while staying in the classroom with preschool children. "I love pre-K," she says. "They make my day every day."

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key force pulling the players together—have left office.

"Generally one of the problems P-16 has faced is that it can be very difficult for a P-16 initiative to survive a leadership change," he says.

In a report issued in September, the Institute for Educational Leadership, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research concluded that, even after a decade, "state-level K-16 reform is in its infancy."

GEORGIA'S EFFORT has hardly been immune to the effects of political upheaval and the frequent unwillingness of state governors to champion efforts undertaken by their predecessors.

The P-16 Council that Governor Miller established in 1995 met frequently, and the state's top education officials took turns leading its meetings. Gov. Roy E. Barnes, a Democrat who assumed office in 1999, renamed the panel the Education Coordinating Council, scaled down its size, called for it to meet only quarterly, and led its meetings himself.

The panel's work was complicated by the frequent absence of the state's elected school superintendent, Linda Schrenko, a Republican who had her eyes on the governorship and frequently traveled the state criticizing Governor Barnes's education policies.

Gov. Sonny Perdue, a Republican who took office in 2003, has chosen not to convene the state council at all, and many of the state's regional P-16 councils no longer hold formal meetings.

Yet Georgia's P-16-education efforts have kept chugging along. Many national experts on such collaboratives give much of the credit to Jan Kettlewell, who was hired by Governor Miller to lead the undertaking, and continues to do so as the university system's associate vice chancellor for P-16 initiatives.

A former dean of the college of education at Miami University of Ohio, Ms. Kettlewell works mainly with other state education agencies' midlevel administrators, who are able to quietly devote time to specific projects without getting caught up in any politics around them. With so many staff people in several offices working on distinct P-16 projects, she says, "the stops and starts have only been at the top leadership level."

States are mistaken in entrusting P-16 reform solely to committees, whose members often end up "just waiting to show up at the next meeting" and doing little to carry out their own plans, says Ms. Kettlewell. "If you don't have dedicated people who do the work, it is going to die on the vine." ■

Better Principals, Better Schools

IT IS HARD to have a good school without a good principal. When the leaders of Georgia's collaborative effort to improve all levels of education concluded four years ago that the state's colleges were not producing the kinds of principals its schools needed, they set up the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement to hone the preparation of school administrators.

Although the institute is led by the University System of Georgia, many other education agencies play key roles, and several of the state's largest businesses are providing financing and leadership, and offering access to private-sector management expertise.

The institute sets up pilot programs in schools, studies the programs to determine which ones work, and then disseminates its findings to school administrators and the college programs that train them. It has also created training and coaching programs for current administrators, as well as regional collaboratives through which school districts help shape the education-leadership programs at their local colleges. Among the skills that the institute emphasizes are how to analyze students' test scores and use them to drive change.

Since it was established, in 2002, the institute has provided training to more than 7,000 educators. It reports that more than nine out of 10 of the school districts, superintendents, and principals involved say their performance improved as a result.

How 3 States Are Bringing Schools and Colleges Together

INDIANA

Effort: Indiana's Education Roundtable

Origins: Formed in 1998 by the late Gov. Frank L. O'Bannon and Superintendent of Public Instruction Suellen K. Reed. Incorporated into state law a year later.

Structure: More than 40 members, including the governor, state legislators, public and private higher-education leaders, public-school officials, representatives of teachers' unions, parents, and business and community leaders.

Agenda: The round table has sought to improve education at all levels, but a chief focus has been increasing the share of students who graduate from high school and go on to college.

Accomplishments: After 13 months of research, the group issued a plan for improving student achievement from preschool through college. Its more than 70 recommendations included calls for the state to offer all-day kindergarten to every student, raise to 18 the minimum age at which students could drop out of high school, and hold colleges accountable for their students' success.

Since then, at the round table's urging, the state has adopted a law making a college-preparatory curriculum called Core 40 the "default" curriculum in high schools. Whereas students and parents previously had the responsibility for making sure students took the classes needed for college, once the Core 40 curriculum is fully phased in, in the 2010-11 academic year, students will automatically take such classes unless they and their parents deliberately meet with school officials and request they opt out.

Web site: http://www.edroundtable.state.in.us

KENTUCKY

Effort: The Kentucky P-16 Council

Origins: Established in 1999 by the Kentucky Board of Education, which oversees the state's public schools, and the Council on Postsecondary Education, the state's higher-education coordinating board.

Structure: The council's 18 members include state officials in charge of higher education, adult education, public schools, early-childhood services, and economic development, as well as a business representative and a labor representative.

Agenda: The "P" in the council's name, which stands for "preschool," reflects a belief that its work begins before children are old enough to enter kindergarten. The council has three key objectives: aligning the curriculum and requirements of high schools and colleges, improving teacher quality through improved teacher education and professional development, and increasing the number and diversity of students attending college by encouraging children and their parents to plan ahead.

Accomplishments: Among its activities so far, the panel has overseen the formation of local P-16 councils across the state; sponsored Kentucky's participation in the American Diploma Project, which seeks to align high-school-graduation requirements with the demands of employers and colleges; and lent support to efforts to improve mathematics and science education in middle schools.

Web site: http://cpe.ky.gov/committees/p16

MARYLAND

Effort: Maryland K-16 Partnership for Teaching and Learning

Origins: Established in 1995 by the leaders of the three main agencies involved, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, the Maryland State Department of Education, and the University System of Maryland.

Structure: The heads of the three agencies that set up the partnership rotate annually in leading it. Membership is voluntary, but it includes representatives of independent colleges, community colleges, local school districts, and businesses.

Agenda: Much of the partnership's early work centered on improving teacher education and aligning teacher-education curricula with elementary- and secondary-education standards. More recently, it has sought to mesh high-school-graduation requirements, particularly in mathematics, with colleges' expectations for freshmen. It has also tried to find ways to expand the state's teacher supply.

Accomplishments: Maryland has adopted a statewide articulation agreement that lets prospective teachers earn associate's degrees in teaching at local community colleges and then transfer smoothly to four-year institutions. The partnership's efforts to improve teacher quality in Baltimore and in the Washington suburbs have attracted about $18-million in federal grants, and its efforts to match high-school requirements with college expectations have made it a leader among states participating in the American Diploma Project. The state's governor, Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., has not been as supportive of the effort as his predecessors, but those involved with it say that it continues to have an impact.

Web site: http://mdk16.usmd.edu

SOURCES: THE WEB SITES OF THE STATE PANELS CITED, THE EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES, THE INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THE STANFORD INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH