

Refocusing the Delaware P–20 Council: Assessment and Recommendations

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This policy brief was prepared by the Institute for Public Administration for the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (the Commission). The analysis includes an overview of P–20 Councils across the nation with a focus on Maryland’s Council. The analysis highlights the development and operation of Delaware’s P–20 Council. Based on the Commission’s framework for improving public education, recommendations are offered for how Delaware’s P–20 Council can better align resources and programs to support student learning and outcomes.

Introduction

P–20 councils, also known as P–16 Councils, were first created in the 1990s to develop a system of education that aligns expectations from early childhood development, the K–12 system, and postsecondary education. The first P–20 Council was created by Georgia in 1996 (Education Commission of the States [ECS], n.d.). Delaware’s P–20 Council was created by Executive Order in 2003 and established into code in 2005 (Delaware P–20 Council, 2005). The Delaware P–20 Council is designed to align Delaware’s education efforts across all grade levels from early childhood to post-secondary (Delaware P–20 Council, 2005).

From the outset, the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (the Commission) has called for the better alignment of resources and

programs to support student learning and development from birth through access to college and careers. In concurrence with this need for alignment, Delaware Gov. John Carney has reestablished the Family Services Cabinet Council to develop a statewide strategy to ensure public and private initiatives coordinate and provide the necessary support and assistance required for all Delaware families to be successful. This action will begin to better focus state resources on the needs of children and their families and catalyze public-private partnerships to reduce service fragmentation and make it easier for families to get supportive services (Executive Order 5, 2017).

The next step toward alignment is to refocus the Delaware P–20 Council to strengthen the alignment of programs and resources from birth to college or career. Focusing on the developmental needs of students, there should be a logical progression of learning from early childhood to post-secondary education and workforce readiness aimed at reducing the need for remediation at each transition. Improved alignment will benefit all children in Delaware. It will be of particular importance to low-income children who often lack sufficient support for their learning progress. Improved alignment will also strengthen cost-effectiveness in the overall delivery of educational programs and services throughout Delaware (Wilmington Education Improvement Commission, 2015).

National P–20 Overview

In 2008, there were 40 councils¹ nationwide. (ECS, n.d.). The councils ranged in size from five to 52 members. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) reports that many, if not most, of the Councils were advisory in nature. As of 2017, roughly 22 states no longer have active councils, and many of the states with active councils have changed their mission (H. Railey, personal communication, November 29, 2017). For example, Colorado’s P–20 Council is no longer active, but the state has an Early Childhood Leadership Commission that focuses on alignment of systems that serve children birth to age eight. Indiana has the Indiana Career Council, which focuses on aligning education systems with the job market (ECS, n.d.). Mississippi’s Education Achievement Council was established by the state’s legislature in 2010 with the goal of increasing the educational attainment and skill levels of the state’s working-age population to meet the benchmark national average by 2025 (Mississippi Public Universities, n.d.). Although these Commissions and Councils are not technically called P–20 councils, they have similar goals to P–20 councils.

The membership of these various councils and commissions typically includes representatives from state government, public K–12 leaders, public and/or private higher education officials and business community leaders.

The authority of P–20 Councils and their ability to make substantial policy decisions varies from state to state. Some are created as voluntary bodies and others are codified into law. Typically, P–20 councils are advisory bodies with minimal

¹ There are a mix of commissions with a P–16 and P–20 scope, one state has a P–21 council. Pennsylvania and Louisiana both have two councils.

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power or formal authority to directly implement policy or program actions (ECS, n.d.). The councils review research and submit recommendations to entities that have the formal power to make and implement policy decisions. For example, the Maryland P–20 council has several workgroups and members of these workgroups have made recommendations to the Maryland legislature. Councils also take on a more action-oriented role when the membership of the council includes key decision-makers in the P–20 system.

Maryland Council Transformation

In the mid-1990s, the state of Maryland formed the Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning K–16. Maryland was one of the first states to form a partnership that targeted students from preK–16. It was officially established through a voluntary Memorandum of Understanding between the Maryland State

Department of Education, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland (Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation [DLLR], n.d.). The goals of this partnership were defined as

1. Creating seamless transitions and assuring effective articulation pre-kindergarten through college and beyond;
2. Enabling students to meet high standards;
3. Preparing faculties to teach to high standards;
4. Aligning expectations for and eliminating barriers to student progress; and
5. Identifying collective strategies that involve all partners in improving student achievement (Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning L-16, n.d.).

In 2007, Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley, through Executive Order, expanded the role of the partnership and established the Governor's P-20 Leadership Council. The representation on the council expanded to include the Secretary of the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation and the Department of Commerce. Membership grew to 35 appointed individuals from the education, workforce development, and business communities. In 2008, the Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning K-16 was dissolved (DLLR, n.d.).

This Executive Order established 17 new areas of focus for the Maryland P-20 Council. These focus areas were substantially more well-defined than the previous five goals of the K-16 Partnership and were specifically targeted to improve education, build a robust workforce, and keep the state competitive.

Several examples from the 17 focus areas are

- **Ensuring** all students have the basic, critical thinking, and technical skills necessary to succeed in the modern workplace;
- **Reducing** dropout rates and increasing retention and graduation rates in high school and college;
- **Improving** student achievement and closing student achievement gaps; teaching quality; teacher retention; connections between the pre-k, primary, secondary, and higher education systems;
- **Connecting** high school expectations and college expectations with employer needs;
- **Creating** pathways for all students to obtain college degrees; programs and incentives to encourage mutually beneficial relationships between schools, school systems, higher education, and the business community; and
- **Aligning** high school graduation requirements with college readiness requirements (DLLR, n.d.).

One priority of the Maryland P-20 Council was the creation of the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS), a workgroup that operates under the Council. The purpose of the MLDS is to generate timely and accurate information about student performance that can be used to improve the State's education system and guide decision makers at all levels. The statute creating the MLDS requires the MLDS Center to perform research on:

- Maryland's education system;
- The impact of state and federal education programs;
- The performance of educator preparation programs; and
- Best practices regarding classroom instruction, education programs, and curriculum, and segment alignment (Governor's P-20 Leadership Council, 2016).

Delaware P–20 Council

The Delaware P–20 Council was established in 2003 by Executive Order 47 and was made permanent by statute in 2005 (Delaware P–20 Council, 2005). The P–20 Council aims to coordinate the efforts of all public and private education-related programs from early care through higher education. The goal of the Council is to make recommendations to

ensure a more integrated, seamless education system that enables children to enter school ready to learn, receive challenging instruction throughout their school careers, graduate from high school ready for college and careers, and continue their education through postsecondary study in a way that makes them productive and successful citizens. (De. Code Title 14 § 107)

The Council was created when the State Board of Education recognized a need for the leadership of schools, districts, and higher education institutions to have a holistic understanding of issues facing children and to communicate more frequently with each other. One of the original goals of the Delaware P–20 Council was to bring higher education—colleges and universities—into the P–12 conversation since there was no designated body in Delaware that had authority over higher education institutions (J. Pika, personal communication, March 7, 2018). When the Delaware P–20 Council was established, the active and coordinated engagement of higher education institutions with the state’s P–12 system was an expressed priority (J. Pika, personal communication, March 7, 2018).

When the Delaware P–20 Council was created, there was also concern about the struggles students were experiencing in transitioning across all levels of the system (J. Pika, personal

communication, March 7, 2018). One of the factors in this challenge seemed to be the lack of alignment of expectations and preparation across these levels. The P–20 Council was charged to find meaningful ways to improve alignments that would better enable students to transition across grade levels with the skills needed to succeed.

Delaware’s P–20 Council Structure

Originally, the Council included representatives from higher education, superintendents of school districts, representatives from early childhood education, members of professional organizations (such as the Delaware State Education Association), and a representative from the Delaware Business Roundtable. The Council was co-chaired by the President of the State Board of Education and the Secretary of Education. Over time, Council membership grew and the Council developed a subcommittee structure that was designed to adjust to the needs of the state determined by the Council. Subcommittees were established based on the measurable goals of the Council and reflected key priority areas that evolved over time, some impactful subcommittees include

- P–20 Data Cube;
- Delaware College Access Network;
- Transfer of Credit Matrix (formed from prior Dual Credit/Enrollment Committee);
- Delaware’s Promise: Dropout Prevention; and
- High School Graduation Requirements (P–20 Overview, 2017).

The current Delaware P–20 Subcommittees are

- English and Math committees to address remediation rates; and
- Data Governance (Early Learning, K–12, Higher education) (P–20 Overview, 2017).

Delaware P–20 Council Membership

The Delaware P–20 Council is co-chaired by the Secretary of Education and the President of the State Board of Education. The council members include

President or designee of the

- Public institutions of higher education in Delaware
- Institutions of higher education offering degree programs in education
- Delaware State Education Association
- Delaware Parent-Teacher Association
- Charter School Network, or their designees

Chair or designee of the

- Delaware Early Care and Education Council
- House and Senate Education Committees
- Business Roundtable Education Committee

Representative or designee of the

- Governor’s Office

Executive director or designee of the

- Delaware State Chamber of Commerce

Secretary or designee of the Department of

- Labor
- Services for Children, Youth and their Families
- Health and Social Services
- Technology and Information

Chief or designee of the

- Delaware Chief School Officers Association

Delaware P–20 Council Successes

During its first decade, the Council, through its subcommittees focused on measurable goals that led to some significant successes. One major accomplishment of the Council originated from the P–20 Data Cube subcommittee. The goal of

this Committee was to help create a single database run by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) that would capture data on Delaware students as they entered public schools up until their graduation from Delaware higher education institutions. The creation of the longitudinal data system was a significant achievement and helped Delaware secure Race to the Top funding in 2010. This subcommittee was integral in creating data sharing agreements between institutes of higher education and DDOE (J. Pika, personal communication, March 7, 2018).

The P–20 Council’s High School Graduation Requirements Committee, which began its work in 2005, provided critical data and information to help align high school graduation requirements with admission expectations of higher education institutions (High School Graduation Requirements Committee, 2006). This work led to the creation of Regulation 505 High School Graduation Requirements and Diplomas that codified standardized definitions and requirements for students transitioning from high school to college throughout Delaware. The work of this Committee also led to the Commitment to Delawareans program, which was “designed to inform students and parents throughout the state of the courses and level of academic performance recommended for admission onto the Newark campus” (UDaily, 2006).

The P–20 Council worked to craft a statewide definition of college and career readiness. This definition was inclusive of all students, focused on career and personal goals, and deemed it necessary that students had the knowledge, communication skills, and independent thinking abilities to succeed and adapt in the global economy (McMurrer, Frizzell, & McIntosh, 2013).

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The Council also worked to institute a Higher Education Transfer Credit Matrix. The Matrix is a web-based system that provides students with information regarding dual-enrollment and clearly articulates to stakeholders the courses that transfer between institutions of higher education (Summary and Scope, 2009).

Ultimately, Delaware's P-20 Council helped align systems targeted at students across all school levels and remains the only group in which higher education has a substantial voice in the discussion.

Delaware P-20 Challenges

Since 2010, a focus on Council goals decreased as the attention shifted to other statewide initiatives underway such as Race to the Top, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, Pathways to Prosperity, and the Delaware College Access Network. P-20 Council meetings began to report on the work of these statewide initiatives rather than on goals developed by the Council. These factors resulted in the

disengagement of some senior members of the Council, who then were replaced by representatives often without the authority to act on behalf of their institutions. These representatives often changed from one Council meeting to another, further convoluting the flow of information to senior leadership.

Another factor leading to Council disengagement was that some leaders of Delaware's business community and nonprofit organizations became directly involved with other education-oriented initiatives outside of the Council (J. Pika, personal communication, March 7, 2018).

In effect, due to a change in statewide priorities and disengaged senior leadership, the Delaware P-20 Council no longer has a well-developed research agenda and strategic plan and has ceased to operate as a driver for many policy recommendations.

Refocusing Delaware's P-20 Council

The Wilmington Education Improvement Commission has called for strengthening the Delaware P-20 Council. To support this refocusing, Secretary of Education Susan Bunting and State Board of Education President Dennis Loftus have called upon the provosts of Delaware's higher education institutions to actively engage in rebuilding the Council's leadership role and improving the overall alignment of all levels of Delaware's education system. That commitment is consistent with the commitment of all higher education institutions in Delaware to become part of the Campus Compact Mid-Atlantic (CCMA), which includes higher education institutions in Maryland and Washington, D.C. CCMA aims to "increase student success from cradle to career and yield improved education and community outcomes by working toward a set of common goals"

(MDCCC CONNECTS, n.d.). A priority of CCMA is to enhance the active engagement of higher education institutions with their community and support the overall improvement of P–20 education (Campus Compact Mid-Atlantic, n.d.).

Recommendations

Based on national best practices, Delaware’s P–20 Council should establish its own research agenda and strategic goals that will lead decision-makers to set clear policy priorities focused on collaboration and alignment. The Council should also strengthen the committee structure to reflect the research agenda and goals.

Based on the Commission’s assessment of needs and opportunities, Delaware’s P–20 Council should focus on the four strategic goals listed below:

1. **Improve alignment of the education system for children birth through third grade, connecting early childhood education with K–3 public education.** The partnership between the P–20 Council and the Early Childhood Council should be revived with a focus on the birth through third grade period and the transition from early learning to kindergarten. The Council should also align efforts with work already under way such as the Delaware Readiness Teams and the Campaign for Grade Level Reading.
2. **Reduce the need for remediation for Delaware high school students transitioning to post-secondary education and training.** In 2016, the P–20 Council established two subcommittees, one for mathematics and one for English, to address this priority. These subcommittees should be made standing committees of the P–20 Council and while continuing to make policy and practice

recommendations, also be charged to lead the way in implementation of recommendations adopted by the council.

3. **Ensure a robust and diverse pipeline of high-quality educators for the State of Delaware and ensure the support of current and future educators, particularly in critical need content areas and high needs schools.** The P–20 Council should align with the recommendations set forth by TeachDE and support a dynamic approach to systems change that concentrates on collaborative work among the DDOE, Delaware school districts and charter schools, Delaware institutions of higher education, and organizations representing educators.
4. **Provide access to education opportunities and programming for every Delaware high school graduate to be prepared and successful for college and career.** This work should build upon, align, and enhance current work underway of the Pathways to Prosperity initiative, the Workforce Development Board, *Delaware’s English Learner Strategic Plan 2022*, and other groups. It should also strengthen coordinated efforts among higher institutions and collaborating districts and charters to expand opportunities for Delaware high school graduates.

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The Wilmington Education Improvement Commission is mandated by law to advise the Governor and General Assembly on how to improve the quality and availability of education for children P–12 within the city of Wilmington and recommend actions to address the needs of all schools statewide that have high concentrations of students in poverty, English language learners, and other students at risk.

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