

CALL TO ACTION
Renovating the P-20 Pyramid in Education
With the Leadership of Schools of Law

http://www.mcgeorge.edu/government_law_and_policy/education_law/wingspread/call_to_action.htm

To work collaboratively to maximize educational aspirations and opportunities for students who are disproportionately under-represented in colleges and universities and in professional schools, particularly law schools.

Overview

If law schools and other professional schools are to continue to train our future civic leaders, and if colleges and universities are to retain their important place as educators in our democracy, the answer must lie in improving the pipeline and substantially increasing the numbers of minority and economically disadvantaged students who have, and who recognize, opportunities to move from P to 20.

It is no longer sufficient for law schools to sit atop the P-20 pyramid in education and wait for those who apply. Nor is it sufficient for law schools to engage in remedial programs for admitted students, or even for potential applicants at the college level. Law schools, which have remained largely aloof from the P-12 school reform agenda, need to reach across the pipeline and involve themselves in the preparation of students along the way. Similarly, colleges and universities must devote themselves to stronger collaborations with both P-12 educators and grade 13-20 educators. And P-12 educators must push for and engage in activities that will close both the gaps in alignment between them and grades 13-20 and the gaps in opportunities among racially and socioeconomically diverse students.

The Genesis of the Call This Call originated as the result of work at a Wingspread Conference held in June of 2004. The Wingspread Conference involved teams of educators from law, education, and liberal arts schools together with K12 educators, as well as a national array of education leaders and experts.

Five Recommended Actions:

* Law schools should take a leadership role in establishing themselves as partners with schools of education and colleges of liberal arts and sciences in their universities and with P-12 educators in their communities, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Law schools should mobilize their faculty, students, and alumni (who are especially steeped in the concepts of due process, justice, and civic engagement), and they should involve themselves in education across the full spectrum of young people throughout the educational pipeline. This involvement can take the form of street law initiatives; mock trial programs; mentor programs involving law students as well as the bench and bar; programmatic, pedagogical, and curricular development around law-related education and civic engagement; and joint appointments and programming within their universities.

Law schools should consider their own curriculum offerings in terms of educating future legislators and leaders about civic engagement and educational policy so that they are prepared to play a constructive role in the P-20 arena.

* Colleges and universities should likewise commit themselves to establishing or strengthening partnerships with neighboring law schools and with their P-12 communities.

Colleges and universities should involve themselves in P-20 school reform initiatives (a) by recommitting themselves to teaching and learning for civic engagement and social responsibility and (b) by aligning expectations and education to facilitate access and opportunity along the pipeline.

College and university involvement could take the form of mentor programs for college students, particularly would-be teachers; training and mentor programs and exchanges for P-20 teachers; curricular and methodological development and sharing around civic engagement; joint appointments with their area law schools; and exchange appointments with their P-12 colleagues.

* All higher education institutions should commit themselves to review, and revise if appropriate, their current policies on promotion and tenure (including academic credit for student projects) in order to assure that recognition is provided for those working and researching public education and public service agendas.

* The P-12 community should be involved with university partners throughout the pipeline, and it should expect and push to have the grade 13-20 community actively engaged in their practice and research.

P-12 communities should work to align their programs with the expectations of the higher education communities in order to assure that their students are appropriately trained with high cognitive skills in rigorous academic environments. P-12 communities should also work to assure that their students are aware of the expectations and requirements for accessing higher education and that they have opportunities and guidance to appropriately credential themselves for future success and leadership.

* P-12, 13-16, and 17-20 educators should form teams that will work cohesively and collaboratively to put into place local, national, and international initiatives to meet these ends. These teams should in turn reach out to encourage the formation of comparable teams with similar agendas

P-12, 13-16 and 17-20 educators should develop area-specific programs, and they should contribute to forums in which current partnerships between law schools and P-16 educational institutions can be showcased and in which ideas can be exchanged and expanded for further work in law-related education, civic education, and school reform.

Why This Is Important

Education at all levels is the public's agenda. From local school boards to law schools, from philanthropic foundations to federal and state agencies, from legislatures to the Supreme Court, education and the civic mission of schools are crucial societal issues. At the same time, education is now characterized in large part by its relationship and convergence with the nation's legal system, as legislative, administrative, and judicial bodies across the country struggle with increasingly complicated regulatory and constitutional demands for adequate and equitable education.

This context offers a moment ripe for change, for new relationships, and for new vision. Decisions made now will influence the diversity of leaders of the future, just as those decisions will influence the shape and richness of our democratic communities.

This Call to Action acknowledges several significant concerns, including the aspiration and achievement gaps across racial and socioeconomic lines, the general decline in civic

engagement among youth, and the lack of cohesive action along the full spectrum of the educational pipeline to address these issues. Simply put, too many of our young people are at risk or lost along the pipeline, and we are losing their potential as leaders and keepers of democratic ideals.

The goal of this Call to Action is to offer a functional, practical approach to improving diversity in the pipeline by recommitting ourselves to the historical public purpose of education and by forging new effective alliances to address our concerns.

The Aspiration and Achievement Gap: As evidenced in lower test scores, lower high school graduation rates, lower college admissions and graduation, lower professional school admissions, and lower representation in various professions (including law), “achievement gap statistics” are troubling and persistent. By way of example, the Urban Institute has recently reported that “barely half of all black, Hispanic, and Native American students who entered U.S. high schools in 2000 will receive diplomas.” Even those students who do graduate will remain under-represented in college, particularly in top-ranked colleges. For those who do go on to college, many will need additional support to survive there, and many will drop out. Similarly, they will be disproportionately represented in graduate schools and in the professions. All along the way African American, Hispanic, and other underrepresented groups will have fewer opportunities to participate in rigorous academic experiences, and they will have lower aspirations about the value of such participation. They may not be exposed to or well-schooled in the critical thinking and writing skills crucial to achievement further along the pipeline, and, thus, the disparities will continue to grow. These failings are not those of the students, but of an infrastructure that fails to provide a continuum of appropriate, consistent, directed, and rigorous guidance and learning experiences.

The Civic Mission: With limited educational aspirations and opportunities has also come civic disengagement. In recent years, the decline in knowledge about the social and political constructs of our democracy has been precipitous, and the cynical disinclination of youth to participate in politics or community institutions endemic. At the same time, our institutions seem to have drifted away from acknowledging their traditional responsibility to engage their diverse communities in the richness of education and society. The call for more schools at all levels to engage in what the Carnegie Commission has called the “civic mission of schools” is strong and necessary.

The Infrastructure Dilemma: While there is now a widely held expectation that meaningful educational reform at secondary and post-secondary levels will require constructive collaboration between secondary schools and colleges and universities, the extent and orientation of the participation of law schools (and other professional schools) in school reform programs are still emerging. The differences of time, pedagogical approach, and mission that separate private and public P-12 schools from our colleges and from our graduate and professional schools are substantial. Indeed, it is also the case that the distance from our schools of education and colleges of liberal arts and sciences to our law schools is also substantial. We lack meaningful infrastructure for true collaboration along the educational pipeline from P to 20. So too we lack appropriate cohesion in approach and alignment in the pipeline, all to the detriment of students. More information is available from Professor Sarah Redfield at sredfield@pacific.edu.