



# CO-DESIGN, CO-DELIVERY, AND CO-VALIDATION

CREATING HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

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Strong, sustained collaboration between secondary and postsecondary systems is essential to preparing more young people to complete college and earn credentials that lead to careers. While high schools and colleges have their own distinct roles in educating students, their shared interest in student success comes closest to converging at the end of high school and the beginning of college. We suggest that at this juncture sharing responsibility for the same students in a communal transition zone can have a greater effect than acting apart.

The work of creating a shared transition zone has not been attempted comprehensively at any substantial scale. However, promising precedents of practice, which can inform the design of a shared zone, exist across the country in successful K-12 and college collaborative efforts. In this paper, we extrapolate from these examples to propose principles for designing new and more productive K-12 and postsecondary institutional partnerships that could create a smoother student transition from senior year into the first year of college.

The challenges to secondary/postsecondary collaboration are deeply rooted in the history and culture of American education. Interest in collaboration may be growing, however, given:

- ▶ the limited life options for individuals without some form of post-high school education,

- ▶ the economic need of communities and states to have educated citizens; and
- ▶ new state curriculum standards that are trying to support the development of college and career readiness for a larger proportion of students.

The aim of this paper is to suggest how educators can build upon this momentum to increase collective responsibility and create solutions across systems, so that more students complete a postsecondary degree or credential within a reasonable amount of time. High school/postsecondary partnerships to redesign grade 12 and the first year of college can follow three principles: **co-design**, **co-delivery**, and **co-validation**.

Practices consistent with these principles will be most powerful if they are implemented together.

### Co-Design

Deciding on and designing together courses, curricular pathways, and support systems—as well as professional development opportunities and data platforms that impact *what* and *how* students learn.

### Co-Delivery

Sharing and coordinating faculty and staff, facilities, and other resources to carry out the co-designed learning experiences and supports.

### Co-Validation

Accepting agreed-upon assessments, successful completion of performance tasks and experiences, and other indicators of learning as evidence of proficiency—including for placement in credit-bearing, college-level courses.

## BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

Examples of co-design, co-delivery, and co-validation are encouraging but still relatively limited in scope and number. To deliver on such principles beyond exceptional programs or pilots, policy and practice leaders will need to address a number of barriers embedded in key areas of school and college operations. These include **accountability systems** that pit high schools and colleges against each other; lack of **capacity** to develop collaborative curricula-delivery programs; **assessment and placement** systems that work at cross-purposes; disparate **curricula and instructional systems that aren't aligned** across high school and college systems; **incentives** that promote competition between systems rather than collaboration; and **limited access to data** that can help academic staff inform and shape their decisions.

## STEPS STATES CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT K-12 AND POSTSECONDARY PARTNERSHIPS

Although effective redesign faces challenges, there are signs that K-12 districts and colleges can successfully work together on significant cross-sector policy and practice changes. Evidence is still needed to determine whether such efforts ultimately expand student opportunities and increase postsecondary success, but they point to some of the types of possible collaboration.

Policies—and the institutional cultures and operating norms that provide context for those policies—must evolve in some of the following ways to support deeper and broader collaboration:

- **Creating and supporting cultures of experimentation:** Policies should support postsecondary systems, postsecondary institutions, districts, and schools in taking calculated, evidence-based risks and experimenting with new forms of collaboration and new strategies to support shared responsibility for students.
- **Capacity building:** Deep collaboration across K-12 and postsecondary requires not only time and space to collaborate and try new things, but also new forms of support and learning for educators. States can encourage capacity building and collaboration by creating and incentivizing shared professional development experiences and regional partnerships of high schools and broad-access colleges.
- **Formative assessment:** States can encourage and incentivize districts to provide financial incentives, time, and professional development for educators to develop and use formative assessments to keep students out of developmental education in college by zeroing in on the specific areas in which they need support in high school.

- > **Curricular and instructional strategies:** To engage students at deeper levels, innovative high school and postsecondary educators are focusing more on the relevancy and application of skills and on student ownership of learning. This progress should continue and be vertically aligned, so that it diversifies pedagogy beyond the lecture-based classroom in both K-12 and higher education.
- > **Finance:** States can provide resources and alter finance structures to incentivize a shared transition zone in areas such as curricular reform, the development of instructional strategies, data system development and use, cross-system diagnostic assessment, and educator learning.
- > **Data use and cultures of continuous improvement:** Data systems require the same kinds of co-development, co-delivery, and co-validation as other areas. Systems, schools, and postsecondary institutions can begin by defining a range of common data points to track and incentivize.

## CONCLUSION

Attempts to change practice and policy will need to take place simultaneously and ensure that policy does not make demands beyond the capacity of education practitioners. Policy must also enable pockets of promising practice to be elevated, replicated, or adapted across the unique contexts of a variety of schools, postsecondary institutions, and partnerships. In addition, local and state leaders will likely need to integrate, align, and incentivize more programs and policies to promote these principles of partnership. This makes more space and capacity for educators to engage in a shared transition zone, rather than layering on another new reform. Given the national focus on supporting greater levels of learning and success after high school, this kind of shared responsibility must occur if states and the nation are to realize their aspirational goals to support postsecondary readiness and completion for a larger proportion of students.

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For more information about JFF services to build educational pathways that prepare all young people for college and careers, contact Joel Vargas, Vice President, School and Learning Designs, [jvargas@jff.org](mailto:jvargas@jff.org).



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