

CONNECTION

NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL

OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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The New England Board of Higher Education is a nonprofit, congressionally authorized, interstate agency whose mission is to foster cooperation and the efficient use of resources among New England's approximately 280 colleges and universities. NEBHE was established by the New England Higher Education Compact, a 1955 agreement among the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. NEBHE operates a variety of programs for New England students, including the tuition-saving Regional Student Program, and advances regional discussion of critical issues through the quarterly journal, CONNECTION.

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EDITOR'S MEMO

Just when I was not getting used to 24-7 and B2B, along comes "P-16"—a sort of shorthand for all the issues surrounding integration of three historically disconnected education systems: preschool, K-12 and higher education.

How disconnected are they? Ernest Boyer, the late president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, once lamented, "Schools and colleges still live in separate worlds. Presidents and deans rarely talk to principals and district superintendents. College faculty do not meet with their counterparts in public schools, and curriculum reforms at every level are planned in isolation."

Rand Corp. Senior Advisor P. Michael Timpane observed in a report to the State Higher Education Executive Officers: "Notwithstanding numerous specific cooperative projects, the basic relationship between higher education and the schools has not changed very much. The divorce may still be friendly, visiting rights may be expanding, but reconciliation does not seem imminent."

And a recent national report by Stanford University education scholar Michael Kirst notes that "the high school curriculum is unmoored from the freshman and sophomore college curriculum."

In fact, in some places, the two seem to be set on different courses. Chris Lydon, the former host of National Public Radio's "The Connection," who put his children through Boston Public Schools on their way toward Harvard and Boston University, told me: "It's just too ironic that the world beats a path to Boston for higher education, yet people are leaving the city because of its K-12 schools."

New England has seen exceptions to the general rule of disconnection. Harvard's Project Zero and Brown's Coalition of Essential Schools are among university institutes on the cutting-edge of student learning. Federally funded Upward Bound programs have been bringing disadvantaged students to campuses such as Wesleyan University since the 1970s, and several New England two-year colleges have introduced Tech-Prep programs, integrating the last two years of high school with two years of specialized technical training at the college level.

More dramatically, Boston University's takeover of the troubled Chelsea, Mass., schools created an unprecedented, if controversial, laboratory for education reform. And as part of a multimillion-dollar revitalization effort to clean up Worcester's deteriorating Main South neighborhood, Clark University and partners opened the University Park Campus School in 1997 with Clark professors as teachers, Clark students as student teachers and mentors, and a promise to pupils that if they do well, Clark will admit them and cover tuition.

Still, few issues tie together higher education and K-12 as tightly as teacher preparation, particularly in light of a deepening teacher shortage.

Community College Week recently noted that "Hardest hit by the teacher shortage are urban school districts, remote rural areas and fast-growing suburbs." Which means there is no teacher shortage on Mars. The teaching posts don't remain vacant for the most part, but they are filled by teachers who lack a license or even a minor in their fields, which in turn virtually ensures low student achievement. No wonder Massachusetts recently announced the unusual step of offering its controversial teacher test to teacher candidates in Chicago, Los Angeles and five other cities outside the Bay State.

By some commonly cited estimates, just one of three of today's teachers will be in the classroom at the end of the decade; the other two will have left the profession and been replaced. By whom is obviously a key question for higher education, whose monopoly in preparing teachers is already weakened.

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Back in the fall of 1998, CONNECTION featured articles on higher education and the media, which drew considerable attention. The piece in this issue on the academy's fallen idols continues this exploration with a look at how the media treats academics accused of intellectual dishonesty. We expect this will not be our last look at higher education and the media.

John O. Harney is executive editor of CONNECTION.