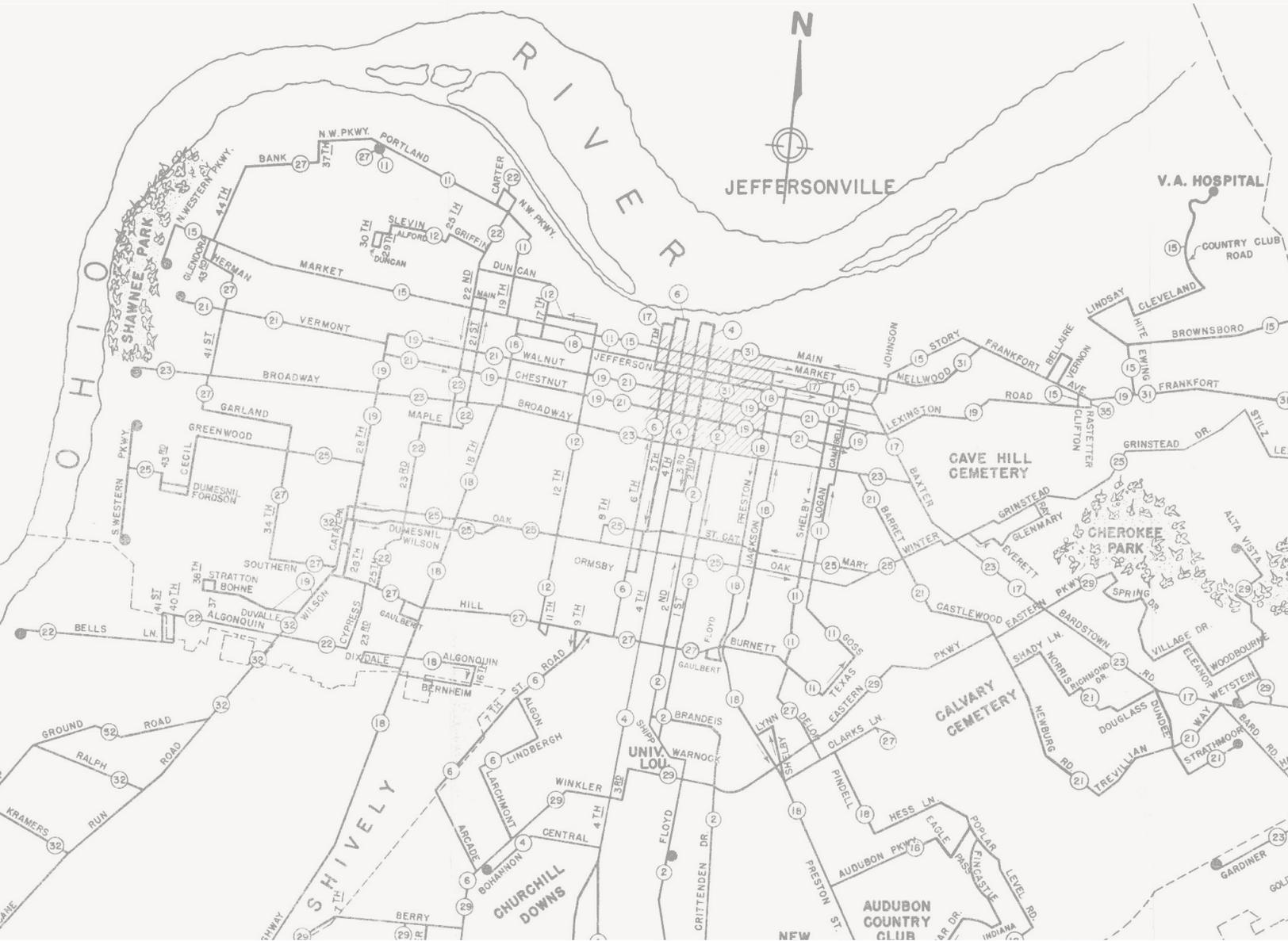


Increasing Baccalaureate Degree Attainment in Louisville: A Proposed Blueprint for Community Action



Greater Louisville Inc.
The Metro Chamber of Commerce



Creating Solutions. Inspiring Action.



Produced by the Business-Higher Education Forum
Draft plan presented to the Mayor's Education Roundtable retreat, July 23, 2009, Louisville, KY
Revised plan delivered to the Mayor's Education Roundtable on August 28, 2009

About BHEF

BHEF is an organization of Fortune 500 CEOs, prominent college and university presidents, and foundation leaders working to advance innovative solutions to the nation's education challenges in order to enhance U.S. competitiveness. BHEF brings together an extraordinary coalition of corporate, academic, and foundation members to influence public policy and inspire other corporate, academic, and foundation leaders to act. Online at www.bhef.com.

Business-Higher Education Forum
2025 M Street NW, Suite 800, Washington DC 20036

August 28, 2009

Dear Members of the Business Leaders for Education (BLE) and Mayor's Education Roundtable (MER):

Across the country, cities and regions have used community-wide partnerships to improve the educational attainment of their citizens. The most established of these partnerships have seen substantial education gains during their tenure.

Your community of Louisville, Kentucky has embarked on a similar effort to improve educational attainment. While the community has long demonstrated commitment to these issues through initiatives such as Every1Reads, this most recent effort is even more systemic and inclusive, focusing on the education pipeline through postsecondary education. Nearly two years ago, the BLE, coordinated through Greater Louisville Inc., asked the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF), a Washington, DC-based organization with experience in community-wide education improvement efforts, to guide them in assessing how best to improve educational attainment within Louisville.

In 2008, BHEF agreed to provide strategic guidance to this group of education leaders and recommended it convene key education and community leaders. At the same time, Mayor Abramson convened the Mayor's Education Roundtable (MER), a group comprised of community leaders from all sectors—including business, K-12 education, postsecondary education, and community organizations—to address the education challenges facing the region.

Following these developments, BHEF committed to working with the Louisville community to develop a plan that will help the community reach its goal of increasing educational attainment. This document is the end result.

BHEF developed this plan after conducting multiple site visits, focus groups, individual interviews, and document review. In May and June 2009, BHEF staff members spoke with dozens of representatives from K-12 and postsecondary education, the business community, community-based organizations, foundations, and the municipal government. Through these interviews, BHEF sought to delve deeper into the challenges facing Louisville and identify P-16 and workforce strategies to increase the number of college graduates.

BHEF presented a draft version of this plan at the MER Strategic Retreat in July 2009. During the day-long retreat, MER members discussed the goals and strategies presented in the plan. As a result of the retreat, substantive changes and refinements were made to the plan's goals, and additional strategies were suggested. BHEF revised the plan on the basis of those suggestions and submitted this final version to the Mayor's Education Roundtable in August 2009. BHEF expects that the community will continue to refine the proposed blueprint in order to effectively implement the plan in the community.

The success of this initiative will depend on widespread community involvement, coordination, and responsibility. This blueprint is intended to be a starting point for those processes, and for the MER to develop a set of strategies for increasing educational attainment and a plan for implementing those strategies.

Sincerely,
The Staff of the Business-Higher Education Forum

Introduction

Across the United States, communities are organizing to address their persistent educational challenges. Although the ways in which regional leaders address educational attainment differ, collectively this activity signals a shift in how we think about education improvement efforts. Rather than asking educators to bear sole responsibility for the preparation of 21st century employees, the most successful communities engage all sectors in this endeavor, aligning their efforts around common goals. Together, these communities identify common threats to community vitality, shape dynamic and sustainable partnerships, and develop systemic solutions that will allow the region to attain its goals—economic, educational, environmental, and social.

In Louisville, Kentucky, the community has taken this challenge to heart. Business leaders, metropolitan government officials, non-profit organizers, religious figures, foundation officers, K-12 superintendents, and college and university presidents have come together with a common goal: Improve the region's educational attainment. Achieving this goal will serve the region's citizens, drive economic competitiveness, and improve Louisville's ratings in comparison to its peer cities.

In early 2008, Greater Louisville Inc., Louisville's Chamber of Commerce, convened a Business Leaders for Education (BLE) group to help drive this effort. In turn, the business community asked the national membership organization, the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF), to help Louisville capitalize on the national momentum building around such efforts.

This work was greatly bolstered in 2008 when Louisville's Mayor Abramson convened the Mayor's Education Roundtable (MER) to focus on the educational challenges facing the region. The MER is a body of K-12 educators, college and university presidents, community and business leaders, and foundation officials committed to improving baccalaureate degree attainment in the Louisville region. In conjunction with the Louisville BLE, the MER asked the Business-Higher Education Forum to draft a community education action plan that integrates the prior work of both local groups, draws on examples from other cities and states, and focuses on helping the community develop systemic education solutions.

Why Now?

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Task Force on Higher Education's 2007 report presented compelling data indicating that while progress is evident the state is well short of its goal of doubling the number of baccalaureate degrees by 2020. Jefferson County increased postsecondary attainment, but increases in postsecondary certificates earned exceeded increases in the number of baccalaureate degrees awarded. In addition, many high school students are not fully prepared to succeed in postsecondary education or the work place. This pattern suggests that meeting this goal will require a new coordinated and systemic approach that begins in middle school with increasing the number of students who graduate from high school expecting to attend college and prepared to do so; continues

through postsecondary education to increase the number of students who complete their associate's degrees, transfer to 4-year institutions, and graduate from 4-year institutions; and extends into the business community to attract industries in key sectors that will create a more vibrant, knowledge-based economy.

A confluence of events at the national, state, and local levels provide a unique opportunity to address these challenges and achieve the community's goals. At the national level, the Obama Administration has made increasing educational attainment a national priority. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the administration has made the largest one-time investment in education in our nation's history. The Obama Administration has also placed significant focus on higher education through new programs that will focus on college access and completion, and on community colleges. Both of these programs present significant opportunities for states and regions that are seeking to improve postsecondary outcomes because they will funnel billions of dollars into our nation's higher education system to ensure that students receive the postsecondary education they need for our national workforce to remain competitive. In Fall 2009, the President likely will announce a coordinated national science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) initiative that will focus heavily on middle and high school math and science, and the National Science Foundation is actively funding partnerships to improve math and science teaching, including a partnership between Jefferson County Public Schools, University of Louisville, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, and Teach Kentucky.

At the state level, the passage of Senate Bill 1 to reform the Kentucky Education Reform Act has once again defined Kentucky as a leader in state education improvement efforts. Moreover, Kentucky has endorsed the Common Core State Standards Initiative of the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. As its name suggests, this effort is committed to developing a common core of state standards within K-12 English and mathematics linked to college and career readiness benchmarks. The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence continues to serve as a vital resource for education improvement efforts across the state, including the Louisville region.

Locally, the leadership is in place to spearhead real, systemic change that will spur regional education improvement. At the K-12 level, JCPS is implementing a series of interconnected reforms designed to better prepare students for success in the 21st century, and high schools within the Archdiocese are sending virtually all of their graduates to college. Postsecondary improvements, guided by individual institutional leaders as well as partnerships such as the HIRE Education Forum and Kentuckiana Metroversity, are driving increases in college transfer and graduation rates and attracting traditionally underrepresented students to higher education. Groups including Greater Louisville Inc. and KentuckianaWorks are coordinating the business community to determine workforce demand and shape programs that will train the workforce of the 21st century. Concurrently, community and faith-based organizations such as Junior Achievement, the Urban League, Boys and Girls Clubs, and numerous churches are implementing new education initiatives to improve student outcomes. These many promising activities signal a willingness to engage with the issues; the next step is to systematically coordinate efforts and capitalize on common interests.

What Does this Plan Do?

This plan presents a blueprint for community action with the deepest respect for the substantial undertaking on which this community has embarked. The collaboration necessary for eventual

implementation is already well underway. The plan's framing goals derive directly from the Mayor's Education Roundtable, reflecting the hours of direct thought and years of experience Louisville's stakeholders have already committed to identifying the region's barriers to educational attainment. While developing this plan, BHEF interviewed dozens of community stakeholders and attended many meetings of concerned stakeholder groups. The goals, strategies, and recommendations in this plan were all garnered from this work. The framing goals are:

- Create a strong college-going culture in Louisville's schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.
- Increase alignment and rigor across the K-12 and postsecondary education systems.
- Ensure that the citizens of Louisville can access and afford postsecondary education.
- Ensure all Louisville students will be able to progress through postsecondary institutions to ultimately attain needed postsecondary credentials.
- Galvanize Louisville's education, business, and community leaders to achieve a long-term, common education agenda.

In turn, the plan presents strategies and recommendations that arise from the dozens of interviews conducted and from analyses of successful community efforts across the country. This blueprint for action is designed to provide comprehensive and systemic guidance for the Louisville community toward its 2020 education attainment target. In achieving this end goal, Louisville will serve as a national leader for community education improvement and as a model that can be replicated in other regions of the state.

Goal 1: Create a strong college-going culture in Louisville's schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

In Louisville, as in other cities, recent changes in the global economy have drawn renewed attention to the role of postsecondary education in strengthening the middle class and contributing to overall economic development. Many careers in health care, the Louisville region's highest demand industry, require at least some college experience, and experts project that two-thirds of all new jobs created nationally by 2020 will require some type of postsecondary credential.ⁱ These trends signal a shift toward a more knowledge-based economy that highly values postsecondary education.

There is some evidence that Louisville residents understand the importance of postsecondary education in today's economy. For example, enrollment at Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) grew by nearly 40 percent from 2000 to 2007 and the number of certificates awarded nearly doubled in that same time period.ⁱⁱ Similarly, graduation rates at the University of Louisville have risen from 32 percent to 48 percent in the past decade. Despite these trends, several people interviewed for this plan indicated that there is a widespread belief in the community that high school graduates can secure well paying jobs without postsecondary education, as has historically been the case. These community and education leaders suggested that such a mindset limits the educational aspirations of adults and young people in Louisville.¹

Limited expectations for college-going can manifest themselves in academic course-taking patterns as early as middle school, in the degree to which students and families learn about college and financial aid options, and in the extent to which students apply themselves in their high school courses. According to one education expert in Louisville, the absence of a strong college-going culture in the community even affects those who do aspire to college: this expert described a trend in which recent high school graduates who enroll in local colleges and universities choose not to attend at the last minute because their peers are not going to college or because they lack family support.

To overcome these challenges, it is critical to link the importance of postsecondary education and lifelong learning to success in today's knowledge-based economy, and to raise expectations about attending postsecondary education and earning a bachelor's degree. Creating a strong college-going culture across the region will involve sustained, multi-layered efforts that reach all sectors of the community, from business to community and faith-based organizations to schools. It will involve a variety of programs and activities that are designed to change people's beliefs about the importance of postsecondary education, increase their expectations for degree attainment, prepare them academically, arm them with the knowledge to enroll and succeed in college, and create viable career pathways for them once they attain their degrees.

¹ The IQS research will shed more light on the beliefs of Louisville residents on the barriers to college-going.

Goal 1: Create a strong college-going culture in Louisville's schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

Strategy 1: Change public expectations about the value of a postsecondary education, especially baccalaureate degrees

Recommendations

- Launch a community-wide media campaign that emphasizes the importance of postsecondary education and lifelong learning for all.
- Work directly with churches and families through community-based organizations to change public opinion regarding the importance of college.
- Launch a well-articulated policy agenda targeting the Kentucky legislature to promote statewide postsecondary education public awareness efforts.
- Foster partnerships among labor unions, employers, workforce development organizations, and postsecondary institutions to link regional workforce needs to postsecondary education.
- Expand career and college awareness programs (e.g., College Day Out and Close the Deal) for middle and high school students, targeting students who are typically underrepresented in postsecondary education.

Strategy 2: Begin a systematic focus on college readiness and access as early as possible and no later than middle school

Recommendations

- Identify the essential components of college access (e.g., middle school and high school course completion, college and FAFSA applications), link those milestones to real-time data systems, and use the data to tailor interventions.
- Ensure that all students have a solid reading foundation in the primary years and begin a college preparatory curriculum in middle school, especially the mathematics core sequence.
- Support deep, widespread implementation of a rigorous, inquiry-based curriculum through professional learning communities, professional development, and teacher training programs.
- Provide additional academic and counseling supports in middle and high school to prepare students for postsecondary education.
- Maximize opportunities for students to prepare for college by taking remedial courses or accelerating their education while still in high school (e.g., move to a trimester schedule, implement an early identification system, teach developmental college courses in high schools, expand dual enrollment opportunities and early college experiences).

Goal 1: Create a strong college-going culture in Louisville's schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

Strategy 3: Ensure that all students have an adult advocate

Recommendations

- Expand the JCPS Advisor/Advisee program to all high schools in the district.
- Increase the number of guidance counselors in schools and community organizations.
- Adopt a more individualized and integrated approach to providing counseling services for students.
- Encourage adults in existing community and faith-based programs (e.g., the National Urban League's Street Academy, mentoring programs, Boys and Girls Club, St. Stephen's Dare to be GREAT program) to act as student advocates, and ensure these advocates have information on college options to best support students.
- Create new opportunities for adults in schools and the community to serve as student advocates.

Strategy 4: Encourage and support adults to get and/or complete their degrees

Recommendations

- Implement recommendations from the America's Promise Drop Out Summit to ensure high school dropouts have pathways back into the education system.
- Create career pathways that reward degree attainment and lifelong learning.
- Use partnerships among labor unions, employers, workforce development organizations, and postsecondary institutions to provide tuition assistance, flexible work environments, and last-dollar funding for comebackers.
- Offer targeted counseling to help adults with GEDs and comebackers re-enter the education system and finish their degrees in a timely manner.
- Expand the range of flexible education delivery options (e.g., programs that offer credit for work experience, online courses, courses in churches or community centers, job-embedded coursework.)
- Enhance the capacity of the Kentuckiana College Access Center.
- Advocate for supportive state policies and federal funding (e.g., tuition or fee waivers, incentives for businesses).

Strategy 5: Attract knowledge-based industries to the region, especially in key sectors

Recommendations

- Analyze the capacity of local colleges and universities to meet the demands of knowledge-based industries.
- Leverage federal stimulus funding to identify and target new, high-growth industries.
- Create incentive programs that encourage Louisville K-12 and postsecondary education groups and community organizations to help recruit new businesses.
- Use education incentives and partnerships to recruit new businesses to the region.

Goal 2: Increase alignment and rigor across the K-12 and postsecondary education systems.

Creating a more seamless education system is vital to college readiness and access, and ultimately, college success. If the skills and competencies required for high school graduation and the first year of college do not mesh well with each other, college freshmen run a high risk of being placed in developmental courses, which can delay or even derail their graduation from college. In one Kentucky study, college students requiring remediation were twice as likely to drop out as their peers who did not require remediation, and students who took developmental courses in more than one subject were at an even greater risk of dropping out of college.ⁱⁱⁱ Viewed in this light, high school/postsecondary alignment also becomes a critical component of the region's plans for economic development.

Senate Bill 1 acknowledges a need for greater P-16 alignment in Kentucky. Statewide, 45 percent of all recent high school graduates entering college in 2006 required remediation in one or more subjects.^{iv} Data from the Louisville region also appear to support this need. In 2007, for example, the vast majority of students in the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) performed at or above grade level on the Kentucky CATS test (92 percent in reading and 83 percent in mathematics). In that same year, roughly two-thirds of recent high school graduates who attended Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) required at least one developmental course, with the greatest developmental needs in mathematics.^v These data point to a fundamental misalignment between the K-12 standards (on which JCPS students succeed) and the standards that postsecondary institutions use to determine college readiness.

The alignment process is complex and systemic. It will require long-term collaboration across the K-12, postsecondary, and business sectors to develop a common definition of college readiness and craft a shared vision of the P-16 education system as a continuum that is linked to career competencies. With this vision in place, the hard work of examining the curriculum and identifying a system of appropriate assessments can begin. To add further complexity, these efforts must take place in the context of the state's directive to implement Senate Bill 1 and of Kentucky's decision to join the national Common Core State Standards Initiative led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Despite its difficulty, the rewards of alignment are potentially great. From a policy perspective, Louisville has an opportunity to be in the vanguard of efforts to implement Senate Bill 1 and to serve as a model for the state and the nation. At the system level, increasing alignment can support a lifetime of learning and improve college readiness by coordinating academic competencies and programs, increasing the effective use of data across the K-12 and postsecondary systems, and allowing for early identification of students who are falling behind. And finally, at the student level, blending the high school and postsecondary experiences can help to establish a strong college-going culture, prepare students for college, and reduce barriers to college attendance, particularly for traditionally underrepresented students.

Goal 2: Increase alignment and rigor across the K-12 and postsecondary education systems.

Strategy 1: Develop a shared definition of college readiness

Recommendations

- Begin shaping this definition by convening local K-12 and postsecondary education leaders for a “College Readiness Symposium.”
- Engage state and national experts in the process.
- Ensure that the definition is consistent with Senate Bill 1 and with the national Common Core State Standards Initiative.

Strategy 2: Articulate a continuum of P-16 competencies that lead to college and career readiness

Recommendations

- Build on JCTC’s Jefferson Counts program, which is designed to improve student learning outcomes in college mathematics.
- Draw on the experiences of strong P-16 councils and similar efforts in other states (e.g., Long Beach, California and Florida’s Indian River Community College).
- Engage major employer partners, especially in high-demand industries (e.g., Humana, Norton Health, Department of the Army, UPS).
- Concurrently identify the student support systems needed to help students reach these competencies.
- Link competencies to real-time data systems.

Strategy 3: Align the K-12 and postsecondary curricula with college and career readiness competencies

Recommendations

- Begin alignment efforts by focusing on high need areas such as mathematics.
- Integrate workforce competencies into professional development to better support K-12 and postsecondary instructors in their teaching.
- Involve K-12 curriculum development experts and postsecondary faculty in the process.
- Promote these efforts as a model for SB 1 and for the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

Goal 2: Increase alignment and rigor across the K-12 and postsecondary education systems.

Strategy 4: Develop or adopt an assessment system to measure college readiness

Recommendations

- Ask national assessment experts to analyze the CATS and ACT tests for their alignment with each other and with the P-16 competencies that the education community identifies.
- Implement a diagnostic assessment system that allows for early identification and timely remediation to help students meet college readiness competencies.
- Advocate for state-level assessments that are aligned with the competencies needed to succeed in postsecondary education.

Strategy 5: Create a more blended experience across grades 9-14

Recommendations

- Increase collaboration among high school and college faculty by expanding programs such as the Math/Science Partnership between JCPS and University of Louisville.
- Teach developmental courses and “Intro to College” in high school.
- Expand dual enrollment opportunities, such the Bullitt County/JCTC 12 x 12 program, for all students.
- Create opportunities for all high school students to spend time on college campuses.

Strategy 6: Support recruitment, retention, and professional development of K-12 teachers and higher education faculty as they work toward greater P-16 and workforce alignment

Recommendations

- Use the Gheens Institute for Innovation to foster innovative K-16 partnerships and partnerships with high-growth industries to provide teachers with industry- and research-based professional development opportunities.
- Strengthen linkages between local teacher preparation programs and Louisville’s K-12 education efforts (e.g., prepare prospective teachers to use inquiry-based methods).
- Help more high school teachers become eligible to teach dual enrollment or developmental courses, particularly in mathematics.
- Develop plans to recruit new teachers and professors (e.g., signing bonuses, differential pay, student loan forgiveness, housing subsidies, stipends, relocation awards).
- Establish programs and policies to address teacher retention challenges (e.g., out-of-field teaching assignments, lack of planning time, inadequate curriculum materials).

Goal 3: Ensure that the citizens of Louisville can access and afford postsecondary education.

Across the United States, participation and success in postsecondary education is hampered by students' inability to afford higher education. In particular, students face inadequate financial assistance to pay for college, and lack information about the aid that does exist. As a result, the educational disparities between lower and upper income students are increasing, even among low-income students who are academically prepared to go to college.^{vi} In Kentucky, and Louisville in particular, affordability concerns may prevent traditional and adult students from enrolling in and completing postsecondary education, despite having adequate academic preparation. This belief was shared by many of the community stakeholders interviewed for this plan.

Nationally, costs associated with higher education have climbed steadily in recent years. Similarly, in Kentucky a combination of stagnant state funding for postsecondary education combined with rising tuition costs may place a disproportionate financial burden on low-income families. Worth noting is that Kentucky has actually outpaced the nation in the increase of federal Pell grant aid awarded to low-income students.^{vii} However, students and families with little college experience tend to overestimate the cost of higher education, often have less information about the availability of financial aid, and may structure K-12 academic course taking around reduced expectations of college attendance.

Though there is some perception among education experts in the community that college in Kentucky is reasonably affordable for full-time students, students who choose to attend college full time are more likely to be able to afford the increasingly higher tuition. Moreover, part-time and independent students are unduly influenced by current financial aid policies, making college attendance particularly challenging for a large subset of the population.

This confluence of issues has a marked impact on the Louisville region. In Jefferson County alone, there are an estimated 71,167 adults over the age of 25 with one or more years of college but no degree.^{viii} Although KentuckianaWorks is providing services to such adults, resource limitations dictate that only a portion of them will receive services. A more comprehensive strategy to address these challenges must be developed.

Ensuring that all of Louisville's citizens can access adequate financial aid is essential to increasing baccalaureate degree attainment. All community stakeholders have a role in ensuring postsecondary education is affordable, from supporting K-12 students to assisting adults in completing their postsecondary degrees while still meeting their current financial obligations.

Goal 3: Ensure that the citizens of Louisville can access and afford postsecondary education.

Strategy 1: Signal to students beginning in middle school the ways to afford college

Recommendations

- Charge a joint K-12/postsecondary committee with developing a series of activities to educate middle school students about the costs of postsecondary education and ways to pay for it.
- Develop incentive programs for middle school students to begin accruing college tuition funds.
- Provide counselors and teachers with necessary professional development to answer students' questions about paying for college.
- Create a college promise program that guarantees a semester of free tuition to any student who enrolls at Jefferson Community and Technical College without needing developmental education.
- Involve regional community and faith-based organizations (e.g., Junior Achievement, the Urban League, local churches) in developing or scaling up programs that target middle school students.
- Assess levels of unmet need and loan burden by postsecondary institution.

Strategy 2: Help students and families by developing a roadmap for financial aid processes

Recommendations

- Further expand the College Goal Sunday program within the Louisville region to better provide information around the financial aid application process.
- Support “information exchange” partnerships between community leaders (e.g., clergy, K-12 and postsecondary educators, business representatives, metropolitan government officials) to ensure everyone learns about paying for postsecondary education.
- Ask postsecondary institutions and community organizations, including religious groups, to host regular events to explain both college costs and methods to address those costs.
- Utilize the resources behind KnowHow2Go Kentucky to share already developed information with parents and students.
- Provide additional resources to the Kentuckiana College Access Center to offer financial aid counseling to a wider audience.
- Expand the Urban League's and the Louisville Asset Building Coalition's financial literacy counseling to include postsecondary financial planning.
- Require every high school student to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by February of their senior year.

Goal 3: Ensure that the citizens of Louisville can access and afford postsecondary education.

Strategy 3: Expand current state college savings programs and develop additional local ones to support Louisville residents specifically

Recommendations

- Support the expansion and/or refinement of the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES) to ensure students can accrue significant college assistance while still in high school.
- Develop a need-based financial aid program for Louisville residents that targets students from high-poverty high schools or neighborhoods.
- Provide matching employer funds to parents who contribute to the Kentucky Education Savings Plan Trust, a 529 savings program.
- Seek support from multiple foundations to fund high-impact scholarship opportunities.

Strategy 4: Develop financial aid strategies that will increase college persistence

Recommendations

- Increase financial aid counseling available for college students and ensure it is readily accessible through multiple media, including face-to-face, online, email, phone, texting, and instant messaging.
- Ask businesses to provide paid internships with progressively higher salaries based on years of college attended, beginning in high demand areas.
- Create small grant programs to help students with emergency costs that might otherwise require them to disrupt their college enrollment, such as one-time car repairs and other unexpected bills.
- Develop a pilot program around multi-year financial aid awards.
- Reward adult employees who successfully complete a college degree.

Strategy 5: Make it feasible for adults to return to postsecondary education while still managing other financial obligations

Recommendations

- Develop employer tuition assistance programs that encourage employees to augment their professional skills.
- Create postsecondary education/business partnerships to bring college to the workplace, especially in businesses with many hourly employees, to minimize time away from work.
- Recognize employers that commit to and foster continuing education options for their employees.
- Advocate for looser federal financial aid regulations for working adults, allowing them to readily access student loans and grants, if applicable.
- Support the expansion of state economic development policies to provide workplace incentives to adults returning to college.

Goal 3: Ensure that the citizens of Louisville can access and afford postsecondary education.

Strategy 6: Support better understanding of higher education costs and possible efficiencies

Recommendations

- Provide stakeholders with baseline knowledge on nuances of postsecondary financing streams.
- Analyze possible postsecondary cost savings (e.g., increased technology usage, alternative textbook models, online course delivery options.)
- Examine the possibility of state policies that financially reward institutions for increasing completion rates.
- Advocate at the state level that K-12 and postsecondary education should be high-priority budget items.

Goal 4: Ensure all Louisville students will be able to progress through postsecondary institutions to attain needed postsecondary credentials.

Moving students through the postsecondary pipeline is a national challenge. Though the issue of whether all citizens need a baccalaureate degree in today's economy is subject to intense debate, everyone can agree that postsecondary attrition prior to certificate or degree completion is a drain on both personal finances and public dollars. Moreover, persistence in postsecondary education should not be dictated by an inability to navigate the system. Yet nationally, only 57 percent of students who enroll full time at four-year institutions graduate within 6 years.^{ix} At community colleges, the three-year AA attainment rate among full-time degree-seeking students is only 31 percent.^x Among community college students intending to transfer to a four-year institution, about 50 percent will eventually do so and slightly less than half of those will eventually attain their bachelor's degrees.^{xi}

Both the state and the Louisville region have made this education pipeline issue a priority, and postsecondary institutions are achieving success. Addressing transfers has been a key component of the statewide Double the Numbers Campaign. Moreover, since 2000, colleges and universities in the Louisville region have increased all postsecondary awards—certificates, associates degrees, and bachelor's degrees—by more than 40 percent.^{xii}

Despite this improvement, less than half of all students in the Louisville region intending to earn an AA degree will do so within 3 years.^{xiii} At the four-year level, six-year graduation rates range from 24 percent to 84 percent, depending on the institution.^{xiv} These attainment rates should be interpreted with caution, as institutions obviously differ in mission, student body composition, and available resources. Despite that reality, many well informed stakeholders interviewed for this plan still expressed dissatisfaction with the current movement of students through the postsecondary education pipeline. Specific challenges included “reverse transfers,” with students enrolling in local four-year institutions but transferring to JCTC after a period of time and “cultural transfers,” where students choose to transfer to institutions that are perceived as more welcoming.

There are numerous causes behind the certificate, associate degree, and baccalaureate degree attainment rates in Louisville. Addressing them will require a concentrated and systemic focus on issues related to preliminary college choice, counseling strategies for students once they are enrolled in postsecondary education, articulation and credit transfer policies, and interventions along the way that prevent students from stopping out or dropping out for preventable reasons. Solutions must also be comprehensive enough to account for the needs and priorities of very different types of learners, from full-time, first-time freshmen to adult students who attended college decades earlier and are now seeking to complete their degrees. Implementing such solutions will require assistance from all community stakeholders.

Goal 4: Ensure all Louisville students will be able to progress through postsecondary institutions to attain needed postsecondary credentials.

Strategy 1: Help the community make better initial postsecondary education choices through increased public awareness of college

Recommendations

- Encourage college students to research their postsecondary options early and often.
- Develop robust profiles of the wide array of postsecondary education providers and ask all advising centers, campuses, workforce development boards, community organizations, and churches to make them available to students and adults.
- Identify one community organization responsible for ensuring postsecondary profiles are up-to-date and spread widely throughout the community.
- Beginning with high-demand industries, tightly link employment-related education experiences to future promotions and articulate those connections.

Strategy 2: Ensure that college-eligible students apply, enroll in, and attend postsecondary education

Recommendations

- Use National Student Clearinghouse data to track students' college enrollment and progression through postsecondary education.
- Identify college-eligible students who do not enroll in postsecondary education and target postsecondary recruitment efforts toward those students.

Strategy 3: Provide continuous transition planning for all students enrolled at two-year postsecondary institutions

Recommendations

- Begin 4-year transition planning from the first day of college enrollment, asking administrators, other students, and faculty to participate in information sharing activities throughout the academic cycle.
- Invite regional employers to conduct seminars, mentor students, and discuss the role of individuals with baccalaureate degrees at their organizations.
- Ensure all students understand important dates, coursework, and additional requirements for transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution.
- Invite academic advisors from baccalaureate institutions to two-year campuses to begin intentionally building relationships with future transfer students.
- Expand successful transfer programs such as the JCTC/University of Louisville ULtra program.

Goal 4: Ensure all Louisville students will be able to progress through postsecondary institutions to attain needed postsecondary credentials.

Strategy 4: Strengthen credit transfer policies and procedures to make campus boundaries more permeable

Recommendations

- Review current articulation agreements to ensure their accuracy and utility.
- Ensure adult college students can apply previously earned credits across institutions by improving long-term articulation agreement fidelity.
- Ensure that developmental education at the postsecondary level relies on evidence-based practices to move students swiftly into general courses and support student success.
- Identify common core general education courses at public postsecondary institutions.
- Create additional automatic admissions and credit transfer programs that streamline the transfer process.
- Encourage state support of regional postsecondary councils around financial aid, college advising, and other pertinent topics to develop cross-boundary services for students.
- Expand the ULtra program to include more colleges and universities in the region.

Strategy 5: Focus on baccalaureate degree completion as a vital measure of college success

Recommendations

- Analyze the causes behind reverse transfers from four-year to two-year institutions and develop programs to address those occurring for non-academic reasons.
- Declare war on postsecondary attrition, following the University of Kentucky's example, to meet statewide baccalaureate attainment goals.
- Improve pedagogy throughout the K-12 and postsecondary education pipeline to increase student retention and college completion.
- Conduct research on the high leverage activities that would reduce time-to-degree on campuses in the Louisville region.
- Adopt systemic campus-based retention strategies, integrating academic and support units.
- Streamline required developmental education courses by expanding pilot programs that enroll students testing into developmental education into regular courses with additional academic supports (e.g., University of Louisville's program).
- Tailor employment offers to students graduating within a particular timeline, especially in high demand fields.
- Identify activities and milestones that should occur on the path to college graduation.
- Identify regional higher education capacity challenges and task higher education groups with considering how best to address them.

Goal 5: Galvanize Louisville’s education, business, and community leaders to achieve a long-term, common education agenda.

Systemic education improvement requires the ongoing efforts of the entire community. These efforts must be integrated within the larger state and national landscape, both for political and pragmatic reasons. At the same time, the Louisville community has the opportunity to drive these reforms beyond where the state might naturally take them and serve as a national exemplar for how a community can come together to answer its education challenges.

The marked success of the Every1Reads Initiative should serve as a strong foundation for this next effort. As the community mobilizes to achieve this next educational attainment goal, leaders must build upon the partnerships formed and lessons learned from the Every1Reads effort.

As with any systemic improvement effort, it will take several years for this initiative to fully mature. Now, in the initiative’s infancy, it is critical to set the stage for successful implementation of the goals, strategies, and recommendations in this plan and for steady progress toward the overarching goal of increasing educational attainment in the Louisville region. The following strategies outline activities for the Mayor’s Education Roundtable and the Business Leaders for Education Forum that will lay a strong foundation for success.

Goal 5: Galvanize Louisville’s education, business, and community leaders to achieve a long-term, common education agenda.

Strategy 1: Agree that there is need for systemic education change in the Louisville region

Recommendations

- Commit to articulating a vision for Louisville’s education future and sharing that vision with stakeholders.
- Develop a comprehensive policy agenda to support the blueprint’s proposed activities.
- Agree to work together for a significant length of time.

Strategy 2: Commit to a series of activities to lay the groundwork for implementation

Recommendations

- Schedule the next Mayor’s Education Roundtable meeting.
- Develop a communications and marketing strategy for the plan that provides messaging and information for the community on who is involved, why it is underway, expected benefits, and projected timeline.
- Commit to developing common data definitions, collecting data, and developing benchmarks to measure progress towards goals.
- Agree to participate in working groups around the first four goals in this plan.
- Solicit constituent feedback about the plan and help to finalize the plan.
- Emulate the Strive Cincinnati model of directing local resources towards those programs and organizations that align with the final implementation plan when developed.

Suggested Timeline

Month 1

- Agree that there is need for systemic change in the Louisville region.
- Commit to articulating a vision for Louisville's education future and sharing that vision with stakeholders.
- Agree to work together for a significant length of time.
- Identify a champion to lead the effort.

Months 2-3

- Use subsequent meetings of the Mayor's Education Roundtable to share information, determine gaps in knowledge, and develop a high-level strategy behind this effort.
- Build knowledge around national education efforts, borrowing best practices and lessons learned.
- Finalize the community action plan with a focus on short and long-term outcomes.

Months 4-6

- Set up a structure (roles, responsibilities, leadership) for implementing the plan that will support cross-sector educational activity.
- Sign a mutual accountability agreement that clearly outlines roles and responsibilities for stakeholder groups and celebrate its signing with a prominent public event.
- Convene local foundations to determine their willingness to work together on coordinated education improvement activities.
- Apply for grant funding that will provide seed money to sustain this effort during the initial 24 months.

Months 7-12

- Create a sub-group of the Mayor's Education Roundtable that will focus specifically on advocacy and has the authority to act on the Roundtable's behalf.
- Shape a statewide legislative agenda and remain informed regarding its progress.
- Leverage the power of the Business Leaders for Education group to ensure rapid response to policy issues.
- Promote Louisville's P-16 alignment efforts as a national and state model.

End Notes

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