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Barriers to Success? The Role of Statewide Education Governance Structures in P-20 Council Collaboration

Barriers to Success? The Role of Statewide Education Governance Structures in P-20 Council Collaboration

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Abstract: Collaboration between K-12 and higher education sectors has not been as productive as participants and policy leaders would like – especially in an era of emphasis on college readiness and completion, which requires such collaboration. Various mechanisms have been used to foster collaboration including state P-20 (early learning through higher education) councils, however these have not always produced the results participants desire and research on why this is so is limited. This study utilizes state education governance and inter-organizational relations literatures to hypothesize that structural barriers to collaboration prevent P-20 councils from reaching their potential. This comparative case study of three state P-20 councils finds that state education governance structures may erect barriers to collaboration. However, this research also shows that P-20 councils, if thoughtfully structured, can help ameliorate these barriers.
Keywords: P-20 Council; education governance; higher education; K-12; state education policy; collaboration; inter-organizational relations

¿Barreras Para el Exito? El Papel de las Estructuras de Colaboración y Gobierno Estaduales en los Consejos P-20

Resumen: La colaboración entre los sectores de educación superior y los de educación básica no ha sido tan productiva comosus participantes y líderes políticos les gustaría – especialmente en una era de énfasis en la preparación para ingresar y completar la universidad, que requiere este tipo de

colaboración. Varios mecanismos se han utilizado para fomentar la colaboración incluyendo consejos estaduales de coordinación entre los diferentes niveles (P-20=del preescolar a laeducación superior) sin embargo, estos no siempre han producido los resultados que los participantes desean y la investigación sobre por qué esto es así, es limitada. Este estudio utiliza la literatura sobre gobernanza de la educación estatal y de relaciones inter-organizacionales, para analizar la hipótesis de que las barreras estructurales a la colaboración impiden a los consejos P-20 de alcanzar su potencial. Este estudio de caso comparativo de tres consejos estaduales P-20 concluye que las estructuras de gobernanza de educación estatales pueden erigir barreras a la colaboración. Sin embargo, esta investigación también muestra que concejos P-20, si son estructurados cuidadosamente, pueden ayudar a eliminar estas barreras.

Palabras clave: Consejos P-20; gobernanza de la educación; educación superior; K-12; política educativa estatal; colaboración; relaciones inter-organizacionales

Barreiras para o Sucesso? O Papel das Estruturas de Colaboração e Governo Estadual nos Conselhos P-20

Resumo: A colaboração entre os sectores do ensino superior e educação básica não tem sido tão produtiva quanto seus participantes e líderes políticos gostariam – especialmente em uma época de ênfase na preparação para entrar e completar os estudos superiores, que requer este tipo de colaboração. Vários mecanismos têm sido utilizados para promover a colaboração incluindo conselhos estaduais P-20 de coordenação entre os diferentes níveis (P-20 = pré-escolar ao ensino superior), mas estes nem sempre têm produzido os resultados que os participantes querem e investigação sobre o porquê isto é assim, é limitada. Este estudo utiliza a literatura sobre a governança da educação estadual e relações inter-organizacionais, para analisar a hipótese de que as barreiras estruturais à colaboração evitam que os conselhos P-20 realizem o seu potencial. Este estudo de caso comparativo de três conselhos estatais P-20 conclui que as estruturas de governação de educação dos estados podem erigir barreiras à colaboração. No entanto, a pesquisa também mostra que conselhos P-20, se forem cuidadosamente estruturados, podem ajudar a remover essas barreiras.

Palavras-chave: Conselhos P-20; governança educação; ensino superior; K-12; Política de educação do Estado; colaboração; relações inter-organizacionais

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore potential barriers to state education agency collaboration as they work to meet overall state educational attainment goals. The rise of a flatter, more integrated global economy highlights the struggles of the American education system to keep pace with economic development needs. A 2014 study conducted by *The Economist* Intelligence Unit placed the United States 15th among 39 countries in an index of cognitive skills and educational attainment. Another study found that the United States' current postsecondary attainment rate for 25-64 year olds was 43 percent, the fifth largest among developed countries (OECD, 2014). However, when looking more narrowly at the population of 25-34 year olds – those entering the workforce – the U.S. ranked 12th (OECD, 2014). Not only have our international rankings fallen, but researchers project that by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the U.S. will require postsecondary training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). This is over 20 percentage points greater than current postsecondary attainment rates supply. All of these issues exist even though the U.S. spends more than most countries on all levels of education combined and the highest of all countries for postsecondary education (OECD, 2014).

State policymakers and leaders are focused on meeting a variety of metrics leading to greater educational attainment and many of these require K-12 and higher education sector collaboration. For example, several states are working to increase postsecondary completion numbers in light of the international rankings and economic forecasts described above. To do this, K-12 must ensure students are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. This requires communication between K-12 and higher education sectors to help the K-12 enterprise learn what students are expected to know upon graduation from high school and to help students understand postsecondary options, entry requirements, and financial aid. To do this well requires regular communication and coordination between the sectors. As two noted researchers state, "the causes of remediation, noncompletion, and inadequate secondary preparation lie in part in the historical split between the levels of our educational systems and the subsequent lack of communication and connection between them" (Kirst & Bracco, 2004, p. 2). Indeed, a recent study of local K-12 and postsecondary collaboration in California showed that the collaboration had a significant positive effect on college-going rates (Domina & Ruzek, 2012). Many state leaders accept that collaboration between K-12 and higher education is important for meeting state education goals. According to a recent survey of education leaders, 80 percent of higher education respondents and 90 percent of K-12 respondents believe collaboration with the other sector is extremely or very important (edBridge Partners and Hart Research Associates [edBridge], 2014). However, only a third of respondents believe that collaboration is currently effective (edBridge, 2014).

P-20 councils have been a popular policy mechanism for state K-12 and higher education collaboration on overarching state education issues. Twenty-two states currently utilize a P-20 council (Rippner, 2014), which is down from 38 states in 2008 (Education Commission of the States 2013). The declining popularity of P-20 councils may not necessarily indicate that they were not or could not be helpful in promoting effective collaboration. Indeed, prior research on P-20 councils shows mixed success in fostering collaboration with some P-20 councils providing a meaningful venue and others providing little more than a "meet and greet" forum (see, for example, Domina & Ruzek, 2012; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Nunez & Oliva, 2009; Shulock, 2009). However, these studies do not necessarily provide insight into why some P-20 councils fall short of providing a viable venue for collaboration. Given states' expenditure of human and financial resources on P-20 councils and the councils' potential impact on important state education goals, more investigation is necessary. Characteristics of P-20 councils vary from state to state and not much is known about the role of various P-20 council characteristics in promoting (or not) collaboration between state education sectors. Investigating P-20 council characteristics and the context around them may shed light on why some councils succeed while others fail at promoting some type of collaboration. One important contextual variable regarding P-20 councils is the state education governance structure in which it is attempting to forge collaboration.

A significant research base demonstrating the effects of state-level governance structures on education policy and student success exists (see, for example, Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Hearn & Holdsworth, 2002; Knott & Payne, 2004; Manna, 2006; Tandberg, 2013). Therefore, if P-20 collaboration has the potential to help states meet their overarching educational goals, as many stakeholders believe it does, and to date, such collaboration remains disappointing to some participants as evidenced by the decreasing use of P-20 councils (Rippner, 2014), survey results regarding perceived effectiveness of collaboration (ed Bridge Partners and Hart Research Associates, 2014), and case study research (e.g. Shulock, 2009; Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, & Usdan, 2005), it could be that collaboration is not yet being arranged in ways responsive to contextual variables such as the state's education governance structure. Further, we know that state governance structures affect other facets of a state's education system, so they could also be affecting the nature of K-12

and higher education collaboration by erecting barriers to coordinated policy and action. Understanding such barriers, if they exist, may enhance collaboration through P-20 councils as they work towards overarching state goals. The goal of this research is to identify potential structural barriers to P-20 council collaboration as a step towards ultimately determining whether this policy mechanism can be made more useful for states, specifically as they work towards increasing completion and attainment rates. To do this, this study examines the influence of state education governance structures on P-20 council collaboration in three diverse states – Georgia, Illinois, and Minnesota.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Existing literature highlights the variety of state education governance structures and the potential implications of structure on performance. In most state structural models, separate boards and agencies oversee K-12 and higher education. Many of these states utilize a P-20 council to connect the separate sectors in pursuit of a more seamless pipeline. While research demonstrates some promising aspects of P-20 councils in promoting collaboration, researchers are also finding that P-20 councils are not meeting expectations – little concrete action as might be evidenced by new policies and/or collaborative endeavors. To date, there has been little inquiry into why P-20 councils encounter difficulty. Borrowing theoretical constructs from the organizational literature, which has a greater tradition of focusing on public agency interaction, may help P-20 councils understand barriers to action and break through them.

State Education Governance Structures

There are four general models of state K-12 governance (Scudella, 2013). Each of these models varies according to whether the governor appoints the chief state school officer and/or the state board (if there is a state board). The most popular configuration (14 states including Illinois) is where the citizens elect the governor and the governor appoints the state board of education that, in turn, appoints the chief state school officer. Nine states (including Georgia) utilize a model where the governor appoints the state board of education and the chief state school officer is elected. Minnesota is one of only two states without a state board of education. Minnesota's governor appoints the chief state school officer (Scudella, 2013).

State higher education structures are generally divided into governing and coordinating agencies (McGuinness, 2005). There are also a couple of states with planning agencies, which are agencies with almost no authority over institutions (McGuinness, 2005). Governing boards centralize authority over state higher education institutions into a state-level corporate body whereas coordinating boards "merely provide an interface between the state government and the governing boards of the state's systems and individual colleges and universities" (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2004, p. 85). Governing boards have more autonomy from other state actors than coordinating boards (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2004). Seventeen states (including Georgia) have governing entities. Thirty-one states (including Illinois and Minnesota) have coordinating and/or planning agencies. In 42 states, the governor appoints the majority of higher education agency commissioners/trustees (ECS, 2012).

New York, Pennsylvania, and Idaho have long had integrated P-20 or K-20 governance systems where K-12 and higher education are overseen by a single governmental body (Zinth, 2011). In the last several years, Florida, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington have made state education governance changes towards a more consolidated arrangement (Smith & Fulton, 2013).

Prior research indicates that the type of state education governance structures may affect education policies and student achievement. A series of research studies by Manna (2006, 2013)

found that structural elements of state K-12 governance – such as whether or not the state K-12 chief and state board of education was elected or appointed – had statistically significant effects on student achievement. On the higher education side, studies often examine how the type of state higher education oversight (planning, coordinating, or governing) affects policies and performance. For example, the type of state higher education board impacts the political process surrounding higher education budgeting (Tandberg, 2013) and are "influential in the core educational activities of states' postsecondary enterprise: teaching, research, and the preparation of citizens and workers" (Hearn & Griswold, 1994, p.183). Governance structures also have an impact on higher education outcomes as Koedel (2014) identified more fragmented states (as measured by the number of higher education institutions) as having higher college completion rates.

The research described above demonstrates a connection between state education governance structure and policies and outcomes; thereby suggesting the possibility that state education governance structures could affect the workings of P-20 councils.

P-20 Councils

In the mid-1990s, states began to create councils to coordinate state education activities and policies. Over the past two decades, many states have used these councils to help bridge communication and policy between K-12 and higher education. P-20 councils bring a variety of education stakeholders together to discuss statewide issues and can vary in many ways so that almost no state council mirrors another. Common variables include number and type of members, chairperson, agenda, staff, and resources. The Education Commission of the States (ECS), a national commission of education and political leaders, has perhaps been the most vocal in touting the promise of P-20 councils. They cite several specific advantages including:1) the ability to build consensus among different actors; 2) the provision of a venue for discussion of cross-cutting issues; 3) the ability to make decisions in the best interests of the student rather than a particular organization; 4) the potential to save money through elimination of redundancies in services; and more long-term 5) a bigger tax base from a more educated population (Dounay, 2009).

Overall, the research identifies some benefits to states from use of P-20 councils while simultaneously noting many issues surrounding implementation and use. Benefits include policy alignment between K-12 and higher education (Kirst & Venezia, 2004) and the ability to build trust and improve communication between council participants (Nunez & Oliva, 2009, Rippner, 2014). On the other hand, prior research has found that the benefits stemming from P-20 councils are stymied by several factors. One criticism is that while they have an important role, they may not result in lasting reform given lack of state investment (Venezia et al., 2005). A 2009 National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education study, utilizing a survey of state higher education executive officers, found that respondents most often cited a lack of resources as an impediment to initiate and sustain collaborations with K-12. In the comparative case study portion of the research, the authors found a strong disconnect between P-20 council planning and action. They found too much time was spent discussing and planning initiatives rather than action towards implementation (Shulock, 2009). Others have also criticized P-20 councils for lack of implementation as well as unclear goals, vague agendas, and limited leadership (Cech, 2008; Dounay, 2008a). Perna and Armijo (2014) best sum up the research thusly:

> Some P–20 councils seem to have had some positive results, particularly with regard to improving intra-agency coordination and advancing a statewide P–20 agenda. P–20 councils have had minimal success, however, in establishing or changing public policies to create a more integrated educational system. (p. 24)

Interestingly, the research does not conclude that K-12 and higher education collaboration is not important, but rather could lead one to conclude that the structure around the collaboration must be improved.

Although both sets of literature provide a strong foundation of knowledge from which to begin understanding K-12 and higher education collaboration, gaps remain. The state education governance literature has not explored the effect, if any, of governance structures on K-12 and higher education collaboration. Similarly, in examining stumbling blocks to collaboration within P-20 councils, researchers have not yet explored whether the state governance structure in which the council operates could be posing barriers to effective collaboration. As Hess (2008) notes, a mechanism that links already dysfunctional structures is not primed for success.

Conceptual Framework

Organizational theory sheds light on the structure and behavior of state education sectors. Specifically, institutional theory suggests that to gain legitimacy, educational organizations will act and be structured like what their leaders think such organizations should look like and therefore, all organizations begin to look the same. Any move away from this, such as to share governance across sectors, could result in loss of perceived legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This is evidenced by the consistent way education governance is structured across states. For instance, states routinely divide their educational systems into PreK, K-12, and higher education sectors. Even in states with shared governance for all sectors, there are still departments for each of the educational levels. However, within any state, each sector is part of an overall state education system and do occasionally intersect and interact with each other. The sectors within a system could be described as loosely-coupled – roughly connected, occasionally interacting to meet some objective or goal, but without a formal hierarchy or tight structure controlling the interactions (March & Olsen, 1976; Weick, 1982).

To more specifically analyze the sectors' interactions, interorganizational relations literature provides a framework. Levine and White's (1961) exchange theory helps to explain when and why organizations would voluntarily collaborate. Organizations will collaborate when each can achieve some goal (economic or otherwise) through the interaction (Levine & White, 1961; Schermerhorn Jr., 1975). Indeed, each organization may gain additional resources (e.g. materials, products, revenues) through cooperation (Galaskiewicz, 1985). This may be why some state education agencies have voluntarily engaged in collaboration through P-20 councils or otherwise. There may be overarching and/or agency-specific goals (e.g. increase the state's education attainment rate) for which agency leaders are being held accountable and only by working with other agencies can additional funds be accessed and/or those goals be achieved. Keeping with the example above, a state higher education agency may need to collaborate with the state K-12 agency to ensure that students graduate high school prepared for college-level work. So, if organizational theory helps to explain that state education sectors are likely connecting due to a loose coupling model and can potentially serve their interests through collaboration, what other aspects of organizational theory could help explain why P-20 councils sometimes fall short of expectations? Perhaps research on barriers to interagency collaboration could shed light on this issue.

Whetten and Bozeman (1991) identified six potential barriers to interagency collaboration through their comprehensive review of interorganizational relations literature. Each of these barriers reflects some element of state governance structure. Mission barriers arise when the organizational missions overlap or in conflict. Political barriers may result from agencies having allegiances to different politicians thereby preventing meaningful collaboration. Agencies in competition for budget funding and/or agencies without the capacity to engage in and sustain collaboration face

resource barriers. Legal barriers arise in a constitutionally fragmented governance structure with separate institutions. Constituent barriers result from overlapping constituencies between agencies and/or cooption of the agencies by the constituencies. Finally, bureaucratic barriers stem from agencies engaging in bureaupathology, taking the good things about bureaucracies to the extreme (e.g. routinization becomes apathy) or most of the knowledge needed for collaboration is stored at lower levels in the agency and is not at the collaboration table.

State education governance structures could produce many of Whetten and Bozeman's (1991) barriers to collaboration. For example, if one or more education agency leaders are elected or appointed by different leaders, political barriers may abound. Well-entrenched and long-time agency staff may complicate or block new education initiatives, which would serve as a bureaucratic barrier. Further, a state higher education agency with planning or coordinating powers rather than governing powers may face legal barriers in holding the state's higher education institutions to any policies created through collaboration. Any attempt to bring together separate agencies must deal with real and/or perceived barriers. The application of Whetten and Bozeman's (1991) noted barriers to interagency collaboration may help researchers and policymakers predict and address such barriers if they do indeed exist. This type of organizational theory has not yet been applied to education sector cooperation and may prove enlightening and ultimately useful in promoting effective collaboration. Therefore, the specific research questions for this project are:

1. Do states' education governance structures evidence Whetten and Bozeman's (1991) common barriers to inter-agency collaboration?
2. Can P-20 councils help states overcome these barriers, if they exist, so that there is more effective collaboration in furtherance of overarching state educational goals?

Methodology

A comparative case study was used as case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic, which allows them to provide more concrete and contextual information than other research methods and allows readers to further the findings through their own interpretations (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). The comparison feature will allow for analyses within and between cases.

Case Selection

Because the goal of this study includes examining K-12 and higher education collaboration in a variety of state education governance structures, maximum variation sampling was employed (Merriam, 2009). State case selection occurred in two phases. Baseline criteria included: 1) an active state P-20 council; 2) membership in the Complete College America alliance; and 3) college completion efforts on the P-20 council agenda. The specific focus on college completion provides a substantive focal point for analysis of collaboration – one that ostensibly requires both K-12 and higher education. Complete College America alliance membership indicates that college completion holds a key spot on a state education agenda given the extensive requirements of membership and is likely a key topic for the P-20 council. Once these criteria were employed, 10 states remained viable candidates. Three additional factors were then applied to ensure maximum variation among cases for comparison purposes. These factors included:

State Higher Education Governance Structure. This variable was chosen to provide variability across case study states regarding state education governance structures. Specifically, the higher education governance configuration was chosen over the K-12 structure given the greater number of structural permutations found in higher education.

Education Week's Quality Counts 2013 measure on college readiness. The K-12 national newspaper *Education Week* publishes an annual report grading states on their policies and student outcomes (Education Week, 2013). Each state receives an overall grade and category grades. One category focuses on "Transitions and Alignment: College Readiness". The grades awarded to states on this component indicate the nature of progress on issues that require K-12 and higher education collaboration.

P-20 Council Size. Although it would be an impossible endeavor to ensure case study states are exactly comparable to other P-20 councils given the wide variety of council structures, they may share general characteristics that can be translatable to other states. One general characteristic of councils that may have a direct impact on collaboration is the size of the council.

Georgia, Illinois, and Minnesota provided maximum variability within the stated confines of the control variables. See Table 1 for more detail.

Table 1
Selected Characteristics of Finalist Case Study States

State	State Higher Education Structure / Governing Authority	Education Week's Quality Counts 2013 measure on College Readiness Score	P-20 Council Membership Size
Colorado	Unified / Coordinating	82.1 / B	31
Connecticut	Unified / Coordinating	78.6 / C	32
Georgia	Multiple / Governing	100 / A*	8
Illinois	Multiple / Coordinating	75.0 / C	43***
Maine	Unified / Governing	82.1 / B	15
Maryland	Unified / Coordinating	96.4 / A	35
Minnesota	Multiple / Governing and Planning**	71.4 / C**	28
Mississippi	Multiple / Governing and coordinating	82.1 / B	12
Tennessee	Unified / Coordinating	92.9 / A	9
Texas	Unified / Coordinating	92.9 / A	5

Notes. *Georgia had the highest state rating for state college readiness policies; **Minnesota was the only state with a planning function for higher education as well as the lowest rating for college readiness policy; ***Illinois had the largest P-20 council.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection occurred from February through December 2013 and included documents and interviews. All three states had websites devoted to their P-20 councils. These provided a rich source of information about the structure of each state's P-20 council, the councils' current agenda items, and previous accomplishments. Overall, 26 documents, including council agendas, council minutes, memos, and strategic plans were analyzed (six related to Georgia, 10 for Illinois, and 10 for Minnesota).

Interviews helped ascertain P-20 council participants' views on the nature of collaboration and any potential barriers. Respondents were identified through review of P-20 council rosters and conversations with knowledgeable sources. During the course of conducting interviews, some respondents suggested that others might have useful information to share. This "snowballing" technique is a recognized method for identifying additional relevant respondents (Merriam, 2009).

Thirty interviews were conducted: 11 in Georgia, 11 in Illinois,[1] and eight in Minnesota. Table 2 shows the roles of respondents in each state. Note that designations may overlap as, for example, one person may be a P-20 council member *and* the state K-12 agency head. In all states, an attempt was made to interview members of the council, K-12 and higher education agency heads, and governor's office staff. Role and membership of the council also played a part in identifying respondents. For example, the governor's office had no role with the P-20 council in Minnesota and no Minnesota respondents recommended interviewing the governor's office. Further, it is likely that the fewer respondents in Minnesota versus Georgia and Illinois reflects the relative activity of that state's council. As many of the same themes echoed throughout documents reviewed and interviews conducted, it appears that a data saturation point was met and sufficient data were collected in all states.

Table 2
Roles of State Respondents

Role of respondent	Georgia	Illinois	Minnesota
P-20 Council Member	5	7	2
P-20 Council or Agency Staff	2	4	3
Governor's office staff	2	1	0
K-12 agency head	1	1	0
Higher education agency head	2	2	1
Former P-20 Council Member	3	0	3

Semi-structured interview protocols were employed with the average length of each interview 45 minutes. Conducting each interview in-person at a place of the respondent's convenience (usually their work place) was preferred as in-person interviews allow for ease of establishing a relationship and observing visual cues (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, given the schedules of the high-level officials and staff on the interview roster, in-person conversations were not always feasible. In those cases, telephone interviews were conducted. Almost all interviews were recorded in order to transcribe and code the information.

Data analysis was an on-going process. An initial set of codes was developed based on the research questions and conceptual framework. While this research is part of a larger project, a priori codes germane to this study included ones aligned with Whetten and Bozeman's (1991) barriers, college completion, and actors relevant to the P-20 council (e.g. governors, K-12 chief, higher education agency leader). Other codes were created as the analysis developed (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which allowed for any barriers other than Whetten & Bozeman's (1991) to be captured and agenda items perhaps more salient to the P-20 council than college completion to be noted. Micro-coding of documents and interview transcripts consisted of line-by-line analysis to pick up key phrases and concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 2007). Care was taken to ensure the codes were exhaustive and captured all relevant data points, were mutually exclusive, and were specific to the data (Merriam, 2009). In most instances, data elements reinforced one another providing confidence in the validity of the results. However, in the few instances where discrepancies arose, further interviews and/or document analysis were conducted to maintain a high level of validity.

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[1] One Illinois respondent submitted written rather than verbal answers to interview questions. Also, in two instances, two respondents were interviewed at the same time.

Result

Georgia – State Education Governance Structure

There are seven state-level education-related agencies in Georgia. Only one of these, the state K-12 schools superintendent, is an elected position, operating on the same election cycle as the governor. Public higher education in Georgia is composed of two sectors: the University System of Georgia (USG) and the Technical College System of Georgia (TSCG). There are 31 institutions in the USG educating 294,118 students. After a recent system-wide reconfiguration of status and mission, there are four research institutions, four comprehensive universities, 10 state universities, and 10 state colleges. The governor appoints the regents of the USG and the regents select their chancellor (although the governor is thought to have significant influence on the decision). While the USG enjoys constitutional status, the governor and legislature have influence over the system through the budget process. The TCSG has also recently undergone restructuring and is now composed of 25 institutions with 95,570 students. The governor appoints the TCSG's governing board and commissioner.

Georgia's P-20 Efforts

Agency collaborative efforts began in 1995 when Governor Zell Miller[2] appointed the first P-16 council. With each change of governor came a change in the structure of collaboration. In 2005, Governor Perdue encouraged the seven education agency heads and his education advisor to undertake formal collaboration to mitigate overlapping and cross-purpose policy adoption by agencies. The governor did not mandate the form or function of the group. Rather, the agency heads came up with the structure, which restricted membership to the seven education agency heads and the governor's education advisor. As one original member stated, "we only wanted people who were responsible and accountable for getting something done as opposed to people who could inform us." The name of the new council advertised this commitment – the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH). The AEAH also decided that the agency heads must attend each meeting and surrogates and staff were not allowed unless previously approved by the membership. From the start, the AEAH determined it needed a private forum to discuss the "real" issues occurring between agencies.

The state K-12 superintendent of school, the only statewide constitutional officer of the AEAH, was asked to chair the group by Governor Perdue. Since then, the chairmanship has rotated among the membership. There is a single professional staff person for the AEAH who communicates and coordinates between the AEAH members in preparation for and between meetings. She also monitors project work plans, especially those occurring between two or more agencies.

Barriers to Collaboration and the P-20 Council Impact in Georgia

In Georgia, there is evidence for five of Whetten and Bozeman's (1991) six barriers to agency collaboration. Evidence for barriers outside of that frame was not found. It appears that the AEAH impacts (to varying extents) all of these barriers.

Mission barriers. Each of Georgia's seven education-related agencies has specific missions and mandates. These often overlap and sometimes conflict, but the governor's leadership provides an expectation that the AEAH will work to overcome these barriers. There is no more notable case of overlapping missions than the historic tension between the USG and TCSG – often caused by

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[2] Zell Miller later served as a U.S. Senator from Georgia.

arguments over which institutions offer which programs and to whom. Conflict between missions also occurs. For instance, the USG works to increase the number of citizens with degrees, including advanced degrees. The Professional Standards Commission (PSC) works to ensure highly qualified K-12 teachers. Consequently, a proposed USG initiative to offer more master's degrees in educational leadership conflicted with the PSC's initiative to halt teacher pay raises for advanced degrees earned in a field other than the subject area taught. In fact, this was one of the issues that prompted Governor Perdue's office to create a P-20 council.

  There is evidence that the AEAH plays a role in overcoming the identified barriers to collaboration. First, greater alignment of agency missions has occurred through the AEAH's strategic planning process that created shared goals and objectives. The process was informed by the governor's educational objectives. As one member stated,

> I would say that every decision the Alliance makes is done with consideration to the governor's views on things . . . we don't have to necessarily do everything the governor says, but at the same time the worst person to make an enemy of is the governor, so you need to pay attention to what the governor's initiatives are.

An agency staff member observed, "if you know where the north star is then it helps with conflict because if we know what we're aiming for then you can figure out a lot of the conflict."

  Political barriers. Political barriers are certainly evident in Georgia where the K-12 state superintendent is a constitutional officer elected by Georgia citizens, but the AEAH provides a forum – where there had previously not been one – for collaboration, even though it doesn't always resolve the political issues. Even though the governor and the state superintendent have been of the same political party since 2002, tensions ensue given the governor's role in state education policy. The governor recommends funding for the department of education in his annual budget, appoints the state board of education, and is generally seen as the state's chief education policy leader. This necessitates interaction, and ideally cooperation, between the two offices. However, it has often resulted in friction as the two separately elected officials negotiate policies, funding, and control. This friction was also evident in earlier Georgia research by Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, and Usdan (2005). Perhaps this particular barrier in Georgia is more personality-driven than structural; however, if the state superintendent was not a constitutionally elected officer, the governor would be able to select a leader more compatible with his vision and views.

  Political barriers have been lessened somewhat through the existence of the AEAH. The state superintendent and governor's office have regular (at least monthly) communications through AEAH meetings, which allows for frequent airing of any potential issues. Further, the presence and involvement of the six other agency heads creates a less intense forum for managing this relationship as it is not just about the governor or the state superintendent, but rather about the larger AEAH. It seems that the other agency heads provide a mediating role between the two elected officials whenever possible. For example, two AEAH members took another member to lunch to "talk real direct turkey" (or quite frankly) about publicly wavering on a policy the AEAH and governor had already come to consensus on. A member noted, "in the context of the Alliance it's a platform that allows us to say – and actually expects us to say – 'this doesn't work' and you can have more honest conversations without appearing to be an enemy."

  Legal barriers. As noted above, with the state superintendent of schools being elected per the Georgia constitution, an obvious potential legal barrier to collaboration exists, as the agency head for K-12 is a constitutional officer and does not report to the governor. Another potential barrier is the constitutional status enjoyed by the USG. Theoretically, the governor cannot compel the chancellor to collaborate with other agencies. However, with Board of Regents and State Board of Education appointment powers and influence over the budgeting process, there are sufficient

levers for the governor to encourage the state superintendent's and chancellor's cooperation should they not be predisposed to collaborating with other agencies. During the course of the research, all sitting chancellors saw the value in and were active participants in the AEAH.

The buy-in of the AEAH members also helps to overcome legal barriers to collaboration. It appears that the state superintendent, the USG chancellor, and other agency heads see the value in working with other agencies to meet their own agency goals. For example, higher education institutions need qualified and prepared high school graduates. Collaboration through the AEAH helps USG and TCSG connect with K-12 to get those graduates. This commitment was evidenced in part by the fact that there were three K-12 superintendent transitions over the eight year period from AEAH's start to the time of this research and each superintendent participated in the AEAH, even the one superintendent who ran to unseat the existing governor.

Constituent barriers. Constituent barriers to collaboration can be found in Georgia, but are partially alleviated by the AEAH. First, a couple of respondents recognized the state superintendent's constituency being different than the other education agency heads given the position's responsibility to the electorate. A long-term AEAH member noted that the K-12 agency and its leadership have "challenges [the rest of us] just don't have."This same AEAH member surfaced another potential constituent barrier – agencies fighting over "what student belongs to whom". This can lead to a myopic view of the educational pipeline (only worried about "my" part) that promotes continuing policy silos.

AEAH members work to provide a united message to agency constituents such as local education agencies and institutions of higher education. A former AEAH member said that often, these specific constituents and staff believe that they can "wait out" an initiative or policy until a new agency head comes in or the momentum passes. The AEAH appears to provide institutionalization for decisions that carries beyond a single agency head.

Bureaucratic barriers. Several agency leaders noted deeply entrenched staff silos within and between agencies that prevent collaboration; however the AEAH is helpful in raising those issues to top leaders' attention. Specifically, several respondents cited work on the statewide longitudinal data system as an example. Staff members of various education agencies had been reluctant to share data or collaborate on building a unified system. Bureaucratic barriers were also found in earlier iterations of Georgia's P-20 council. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the USG housed a P-16 office which included several grant projects related to P-16 work in Georgia. This seemed to thwart other agencies' buy-in as they identified P-16 with the USG rather than as a project of the whole (Turner, Jones, & Hearn, 2004).

The majority of respondents cited the ability of the AEAH to alleviate bureaucratic barriers often noting that there is more clarity at the leadership level about how lower levels of the agencies are working together. Many specifically cited the recent success in finalizing the statewide longitudinal data system that had been plaguing gubernatorial, state superintendent, and P-16 council agendas for decades. A long-term AEAH member explained that all agency heads were in favor of the data system and provided a united front to their staffs to work with each other and share data. Further, the structure of the AEAH – monthly meetings of agency heads only – helped create an environment where members could candidly share information about bureaucratic barriers within and between agencies.

Illinois – State Education Governance Structure

In Illinois, the governor appoints all K-12 state board of education (SBOE) members who, in turn, appoint the chief state school officer.[3] Higher education is organized through a "system of subsystems" (Richardson, Bracco, Callan, & Finney, 1999, p. 144). The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) is responsible for planning and coordinating all higher education-related agencies (including the community college system and the student assistance commission), 12 public university campuses (each with its own governing board), state university civil system, and the state university retirement system. The 12 public universities have 233,835 students. The governor appoints members of the board and they, in turn, hire their executive director. The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is the state coordinating board for community colleges. Although it operates under the auspices of the IBHE, it has its own board and executive director. The governor appoints the board members and selects the chair. The board hires its executive director. The system has 48 colleges (each with its own governing board) and one multi-community college center serving 728,569 students as of the 2009-2010 school year.

Illinois' P-20 Efforts

Formal K-12 and higher education collaboration began in the 1990s through a Joint Education Committee (JEC), established by statute. Research conducted during that time noted, "[f]rom one K-12 respondent's perspective … the joint education committee is 'a wonderful idea without authority, a very ineffective group' where meetings exemplify the gulf [between K-12 and higher education]: 'They sit on one side, we sit on the other'" (Richardson, Bracco, Callan, & Finney, 1999, p. 165). Other initiatives came and went until 2009, when the state legislature called for education sector collaboration. Although there are differing accounts of the impetus for the new legislation, one long-time agency leader noted that prior to the legislation, "the different boards did their own thing and nobody knew what they were doing."

The statute calls for 21 voting members and 10 ex-officio, non-voting members (Il. Stat. ch.105, §22-45(a), 2009). All of the ex-officio members represent state agency heads or their designee. The governor or his designee is a voting member of the Council and serves as chairperson. The governor appoints seven members of the Council. Voting members have terms that range from one to three years, except for the chair who has no term. Term length was decided "by lot" at the initial meeting of the Council. The voting members must come from the following categories: the governor or his designee; legislators; at-large members; business organizations; educator organizations/associations; private higher education.

The legislation calls for state appropriations to fund Council staff, research, data collection, and dissemination. The Office of the Governor provides leadership for the Council in coordination with agencies. The Illinois Education Research Council also assists the Council.
The list of proscribed Council duties is long. The Council must make recommendations on a laundry list of items including coordination of education "through working at the intersections of educational systems to promote collaborative infrastructure" (Il. Stat. ch.105, §22-45(d)(1), 2009). Beyond making recommendations, the Council must advise the governor and other leaders, articulate a framework for systemic educational improvement and innovation, and provide an estimated fiscal impact with any Council recommendations (Il. Stat. ch.105, §22-45(d), 2009).

Members were not appointed until the start of Governor Quinn's term in 2009 at the urging of key educational stakeholders. Governor Quinn organized the appointment process for the P-20

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[3] Although this is the formal method of selection, respondents often referred to the state superintendent as being appointed by the governor.

Council and appointed a former state senator as chair. The Council has met quarterly at various education institutions across the state. Although the statute allows designees, a respondent noted that most appointees attend, with the exception of university presidents who usually send designees.

The P-20 Council legislation allows the chairman to create committees as necessary. After over three years in operation, the P-20 Council has an extensive array of committees. Any citizen, whether or not a member of the P-20 Council, may participate on a committee. A coordinating committee of committee chairs meets with the Council chairman prior to each quarterly P-20 Council meeting to give updates on their work and discuss the agenda. There is also a Joint Education Leadership Committee (JELC), chaired by the Lieutenant Governor, which is composed of the agency heads, the chair of the P-20 Council, and the governor's deputy chief of staff. The JELC developed organically, outside of statutory provisions, to give agency heads a forum for discussion and collaboration.

Barriers to Collaboration and the P-20 Council Impact in Illinois

Illinois's education governance structure evidences three of Whetten and Bozeman's (1991) barriers to interagency collaboration and all evidence for collaborative barriers falls within the Whetten and Bozeman (1991) framework.

Legal barriers. A legal barrier to collaboration is prominent in Illinois and is evidenced through Illinois' fragmented higher education structure, but the legislature has attempted to remedy through a statutory requirement to collaborate. The IBHE and ICCB are coordinating boards without governing authority. Each community college and four-year institution has its own governing board and sponsors its own legislative lobbying effort (Merchant, 2004). As one long-time state leader noted,

> the higher education board is a coordinating board, not a governing board, so there's
> only so much that they can herd cats along, but they can't tell the cats what to do …
> everybody just takes their money and goes and does their own thing.

Even in highly centralized states, higher education institutions enjoy a level of autonomy not found in K-12 education given the tradition of shared governance between institutional faculty and administration. Institutional governance is stronger when the state board retains less power, as is the case in Illinois. Therefore, IBHE and ICCB can participate in P-20 efforts and set overarching policies and goals, but they wield much less power over institutions than governing board states.

A legislative mandate to collaborate through the P-20 Council was the major incentive to overcome the legal barrier to collaboration. Although the higher education agencies do not govern their respective higher education institutions, an expectation from the state for aligned policies and the opportunity for institutional representatives to participate on P-20 Council committees helps to mitigate this barrier. Certainly, the P-20 Council goals are ones that institutions of higher education should be behind. The statute states, in part,

> Establishing an Illinois P-20 Council will develop a statewide agenda that will move
> the State towards the common goals of improving academic achievement, increasing
> college access and success, improving use of existing data and measurements,
> developing improved accountability, fostering innovative approaches to education,
> promoting lifelong learning, easing the transition to college, and reducing
> remediation" (Il. Stat. ch.105, §22-45(a), 2009).

Bureaucratic barriers. Bureaucratic barriers are somewhat evident in Illinois but appear to be mitigated through committed collaboration and strong leadership. Two respondents recounted reluctance on the part of one agency to participate in the statewide longitudinal data system, which hindered progress towards a statewide longitudinal data system. This was the most concrete example

of a bureaucratic barrier to collaboration, but as noted below agency leaders seem to be working to avoid these types of barriers.

There are several indications that the P-20 Council breaks through any bureaucratic barriers to collaboration. The most concrete example of this was the development of a new statewide report card within nine months. The P-20 Council developed prototypes, garnered stakeholder feedback, and won approval in a very short time. Although there is no previous history of attempting this type of report card which would allow comparison of collaboration before and after creation of the P-20 council, gaining consensus by many different groups on a public accountability instrument such as the report card would seem to lend itself to a variety of bureaucratic barriers in selecting the right indicators and gathering the relevant data. One agency head respondent specifically noted that the Joint Education Leadership Committee meetings are very helpful in alleviating bureaucratic barriers,

> if there's a special initiative that one of the agencies have, we delve into that a little bit and we are all focused on it from the perspective of . . . trying to move this forward and . . . the focus of the meetings is collaboration. Who can help with what …"

The personality of the P-20 Council chair has a role in breaking through barriers as well. "Respect" was a term used by almost every respondent when describing the chairman. There is a sense that he wields a velvet hammer. A respondent remarked that the chairman "doesn't take any crap, so if he asks someone to do something he pretty much expects them to do it or explain why they're not doing it."

Resource barriers. Illinois faces a resource barrier given significant drops in education funding, but has been able to rely on volunteer labor to foster collaboration on the P-20 council. The state board of education website presents data showing that Illinois is ranked 50th of all states in terms of state proportion of K-12 funding. An agency staff member, echoing sentiments of other respondents, noted that it has "been a very, very economically challenging time in the state of Illinois." This leaves little time to develop and staff a collaborative effort.

The statute requires the governor's office, in coordination with agencies, to staff the P-20 Council. Participants believed this alone would not be enough to carry out the current P-20 Council structure and functions so the council relies on volunteer labor. The chairman devotes a large amount of time organizing the many committees forming the council. Illinois non-profits and citizens chair and participate on committees. One P-20 Council member noted,

> This [P-20 Council] could have been nothing and in many ways it was set-up to be nothing because there wasn't any money attached, but because of the people . . . it's sort of a virtuous cycle. Once it starts, it only gets better. People are like "Oh, we can do things, so I'll even do a little more than I was before".

Another respondent noted, "[S]tuff doesn't happen just because you hold the meeting. It's because of what happens in between those [meetings]".

Minnesota – State Education Governance Structure

A governor-appointed commissioner of education leads the state's department of education (DOE). Although there is not a state board of education, a state Board of Teaching provides leadership on teacher education issues.

Higher education in Minnesota is overseen by different agencies. The Office of Higher Education (OHE), a planning / coordinating agency, is led by a gubernatorial appointee. The office has a relatively small staff and oversees several advisory groups. There is no governing board for the OHE. The Minnesota State Colleges and University system (MNSCU) governs 31 higher education institutions – 24 two-year colleges (enrollment of 135,155 students) and seven state universities

(enrollment of 69,816 students). MNSCU was created in 1995 through legislation that merged the state's community colleges, technical colleges, and state universities into one system. Institutions report to the chancellor and do not have their own governing boards. A board of trustees who are appointed by the governor oversees MNSCU. Finally, the University of Minnesota (UM) has five campuses and boasts an enrollment of 69,200 students. Its Board of Regents is elected by a joint convention of the Minnesota legislature.

Minnesota's P-20 Efforts

Like Georgia and Illinois, Minnesota has a lengthy history of attempts at collaboration between K-12 and higher education. Minnesota's formal efforts began in 2003 when the MNSCU Chancellor came up with the idea to join forces with the UM and the DOE to think about the state's educational future. Collaboration had been occurring between these agencies, but these leaders believed it needed coordination. Out of this, the Minnesota P-16 Education Partnership was developed with 15 organizational members.

In 2009 the Partnership was codified in law. Most of the structure remained the same, but the name was changed to the P-20 Education Partnership and four legislative members were added. The current Partnership structure is very similar to the structure created by the founding members – no monetary resources, quarterly meetings, and rotating chairs that provide staff. Current membership includes 28 voting member organizations that choose their own representative and designee. These organizations include state education agencies, business associations, state legislators, education associations, and citizen groups.

There are eight non-voting members representing various staff of voting members. Notably, the state's governor is not on the council; however a few respondents noted that the commissioner of education is seen as his representative. New members may be added through nomination of any current member and a two-thirds vote of the Partnership. The statute requires that member organizations "be represented by the chief executives, presidents, or other formally designated leaders…or their designees" (Minn. Stat. ch.127A.70 §1(c), 2009). The Partnership is also commanded to "seek input from nonmember organizations whose expertise can help inform the partnership's work" (Minn. Stat. ch.127A.70 §1(b), 2009).

The statute directs the Partnership to "develop recommendations to the governor and the legislature designed to maximize the achievement of all P-20 students while promoting the efficient use of state resources, thereby helping the state realize the maximum value for its investment" (Minn. Stat. ch.127A.70 §2(a), 2009). An executive committee is comprised of the rotating chairs and works between meetings to set the agenda. Eight committees are used to discuss specific issues.

Barriers to Collaboration and the P-20 Council Impact

Three of Whetten and Bozeman's (1991) barriers to interagency collaboration are evident in Minnesota.

Mission barriers. Mission barriers are not as evident in Minnesota as they are in other case study states, but they do exist. A former Partnership founding member states "The barriers are sort of obvious. In some way you have natural barriers … when you have different organizations that are run for different purposes or have different responsibilities." The Minnesota education structure is not as fragmented or overlapping as in some other states, but the very nature of separateness causes mission barriers, as each agency will likely advocate in its own interests.

The Partnership brings all state education agencies (and other stakeholders) to the table and some respondents noted that relationships are strengthened through the regular interactions. In that way, the Partnership can help overcome mission barriers. However, the Partnership has not been able to settle on a unified mission or plan of action. One respondent noted the Partnership, "would

have these endless debates and they would never really reach consensus". This may be due, in part, to lack of consistency in the chairmanship and staffing. Another respondent stated, "not only does the chair transition, but then the organization that's supposed to support the partnership transitions with them. What happens is you just don't have anybody who's really doing the nitty-gritty work of connecting the dots."

Resource barriers. There are two ways in which resources pose a barrier to collaboration in Minnesota. The first is the scarcity of overall state resources given the recent economic downturn. This hinders the ability of agencies to focus on substantive collaboration, as their main goal is to find funding. As one respondent observed, these have "been difficult funding years and so I see just about every discussion in education comes back to funding and there is always a concern, well, if that's a priority does that mean they're going to transfer that higher ed[ucation] funding to K-12 or that K-12 [funding] to pre-school?" The scramble for scarce resources seems to prevent an open dialogue about the educational needs of the state.

The second way resources pose a barrier to collaboration is lack of staffing and funding to spur collaboration. Although the Partnership was designed to operate independently of external resources, many respondents cited the lack of consistent full-time staff for the Partnership as a major barrier to its effectiveness.

The Partnership has not done much to transcend the resource barriers to collaboration. Although the Partnership exists and meets, there was not a lot of evidence of collaboration. A founding member explained, "we did not want to be a state agency or a legislatively created commission. We wanted to be a voluntary organization and so we didn't ask for money, we didn't raise money; we basically rotated the responsibility for managing it". Perhaps additional resources could have transcended both the resource barrier and the mission barrier as detailed above.

Legal barriers. The structure of Minnesota's education system poses a few legal barriers to collaboration. The first is the fragmented nature of the higher education agencies. The Office of Higher Education is a planning agency. MNSCU governs 31 of the state's institutions and the UM has its own governing authority. A similar barrier concerns the differences between higher education and K-12 governance. As one respondent notes, "K-12 is basically … a state-run operation [where] 95 percent of kids go to public institutions run through state structures … and most of the funding comes through the state. Higher ed[ucation] on the other hand has historically … [had] more of a private sector and a federal government contribution."

There is evidence that the Partnership helps the state transcend legal barriers to collaboration, simply by bringing agencies to the same table. In 2009, the legislature proposed a remedy to the legal barriers and codified the Partnership to ensure its continued operation. A long-time observer stated the Partnership is "a place that people could come and get to know each other better and network and have an opportunity to meet each other; . . . that sort of personal relationship . . . makes it easier to cooperate and do things." Another respondent noticed that "the types of collaboration that have happened in the last seven or eight years have really helped bridge the gap between higher education and secondary education in ways that didn't evolve over night, but they have evolved quite a bit." While there was a general appreciation for the Partnership's convening role from most respondents, the frustration over lack of measurable and substantive progress was equally in evidence.

Discussion

The cases in this study provide an in-depth look at structurally diverse P-20 councils in three different states that are focused on increasing educational attainment levels. The research focused on

the barriers to collaboration between K-12 and higher education, as ostensibly, that collaboration can assist with overall state educational goals, and P-20 councils' impact on those barriers. Within and cross-case analyses of the data lead to five key findings.

First, state education governance structures can create barriers to inter-agency collaboration. Evidence existed for at least three of Whetten & Bozeman's (1991) barriers in each of the case study states. Table 3 demonstrates which barriers were found in each state. Structural barriers, other than those posed by Whetten and Bozeman (1991), were not found. The fact that state education governance structures affected collaboration is not surprising given previous research noting student achievement and policy differences linked to state governance structures (see Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Koedel, 2014; Manna, 2006, 2013; Tandberg, 2013). Although the finding is not surprising, it furthers the literature and knowledge in this area by demonstrating that theoretical constructs from organizational literature, such as Whetten and Bozeman's (1991) framework, can be relevant in the education field.

The remaining findings elaborate on this key conclusion.

Table 3
Barriers to Collaboration Found in Case Study States

Barrier	Georgia	Illinois	Minnesota
Mission	x		x
Political	x		
Resource		x	x
Legal	x	x	x
Constituent	x		
Bureaucratic	x	x	

Second, there is evidence that an elected state K-12 superintendent may pose multiple barriers to collaboration with higher education. As seen in Georgia, an elected state K-12 chief could pose political, legal, and constituent barriers to collaboration. While it could be argued the barriers may be due more to personality than structural issues, the political and constituent barriers were not evident in Illinois or Minnesota where the governor appoints the state chief, making it more likely that this particular structure may be problematic to collaboration. The Georgia barriers existed in the form of tensions between the state superintendent of schools and the governor (even though both positions have been filled by the same political party since 2002) and between the superintendent and other education agency heads. As one long-term Georgia P-20 council member noted, the state superintendent has "challenges [the rest of us] just don't have." The tension between the state superintendent and the governor is not surprising as governors have been taking an increasing role in state education policy over the past few decades (Manna, 2006, 2012; Shober, 2012), which may interfere with the historic scope of the K-12 leader's duties. Further, as the governor is responsible for the entire education system he or she has a stake in ensuring the P-20 system operates smoothly and effectively and needs K-12 to be part of, not separate from, that system.

Third, state higher education governance structures can pose a barrier to collaboration. In Illinois, the higher education agencies are coordinating, not governing entities; therefore each higher education institution has its own governing board, making unified higher education policy through collaboration difficult. A long-time Illinois state leader referred to the troublesome nature of coordinating higher education institutions as "herding cats."

Even with very different higher education structures, all three states evidenced potential legal barriers to collaboration stemming from the higher education governance structure. Although

Georgia employs a governing board over its university system, which gives the system control over its institutions, the system has state constitutional status. Therefore, the governor does not have strong legal authority over the USG including the power to mandate its participation in the P-20 council. Fortunately, the USG has seen the value of collaboration and is an active partner in the state P-20 council.

Minnesota's fragmented higher education structure with a planning agency, a governing agency for all but the University of Minnesota, and then the University of Minnesota, means coordination must include representatives from all parties. In any setting, additional parties (with additional viewpoints, constituencies, and more) often means additional effort needed to collaborate. Certainly, Minnesota evidenced issues in moving an actionable P-20 agenda and this seems to be a contributing factor. The more fractured higher education structures of Illinois and Minnesota may also account for why there were more representatives on the P-20 councils in those states than in Georgia.

Fourth, P-20 councils can help states overcome structural barriers to collaboration. There was greater evidence of P-20 council success in overcoming barriers to collaboration in Georgia and Illinois than in Minnesota. Certainly, Georgia had more barriers to overcome which may have created a greater impetus for collaboration than Minnesota, but Illinois shared the same number of barriers as Minnesota. Illinois and Georgia P-20 councils demonstrated several examples of member commitment and collaboration. Minnesota's council never seemed to find its focus according to most respondents. One respondent noted, "They would have these endless debates and they would never really reach consensus." The extent and perceived effectiveness of the collaboration varied across states and is a ripe area for further study.

Finally, it is important to note that college completion was not a major focus of any state's P-20 council agenda. Although all states were undertaking significant college completion policy efforts during this research as part of the Complete College America Alliance, these efforts served as more of an organizing principle for councils' work rather than a main agenda item. There could be a variety of reasons for this. For example, perhaps as long as state policy leaders agree on an ultimate goal to increase college completion and overall educational attainment, higher education does not see the need to collaborate on the means to that end as it affects higher education institutions. Rather, they may steer the council to focus on preparing more college-ready high school graduates. It could also be that college completion was not on the councils' agendas during the time period covered by this research, although information gleaned from respondents indicated that in all cases college completion has always been a theme or end goal for the councils rather than a main, strategic initiative. Certainly, more research is needed to determine why strategies for college completion were not more of a focus of P-20 councils in this study.

Conclusion

"The truth is that we do not yet have a system of education in this country. We have silos in which various forms and stages of education take place . . ." (Zimpher, 2013).

The policy implications of the findings are important, as the stakes for K-12 and higher education collaboration are high. The myriad issues on state education policy agendas, such as increasing college access and success, require structured and sustained collaboration between the sectors. Unaligned policies and practices will keep achievement and attainment at current or decreasing levels (Kirst, 2005; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Shulock, 2009).

This study provides new insight on the barriers to K-12 and higher education collaboration and P-20 councils' potential role in alleviating those barriers. As one respondent noted, "the P-20 council is an opportunity. It is not a recipe for success without a good, mindful cook." By applying inter-organizational theory to state education governance, a new view of the potential issues surrounding collaboration is presented. This, in turn, can help states identify possibilities for overcoming certain barriers to collaboration and perhaps purposefully structure a P-20 council to allow for the effective collaboration needed to meet state education achievement and attainment goals. For example, a state with a fragmented higher education governance structure may want to consider establishing strong P-20 council leadership with an expectation of active collaboration by all parties. This expectation could come from the governor, the legislature or legislator, or an effective P-20 council chairman. Accountability for results can help overcome barriers to collaboration (Rippner, 2014).

However, this study is not without its limitations. While it identifies education governance structures as potential barriers to collaboration on P-20 councils, there are many variables affecting this collaboration. P-20 council resources, size, membership, chairmanship, agenda, and policy context, among other variables, may affect the ability of these councils to meet their goals. Future research may investigate one or more of these variables. Expanded focus on defining P-20 council effectiveness is also needed. Can a line of causality be drawn from P-20 council operations to student outcomes? Or should P-20 council effectiveness be defined by internally focused goals such as shared policy and/or budget development between agencies? Finally, replication and expansion of this study to other states could determine if the structural barriers found in these three states appear in others as well.

In all, there seems to be sufficient evidence to suggest that P-20 councils are not a passé trend. Rather, more study about how these councils operate could improve their potential for bridging the gap between state education sectors to make the transition from early learning to K-12 and from K-12 to higher education more seamless and efficient. As seen through this study, even a cursory look at other fields provides some assistance in assessing the work of P-20 councils. While myriad studies focus on factors within educational structures that affect student outcomes such as instructional quality and funding, it may be that the educational structures themselves affect student outcomes and devoting attention to those may assist states in reaching desired attainment goals.

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Jennifer Rippner recently became the coordinator of Georgia's P-20 council (as of May 2015) after having started the council as Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue's education policy advisor in 2006, serving on the council as the Executive Director of Georgia's Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and researching this and other P-20 councils. Rippner was recently a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education where she furthered her research on state education governance and collaboration between education sectors. Her book, *The American Education Policy Landscape*, will be published by Routledge in December 2015. She earned her Ph.D. in higher education from the University of Georgia and her J.D. and B.A. in Political Science from the University of Florida.

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