Understanding the Role of Public Policy In Improving the Performance of Higher Education: Insights from a State Policy Review Project

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Importance of Improving Educational Attainment: International Competitiveness

Importance of Improving Attainment: Demand for College-Educated Workers

By 2018, about two-thirds of all employment will require some college education or better. Source: Authors’ analysis of March CPS data, various years; Center on Education and the Workforce forecast of educational demand to 2018.

Importance of Improving Attainment: Equity and Social Justice

Percent of Adults Age 25 and Older With At least a Bachelor's Degree

- Asians: 49.7%
- Blacks: 17.2%
- Hispanics: 12.6%
- Whites: 30.4%

Source: Analyses of data from the American Community Survey.
Importance of Improving Attainment: Increasing Racial/Ethnic Diversity of The U.S. Population

What Do We Know about the Role of States in Promoting Educational Attainment?

*Measuring Up* - Biennial state-by-state report card (National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education)

- Identifies performance of each state on indicators of:
  - Preparation
  - Participation
  - Completion
  - Affordability
  - Benefits
- Does not reveal:
  - Reasons for high or low performance
  - Reasons for changes in performance
1. What is the performance of higher education in particular states? How has performance changed over time?

2. What is the context that informs higher education performance in a state? How are aspects of context changing? How does the state context influence the policy options considered?

3. What policy levers have been used in each state?

4. How does public policy explain higher education performance in these states?
What We Did

States
- Georgia
- Illinois
- Maryland
- Texas
- Washington

Data Sources
- Documents
- Reports
- Existing data
- Interviews

Products
- Case study reports
- Cross-case analysis
Educational Attainment Levels & Needs Vary Across States

Source: Kelly (2010)
What We Found: The State Stories

- Illinois: A story of decline
- Washington: State leadership vacuum
- Maryland: Much accomplished, much at stake
- Texas: Hard choices ahead
- Georgia: Perpetuating disparity

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Explaining Performance: Emerging Conclusions

State-Specific Context

- Use of Fiscal Resources
- Maximize System Capacity
- Movement of Students
- Planning & Leadership
- Efforts to Reduce Stratification

Performance
Planning and Leadership

Shared Public Agenda for Higher Education

Clear goals and priorities?

Consensus about goals?

Policies implemented to achieve goals?

State-Specific Context
Strategic Use of Fiscal Resources

Finance

- Tuition linked to family income?
- Aid targeted appropriately?
- Appropriations incentivize performance?

State-Specific Context
Movement of Students Across Sectors and Levels

State-Specific Context

- Students academically prepared?
- Students transfer without loss of credit?
Maximize Higher Education Capacity

Encourage enrollment in all sectors?

Use of innovative strategies?

Mechanisms to ensure opportunity to attend?

State-Specific Context

Matching Higher Education Supply to Population Needs
Reduction in Stratification

Policies ensure academic readiness and affordability?

Race and income explicit foci?

Response to desegregation mandates?

State-Specific Context

Reduction in Stratification
Conclusions

• All states must do more to improve higher education performance
• Context and structure matter
• BUT lessons can be identified across states about the role of public policy in improving performance