



# The Collaboration Imperative

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FINDINGS FROM A SURVEY  
OF SCHOOL DISTRICT AND  
POST-SECONDARY LEADERS

A Report by edBridge Partners and Hart Research Associates.  
January 2014.

## Acknowledgements

AASA, the School Superintendents Association, and AASCU, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities are committed to supporting effective collaboration between education sectors to advance college readiness, completion and student success. Both AASA and AASCU have contributed significantly to advocacy, research, and strategies for exemplary P-20 partnerships and institutional alignment to improve student outcomes. We are grateful to both associations for their review and contributions to the writing of this report and to assisting with the dissemination of these findings and recommendations to their memberships.

edBridge Partners and Peter D. Hart Research Associates would especially like to thank the school district superintendents and the college and university chancellors, presidents, and academic deans who participated in the survey and shared their thoughts and reflections for this study.

We also give special thanks to Heather Ayres who authored the report *The Collaboration Imperative*.



For more information about edBridge Partners contact:  
Christen Pollock  
cpollock@edbridgepartners.com  
www.edbridgepartners.com

January 2014

In today's competitive global economy, the nation is focused as never before on the college and career readiness of our students. Raising standards and increasing the number of students who graduate from high school prepared for college and who persist to earn a college degree are twin challenges that sit front and center on our national education agenda. Adoption of higher academic standards presents K-12 school districts and post-secondary institutions, particularly those who share students and teachers in common, with valuable opportunities to work together to address the college readiness challenge. However, in order to embrace these opportunities, partnerships to advance college readiness must become an institutional priority and collaboration between schools and colleges, or cross-sector collaboration, a far more integral part of the work of educators. To achieve our readiness goals, we must view the educational pipeline as a single continuum and identify shared solutions to raise student achievement.

To better understand how schools and colleges are working together and how best to advance this work, we interviewed education leaders from school districts and institutions at the forefront of efforts to redress longstanding achievement gaps. Our survey included more than 104 superintendents and 102 college and university presidents, chancellors and deans, seeking out their perspectives on collaboration.

Reporting the survey findings represents a collaboration with two national educational associations best positioned to provide insight into and support for this work: the American Association of State College & Universities and AASA: The School Superintendents Association, along with edBridge Partners and Hart Research Associates.

Schools and colleges across the nation are currently engaged in a wide-variety of educational initiatives to increase preparation and smooth student transitions from high school to college. We hope the results of this survey shed light on how these efforts can be strengthened and what is needed most to facilitate effective collaboration to shape cross-sector partnerships that result in meaningful student success.

We appreciate your interest in this area, and we are eager to learn about your work. Together we can improve our education system for all students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christen Pollock".

**CHRISTEN POLLOCK,**  
PRESIDENT & CEO,  
EDBRIDGE PARTNERS

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Muriel A. Howard".

**MURIEL A. HOWARD,**  
PRESIDENT, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF  
STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel A. Domenech".

**DANIEL A. DOMENECH,**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AASA, THE SCHOOL  
SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allan Rivlin".

**ALLAN RIVLIN,**  
PARTNER,  
HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

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## MAIN FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

- » 90 percent of district superintendents and 80 percent of post-secondary system leaders agree that collaboration is extremely or very important.

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  - » However, few think that they are collaborating effectively: only 33 percent of district superintendents and 34 percent of college leaders say they are collaborating extremely or very effectively.

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  - » Priorities for collaboration differ and reflect the external demands on sector leaders, with district leaders looking for improvements aimed at training and developing teachers and aligning curriculum and instruction. Post-secondary leaders are interested in collaboration aimed at alignment but also aimed at improving students' transition and reducing the need for remediation.

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  - » In addition to more time and money, the key support for effective collaboration is having someone dedicated to sustaining momentum.

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  - » Both groups have questions about the value their counterparts place on collaboration, however, given the importance both groups place on effective collaboration, the findings also highlight areas where productive collaboration can begin.
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# The Collaboration Imperative & Next Generation Education Reform

Much of today's education occurs in silos: with little sharing and planning across subjects and schools and districts; with separate agendas or independent goals in departments, divisions or centers within colleges, universities and systems; higher education and K-12 sectors also operate in silos with not enough cross sector planning and collaboration. We regularly confront the consequences of these divisions for students – in school dropout, post-secondary remediation, and degree completion statistics – and we recognize the compelling need for better connected educational experiences and smoother transitions as a way to improve students' success. Cooperatively developed teaching and learning systems, aligned research agendas, and allied initiatives to organize education, business and community assets in support of a region's students would surely add value to the whole educational enterprise. But activities like these require much higher degrees of collaboration and collective responsibility for bridging the educational divide, than we have so far been able to achieve on a broad scale.

We, in American education, stand at a critical crossroads. With the adoption of Common Core State Standards, emergence of the widely accepted Next Generation Science Standards, and with the rapid development of promising instructional technology to personalize instruction, expand access to post-secondary credentials, and provide more fine-grained information about student achievement, we have invaluable opportunities to improve the odds of success for many students, whom we cannot afford to leave behind. Reorganizing to foster collaboration between people and programs of study within our schools and colleges may be one of the most vital steps we can take to ensure that the above opportunities are not lost and that all students receive the education they need.

An historical perspective is useful in understanding those structural barriers that tend to limit cooperation between the K-12 and higher education sectors and which many educational leaders are concerned with overcoming. Since the turn of the 20th century, colleges and universities have significantly influenced high school curricula, proposing courses and standards to ensure that students would be adequately prepared for post-secondary study. But as high school enrollments have grown, so too have the demands on schools to expand academic programs to include vocational and other training. Over time, the notion of shared secondary and post-secondary standards for a select group of college-bound students has been supplanted by what we now know as the comprehensive high school and distinct subject-specific standards. In the evolution of New York Regents Exams and programs like Advanced Placement (AP), we see attempts to align high school and post-secondary curricula within this subject-specific scope.

The separation of schools and colleges and the public purposes they serve has been reinforced by the evolution of their separate state governance

structures. Typically operating in distinct spheres, state-level efforts, in the form of P-20 councils and executive offices of education, are relatively recent attempts to work against this historic division. In some instances, teacher preparation programs have evolved in a similar manner, with separate departments or colleges of education formed, particularly in large research university settings. However, for many state or regional public universities and colleges, founded as normal schools in the 19th century, teacher preparation remains central to their institutional mission and a faculty-wide commitment. Given their history, mission and longstanding tradition of teacher education, it is in this group of public colleges and universities that we observe many of the most promising examples district-university partnerships and many of the most promising opportunities for leadership to align P-16 curriculum and to improve regional student outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

As a consequence of the structural barriers that divide schools and colleges, today, school teachers and post-secondary faculty may be affiliated through disciplinary organizations but rarely come together to work on curriculum and instruction. So too is education legislation and oversight divided between K-12 state boards of education and higher education governing bodies. As referenced above, P-16 coordinating councils, which first emerged in the 1990s as well as STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education advisory boards, are examples of more recent state and regional efforts to form important cross-sector structures for examining assessment practices and academic pathways – both in response to regional educational needs and in the interest of removing obstacles that prevent students, particularly historically underserved students, from progressing successfully from one level to the next.

In order to gauge the current state of school-college collaboration, edBridge Partners engaged Hart Research Associates to develop and conduct a national phone survey of over 200 education leaders: school district superintendents, 2-year and 4-year college presidents and deans, and university and college system heads. edBridge was formed to advance the aims of higher education, K-12 and not-for profit organizations through strategic and well-designed collaboration. We bring a deep commitment to improving education backed by extensive field experience. We believe it is important to learn more about how education leaders across sectors perceive the current state of collaboration; the schools and colleges they lead are at the forefront of efforts to redress gaps in the skills and knowledge of the nation's students.

How the nation's educational leaders can advocate and partner to address college readiness figures prominently in the work of AASA, the School Superintendents Association, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). These organizations have long

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**It's critical to look at collaboration, K to 16. It's in the best interest of students.”**

**K-12 DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT**

<sup>1</sup> Krst, W. & Usdan, M. (2009). “The Historical Context of the Divide between K-12 and Higher Education Michael,” in *States, Schools, and Colleges: Policies to Improve Student Readiness for College and Strengthen Coordination between Schools and Colleges* (pp. 5-22). The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. San Jose, CA.

championed the need for stronger school-college partnerships through their research and programs, and we are grateful for their support of this shared effort to hear from public school superintendents and higher education leaders about the role that effective collaboration can play in advancing the nation's readiness agenda.

In phone interviews, 104 superintendents and 102 2-year and 4-year college and university presidents, deans and system heads were asked to characterize the importance and effectiveness of current collaboration in improving important educational outcomes; their attitudes and beliefs around the issues where collaboration across sectors is needed most; and, reflecting on current and past efforts, to identify the barriers and catalysts to sustained collaboration. Results offer insight into similarities and differences across the sectors both in what collaboration should be organized to accomplish and in where and how educators can most productively initiate and concentrate partnership activities. Below, we present main findings and an analysis of these findings, to clarify the kind of effective collaboration that both schools and colleges agree is needed to better serve the nation's students. Implications of this research and our recommendations for practice are presented as well.

## Main Findings on the Perceived Importance and Efficacy of Cross-Sector Collaboration

### COLLABORATION IS NECESSARY

When asked about the *importance* of collaboration, remarkably high proportions of leaders from both sectors - 90 percent of school district superintendents and 80 percent post-secondary leaders - say collaboration is either extremely or very important to achieving their aims. In sharp contrast, however, just a minority of 33 percent of superintendents and 34 percent of higher education leaders characterize collaboration between the K-12 and higher education sectors as either *extremely or very effective*. Indeed, across both sectors, a majority of system leaders regard current levels of collaboration as somewhat, not too, or not all effective. And yet, as noted above, the overwhelming majority of secondary and post-secondary leaders believe bridging the school-college divide through deeper collaboration is a key to realizing the student learning gains their institutions are attempting to achieve.



### EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION EXEMPLIFIED

It is interesting that educational leaders widely agree that cross-sector collaboration is important but to what end? To achieve which aims? To investigate these questions we asked respondents to identify examples of what constitutes collaboration between schools and colleges, providing a list of options that included more and less intensive or demanding cooperative activities. Among the most interesting and noteworthy findings from this portion of the survey: the highest proportions of respondents from both sectors say collaboration organized for the purposes of improving student outcomes (36 percent of school district and 38 percent of post-secondary leaders) constitutes the kind of "effective collaboration" they envision. For a smaller but also equally balanced proportion of school district and post-secondary leaders, participation in joint K-12 district and higher education councils (16 percent) – an approach to collaboration largely taken at the state level through P-20 or K-16 councils – is also a feature of effective collaboration.

Also noteworthy are areas where views of effective collaboration diverge across sectors. For example, far more school district leaders (22 percent) than post-secondary leaders (9 percent) say working together to understand and implement state education policy is what they mean by effective collaboration. So too is the sharing of resources across institutions, which 18 percent of school district and just 10 percent of post-secondary leaders see as an effective form of collaboration. By contrast, coordination of regional efforts to affect student learning outcomes represents effective collaboration by a higher proportion of post-secondary (25 percent) than school district (16 percent) leaders, as do events that provide students with opportunities to learn about local colleges and universities, where 19 percent of post-secondary and slightly fewer or 12 percent of school district leaders see effective collaboration taking place.

Q3: WHICH BEST DEFINES EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION?		
	DISTRICT LEADERS	COLLEGE LEADERS
Working together to develop programs that solve a specific problem or aim to improve student outcomes	36	38
Coordinating initiatives to impact regional student outcomes	16	25
Participation in councils or committees made up of representatives from K-12 and higher education	16	16
Working together to understand and implement state legislation and policy	22	9
Sharing resources and assets across institutions and systems	18	10
Having events where local students can learn more about colleges and universities	12	19
Having large numbers of local students attend local colleges and universities	9	9
Sharing data, evaluation systems, and research studies	13	6

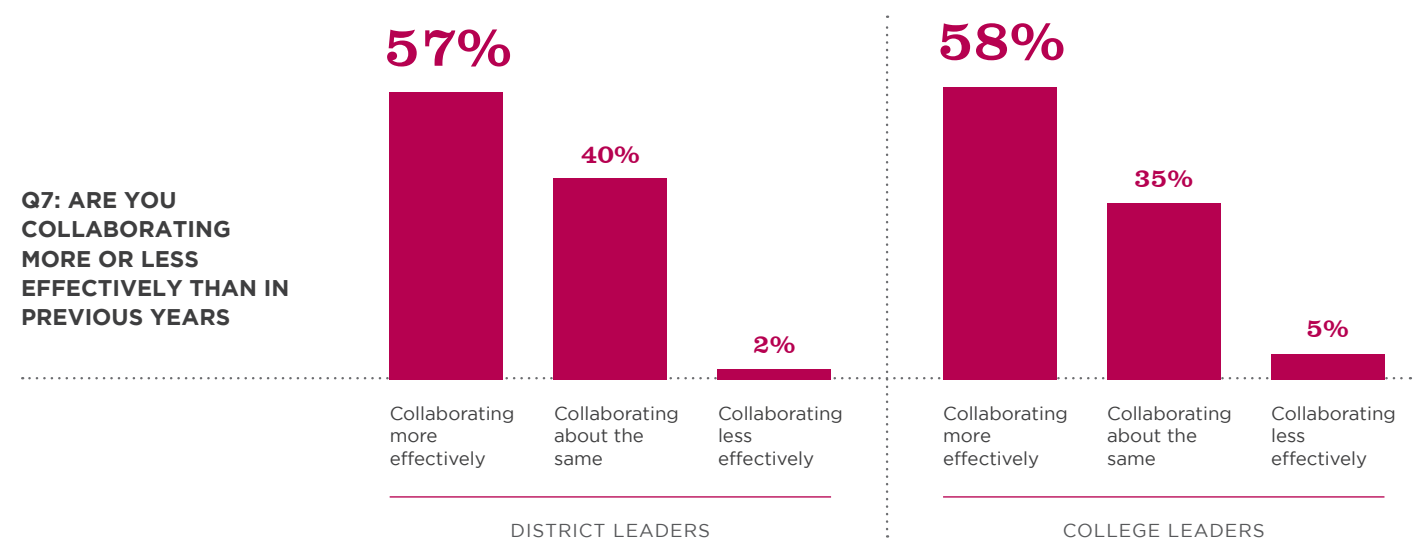
Given the different mandates on district superintendents and post-secondary leaders and their institutions, differences in how they define effective collaboration are not unexpected. However, these differences do highlight expectations, which are likely to influence how leaders initiate and on what basis they may be inclined to lend support to collaborative initiatives. The above differences also speak to the areas where state policies influence the form collaboration takes and where leaders are likely to feel pressure to demonstrate value to stakeholder groups, when and if a joint commitment is made to devote resources and staff time to address shared areas of concern.

## EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION DEFINED

After offering respondents a chance to define “effective collaboration,” a definition of collaboration was offered to them, in order to bring greater clarity to the meaning of effective collaboration for the remainder of the survey. The overwhelming expression of comfort with this definition suggests greater potential for consensus and cooperation when and if collaborative efforts are focused and facilitated. In considering the following definition of effective collaboration, almost all respondents (96 percent of school district and 97 percent of post-secondary leaders) say they are comfortable with this definition:

*Effective collaboration is defined as local middle and high school, colleges and universities, working together on a regular basis, focusing on specific challenges in order to generate fresh ideas, solutions, and collective action plans that are implemented to achieve shared goals.*

Educational leaders both agree on the importance of collaboration and are comfortable with a common definition of the form it should take, with sustained cooperation and a focus on action to achieve shared goals. Holding this form of collaboration in mind, we were interested to know how educational leaders regard the state of collaboration within their regions. Are they seeing improvements in school-college collaboration along the lines described above? In response to this question, slightly more than half of school district (57 percent) and post-secondary (58 percent) leaders say they perceive collaboration in the forms described above, as improved over previous years. Very small numbers see collaborative activities as being less effective than they have been: just 2 percent of school district and 5 percent of post-secondary leaders characterize the current state of collaboration in this way. The implications of these results is that educational leaders share a common vision for the how they aspire to collaborate, many believe they are making progress but most also acknowledge that there is quite a lot of room for improvement.





# Priorities, Barriers and Catalysts to Collaboration

## PRIORITIES

If the aims are both to enact and sustain the kind of deep collaboration that educational leaders envision above and to direct that collaboration at improving student learning outcomes, then to what extent is there consensus on the areas of challenge that leaders believe can be most promisingly addressed through effective cross-sector work? Said another way, to what extent are the current collaborative priorities of school district and higher education leaders similar or different? The survey findings reveal that for a sizable proportion of leaders from both groups, including 28 percent of district and 22 percent of higher education, cross-sector work to align K-12, 2-year and 4-year programs of study is a shared priority, possibly a reflection of work to strengthen transfer credit policies, develop common high school exit and college placement exams, and establish competency-based credit systems, for example. From the perspective of superintendents, teacher training and professional development (30 percent) and development of interdisciplinary curriculum and improvements in the delivery of instruction (30 percent) are also priority areas for cross-sector collaboration. These results suggest a desire for partnerships to strengthen professional learning and the design and development of better integrated and modes of instruction that are both relevant and responsive to the needs of today's students. Among post-secondary leaders, coordination of services to smooth the transition from school to college (29 percent), to reduce remediation (18 percent) and to promote access, persistence, and completion (17 percent) are priorities ideally addressed through cross-sector collaboration. In these findings we see collaborative priorities, although articulated differently within sectors, as interrelated and, arguably, better achieved by educators across sectors working together to identify and advance promising practices, rather than unilaterally.

### Q8: WHICH AREAS WOULD MOST BENEFIT FROM EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

	DISTRICT LEADERS	COLLEGE LEADERS
Alignment of K-12, community college, and four year college and university programs of study	28	22
Student service to ease the high-school-to-college transition and first year success	18	29
Development of more integrated interdisciplinary curriculum and improvement of the delivery of instruction	30	13
Teacher training and professional development	30	9
Remediation or developmental education	8	18
Closing the achievement gap	10	13
Implementation of common core state standards	13	5
College access, persistence, and completion	3	17

## ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS

In addition to understanding the extent to which the sectors share interrelated or overlapping priorities, what groundwork must be laid for effective collaboration to take hold? What barriers should we work with schools and colleges to remove? For school district leaders, the number of competing educational challenges that districts are concurrently managing (37 percent) is regarded by many as a barrier to launching or engaging in effective collaboration. For post-secondary leaders, resource limitations (26 percent), including the availability of outside funding and budget flexibility to develop collaborative efforts, is the most consistently mentioned barrier to collaboration. It is noteworthy that across both sectors, the second most consistently identified barrier is dedicated staff - to design, integrate, manage, evaluate, and sustain momentum - all of which are required for effective collaboration to deliver meaningful results. Here we see respondents acknowledging the need for new organizational structures, including approaches to resource allocation and the assignment of roles and responsibilities, to facilitate the deeper and most effective forms of cross-sector collaboration our educational leaders aspire to achieve.

### Q9: BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

	DISTRICT LEADERS	COLLEGE LEADERS
The number of other challenges facing education makes it difficult to make collaboration a priority	37	16
Not having someone dedicated to facilitating and managing the collaboration process to sustain momentum and results	27	20
Budgeting issues and finding external funding sources	18	26
The challenge of getting internal and external buy-in for collaborative efforts	15	13
Difficulty in moving from identifying issues to developing workable solutions and action plans to sustain momentum	14	12
Culture differences between K-12 and higher education	13	12
We do not have a roadmap for more effective collaboration	10	10
Lack of incentives for faculty and administrators in collaborative engagements	3	7

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The one major obstacle is the perception of turf. It makes us competitive.”

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

## CATALYSTS

Under what conditions are district and post-secondary leaders likely to attempt to build the will required to organize initiatives that use cross-sector collaboration as a strategy to achieve their aims? Reinforcing the above findings, 44 percent of leaders from both sectors believe that successfully launching the kind of collaboration they envision will require either additional or a shift in existing resources so that people's time and administrative supports are available to advance collaborative endeavors. Twenty-four percent of high school and 27 percent of post-secondary say that engaging the right people - both those with the knowledge and experience and those who are ultimately responsible for enacting changes - is also a key condition to catalyzing effective collaboration. Among 26 percent of postsecondary and 14 percent of school district leaders, visible cross-sector leadership support and dedicated staff or external support (14 percent) to manage and facilitate collaborative efforts are key catalysts as well.

### Q10: CATALYSTS TO ENABLE EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

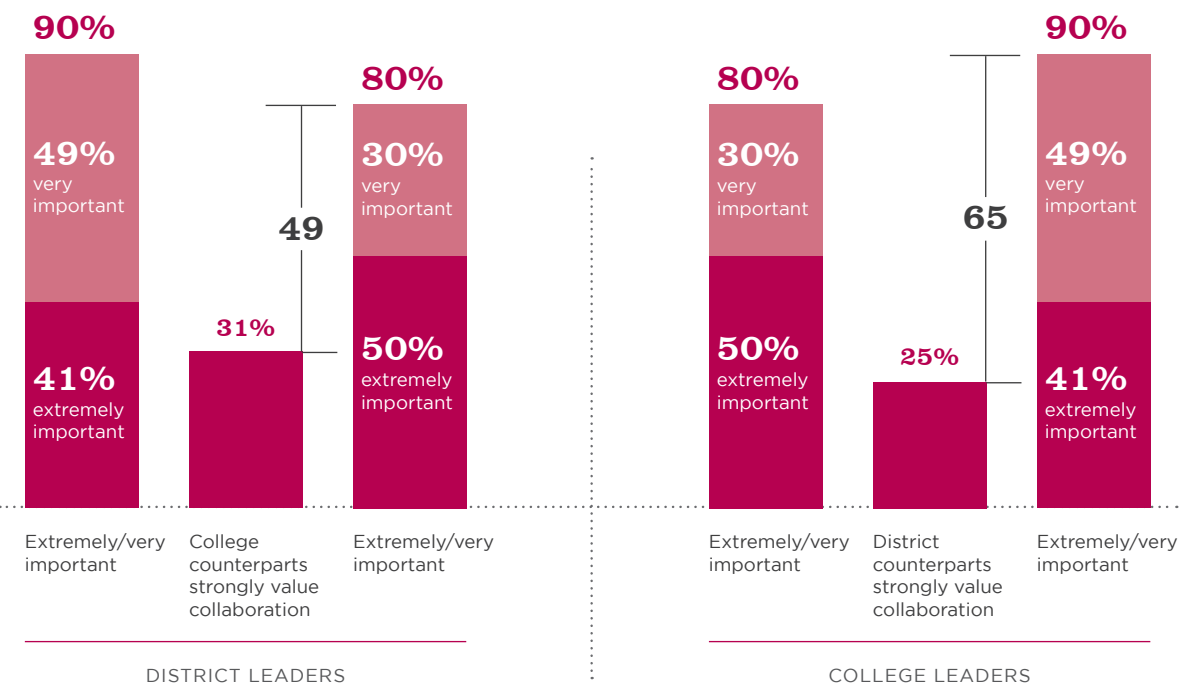
	DISTRICT LEADERS	COLLEGE LEADERS
Adequate resources, time, and money to support these efforts	44	44
Engaging the right people who have the right knowledge, experience, and responsibility to affect changes	24	27
Leadership support from all sectors	14	26
Dedicated staff or outside experts to lead collaborative efforts	14	14
Commitment to sustained partnerships	17	7
Effective communication of progress and results to key stakeholders	11	4
Effective and efficient management, including facilitation of coordinated activities	9	9

## BELIEVING IN THE POSSIBILITY OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

To begin, these survey findings underscore a belief, widely shared by district and postsecondary leaders, that there is much to be gained by organizing practitioners to collaborate with regional counterparts. This is an important starting point and a belief for which we have evidence, as illustrated by student achievement gains produced in connection with school-college partnerships like Texas' Regional Collaboratives for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching (<http://thetrc.org>), a group of results-driven statewide professional learning networks. Indeed, for many interviewed leaders, achieving better student learning outcomes than have heretofore been achieved by operating independently represents the most highly desired outcome of cross-sector collaboration or what collaboration ultimately amounts to, when done well.

However, to initiate cooperative relationships like these, trust is also essential, including trust that counterparts are equally motivated, prepared to adjust roles and responsibilities and to share resources, in order for collaborative endeavors to gain traction and succeed, over time. Hence, we asked respondents to tell us how much they believed their counterparts, across the sectors, value collaboration.

It was instructive to learn that just 24 percent of college and 31 percent of district leaders perceive their counterparts highly valuing collaboration. Again, recalling that much higher proportions of school district and post-secondary leaders say collaboration is important or extremely important to achieving their aims, overcoming potential misconceptions about the value one's counterparts place on collaboration is an important first step and, of course, precursor to initiating successful partnerships. That more than half - 52 percent of school district and 57 percent of post-secondary - leaders regard their counterparts as only somewhat valuing collaboration is also a useful finding. We did not survey matched pairs of school district and higher education leaders. Nonetheless, the finding that so many leaders on both sides underestimate the value their counterparts place on collaborating across sectors is noteworthy. Here we see superintendents and post-secondary leaders serving diverse institutional missions and student populations regarding their counterparts as generally open but also underestimating the degree to which they are prepared to collaborate at the more involved levels described above to realize overall student achievement gains.





# Conclusions & Recommendations: The Way Forward

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Factors that work against cross-sector collaboration are many and well documented: limited time and funding, limited organizational support, and poorly aligned roles and resources to name a few.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as we scan the educational landscape for promising practices and breakthrough models, we see time and again that many of the most productive efforts to ensure that students are prepared and experience successful transitions, as they move from one level of schooling and performance to the next, are based on close collaboration between educators who work in different sectors.

If system-wide collaboration is the imperative, in individual programs and new school models to organize people and resources in ways that allow for more seamless transitions, we begin to see a way forward. Examples encompass newer models of middle college and early-college high schools, including Wake North Carolina State University STEM Early College High School, Prince George's Community College Middle College High School Academy of Health Sciences, and Utah State University Intech Collegiate High School. They include efforts organized through schools of education, including California State University Long Beach Seamless Educational Partnership and North County Professional Development Federation (NCPDF), a collaboration representing the San Diego County Office of Education, the College of Education at California State University San Marcos, and 26 Northern San Diego County member districts. They also include wide-ranging college partnerships like Worcester State University and Worcester Public Schools' Latino Education Initiative and comprehensive P-20 initiatives such as Albany Promise, a partnership co-convened by the State University of New York (SUNY), the Albany Family Education Alliance and the Albany City Common Council. In as many as 40 states, administrative councils exist to facilitate P-20 or K-16 efforts, as exemplified by Maryland's P-20 Leadership Council and Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning, P-16. And in the interest of leveraging opportunities presented by new standards adoption and agreement on a comprehensive definition of readiness, state-level efforts like those facilitate by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and through legislation (see for example, Maryland's College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013) are promoting the redesign of learning delivery, educator preparation and comprehensive assessment systems.

These are complex tasks that cannot be accomplished without the deep knowledge of professional practice, findings from cognitive research, and insight into student and adult development that reside in both sectors. So too is leadership required to communicate the view that students are best served when their sectors assume shared responsibility for, and educators are organized to, engage in improvement processes capable of delivering the results we need.

Findings of this survey reveal a remarkably high degree of consensus - consensus in areas that provide a strong foundation for moving collaborative efforts forward. Most notably, educational leaders across both the K-12 and post-secondary sectors regard collaboration as important to achieving their respective aims and few see cross-sector collaboration as being as effective as they would like. Taken together these findings indicate recognition that there is room for improvement and strong desire (born of both individual institutional and collective regional interests) to take action, as well. There is also a remarkable degree of consistency in how leaders envision the form effective collaboration should take.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

Collaboration between schools and colleges is not a universal solution nor is it new. As noted above, we have any number of effective partnership models to learn from and to build upon. That said, what are the new or more concerted efforts required to realize the greater vision of effective collaboration that is supported by today's educational leaders? How can we develop conditions to launch, deepen and sustain effective collaboration and seed high-level collaboration of this kind, much more widely among schools and colleges? As always, we realize that time and resources are barriers, as both sides have difficulty setting aside the time and staff. Although not insurmountable, these barriers especially requires fresh and innovative thinking about how resources can be marshaled or pooled if we are serious about functioning as a coherent educational system, rather than separate sectors.

The findings of this survey underscore a belief among educational leaders that the nation's readiness and completion agenda can be more productively advanced if schools and colleges work better together. As suggested earlier, in these results we especially recognize the promise of regional collaboration, organized among schools and colleges who share students and teachers in common and who, therefore, have clear connections to shared outcomes and compelling overlapping interests. These findings coupled with our own field work and research on effective educational partnerships suggest the following as promising strategies to lay the groundwork for the deep and sustained collaboration at the level that leaders envision:

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**Yes, collaboration needs to be strengthened so that high school students can be competitive and successful as they transition from high school to college.”**

**FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE PRESIDENT**

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Kirst, M.W & Venezia, A. (2006) "Improving College Readiness and Success for All Students: A Joint Responsibility between K-12 and Postsecondary Education" An Issue Brief for the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education.

**SURVEY RESPONDENTS' PRIORITIES AND PERCEPTIONS****RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADVANCE EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION**

» Collaboration is extremely or very important, and effective collaboration should be student-outcomes driven. A key catalyst for effective collaboration is engaging the right people, with the knowledge, experience and responsibility to affect change.

» Work against the tendency for collaborative activities to take place on the margins of our schools and colleges by characterizing forms of effective professional collaboration within and across fields of study and by explicitly embedding professional collaboration expectations into individual, departmental, and divisional roles and rewards.

» The overall aim of effective collaboration should be to improve student outcomes. Partnerships to achieve effective collaboration are more likely to succeed when organized around areas of need that represent shared priorities, when adequately staffed, nurtured by cross-sector leadership, and when supported through aligned resources.

» Examine existing governance structures and policies to align with interdependent (rather than independent) efforts aimed at improving student outcomes and to incentivize cooperation among schools and colleges to meet collective goals such as college readiness and degree completion.

» The number of challenges facing education makes it difficult for superintendents to advance cross-sector collaboration as a strategic imperative and for higher education leaders to secure buy-in and advocate for funding to support cross-sector collaboration.

» Cooperatively build the will and amplify the need for removing barriers to collaboration with evidence derived from jointly developed research agendas that leverage newly available longitudinal data capable of better illustrating the interdependency between schools and colleges in achieving regional readiness and completion outcomes.

» Superintendents and post-secondary leaders agree on the form collaboration should ideally take and are interested in related collaborative priorities to improve curriculum and instruction, alignment, and cooperatively developed student support systems to ease school to college transition.

» Overcome institutional silos through opportunities for school and college practitioners, who share disciplinary and other affiliations in common, to develop new more effective and integrative modes of instruction and, in the process of doing so, to define the supports required to work together in a sustained manner on improving practice.

» Superintendents and post-secondary leaders agree on the importance of cross-sector collaboration. Though strong examples exist, far fewer regard current efforts to jointly develop and implement solutions to shared challenges as highly effective.

» Design, test, and evaluate the impact of new cross-sector collaborative programs and professional learning and improvement models to drive at agreed upon student learning outcomes and to communicate, even more broadly, why cross-sector collaboration is vital to improving practice.

» Effective collaboration is regarded as a promising improvement strategy when defined as schools and colleges coordinating staff and other resources to achieve specific goals. Superintendents and post-secondary leaders both say they highly value collaboration but many are unsure of how strongly their counterparts value it, in turn.

» In envisioning a more coherent system anchored in collaboration and designed to produce clearer P-20 pathways, recognize the combined wealth of knowledge (with respect to content, practice, and the lives of students) within schools and colleges is our greatest asset. Acknowledging that resources are limited and unevenly distributed among the sectors, strive to create conditions for this collective knowledge to be productively leveraged.

» When asked about areas most effectively addressed through cross-sector collaboration, district and college leaders express different priorities and yet the interests of both are interconnect and their views on effective collaboration are highly consistent, as well.

» Emphasize ongoing communication, open information sharing, and joint planning to establish the conditions of trust required for collaboration to take hold, with clear goals and an agreed-upon road map.

Reimagining a *system* that produces more coherent educational pathways – pathways that lead students to a promising future *is the way forward*. Next generation education reforms are highly unlikely to take hold without much more widespread and intentionally designed regional cross-sector collaboration. The footholds for this work are numerous, but the basis must be mutuality, trust anchored in shared accountability, and a willingness to take a longer view on our collective responsibility for student achievement along a P-20 continuum.

The conclusions of this survey bolster recommendations presented in AASCU's, *Serving America's Future: Increasing College Readiness and* lend support for use of a RISE (research-based, intentional, sustained, and evaluated) model for advancing strategic collaboration. The ability for improvements, like those envisioned by surveyed leaders, are predicated on any number of conditions, including clear and specific evidence to demonstrate the essential interdependency between schools and colleges in improving readiness outcomes. If we assume no change in the resources available to schools and colleges, stakeholders are unlikely to see an advantage in collaborating unless there is evidence to show the potentially greater impact that can be made by providing practitioners with opportunities to work more closely and effectively to advance regional readiness agendas.

Given the varied histories and missions of our nation's schools and colleges and policy environments in which they operate, creating the conditions for cross-sector collaboration to drive readiness and completion will require significant shifts: shifts in how educators work together as professionals; how institutions define roles and responsibilities and allocate resources; and how we evaluate the results of collective efforts. So too will they require changes in policies and governance structures that now tend to promote a view of students as mine or yours, in separate schools or colleges, rather than as ours in a comprehensive and newly envisioned educational system. And so, as our schools and colleges begin to join efforts in order to more powerfully address the readiness and completion challenges, we will also need to design and advocate for policies, funding practices, and accountability frameworks that support a more coherent educational improvement system. If we are to accept responsibility for the student population as a whole, then we must strive to form a new system that collectively promotes their success.

How educational leaders view the state of and imperative for cross-sector collaboration and how we can support their efforts to advance the nation's readiness and completion agenda through collaboration are questions that motivated the design of this survey. Lending support to college readiness efforts mobilized through organizations such as AASCU and AASA, this survey report is the first in a series of efforts to derive recommendations from the field to advance the national conversation around school-college collaboration.

## Appendix A

### METHODOLOGY

In partnership with edBridge Partners, Hart Research conducted 205 telephone survey interviews engaging a national sample of 104 public school district superintendents and 101 public and private 2- and 4-year college and university system heads, including chancellors, presidents, and academic deans. Contact information was obtained through the list provider MDR, a Dunn and Bradstreet company, and respondents received invitations to participate by telephone. Interviews took place from October 17, to November 14, 2013. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary and no incentives were offered for the time they took from away from other work to answer the survey questions, which included open-ended questions, inviting respondents to present their perspectives in their own words. Given the very busy schedules of respondents, by design, survey interviews lasted roughly 15 minutes.

Researchers and managers from edBridge Partners and Hart Research drew upon both research literature and field work experience to inform survey item development. edBridge Partners was formed for the purposes of strengthening collaboration between and within education sectors. edBridge Partners' motivation for conducting this survey with Hart Research was to add value to the field and provide a better understanding of how our educational leaders perceive the current state of collaboration; to clarify areas where they believe that collaboration can most productively take hold; and to consider how collaboration between sectors can be most productively advanced.

## Appendix B

### RESOURCES

American Association of Community Colleges. Reclaiming the American Dream. Community Colleges and the Nation's Future. <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/21stcenturyreport/index.html> (April, 2012).

American Association of School Administrators. Driving K-12 Reform through a College Access & Success Agenda. [http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Resources/College-Going\\_Data/College-Going%20Culture%20Toolkit\\_final.pdf](http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Resources/College-Going_Data/College-Going%20Culture%20Toolkit_final.pdf). (March, 2012).

American Association of State Colleges & Universities. Serving America's Future: Increasing College Readiness. <http://www.aascu.org/CollegeReadiness/> (October, 2012).

American Association of State Colleges & Universities College. Innovations Resource Exchange. <http://www.aascu.org/PROGRAMS/IE/SubmissionArchives.aspx?categoryid=161>

Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Partnerships for College Readiness. <http://annenberginstitute.org/sites/default/files/PartnershipReport.pdf>. (November, 2013).

California Alliance for Pre K-18 Partnerships. Raising Achievement through Effective Education Partnerships: Policy & Practice. [http://www.calstate.edu/capp/publications/Alliance\\_for\\_Pre\\_K-18\\_Partnerships.pdf](http://www.calstate.edu/capp/publications/Alliance_for_Pre_K-18_Partnerships.pdf) (January, 2004).

The College Board. Finding A Way: Practical Examples of How an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead to Success for All Students. <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/nosca/finding-a-way.pdf> (May, 2009).

North County Professional Development Federation (NCPDF). NCPDF is a collaboration representing the San Diego County Office of Education, the College of Education at California State University San Marcos, and 26 Northern San Diego County member districts. <http://www.ncpdf.org/welcome.asp>

The National Education Association's National Foundation for the Improvement of Education. Creating Teacher-Led Professional Development Centers. [http://www.neafoundation.org/downloads/NEA-Creating\\_Teacher-Led\\_Prof\\_Dev.pdf](http://www.neafoundation.org/downloads/NEA-Creating_Teacher-Led_Prof_Dev.pdf) (Summer 2000, No. 2.).



AASA, the School Superintendents Association, advocates for the highest quality public education for all students, and develops and supports school system leaders. [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org)



AASCU is a Washington-based higher education association of more than 400 public colleges, universities and systems whose members share a learning- and teaching-centered culture, a historic commitment to underserved student populations and a dedication to research and creativity that advances their regions' economic progress and cultural development. [www.aascu.org](http://www.aascu.org)



Founded in 1971, Hart Research Associates is one of the leading survey research firms in the United States and has been at the cutting edge of change in the field of public opinion for more than three decades. [www.hartresearch.com](http://www.hartresearch.com)



Defined by collaboration & driven by a bias for action

By working better together, educators can achieve more. edBridge Partners understands the issues that impede collaboration and employs proven methodologies, innovative thinking, comprehensive planning and implementation strategies to transform goals into collective action.

[www.edbridgepartners.com](http://www.edbridgepartners.com)  
[cpollock@edbridgepartners.com](mailto:cpollock@edbridgepartners.com)



edBridge Partners, LLC  
115 East 34th Street #1900  
New York, NY 10156  
[www.edbridgepartners.com](http://www.edbridgepartners.com)

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