West Virginia’s Global 21 Initiative and other State Efforts Supporting School-Community Partnerships

Given the increased need for highly skilled workers in today’s economy, policymakers in West Virginia developed the Global 21 Initiative, a comprehensive education plan that will prepare students for any path after graduation. State policymakers recognized that there is no single strategy to improve schools consistently or keep students engaged, so they developed a multi-faceted approach to a curriculum that would be relevant to all students. The Initiative incorporates rigorous 21st century skills and technology tools into the curriculum to better prepare students for life after graduation, provides a systemic framework for improving schools over time, and utilizes community involvement for accomplishing this goal.

The framework aims to improve schools through:

- quality curriculum,
- quality instruction,
- the current effective practices of each school, and
- support of families.

This educational framework provides a cohesive structure for improvement, while recognizing that schools operate in communities with unique resources that can support student learning.

To implement this Global 21 framework, the state provides district leadership with professional development workshops and information on the Initiative. In addition, all teachers are given comprehensive information about the Initiative’s content and pedagogy to create classrooms that are more effective. Without professional development and technical assistance, state officials say, the education framework is unlikely to be integrated into practice and improve student outcomes.

A key aspect of the Global 21 Initiative is state-level support for school-community partnerships. West Virginia has leveraged the role of the state to promote school-community partnerships through the passage of Policy 2200, development of the 21st Century Jobs Cabinet, and the financial support of Parent/Community Involvement Mini-Grants.

Policy on Community Involvement in Schools — In 2008, the West Virginia State Board of Education passed Policy 2200 to promote the importance of community involvement in education. The board noted that community involvement is fundamental to ensuring a quality education for all children. The policy states that “community involvement…promotes a safe and supportive school climate that connects students to a broader learning community.” Each county is required to establish a strategic plan for community involvement in schools. Parts of the strategic plan include utilizing community resources, training for teachers and parents, and developing a communication strategy for segments of the community that are harder to reach. Policy 2200 is an example of using the role of the state board to establish clear guidance for districts to integrate community involvement.

21st Century Jobs Cabinet — In addition, state leaders have taken an active role in forging strategic collaborations between the state, the workforce, higher education, and the
Governor Joe Manchin established the 21st Century Jobs Cabinet to advise him on P-20 education and to coordinate decision making among agencies in state education, job creation, and economic development efforts. The Cabinet has the goal of "creating a career pathways model; developing ways to improve the preparation of educators at all levels; ensuring the integration of vocational education and career counseling into all levels of education; and promoting greater family and community involvement in the education system." Members of the Cabinet include the secretary of education, the state superintendent, the chancellor of higher education, the chancellor of community and technical education, and the executive director of the West Virginia Development Office, as well as other stakeholders from around the state.

Community Forums — Through the Jobs Cabinet, state leaders convened community forums to understand how to better prepare West Virginia students for a 21st century economy. Additionally, as a recipient of NASBE’s High School Policy grant, West Virginia convened various stakeholders, such as parents, higher education, business and community leaders, and students, to discuss what high school students should know and be able to do when they graduate and the support they need to ensure they graduate. These forums illuminated the challenges students face and the role that the state can play in helping students overcome these challenges. In addition, the forums leveraged the role of the state board as a convener, able to bring together key people to discuss and highlight important issues in education such as meaningful community partnerships and developing support for such initiatives.

Parent/Community Involvement Mini-Grants — Lastly, state leaders fostered meaningful partnerships through financial support of promising practices that encourage partnerships. The West Virginia Department of Education has funded Parent/Community Involvement Mini-Grants for the last two years. In the 2009-2010 school-year, thirty $1,000 mini grants will be available to districts and schools to get communities involved in schools. Some examples of the use of these grants include developing a communication plan for families in transition and holding targeted learning sessions for parents and the broader community on issues such as health/wellness and financial literacy. These grants bolster schools’ ability to involve the community in meaningful ways and have an impact on students and the surrounding communities.

Through the Global 21 Initiative, policymakers in West Virginia have taken significant steps to create meaningful school-community partnerships. The comprehensive framework Initiative emphasizes the need for partnerships to prepare students for the 21st century. State leaders have stressed this importance by designing initiatives and policies that incorporate community partnerships and involving stakeholders in education planning and implementation. As policymakers from other states develop similar policies and programs, West Virginia’s efforts are good examples of utilizing school-community partnerships within a comprehensive education framework to improve student outcomes. The recently released NASBE study group report, Partners in Prevention: The Role of School-Community Partnerships in Dropout Prevention, can assist education leaders as they begin to address these issues. The report provides resources, guiding questions, and state examples for each strategy to increase community involvement and keep students on the path to graduation.

For more information on West Virginia’s Global 21 Initiative and other efforts to promote school-community partnerships, go to the West Virginia Department of Education’s website at wvde.state.wv.us/global21/.

To order copies of Partners in Prevention, call NASBE at 800-220-5183 or go online to the bookstore at www.nasbe.org.

For more information about the NASBE High School Redesign Project as well as the latest resources regarding student engagement, postsecondary transition, and school-community partnerships, please visit www.nasbe.org/index.php/hsr/.

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Endnotes
