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## Getting There from Here

**With P-16 programs, states seek a better fit across educational levels.**

**By Gigi Douban**

Post-secondary remedial classes cost U.S. colleges, businesses, and students and their families \$17 billion each year, according to Achieve, an educational nonprofit founded by the nation's governors and business leaders. Add in the fact that students who require such catch-up instruction are far less likely to earn a degree, and the financial picture looks even worse.

That money drain is the impetus behind the so-called "P-16" movement: a collection of initiatives aimed at better preparing students to succeed in college and beyond by coordinating what they learn at different educational levels, from

preschool through college. While some states' P-16 programs have been in place for more than a decade, many such efforts—which hinge on cooperation between university faculty and K-12 teachers—have been haphazard, poorly funded, and ineffective.

That's starting to change, however.

"We've moved from the idea of P-16 to now seeing definite action happening in the states," says Bruce Vandal, director of the Postsecondary and Workforce Development Institute of the Education Commission of the States, which advises state policy makers on education. "The key challenge for a lot of these P-16 partnerships is, once you develop policy, how do you effect change on the ground, in the classroom?"



—Matt Collins

Education officials across the country have begun developing data systems to track students through high school and college, incorporate feedback from business leaders and university faculty, and establish more rigorous graduation requirements. And in a growing number of states—especially Georgia, Maryland, and Indiana—higher education institutions are investing in programs designed to assist local schools, often by sending university faculty out into classrooms to share their expertise.

This fall, faculty at Indiana University’s School of Education hope to take their collaboration with teachers one step farther with the opening of a new Center for Educational Sciences Research and P-16 Collaboration. Gerardo Gonzalez, dean of IU’s school of education, says the center will link the research of professors to the needs of schools, particularly those with large populations of low-income and minority students.

Though unusual, the Indiana center will not be unique. A similar office established in 1995, the University System of Georgia’s P-16 Department, has helped develop an institute for veteran teachers and other leaders, as well as programs to train educators in teaching reading, science, and math.

### Playing Catch-Up

Reducing the number of college-students—currently almost one-third of freshmen—who need remedial classes is one goal of P-16 programs. But there’s a long way to go.

#### Percentage of college freshmen enrolled in remedial classes, by subject:

Math: **22%**  
 Reading: **11%**  
 Writing: **14%**

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, 2004

Like the Georgia P-16 office, the IU center aims to build solid, long-term relationships between university faculty and teachers. The first step, explains Catherine Brown, the center’s director, will be to open a dialogue. “We’re not saying we’re going to swoop in with yet another program,” she says. “We need to understand the needs of schools and see how we can connect our resources together on finding solutions to those problems.”

That approach bodes well. “The teachers can’t be second-class citizens,” says Liz Owens, academic dean of LEAPS Academy, a public school in Indianapolis. “They’ve got to have a voice.” A recent collaboration with faculty from Ball State was generally fruitful, Owens says, but some of the professors hadn’t been in the classroom for years and lacked experience in urban settings, or with Hispanic students. The collaboration emphasized the fact that classroom teachers have their own expertise to bring to the table. Notes Owens: “It has to be a two-way street.”

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