

DH19990572E1

Mismatched Curricula Leave Freshmen Ill-Prepared, Study Finds

By Julie Blair

Next fall, thousands of top-flight high school alumni will likely call home from their college dorm rooms to complain to disbelieving parents that they are miserably unprepared for the rigors of higher education.

In most cases, though, the knowledge gap is not the student's fault, but the result of misaligned standards in American K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, a report released last week contends.

Despite the recent standards and accountability movement, most K-12 schools and colleges don't take time to discuss what students should know and be able to do as incoming freshman, says the report, "Ticket to Nowhere: The Gap Between

Leaving High School and Entering College and High-Performance Jobs." Nor do they work together to ensure that high school assessments and college-placement exams are parallel.

The report was prepared by the Education Trust, a research and advocacy group that works to enable disadvantaged students to meet high standards, and the National Association of System Heads, which represents the leaders of the nation's state university systems. Both are based in Washington.

"Many of the kids who land in remedial courses are the kids who play by what they were told were the rules in high school," Janis Somerville, the director of the university leaders' group, said in a statement. "They completed the courses, they passed the tests, they got admitted to

college and wham, they take a college-placement test that lands them in noncredit-bearing remedial courses."

'Separate Orbits'

The gap between high school and college standards, course content, and assessment spans the academic spectrum, according to the report.

For example, states typically require high school graduates to take two or three years of mathematics, yet the content of those classes is not specified, the report says. College-admissions officers assume that the students have mastered Algebra 1 and geometry when, in fact, many students took classes that did not provide comprehensive coverage of the subject matter. Or, while a student's transcript may state that he or she has taken four years of English,

the student may have never read classic works of fiction expected of students preparing for college-level work.

Michael W. Kirst, a professor of education at Stanford University, who is researching such issues as curriculum misalignment, said the study had broken some new ground.

"American education was set up in a divided way, in which K-12 policies are settled in separate orbits from postsecondary policy," Mr. Kirst said. "You have states with coordinating councils for higher education and state boards of education, and they rarely, if ever, meet."

The report recommends several solutions.

The first priority, it says, is to ensure that educators within the K-16 system are aware of the gaps. "Everybody in every

community needs clear information on both course requirements and the content of each relevant test," the report says.

The second step is creating assessments to measure that content, according to the report. Such exams could be used by both pre-collegiate and higher education for admission to college and placements at the college level.

The report also recommends blurring the lines between high school and college by allowing students to take classes at either level whenever they are ready.

FOLLOW-UP: "Ticket to Nowhere: The Gap Between Leaving High School and Entering College and High-Performance Jobs" is available for \$2.50 from the Education Trust, 1725 K St. N.W., Washington, DC 20006; (202) 293-1217.

教育周刊
1999.12.15