
4D

Information

Legislative Committee of the Whole

Issues of Interest to the Commission

Executive Summary: Staff will present an update on the activities of the Joint Legislative Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education. This update will include information on the Committee's recent hearing on postsecondary education accountability.

Presenter: Linda G. Bond, Director, Office of Governmental Relations

In stark contrast to the state's focus on accountability for its K-12 school system, little formal state accountability exists for its higher education system. Historically, public universities have been afforded an autonomy that has largely delegated accountability to institutions and their governing boards. Accordingly each higher education segment – UC, CSU, the California Community Colleges (CCC), and independent colleges and universities – has developed in isolation its own structure for accountability that addresses its performance relative to its own mission and needs. These institutional accountability structures are the Partnership for Excellence for the CCC; budget-based partnerships with the governor for the UC and CSU; and CPEC's annual report of performance indicators. These individual accountability efforts are not linked in terms of what data are collected, what priorities are reflected, or what needs are addressed, and therefore do not constitute measurement of the success of the system in meeting the state's public interest policy goals for higher education in California.

Without a unified system of accountability for higher education, the Legislature and other policymakers have limited access to meaningful data about how the state is performing in key areas and must make important fiscal and policy decisions without that knowledge. In particular, the lack of a unified system has hampered efforts to address some key issues regarding the state's higher education system as a whole, such as community college transfer, college preparation, affordability, and the state's capacity to educate all eligible students.

Process

Since summer of 2000, the Joint Committee has publicly defined one of its goals as ensuring that an appropriate system of accountability for higher education be adopted to provide policymakers with this comprehensive understanding of the entire system's successes and failures with respect to attaining state goals and supporting students' success in achieving their goals. Accountability was one of the four cornerstones of the Master Plan for Education, adopted in 2002.

In support of this objective the Joint Committee, via the Senate Office of Research, commissioned a study to examine higher education accountability trends in California and across the nation and to recommend an accountability framework for California. Nancy Shulock, Director of the Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, submitted her report in November 2002, entitled "*An Accountability Framework for California Higher Education: Informing Public Policy and Improving Outcomes.*"

The Joint Committee, in concert with the Assembly Committee on Higher Education and the Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education, then convened an invitation-only symposium in January 2003, using the Shulock report to begin a formal dialogue to develop a meaningful postsecondary education accountability structure for California. Higher education leaders, public officials, students, faculty, members of the business community and policymakers attended this symposium.

Subsequent to the symposium, an advisory group was convened to develop the details of this proposal for a postsecondary education accountability structure in California. The group was comprised of representatives from each segment of post-secondary education, national policy experts and legislative staff. The group conducted its work throughout the year and submitted its proposal to the Joint Committee in December 2003.

Key Features and Principles of the Proposal:

The proposed framework is designed to measure progress toward four broad public policy goals for higher education: (1) *educational opportunity*, (2) *participation*, (3) *student success*, and (4) *public benefits*. The advisory group developed a number of key indicators (to be presented in committee) that would be used to help evaluate progress on these public policy goals. The proposal calls for indicator data to be available on statewide, regional and institutional bases and to be provided, to the extent to which it is available, by race/ethnicity, gender, Cal Grant status, and socio-economic status. National comparison data would also be included. The proposal delineates collective accountability for state-level outcomes, segmental accountability for institutional outcomes, and campus accountability for student outcomes. The distinguishing features of the proposed framework for higher education accountability in California can be summarized in a set of eight principles:

1. *Defining the purpose of state-level accountability framework*
A state-level accountability framework should help policymakers design, maintain, and fund an education system that meets the state's goals and should guide the segments toward maintaining effective institutions consistent with state goals and institutional missions.
2. *Ensuring institutional accountability and governance*
An effective accountability system should recognize the ongoing responsibility of the system governing boards to monitor and be held accountable for the performance of individual colleges and universities for meeting statewide policy goals, institutional missions and goals, and for the quality education of its students.
3. *Linking institutional accountability and state-level accountability*
The segments should conduct institutional accountability within the framework of the state's policy goals and keep state policymakers informed about how segment goals and priorities contribute to state goals.
4. *Defining outcomes information*
The state-level reporting system should contain only data that helps policymakers assess progress toward state goals and evaluate policy and funding options.
5. *Assessing student learning*
Assessment of student learning is the responsibility of the segments. The state role is to examine broad measures of student success and to monitor the processes used by the segments to assess and improve student learning.
6. *Relating accountability to budgets*
The state-level data should help identify the priorities for funding. Data-driven discussions about budget sufficiency and funding priorities should become a routine part of the existing decision processes.
7. *Making the data useful*
Data should be communicated publicly in a concise manner that conveys clearly the relevance of each measure to state policy choices.
8. *Sustaining the accountability system*
A strong, competent, and independent steward is needed to build and maintain this accountability system so as to earn the support of policymakers and educators alike.

Key Issues

The extensive work of the advisory group was informed by a critical review of both “best practices” and misguided approaches employed in other states, and by a resulting set of principles and goals it developed that attempted to capture the needs of policymakers as they continually examine the effectiveness of the higher education system. As members consider the proposal presented before them today, they may be well-served to observe the questions that guided the advisory group.

1. Does the proposal focus system efforts on key statewide goals? The proposed framework and indicators are based on key statewide goals for participation and success by all students that are attained through the collective efforts of our higher education institutions. They will measure outcomes that can be used to set more effective public policy at the state level, including funding policy. Because this accountability proposal is driven by those goals – including goals that transcend the efforts of any one segment – it should lead to a greater focus by policymakers and by the segments on attainment of goals that require the active effort of more than one segment (including efforts in the K-12 system).
2. Does the proposal allow policymakers’ a better evaluation of success? Much of our higher education policy currently is driven by goals and measurement of access, with insufficient attention given to the assurance of success. The proposed accountability framework incorporates significant outcome measures that will inform policymakers of the effectiveness of state investments and efforts to serve the state’s educational and informational needs.
3. Does the proposal provide sufficient focus on student learning outcomes? The proposal formally brings student performance into the state’s higher education accountability structure. Absent standardized expectations for students across segments and programs, however, the proposal relies on broad measures of student success. It requires that the segments identify for the state the manner in which student learning is being addressed. However, detailed student performance data itself will rest with the campuses and systems.
4. Does the proposal allow meaningful statewide analysis and comparison? Current institutional accountability structures are individually designed and the data elements they use – as well as the standards for those data – are individually determined. The proposed framework would ensure that the data collected from the segments is comparable. Members may wish to consider the costs inherent in systems’ modifying their current data collection apparatus.
5. Is the data collection and reporting efficient? One of the difficulties policymakers often face in attempting to address perceived deficiencies is being provided an overabundance of data that is not directly related to their policy objectives. This accountability proposal would have the state collect only those data that are determined to be meaningful indicators of progress on predetermined statewide goals, and that can therefore drive policy and fiscal interventions.

6. Are the different institutional missions and the expectations of governing boards accommodated? The proposal recognizes the charges given to the various governing boards to manage the individual segments. It holds the governing boards accountable for doing their part to meet statewide goals, allows them to determine and expects them to meet their institutional goals, requires that they ensure that institutional goals reflect statewide goals wherever appropriate. And holds them responsible for ensuring campus performance.
7. How can this system of higher education accountability be managed at the state level? The proposal relies on an objective entity capable of collection, reporting and analyzing the data. This function would, under the state's current structure of education governance, most appropriately be assigned to CPEC. However, recent budget reductions to CPEC, as well as current limitations to CPEC's authority to require the submission of necessary data, raise doubts regarding its current capacity to carry out this additional responsibility.
8. Is the state prepared to implement this accountability model immediately? Some of the indicator data necessary for full implementation of the accountability framework is not currently available. Additional data will need to be collected in future years to fully realize the expected benefits of this system.
9. Will this accountability system support meaningful analysis of the impacts of funding decisions? The framework would produce analytical data relative to statewide goals that can be tracked annually against funding levels and ultimately correlate to the consequences of funding decisions. This, in turn, can routinely inform the budget and appropriations processes.