

**REMARKS TO FIRST PUERTO RICO COUNCIL ON EDUCATION RESEARCH**  
**CONFERENCE: TOWARDS P-20-W**

**George Pernsteiner**

**18 October 2013**

My heartfelt thanks to President Aponte Parsi and the members of the Council for the opportunity to be a part of this important conference. And my thanks to all of you who have chosen to participate: you are the leaders of education, business, community, and government whose partnerships are essential for the success of the students and the workers of the Commonwealth.

Is P-20-W integration possible? Yes.

Is it easy? No.

Will it be worth it? Definitely.

The success of any community, state, region, territory or nation will be related directly to the education level of its adult population. Craig Barrett, who once headed Intel, has made that argument around the globe for nearly a decade. The other dimension to his statement is that corporations, like Intel, will hire talent anywhere they can find it, paying no attention to national boundaries, much less those of subnational areas. The future, in other words, belongs to the educated of the world and education and economic success will go hand in hand to a degree that we have not seen before in human history.

The comparative advantage of any area will come to be based more on its human capital than on its location or its natural resources. Comparative advantage will shift from low cost to high quality. And education will help provide advantage to a community or country.

The United States came out of World War II as the pre-eminent military and economic power in the world. Its leaders headed a country that bestrode the world stage. They had been tested not just in war but in the crucible of the Great Depression. Their view of government was optimistic. Government existed to

better the lot of the people and there were few limits to what it could or should do.

When it came time to demobilize 16 million service men and women, instead of mustering them out and letting them fend for themselves, as the nation had done after every one of its previous wars, it gave them the GI Bill so they could attend college.

The GI Bill was enacted so that the country was not flooded with hopeless unemployed veterans. Its results, though, were not just to stave off temporary labor force adjustments. Instead, the GI Bill democratized higher education and helped build the best educated labor force the world had ever seen—a labor force that sparked the long postwar expansion.

Other federal actions, particularly with regard to student financial aid, enabled further expansions of college enrollment in the 1960s-1980s.

By 1990, American higher education was recognized as one of the key features of the country's postwar prosperity and was viewed as an important factor in personal upward mobility for American families. The United States and Canada vied for who had the best educated adults in the world.

Now, the education level of America's young adults stands in the middle of the pack among developed nations and is being eclipsed even by some countries that a few years ago were viewed as in the early stages of modern economic development.

It is not that the performance of the United States has gotten worse. In fact, it has improved slightly over time. But many other nations are leapfrogging America's educational attainment position just as education is becoming THE paramount success factor.

That is why the President wants the U.S. to again be first in the world in educational attainment. That is why foundations such as Lumina have adopted "big goals." That is why states all over the country are seeking to improve the performance of their students, in K-12 and in postsecondary education, by adopting the Common Core State Standards, by demanding competency based

assessment of real learning, by switching college funding from enrollment-based to performance-based formulas.

It is all about competitive advantage, all about economic development and vitality. P-20-Workforce integration, linkages and systems have taken on more urgency as the nation and its states and territories struggle to recover from the Great Recession.

Two other factors argue for closer linkages between education and workforce. The first is that employers complain that they cannot find workers with the skills they need and often must let positions remain vacant. The second is the advent of big data and our newfound ability to get and process information on everything and everyone in seemingly excruciating and certainly mind-numbing detail. We are at the beginning of a revolution in the use of huge amounts of data to manage everything from climate change to which of his toys my toddler will want at 4:30 this afternoon.

We now can collect and use data much more effectively than we ever have thought possible and we know that we can use those data to help us achieve our goals. Big data will drive much of what we see in public policy over the next few years because it enables us to think about things we never conceived before.

So, it makes a great deal of sense for Puerto Rico to look now at greater integration of education and workforce. The economic imperative now is matched with the ability to capture and use information to improve progress and success.

Other states and nations are doing so, too. And you can and will learn from their experiences. But your choices and your approaches must be your own, born of your unique circumstances and context but enabled by the wisdom of others' experiences and the tools that are coming of age.

In part, this will require an integrated and systematic look at education. In part, it will demand a rigorous assessment of what you currently are achieving and what can be done to improve. But it also is essential that young Puerto Ricans believe in themselves and that they can succeed here in Puerto Rico, with the help of

education and hard work. Instilling that belief is a necessary part of any strategy to improve education and workforce development.

I mentioned other states. Who else is doing this and how well has it worked? I will highlight just a few, although many others either have started or intend to undertake efforts for more effective linkage. Part of what is happening is being spurred on by federal Race to the Top and other efforts that put a premium on educational reform and statewide (and, in some cases, multistate) integrated longitudinal student data systems.

Oregon two years ago established an overarching Education Investment Board charged with spurring innovation and focusing early learning, K-12 and postsecondary education on efforts to achieve the state's ambitious 40-40-20 education attainment goal, where every Oregon adult would earn a high school credential, 40% would hold bachelor's or advanced degrees, and the remaining 40% would hold associates degrees or certificates of value in the workplace. The OEIB has developed Achievement Compacts with school districts, preschool programs, and colleges specifying outcomes to be achieved each year for the investment that the state is making. So far, funding has not been tied to outcomes but only to the signing of the compacts each year. But this is only year two.

Washington, which has an effective community college system as well as prominent research universities, has what some view as the best data system in the country, a system that tracks students and workers and even can be linked with the workforce and education systems in three other states.

Tennessee, with its technical college system has made strides in linking education with the immediate workforce needs of many of its employers.

Hawaii, whose university president is responsible for its P-16 council, is hoping integrated data will help it deal with education and workforce mismatches.

Kentucky is linking its K-12 and higher education systems and has embedded many of its workforce programs under its commission on postsecondary education. Kentucky's progress in implementing the common core state standards is noteworthy in that it is founded on a partnership between higher

education and K-12 that involves teachers and districts in curricular alignment, assessment/acceleration/remediation, and teacher preparation and professional development. Of note, too, is that Kentucky has stayed the course with consistent policies and evolving but congruent programs for 17 years.

Idaho for many years has had the structure that provides the most official integration of education at all levels in the country (although Rhode Island is considering ambitious structural changes along those same lines).

But a look at the integration of preschool, K-12, college and university education, and workforce programs is not just an exercise in aligning data, articulating curricula, and adopting integrated policies.

It must start with an understanding of what you are trying to achieve and why. Knowing where you want to go and why you want to get there is critical to how a system is designed, how it operates, whether it is sustained, and whether it is successful. That really is one lesson from Kentucky; another is the continuing commitment and involvement over many years of the state's political, business, and education leaders.

But lessons from other states also illustrate that organization change does not by itself ensure success. Instead, hard work and close cooperation across education sectors and with workforce programs is essential. This is difficult and demands close partnerships that endure.

I asked Bob King from Kentucky what he believed to be the keys to success if a state or territory wants to raise education achievement and build a competitive workforce. He identified six factors that he thought were essential to success:

1. Leaders for K-12 and higher education who understand the culture, language, and traditions of their own education sectors because the sectors are so very different from one another, with different histories, traditions, mores and languages.
2. A strong shared commitment from each of those leaders to work together to achieve the Commonwealth's goals.
3. Providing the framework and the incentives for the two sectors of K-12 and higher education to work as a system, integrating their efforts in ways that ensure the achievement of policy goals. This requires creating

and nurturing a shared culture of collaboration—and that takes time and trust.

4. Whoever oversees the higher education effort must have some leverage (program approval, setting tuition ceilings, and mandated transfer pathways are examples).
5. Clear governance authority. A system can have a single governing board over all education or a coordinating board with each sector, district, or college having its own governing board. The important thing is that it be clear to everyone who has what responsibility and authority and that everyone is invested in mutual success.
6. If there is a commonwealth-wide board and if the commonwealth wants its efforts to transcend time and changes in office holders, the board members' terms must last longer than the initial term of the governor and the board members should be drawn from the most influential and respected private sector leaders on the island: those from business, labor, philanthropy and major community organizations.

I then asked Mike Rush, who oversees higher education in Idaho (a state that has had a single governance structure for K-12 and postsecondary education for many years) for his advice and observations. He listed four:

1. Common governance does not automatically equate with common goals, integrated systems, and seamless transitions. The hard work of forging linkages requires a framework of incentives and the development of clearly communicated common goals. This demands the active and consistent involvement over a long period of time from not just the governing board but also the leaders from each sector.
2. Each level (K-12 and higher education) needs its own advocate for policies and funding. For years, the common tendency in Idaho had been for the board and the state to focus virtually all attention on K-12, with the result that higher education often became an afterthought and workforce needs were divorced from educational policies even though a single board oversaw all these areas.
3. The governing board must have quality information about all aspects of education and the workforce.
4. The governing board must keep its attention and focus on policy and outcomes and not on the operations of schools and colleges.

The lessons from these and other states show that integration is not simple, is not automatically achieved by structural changes, and takes intense communication and constant attention to a consistent shared goal. It requires the integration of high quality and timely data about students and workers (something that suggests not only technology investments but workarounds of federal privacy requirements and, of course, the willing participation of all sectors). I cannot emphasize enough the importance and opportunities of designing and building thoughtful data systems that transcend institutional and sectoral boundaries and then using the data from those systems to advance student success, further workforce competitiveness, and lead and manage the education enterprise effectively and efficiently.

Although other states have embarked on this journey, an integrated approach to education and the workforce cannot be imported wholesale from another state or region. It must take into account the facets of Puerto Rico that will contribute to your success: the young age of your people, your strong manufacturing sector, the strengths and weaknesses of your current education system, the unique history and culture of the Commonwealth, the financial condition of your government, and the aspirations of your leaders.

You have advantages that some other parts of America do not have. One is your relatively young population, giving you an opportunity for an educable workforce. But you also have challenges that are rooted in your history and in your relationship with mainland states. For example, much of your talent has gone on to work and produce there, not here. A key to any education-workforce system, then, must also have a link to a parallel economic development strategy that leads to more good jobs here in Puerto Rico.

That means that your business strategy must look not just in the rear view mirror to see what jobs were needed last year or gaze into the near term by asking employers what jobs they will need to fill in the next year or two. It also must find ways to expand business opportunities in areas you do not yet have and to educate your people more broadly so they can be successful in the jobs those new opportunities create—jobs whose outlines and requirements we cannot yet define.

In recent years, leaders of multi-national corporations have been asked several times about what they need in their workers. What they stressed were not the technical skills of today's immediate jobs (although those are necessary) but the ability to understand and solve problems and work in effective teams. These are skills associated with what we once called a liberal education—and are skills that are needed by engineers, programmers, designers, accountants, shop floor supervisors, and virtually everyone not at an entry level. And these are the skills that prepare workers for lifetime careers and not just one-time jobs.

So, in looking at integrating education and workforce, one of the lessons must be to not adopt only a formulaic view of workforce needs that looks at what is required today and extrapolates that into the future. Workers must have the ability to adapt to changing technologies, changing business environments, changing markets, changing alliances or they will not be successful in the competitive world of a 21<sup>st</sup> century global, information-enabled economy. Your system cannot be just a training to workforce system. It must be an education to workforce system.

The challenges of privacy, of data security and integrity, of raising and meeting standards, of building thoroughfares among levels of education and among institutions, are monumental. To overcome them will take hard work, persistence, determination, consensus as to the importance and necessity of the task, putting aside personal and institutional egos, and massive investments of time and effort (to say nothing of dollars).

But the single most important factor may be the desire of the participants to work together to achieve a shared vision, each performing in her or his own sphere, but each aware of and supportive of the others' efforts and needs.

You will determine how best to develop the goals, plan the programs, and build the team that will lead to greater educational attainment and prosperity for Puerto Rico's citizens. Your history, your culture, your essence will determine how you will approach doing this important work of goal setting and integration of efforts.

But I believe the results of true integration by willing partners will be startling and the payoff immense. But, first, you must instill in young people the belief in



themselves and the hope for a bright future that will motivate them to seek and succeed in higher education.

One of the questions I was asked to address dealt with the impediments to a successful integrated education-workforce system. I will list several: institutional siloes, unwillingness to share with other educators, strictures (some imposed by federal law) surrounding who can see and use student data and how those data can be sent to and used by others within the system, and the way we fund educational institutions (what we pay for, what we reward). All of these and other impediments—legal, structural, cultural, financial—are real and will be hard to overcome or work around. But fundamental to meeting any of these challenges and to the success of any integrated education-workforce effort is that the unit of success is the individual student, the individual worker, the individual citizen.

Our systems today often are set up around institutions. Successful systems of the future must be set up around the success individual students or we will never succeed in motivating and educating enough students to high enough levels of competency to meet our goals for the success of our citizens, our society, and the commonwealth.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am humbled and honored by the experience and very much look forward to learning from you during the rest of the day's discussions.