

**DATE:** April 20, 2006

**SUBJECT:** Status of Tennessee P-16 Council Mathematics Curricula Alignment Initiative

**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Information

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The Tennessee P-16 Council is the oversight body for K-12 and higher education joint initiatives aimed at improving student readiness for college and career. The P-16 concept promotes collaboration between K-12 and post-secondary in addressing public education as a “pipeline” of related issues and needs. The primary objective of the Council is to close pipeline leaks where too few students graduate from high school, enter college, and graduate with the baccalaureate. According to National Center for Higher Education Management Systems’ data, of every 100 Tennessee ninth graders, only 16 will likely persist to bachelor’s degree completion.

Members of the nine-member council are: Drew Kim, Governor’s Policy Advisor; Charles W. Manning, Chancellor, Tennessee Board of Regents; Gary L. Nixon, Executive Director, State Board of Education; John D. Petersen, President, University of Tennessee; Claude O. Pressnell, Jr., Independent Colleges and Universities Association; Richard G. Rhoda, Executive Director, Tennessee Higher Education Commission; Lana Seivers, Commissioner of Education; Ellen Thornton, Tennessee Business Roundtable; and Deborah K. Woolley, President, Tennessee Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

This Council has recognized the *THEC 2005-2010 Master Plan* goal to address student readiness for college through high school-to-college curricula alignment and has chosen to focus on improvements in student performance in mathematics as a first step for the Council’s agenda. That a third of recent high school graduates entering state universities and one half entering community colleges require remedial/and or developmental courses, most often in math, is a compelling rationale for the P-16 initiative. Couple this profile with the fact that only 21.5 percent of Tennesseans hold a bachelor’s degree, and the “pipeline” improvement urgency becomes apparent. These Tennessee realities underscore the observation in the recently published (February 2006) U.S. Department of Education’s national study, *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School through College*, that “the highest level of mathematics reached in high school continues to be a key marker in precollegiate momentum, with the tipping point of momentum toward a bachelor’s degree now firmly above Algebra 2.” The P-16 Council’s focus on mathematics education was supported by the State Board of Education and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission at their annual joint meeting in January.

After the January joint meeting, the THEC convened a committee charged with recommending strategies for achieving a “seamless” set of high school-to-first year college math course standards and assessments. The committee membership includes high school math teachers, college and university math faculty, university and community college academic officers, representatives from colleges of education and arts and sciences, and leadership from the State Department of Education, State Board of Education, the Tennessee Board of Regents and University of Tennessee systems, and THEC.

The committee is taking into account the recent math standards reform actions by other states as it determines advisable directions for Tennessee. These states include Kentucky, North Carolina, and Oklahoma, where policy levers such as changes in high school graduation unit and university admission requirements are intended to bring more rigor to student learning in mathematics and greater degree completion rates. Specifically, these states have instituted some or all of the following: the requirement of 4 units of math for high school graduation, early assessment in high school to ensure course placement for college readiness, a required mathematics course in the high school senior year, and maximized dual enrollment opportunities.

The committee recognizes the current opportunity to capitalize on an unusual convergence of grant funding and non-state resources to support curricula alignment. These resources include the Tennessee GEAR UP Grant, which permits curriculum pilot activity in the nine county sites; local P-16 council self-supporting initiatives in mathematics under the leadership of the TBR; the state Dual Enrollment Lottery Grant; the SDE and THEC Pathways to Success grant, and the web-based state-wide middle and high school student counseling, transcript, and college application database (XAP). Finally, recommending strategies for necessary professional development of new and existing math teachers is a second dimension of the charge to the committee.

A dedicated Mathematics Curricula Alignment web site, anchored by the THEC web site, will serve as the repository of all committee correspondence, the committee roster, posted resources, and data for its deliberations.