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KnowledgeWorks Foundation Conference

# *Thinking P-16 and Beyond*

**Text of speech given by Dr. Adrienne O'Neill, President, Stark Education Partnership**

Thank you Terry Seery for that wonderful introduction. I am humbled by what Governor Taft and Stephen Portch have said about our local P-16. Please know that I didn't do this alone. We have so many wonderful partners who have worked very hard to get where we are. I'd like you to meet two of them who are here today and are working with you in work groups. Dr. O'Donnell is the Chair of the P-16 and President of Stark State College of Technology. If asked to describe him, I would use the words innovator and problem solver. Mel Lioi is the Assistant Superintendent for the Stark County Educational Service Center. If asked for a word to describe her, I would say, collaborator. I am pleased to call both of these folks friends. Would you both stand so that all can see who you are. Please find these people, they will be very glad to discuss P-16 with you. Also present today is Joe Rochford, Vice President of the Stark Education Partnership. One word to describe him would be researcher—you have a copy of his web published book on a CD and can access much of his work on our website. You will meet him later, but Joe would you please stand so that folks can see who you are?

Thank you very much to the KnowledgeWorks Foundation for inviting me here today. The Stark Education Partnership is pleased to have a strategic partnership with the KnowledgeWorks Foundation around establishing local P-16's in Ohio.

Chad Wick was recently honored by the Ohio Grantmakers Association and well he should have been. He used that occasion to ask that all of the Foundations in Ohio step up to the huge challenges that exist in Ohio—making life better for all. KnowledgeWorks is a relatively new foundation, but their strategic work with many points of convergence has made an extraordinary difference in the life of Ohioans in ways that are not seen by most. I marvel at the message of hope that KnowledgeWorks brings to communities where they work.

There are several hallmarks in working with KnowledgeWorks and I know that you will enjoy working with them as much as we have. The first hallmark is extensive research followed by the principle of participation of all aimed at raising the educational attainment of all Ohioans. KnowledgeWorks believes that educational attainment is linked to economic development. For example, the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative and the Early College initiative include the participation of the unions in all of the transformation and early college sites. Also included in those initiatives is a community engagement process. Inclusion of all is particular to Ohio in the Gates nationally funded projects because of the articulated beliefs of the KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

Helping to establish local P-16's is a logical KnowledgeWorks activity because it is largely a process with participation of all. KnowledgeWorks forms networks in all of the strategies they pursue. So this conference is an opportunity for you to network with others who have established local P-16 Councils or with others who have a desire to do so.

Frequently the strategies initiated by KnowledgeWorks include a coaching component and this initiative also includes coaching. And last, but certainly not least, KW brings experts to the network continuing a learning process for all. You have heard from Stephen Portch and will hear from more experts as this conference continues.

And the folks who work for KW are classy. For this and all of the above reasons, it is always exciting to work with KW.

My purpose today is to talk about selecting and developing goals that will serve as the focus for your P-16. As you proceed through the planning process you will test these goals against what a wider segment of the community thinks and you will likely refine the goals. This process is a little like the strategic planning process that you all have done for your organization, but it differs because the goals and eventual strategies are for a wide community and multiple organizations. Those who know me well, and many of you do, know that I usually think a little differently than most. In this case, I think about goal setting for a local P-16 as being more akin to chaos theory than to a linear process. Why, because as the process of goal setting and forming a local P-16 proceeds, multiple ideas and multiple people keep talking until convergence occurs. However, the convergence evolves. I'll try to make that a little clearer as we continue.

I will describe how we selected our goals, how we measure them and what the results have been. I will discuss how we have amalgamated the existing accountability systems into our work.

We also know that the way you eventually operate your P-16 may be quite different from how we work, but two things will be the same. You too will develop goals and you too will measure the results of those goals over time after deciding in advance what data you will use for measurement. It is the goals and the measurement of those goals that sustain the work or said another way the progress is what keeps people coming back to the table to continue the discussion about new strategies to increase the progress. Progress is the pay for attending P-16 meetings.

As Governor Taft mentioned, our P-16 recently had a meeting with him about his State of the State proposal regarding the Ohio Core, the institution of an entrance exam, and a semester of college credit in the senior year for all qualified seniors. To our P-16, this proposal is music to our ears. We have been trying to increase rigor in the high schools and to increase the number of students going on to college remediation free. We had hoped we would change the culture so that in a low income, low college educated county rigor would become the order of the day. It was heart warming to hear community leaders, the Mayor of Canton, college presidents, school superintendents, business leaders, and foundation leaders verify those goals all speaking with one voice. But, the most exciting thing was to listen to a student, James Jeter, talk about rigor. We thank the Canton Repository for permission to play his speech. Listen to what he says: Our pay for working on this comes from students like James Jeter. It was even more interesting to listen to the question asked of James by the President and CEO of greater Canton Chamber of Commerce. Dennis Saunier asked James: When you graduate from Ohio State will you come back to Canton. James said that was his plan, and the room full of people clapped. We all now realize that if we lose our student talent from our area we lose opportunity for economic development. For years, the Chamber of Commerce had not seen this connection with K-12. Now, because of P-16, they do.

We are so pleased that students are talking about rigor. In fact, there is a consideration about Early College in Canton and whether or not the students should be allowed to go to McKinley and not be restricted to attendance at Timken High School. You would have to live in Canton to understand what this all about, but what we all see in the continued newspaper coverage and letters to the editor is the never ending mention of rigor by parents and students. That would not have been the discussion 5 years ago. And, McKinley student athletes were not recruited by Ivy League schools in the numbers that has

happened this year. While those athletes chose to go to Ohio universities, wasn't it nice that they had this choice? And the Ivy League schools are already pursuing juniors who are athletes at McKinley.

You might be wondering why we are so focused on rigor. Our experiences have taught us a great deal. As jobs were lost in our area, those employees had great difficulty finding new jobs in a work world that demands higher skill levels. An example. Our office is in a downtown building anchored by Unizan Bank. Two years ago, Unizan announced a merger with Huntington Bank and a consequent loss of back office jobs in Canton. Given the SEC questions about the merger, it has been delayed for two years. In the meantime, some of those about to be excessed employees, decided to go to college to find a new career. One of those folks decided to pursue an occupational therapy assistant degree at Stark State College of Technology. She had not taken a core curriculum in high school and immediately had to take remedial courses—Algebra and English to get accepted into the program she wanted. As she took the classes she kept saying, I wish I had done this in high school. I never knew I had the potential to do this. Long story short, she is well on her way toward finishing the degree—with all A's in the classes she has completed. Moreover, she is an example for others who have chosen to follow her to college.

Rigor is opportunity. When you look at what other states are doing, you get the clear idea that Ohio has to do something to stay competitive. We cannot continue to decline in rank with respect to the number of baccalaureate degrees. A rank of 40 does not match Ohio's potential.

As we met some of you and talked about P-16, questions and concerns arose:

- “How does all of this go together with NCLB and the State of Ohio accountability system?”
- “How can we do this locally when we are having state-wide funding problems P-16?”
- “How will we operate if we do not have a group like the Stark Education Partnership to do the staff work for our P-16?”
- Will blame be the currency of the conversation about P-16?
- Will someone try to control our decision making process through P-16?
- Will we lose funding if certain strategies are pursued?

As a result, I decided to weave some of our stories into this presentation to let you know that your concerns are legitimate. We had some of the same concerns and we have found ways to deal with the issues. But what you are really asking us is about risk when forming a P-16. The answer is probably yes, there is a risk, but success will carry the day making the risk worthwhile.

Our Stark County P-16 does not have a specific budget. As we decide upon a strategy, we usually raise funds for that strategy. For example, our first large community engagement meeting that focused on the data regarding the transition from HS to college was funded by Unizan Bank. The second large community engagement meeting at which Stephen Porch spoke was funded by the Stark Development Board. As we got into specific strategies, we asked local foundations to support our work. For example, the Sisters of Charity of Canton funded the purchase of ACT preparation booklets for students at our OCAN sites, Dominion East Ohio paid for second administrations of the ACT test for low income students at our OCAN sites, many of the local foundations, KW and Jennings funded our ACT study, the Timken Corporation Charitable Trust is funding a comparative study of local P-16's across the US to serve as the research for the second in a three web published book series on P-16's, and the Jennings Foundation is supporting research on the Compass Test compared to the skills taught in grades 11 to 13.

Equally as often, the colleges and school districts redirect their funds. For example, five years ago the Canton City Schools was the recipient of a very large GEAR-UP Grant. Partners in this project were Kent State University and our organization. Students in the then 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade were followed through those grades until graduation from high school. The first class will graduate this year. And many more will go on to college. Other school districts are using the results of that work to begin programs about college going in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Malone college has redirected some of its marketing funds to “adopt” 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in Canton Local and carry each group through college enrollment—at any college, not just limited to Malone College.

Most frequently, discussions at the P-16 meetings result in local institutional actions that are paid for by the local institution. My favorite example is a college president who comes to the meetings, takes copious notes and goes back to his college and convenes faculty and administrative meetings to discuss new strategies to be used. After we discussed retention, he and his team took actions to increase retention. His institution is among the 10 ten most improved in Ohio for retention—the rate is now 94% of entering freshman are retained to sophomore year. He has shared his successful strategies and other colleges have derived their own strategies from this. Interestingly enough, another local college is also in the top 10 on the most improved list.

P-16 will not solve the state-wide funding problems talked about by all levels of P-16. Funding will continue to be the prerogative of the legislature and will be a balancing act with entitlement programs, needs etc.

However, if P-16 is successful and we do eliminate the leaks in the pipeline, and economic development follows, then we think that the system will be strengthened and we will have increased dollars with a rise in average income in Stark County. If we do our work well we may very well be able to eliminate some of our problems and shift our dollars on other concerns.

For example, there are limited funds for pre-school in Ohio. Perhaps we can shift dollars from remedial education at the college level to pre-school.

We are experiencing a culture shock in Stark County, Ohio. Our largest employer is the Timken Company. I received an E-Mail from the Timken Company several weeks ago asking if I had someone from my travels to recommend as the head of their new corporate division on global education. They have decided to stop outsourcing this function and bring it in-house through distance learning. They had a person who just quite after 6 months. Why? His wife would not more with their children to Stark County. She was convinced that Stark County was too different. She had read the newspapers and learned that in order to pass levies, the local school districts had to cut their budgets to the bone. By contrast the school districts in suburban Pittsburg could only pass levies if they added programs. The same thing is happening with the consolidation of the engineers from Ingersol Rand in Darien, Connecticut. They too will leave the now consolidated company and work for someone else before they will come to Stark County. Upon learning all of this I asked the individual who had called to join our P-16 and to discuss this with all of us. Only if we know can we do something about it. Some might say, so what, that makes for more local high paying jobs. Others might say, it’s a chicken versus the egg problem. Our average income in Stark County is low and explains the no votes on levies—people really can’t afford it. But, we have to find a way to be attractive in a competitive world where we want to locate more business and industry.

Describing P-16 is challenging because it is a dynamic process, not a program. Programs have specific components and specific prescriptions for getting to pre-determined outcomes. We all know many of these programs and recognize that success is limited to how well the original design is followed. Little individual creativity is called for in that framework and we switch to a new program when the outcomes are not what we expected. Cynicism follows and pejorative labels such as “flavor of the month” are assigned.

On the other hand, P-16 is what you make it locally. You determine the components, ways of operating and local outcomes or goals. And, what is probably most unique is that you collaboratively and individually select the strategies that will be used. Our experience is that locally developed strategies survive much longer than programs developed by others

The context for Goal Setting is Important On Jan 1, 2006, the Canton Repository had an article about a bright future for Stark County—60% of the companies see an expansion in the next two to three years; Timken has grow from a 2.5 billion company three years ago to a 5 billion dollar company now. Manufacturing is rebounding—there is a need for more engineers, more knowledgeworkers and thus more income will be generated. We finally see this beginning to be reflected in the City of Canton where the 2006 budget allows for some expansion instead of continued budget reductions.

No one talked about a bright future in 2001 when we began talking about our P-16. Our unemployment numbers were high and businesses were leaving Stark County. It is for those reasons that we chose to focus on the transition from HS to college.

Stark County has two P-16 Goals:

- Increase high school graduation rates in Stark County to 100%
- Increase the high school to college going rate

Your goals may be very different from ours given the problem or challenge you decide to address. We have focused on trying to solve the problem of a low educated workforce recognizing that economic development requires a highly educated workforce.

When we began we had a very difficult time with the second goal and frequently heard statements like: “Not all students should go to college because high paying jobs are available without college.” That remains true in our area. Beginning welders without a certificate earn more money that our beginning teachers with a bachelor’s degree. But, the higher paying, knowledgework jobs are growing in our county and recognition is growing simultaneously that everyone needs more education to have choices.

Our second problem with goal two was that few saw the connection between economic development and P-16. Three things have helped with that issue. First, a large company located in Canton two years ago because they wished to be in a place that had a P-16. Second, the KnowledgeWorks polls helped to focus opinions statewide and Jonathan Weiss’s book that you have helped make the connection between education and economic development. Voices and Choices have been conducting a very large community engagement program in a 17 county Northeastern Ohio area. Once again, opinions are focused on the need for an educated public. And, we thank Thomas Friedman for his book: “The World is Flat.” Most recently, we recognized that the competition is not with each other but with the growth of a highly educated population in India and China.

As success has happened, and our P-16 got better with analyzing data or trying strategies, the goals have been raised:

Increase the high school to college going rate to 80% from 49% or 50%. The Governor’s Commission on Higher Education and the Economy suggested a 30% increase in our State. However, we weren’t ready to talk about that until we could see how to make the difference. Now we have an estimate of how many more students need to go on to college to get to 80%. We know more about the 30% who do not go on from a strategy tried last Spring. All 17 school districts agreed to identify students who had the credentials to go on but had signaled no plans after graduation by April 15, 2005. Letters were mailed to

these students from Stark State College of Technology. Very few attended a session about going to college. Adele Gelb from our organization conducted focus groups in one school district and we learned that parents would not allow students to go on. They did not want the students to incur debt and often saw no productive outcome from going on. Who were the students—first generation to go to college and low income. We are now going to try a dual credit opportunity with 125 of these students. They will take 6 credits in the summer before their junior year patterned on the successes in Early College and 6 credits in the summer before their senior year. Hopefully with 12 earned credits, students will go forward because they know they can do college work. We will make them feel special as we have identified them as Summer Scholars. High School teachers will team teach with college faculty so that success is more likely. College advisors will work with the students on financial aid potential during their Senior Year.

Coupled with an increased tech prep enrollment in college and 100 students per year enrolled in Early College in Canton, we know we are getting closer to reaching our 1227 estimated deficit for an 80% college going rate.

Some have now talked about making Stark County the most educated county in the US. Once again, ongoing success is increasing the goal.

I have a bias that says that we can only use existing data to measure our P-16 goals. We use the HS graduation rates that come from the EMIS data, income and education rates from Census Data, College graduation rates from Education Trust and high school to college going rates, remediation rates and retention rates from OBR performance reports. When folks tell us that the data are not correct, we are able to respond, we can only report what is officially reported. And we continue, check with you school or college to get data corrections.

As I began to prepare this talk, I couldn't decide where goal setting starts and finally came to the conclusion that it probably begins at a different point in every community given its history and local conventions. It is probably impossible to keep just one step in mind because others blend into the conversation. Regardless of where the process starts, it includes all of the following elements:

- Knowing the context
- Examining the Data (Talk about this)
- Establishing Trust
- Beginning Community Engagement
- Identifying Strengths of Region
- Knowing History of Region
- Specifying Questions, Reservations, Concerns
- Identifying Local challenges/problems
- Researching Information about What P-16 is and is not.

Our process began with conversations with a consultant, Robert Kronley, who helped the Stark Education Partnership formulate a strategic plan. As Dr. Kronley talked with others in Stark County about our possible future work, he came to the conclusion that Stark County should establish a P-16. Parenthetically, that recommendation was not surprising since he also hails from Georgia. He clearly thought our county's strength was our long history of collaboration. Setting specific goals, he thought, would add focus to all of the previous work and would help all of us overcome blame and negativism. He had heard our horror stories and thought we could get beyond them to successfully build trust and work together.

Stark Countonians have a long memory. The Superintendents had not forgotten when a college administrator had called them together to blame them for the high remediation rate and the low post secondary participation rate in Stark County. A ten year standoff with no conversation occurred after the Superintendents responded that post secondary was “middle class welfare taught by lesser credentialed teachers than high school teachers” and if something other than the Compass test was used to determine the remediation rate, maybe a different result would follow. Every administrator new to the County heard the story as a part of their orientation to Stark County.

After sharing the above concerns, the planning group that included Superintendents agreed with Robert that collaboration, under certain circumstances was our strength. As we broadened the group, all continued to agree. Each member of the planning group took the identified strength back to their constituents and we became more precise about when collaboration works for us and when it does not.

We have developed a set of assumptions that arise from the successful collaborations. Those assumptions have guided our work. For example, our successful and sustained collaborations across various institutions usually require that the partners determine how they will work independently or together. If someone else or one of the partners pre-determines how the partners will work we usually have huge glitches involving control issues.

We have learned how to change blame into collaboration. Some of you have told me that you are concerned with this aspects of goal setting because you think that the blame will dictate how you operate your institution.

In our case one of the Stark County P-16 goals was to increase high school graduation rates to 100% across the 17 school districts in the county. Local school districts decided how to do that and in some cases collaborated on strategies with the County Educational Service Center and the State School Improvement Coaches. Most districts now approach 100% graduation rates except Canton, but that rate is improving also.

In preparation for large community meetings on this subject we added the data. The goals grew out of the discussions about the data. Everyone had initial concerns, but as we grew more familiar with working together, we were better able to define what we think our P-16 Compact is.

It is good to see so many familiar faces here today—we have been fortunate to meet or talk with many of you about forming or operating a P-16 Compact. We know that many of you have been working together for a long time and without using the words, you have aspects of a P-16 Compact already in operation. We learned things from meeting with you and tried to incorporate some of your very good ideas into our work. For example, in Dayton we were very impressed with the high tech prep enrollment into Sinclair. More than 70% of tech prep students enroll in college and that is above the state average and above our average. We have since learned that the local community and its foundations contributed to the success of this strategy by providing scholarship dollars to tech prep students. Hat’s off to you.

We attended a program in Akron that showcased the thoughtful after school activities that have been created with existing institutions such as the museum or the library in Summit County. What is most unique about the activities is that are tied to hard to learn Ohio standards. If you don’t know about Learning 24/7, ask the team from Summit County to tell you about it. It’s worth your time!

I have given a couple of examples of outcomes in other regions, but underneath those successes are strengths. Please take a moment and write down what you believe to be the greatest strength present in your region. You will have time to share your thoughts in your group that follows this meeting. Your

team list is a good place to start as you share this list with others in your region. The list may shrink or expand with more conversation.

Part of what excites me about P-16 is the notion that we are all responsible for finding solutions to what we deem to be challenges or problems.

Please take a moment and write down what you believe to be the problem or challenge in your region. Once again, this list will serve as a starting point.

Please take a moment and suggest a strategy you would use to solve the problem/challenge you identified.

Recognizing, respecting, and celebrating local creativity, learning to collaborate and then to collectively or individually implement action with focused outcomes is for me the essence of P-16.

I have marveled in Stark County at the efforts of so many and am often reminded of a quote from Martin Luther King Jr.: “There is no easy way to create a world where all children receive as much education as their minds can absorb. But, if such a world can be created in our lifetime, it will be done by people of good will.”