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# IERC InformED

*Ensuring research-informed education policy for Illinois*

## IERC News

### Highlights from the 15th Annual Focus on Illinois Education Research Symposium

Last November, nearly 140 education researchers, students, practitioners, and policymakers from throughout the state gathered at the Northern Illinois University Conference Center in Naperville for the 15th annual Focus on Illinois Education Research Symposium. The IERC presented two of our recent studies at the Symposium. On Day 1, **we presented findings** from our analyses of colleges that are successfully serving low-income, minority, and first-generation students by helping them graduate and gain employment in Illinois (**Cornerstones of Student Success: Institutions Yielding High Return on Investment for Underserved Students**) and Missouri (**Degrees with Less Debt: Effective Higher Education Strategies for Underrepresented Student Populations**). And on Day 2, we presented a summary of our study, **Illinois' Early Childhood Innovation Zones: A New Model for State Policy?** (2017-1).



The opening keynote speaker, Dr. Valerie Purdie-Greenaway, from Columbia University's Laboratory of Intergroup Relations and the Social Mind, shared the story of how she and a team of researchers advanced the study of how stereotypes, bias, and discrimination can undermine student achievement. A video of a similar presentation from Dr. Purdie-Greenaway's 2015 University Lecture at Columbia is available [here](#) (scroll to "Teaching and Learning in a University"). Our breakfast panel featured Illinois' leading experts on school leadership, school funding, and assessment reflecting on findings from Paul Zavitkovsky and Steven Tozer's excellent **Upstate/Downstate** report. A copy of Dr. Zavitkovsky's presentation is available on the IERC website [here](#). For our closing keynote, Dr. Julie Kochanek discussed valuable lessons learned from her experience building successful research-practice partnerships as Director of the REL Midwest and managing director of the local, regional, state, and national education systems practice area at AIR. Her presentation is available on the IERC website [here](#).

## **Increasing College Completion and Reducing Debt for Underserved Students**

In **Degrees with Less Debt** (February 2017), a collaboration with St. Louis Graduates, we examined effective strategies in higher education to better serve underrepresented students and identified stand-out institutions in Missouri and Illinois. As a follow up to that report, IERC released **Cornerstones of Student Success: Institutions Yielding High Return on Investment for Underserved Students**, which analyzes publicly available institutional data on graduation rates, student earnings, and student loan debt and loan default rates. The report ranks 55 public, non-profit private, and for-profit private institutions in Illinois and identifies the Top 7 institutions that best support underserved students. Together, these two reports shine a spotlight on institutions that are admitting and graduating low-income students and helping them gain employment with less debt. These reports highlight universities doing an excellent job of serving students who have traditionally been underserved.

## **The Role of Performance-Based Funding in Helping to Diversify College Campuses**

In the last issue of IERC InformEd, we previewed IERC Faculty Fellow Dr. Sosanya Jones' report, **Incentivizing Diversity: Midwestern Performance Funding Policy and Diversity Indicators**. Released in January, Incentivizing Diversity details postsecondary performance funding policies in four Midwestern states (including Illinois) and explores how each policy's metrics and weights address racial diversity in higher education through a multi-case study. Building on the growing body of literature around performance-based funding, Dr. Jones' research examines the development and use of state-level performance funding policy to incentivize racial diversity goals in higher education.

Report recommendations outline opportunities for policymakers to meaningfully address racial diversity in higher education and increase the participation and retention of underrepresented students of color as well as guidance for researchers planning future studies on performance funding policy and institutional diversity goals. Dr. Jones was IERC Faculty Fellow 2016-17 and is Assistant Professor of Qualitative Methods and Higher Education in the Department of Educational Administration and Higher Education at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

## Guest Feature

*Patrick Payne, Director of Data Strategies and Analytics at Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), is leading critical work on key education initiatives for the state. We are pleased to share our recent conversation on some of these projects including aspects of the School Report Card, new school funding formula, and Educator Supply and Demand Report.*



**Q: Tell us about your role and your background prior to joining the team at ISBE.**

**A:** I am responsible for managing the Agency's data environment. My division covers several programmatic areas including the school report card, verifying enrollment for the first year of the evidence-based funding formula, and the educator supply and demand study. We administer many of the Agency's data collections, are responsible for data quality maintenance, and review and analyze data to produce reports, and ensure data security.

**Q: Can you tell us how you have worked to improve the Educator Supply and Demand Report, and how it helps to inform ISBE's work and the work of the Agency's partners?**

**A:** The report provides information on the supply and demand of teachers, administrators, and personnel by grade level, subject area, and other areas. We have released the 2017 **report** and we have some exciting changes in the works to make the report more helpful and user-friendly.

For example, we are producing an online enhancement that includes dynamic reporting and interactive capabilities. As a part of this web-based tool, users will be able to view data by geographic region. Another important change is that we are moving to producing the report annually instead of every three years so that stakeholders have more up-to-date information to inform their planning.

**Q: Recently, you collaborated with the IERC on an analysis related to Illinois' Educator Supply and Demand Report. Can you tell us more about what you are finding and if there are any trends?**

**A:** The supply of educators represents how many teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals are available. Demand is how many need to be hired. Overall demand and supply have been relatively stable over past several years; however, specific shortages by region, content area, or grade level still appear. Even one position that goes unfilled severely impacts students' learning opportunities. I know of a rural district whose students have to take science online because they can't find a qualified science teacher. That's only one position, but it's a critical shortage from the students' perspective. Additionally, the overall number of unfilled positions has gone up slightly and the workforce declined slightly. During this time, we have also seen student enrollment decrease.

Report data will help us make projections about likely high demand areas. For example, we see a particular need for special education, bilingual teachers and school psychologists. This information can be used to inform educator preparation planning. Developing the workforce pipeline is a big focus for the Agency.

**Q: Last year Illinois adopted historic education funding reform. Now ISBE is working to implement the new evidence-based school funding formula. What distinguishes the new formula as evidence-based?**

**A:** The new formula replaces five major grants that made up the bulk of school funding in the state previously. The evidence-based formula leverages enrollment data to determine what an adequate funding level is for each district. The formula applies 34 cost factors, such as student-teacher ratios, librarians, and technology, to the district's actual student population. The result is a unique adequacy target for each district.

Under the new formula, the State compares each district's adequacy target to their local resources, which include a "hold harmless" amount from those original five grants. The State then distributes increases in state appropriations to the districts in the greatest need. The aim is to get everyone to adequate funding and to prioritize State resources more equitably.

**Q: Each year ISBE issues a report card providing information on academic performance, school climate, and more for each Illinois public school. Any updates we can look forward to this year?**

**A:** We have lots of updates on the way! New metrics will be added per the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA. We are working with the Technical Assistance

Committee to develop these metrics, including a new college and career readiness indicator and an indicator showing student performance growth. Our goal is to incorporate new information in a way that is meaningful and not overwhelming.

**Q: What's a fun fact about yourself?**

**A:** I drive a Vespa, and in true data guy fashion, I track my gas mileage day-to-day. On a less mathematical note, I'm a former avid rugby player.

**Feature Topic**

**Finding the Power in IL-EMPOWER**

Bradford R. White, *Interim Director, Illinois Education Research Council (IERC)*

David Osta, *Senior Director-School Improvement Grants, Consortium for Educational Change (CEC)*



Illinois has launched a new program to improve the lowest performing schools in the state as part of its U. S. Department of Education Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan. The new structure, called IL-EMPOWER, is promoted by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to provide schools with “greater choice and voice in the school improvement process.” The program departs from the more prescriptive policies of NCLB (No Child Left Behind) (School Improvement Grants) and the NCLB Waiver (Priority and Focus Schools). As Michael Fullan<sup>i</sup> points out, freedom from regulations requires an equally determined and defined sense of what to do next. Fullan calls this the “freedom to” and IL-EMPOWER is a move in that direction. As the state, districts, and schools prepare to take advantage of the voice and choice provided by IL-EMPOWER, it is important to reflect on what can be learned from previous large-scale school improvement efforts.

The research literature suggests that prior school turnaround efforts produced mixed, and often disappointing, results. The study that created the most headlines recently<sup>ii</sup> concluded that “implementing any [School Improvement Grant]-funded model had no significant impacts on math or reading test scores, high school graduation, or college enrollment” on the national scale. However, other studies found evidence of positive impacts in specific locales, such as at the state-level in California and Massachusetts and for urban areas like Philadelphia and Memphis.<sup>iii</sup> A review by the Center on Reinventing Public Education<sup>iv</sup> found that most approaches to state-initiated turnaround have shown evidence of effectiveness in at least one state or district. Additional research indicates that school improvement programs are particularly effective in the lowest-performing schools,<sup>v</sup> schools that were not already improving,<sup>vi</sup> and for English Language Learners.<sup>vii</sup>

A key consideration with much of this research is the substantial amount of variation in effectiveness within each approach to school improvement. As one scholar<sup>viii</sup> keenly observed, this should not be surprising given the differences in how states and districts implemented their turnaround efforts and the diversity of contexts in which these efforts have been applied. Unfortunately, not many studies have looked across these efforts to examine why some interventions fail while others succeed. As a result, we still know very little about how to affect school improvement at scale and across all contexts, especially in rural areas.<sup>ix</sup>

The experience of School Improvement Grant awardees and Priority and Focus schools in Illinois was decidedly mixed. Districts, schools, and partners that received School Improvement Grants faced a long list of 16 required elements. Whereas many of those elements were research-based, the potential impact was greatly diminished by the overall volume of mandates. Districts, schools, and partners worked to fit the requirements into their sense of what was important for school improvement success. At times, schools found a useful pathway to disrupt the status quo or provide resources for important improvements. However, more often, the schools struggled with the sheer number of requirements heaped on top of already over-burdened institutions. This summary verdict on these efforts should not cloud the bright spots that emerged from the era that can inform those beginning similar turnaround efforts.

To fully understand this next wave of school turnaround efforts and extend the lessons more broadly, future research needs to identify the components of interventions and contexts of implementation that contribute to successes and failures. Additionally, we need to discern the strategies that worked best and the conditions under which they were successful.<sup>x</sup> For these reasons, our work in this area will focus on situations under which SIG (School Improvement Grant) worked and the features of successful school improvement efforts. The research literature has identified five components of successful school improvement efforts. This typology is based largely on Turnaround Framework developed by The Center on School Turnaround.<sup>xi</sup> The components are:

- **Supporting structures and systems** at the state and district level, including assistance from proven outside providers, to jump-start turnaround efforts.
- **A culture shift** that engages all stakeholders, spurs intensive transformation, and rallies the school community around a clear and compelling turnaround strategy.
- **Turnaround leadership** at the state, district, and school levels that prioritizes improvement efforts and has the desire, capacity, and authority to execute the plan.

- **Talent management** to recruit, develop, and retain high quality educators and build a collaborative team.
- **Instructional transformation** that responds to student needs with rigorous, evidence-based interventions and modifies practices based on data.

Over the course of the next month, we will write a series of posts detailing and providing examples from each of these components at [cecweb.org](http://cecweb.org). This series of posts will culminate in a webinar for schools and districts interested in pursuing these efforts under IL-EMPOWER in early spring. Check [cecweb.org](http://cecweb.org) for details!

References are provided at the end of the newsletter.

## Upcoming

### Upcoming Publications

- Spring 2018. *Public School Funding and Postsecondary Outcomes in Illinois: What is Reasonable to Expect from Illinois' School Funding Reforms?* (Dr. Derek Houston, Assistant Professor, Education Leadership & Policy Studies, University of Oklahoma)
- Spring 2018. Book on competency-based education and career pathways (with the Illinois Board of Higher Education)

### Upcoming Events

- February 28 - March 3  
**Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness**; Spring Conference, Washington, DC
- March 8  
**Illinois Governor's Cabinet on Children and Youth**, Springfield and Chicago
- March 9  
**College Changes Everything – Call for Proposal** deadline, Roosevelt University, Chicago
- March 12  
**Illinois P-20 Council**, location TBD
- March 15-18  
**Association for Education Finance and Policy** (AEFP), 43rd Annual Conference, Portland, OR
- April 3-5  
**Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching**, Summit on Improvement in Education, San Francisco

- April 13-17  
**American Education Research Association (AERA)** annual meeting,  
New York City

## Let's Keep in Touch!

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Follow us on **Facebook** and **Twitter** for the latest updates and news on education policy in Illinois and beyond!.

Have a suggestion for an issue feature, interview, or upcoming event? We'd love to hear it. Share it with us at [ierc@siue.edu](mailto:ierc@siue.edu).

<sup>i</sup> Fullan, M. (2015). *Freedom to Change: Four Strategies to Put Your Inner Drive into Overdrive*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>ii</sup> Dragoset, L., Thomas, J., Herrmann, M., Deke, J., James-Burdumy, S., Graczewski, C., Boyle, A., Upton, R., Tanenbaum, C., Giffin, J. (2017). *School improvement grants: Implementation and effectiveness*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education and Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>iii</sup> Cunningham, P. (2017, January 24). *Smarick's Crusade Against SIG*. Education Next. Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/smaricks-crusade-against-sig/>.

<sup>iv</sup> Jochim, A. (2016). *Measures of Last Resort: Assessing Strategies for State-Initiated Turnarounds*. Linking State and Local School Improvement. Center on Reinventing Public Education.

<sup>v</sup> Henry, G. T., Guthrie, J. E., & Townsend, L. W. (2015). *Outcomes and Impacts of North Carolina's Initiative to Turn Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools*. The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, North Carolina State University.

<sup>vi</sup> Dee, T. (2012). *School turnarounds: Evidence from the 2009 stimulus* (No. w17990). National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>vii</sup> LiCalsi, C., Citkowitz, M., Friedman, L. B., & Brown, M. (2015). *Evaluation of Massachusetts Office of District and School Turnaround Assistance to Commissioner's Districts and Schools: Impact of school redesign grants*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

<sup>viii</sup> Jochim, 2016

<sup>ix</sup> Herman, R. (2017, May 9). *Obamas' School Improvement grants flunked the test – now what?* The Hill. Retrieved from <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/education/332584-obamas-school-improvement-grant-program-flunks-the-test-now-what>.

<sup>x</sup> Dee, 2102; Jochim, 2016

<sup>xi</sup> The Center on School Turnaround. (2017). *Four domains for rapid school improvement: A systems framework*. The Center for School Turnaround at WestEd. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.



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