

IERC News

We are sad to report that this will be our last newsletter, as the IERC will cease operations at the end of this month. Moving forward, our publications, presentations, and symposium materials will continue to be available on our current website, <https://ierc.education> through late summer. After that time, you can access archived IERC content at <http://www.siu.edu/ierc/>. And you will still be able to reach us via e-mail at ierc@siue.edu. It has been a pleasure serving you for the past 17 years, thank you for your support!

Reflections on the Rich Legacy of the IERC from Founding Director Jennifer Presley

In March 2001, I began the best job I have had in four decades in education policy research—Founding Director of the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC). In 2000, the IERC was the brainchild of Dr. Hazel Loucks, then Deputy Governor of Education, and a former teacher and faculty member at SIU Carbondale. She recognized that Illinois knew very little about how its education enterprise was faring, and that reliable data analysis would be a critical component of good education policymaking.

New funding for the IERC, to be housed at SIUE, was included in the state education budget. During the next few years we grew to an excellent cadre of quantitative and qualitative researchers and support staff. Dedicated funding freed the IERC to take on critical state-level work without having to seek external funding. It also allowed us to be nimble in addressing emerging topics for Illinois.

The IERC was a national leader in the use of state data for longitudinal analyses. Through groundbreaking shared data agreements with Illinois' education agencies, we obtained access to decades of teacher data which allowed us to examine teacher recruitment and turnover longitudinally, and to develop a teacher quality index that revealed the uneven distribution of teacher academic capital across different types of schools.

Our second large-data initiative addressed the transition of students from high school to college. These studies traced entire cohorts of Illinois public high school graduates' transitions to, and persistence in, colleges nationwide. The project was the first use of National Student Clearinghouse data for state-level work, and our creation of a college-readiness index led the field.

Additional noteworthy efforts included work on early childhood education, school funding equity, school leadership, and, of course, the annual symposium. Each of these endeavors established the IERC as a unique analytic resource to state agency leaders and legislators in Illinois, and demonstrated the potential for analyzing 'big data' to address pressing strategic questions.

As the IERC matured and leadership changed, the external environment also changed. Longitudinal data analysis gained traction nationwide, and more players entered the arena as Illinois embraced a P-20 perspective through a statewide education advisory council, the P-20 Council. While the IERC's time is coming to an end, I am delighted that others in the state, through the current efforts of Illinois' philanthropic community, are building on the original concept of the IERC in a new context [see the "Feature Topic" section of this newsletter]. I will watch with fond attention as Illinois continues its commitment to educational policymaking based on high-quality, innovative research.

Jennifer B. Presley was the Director of the IERC from 2001 to 2007.

What Impact Might School Funding Reform Have on Postsecondary Outcomes?



Illinois recently undertook a major overhaul of its school funding formula, moving from a regressive method of resource allocation toward an evidence-based system for distributing resources across districts. Proponents advocating for the change emphasized the need for the shift to better ensure equitable educational opportunities. So what can Illinois expect in terms of student outcomes as a result of this shift?

A new IERC report, **Public School Funding and Postsecondary Outcomes in Illinois: What Is Reasonable to Expect from Illinois' School Funding Reforms?**, authored by Dr. Derek Houston provides some insights into this question. The study takes a longitudinal approach to exploring the relationship between differential PK-12 public school funding across six outcomes: 1) ACT Composite Scores, 2) ACT math scores, 3) enrollment in postsecondary education, 4) enrollment in four-year institutions, 5) attainment of any postsecondary degree, and 6) attainment of a four-year degree. Findings show a significant and positive relationship between higher PK-12 public school funding and postsecondary outcomes across the measures considered.

Guest Feature

Dr. Jerry Weinberg, Associate Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate School at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE)



Dr. Weinberg was appointed Acting Associate Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate School at SIUE in 2010, and hired into the permanent position in 2012. In addition to overseeing the Office of Research and Projects and the graduate education programs, the school is home to the IERC.

Dr. Weinberg plays an integral role in the fabric of campus, having served in various administrative and faculty roles prior to becoming Dean and Associate Provost including as a chair and professor in the Department of Computer Science.

Q: How has the IERC contributed to and enriched the work of the University?

A: I have had the opportunity to work with great directors of the IERC—Brenda Klostermann, Janet Holt, and Brad White who is carrying the torch today. Under their leadership, IERC launched the faculty fellowship program, increased the number of policy-related research opportunities for graduate students, and generated new partnerships.

The IERC also expanded the ways in which the University connected to state agencies, helping foster relationships with them outside of the traditional oversight and regulation dynamic. This connection laid the groundwork for us to be able to work together in different ways and partner to strengthen the educational opportunities for students in higher education. For example, while I was serving at the President of the Illinois Association of Graduate Schools, I was able to work together with the leadership of Illinois Board of Higher Education on an initiative to improve graduate education after connecting through IERC.

Q: Can you speak to the decision to bring IERC's work to a close?

A: During the State's historic budget impasse, many difficult decisions needed to be made about where to invest resources to best meet the mission of the University. The work of the IERC aligns with that mission by enhancing the educational experience for students through policy-focused research opportunities. IERC research publications also contribute to the mission of the University, creating and disseminating cutting-edge knowledge to stakeholders throughout the state.

But ultimately the primary mission of the University is educating students. Hard decisions had to be made. At this point in time, SIUE does not have an

education policy program with a critical mass of students and faculty engaged in complimentary research and associated coursework.

Q: What accomplishments and contributions of the IERC are you are proudest of? What do you hope the enduring legacy of IERC will be?

A: I am proud of a number things that the IERC was able to achieve and bring to our state and campus. Certainly, the research and reports that were read, cited, and helped to guide policymaking in the state and beyond.

Probably the most well-known element of the IERC's work outside of the policy briefs was the annual symposium. The symposium was a unique space that allowed researchers and policymakers to come together and have a dialogue on important topics and emerging issues instead of simply issuing a report and hoping it ends up in the right hands. This is a special opportunity that will be sorely missed, and one that I hope others will pick up and carry on.

Q: What's a fun fact about you?

A: I just got back from Alaska where I stayed in an ecolodge, kayaked, and did some bear watching. We took a sea plane to a national park and watched brown bears graze 20 feet away. I really enjoy adventure and new experiences.

Feature Topic

What's Next for State Level Education Research?



Guest contributor Robin Steans is Board Chair at the Steans Family Foundation, where she guides education and community development grant-making in the North Lawndale community. Previously, she served as Executive Director at Advance Illinois, a statewide education policy and advocacy organization. Steans has also served on several education advisory bodies including as a committee co-chair on the Illinois P-20 Council.

For many years, the Illinois Education Research Council has been dedicated to providing evidence to support sound policy and practice across the birth through higher education continuum. I suspect all of us recall IERC studies that shifted our thinking and that continue to shape our views and actions today. Indeed, anyone reading this piece must already be a data and research geek!

So while I am sad to see the IERC close its doors, I am grateful to the many leaders and researchers who have done important work over the years. IERC has made

substantial contributions to Illinois-focused education research and provided useful guidance to many of us.

However, as the IERC closes its doors, the need for state-of-the-art research on cutting-edge issues of policy and practice is greater than ever. Fortunately, leaders and stakeholders from philanthropy, higher education, early childhood, K-12, workforce development, business and the research community have come together to discuss whether and how Illinois might generate greater ability to investigate the questions and issues generated by the state's P-20 Council, by the new Illinois Longitudinal Data System, and by stakeholders and policymakers across the state.

An anonymous foundation, together with the Joyce Foundation, McCormick Foundation, Spencer Foundation and Steans Family Foundation helped fund a planning process to gauge interest in and thoughts around a new research entity to tackle birth-career issues. Many were involved and consulted (including the IERC's own Brad White, leaders from the Consortium on School Research, and researchers from the University of Illinois and Northwestern, among others). There was resounding support for a state level research entity that would be responsive to priorities from stakeholders, agency leaders, legislators and those in the front lines of work. In addition, all involved valued research that was presented in a way designed to be used by practitioners and policymakers, and where communication is clear, compelling, and not an afterthought.

Illinois has a strong tradition of seeking and using data and research to inform its work. That said, there is always more to learn, always a next question, and always better ways to get the right information into the right hands in the right way.

We hope any new research entity will learn from IERC's experiences and carry on its spirit.

Upcoming

Upcoming Events

- July 19
College Changes Everything, Tinley Park
- September 10
Illinois P-20 Council, location TBD
- November 19
Illinois Early Learning Council, Roosevelt University, 425 S. Wabash, Room 418, Chicago