Innovative Pathways to Degrees and Capacity-Building for Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce

Bradford White, Brenda Klostermann,
Debra Baron, Janet Holt, Dan Duffy

Gateways to Opportunity
Higher Education Forum
April 20, 2017

Illinois Education Research Council

Our Mission

To provide objective and reliable evidence for Illinois P-20 education policy making and program development.

*Ensuring Research-Informed Education Policy for Illinois*

Early Childhood Education is Complex

- Myriad of settings & funding streams

- Educators have a wide range of roles and responsibilities

- Numerous degrees, licenses, and/or credentials

- Multiple entry points into preparation and the workforce

The Educator Preparation Program Innovation (EPPI) Grant Initiative

- **The EPPI initiative was designed to:**
  - Develop models of effective early childhood educator preparation
  - Develop partnerships between 2- and 4-year preparation programs and other community-based organizations
  - Promote articulation between institutions
  - Incorporate Gateways credentials
  - Support ECE programs in designing curriculum to incorporate new program requirements
  - Build capacity in key areas of need (e.g., Bilingual/ESL, early math learning, special education)
  - Create opportunities for innovation

- **Grants awarded to 20 partnerships of two- and four-year institutions**
  - From all regions of the state, representing 70% of state's ECE programs
  - Two cohorts (2014-15 and 2015-16)
  - Grant periods of approximately 10 months
  - All awards $50k or less

IERC

EPPI Partnerships
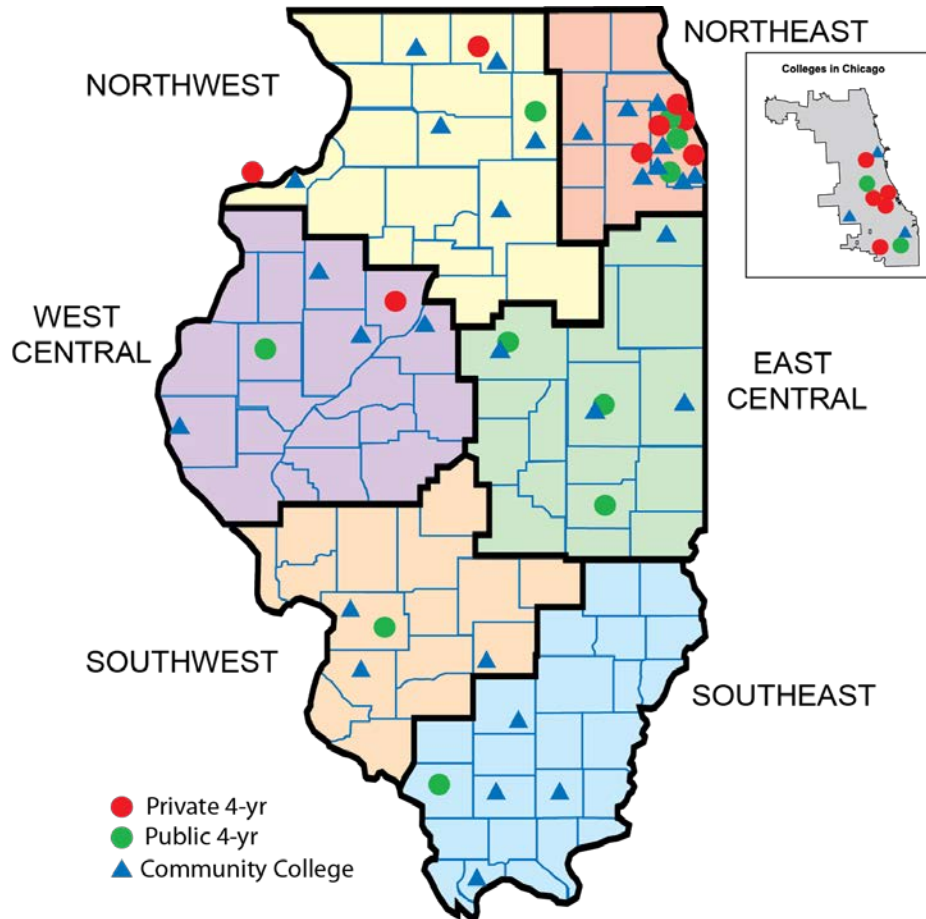
Qualitative Implementation Study

- Examine grant activities to determine what progress partnerships are making in developing ECE preparation models

- Identify innovative and promising initiatives coming out of the institutional partnerships and to build capacity in 7 key areas of need

- For each of these areas, we also examine:
  - Catalysts
  - Challenges
  - Potential for scalability and sustainability
  - Recommendations for future early childhood policies and partnerships

Methods

1. Systematic review of proposal narratives

2. Case-study approach to examine innovative and promising practices

3. In-depth interviews across multiple sites

4. Analyzed responses for overarching themes and sub-topics as well as their relationship to partnership development theory *(McQuaid, 2009)*

   - Summarized in two IERC reports (available on the IERC website):

     – **The Early Childhood Educator Preparation Innovation Grant: Lessons from Initial Implementation (2015),** *Eric J. Lichtenberger, Brenda K. Klostermann, and Daniel Q. Duffy*

     – **Innovations for High Quality, Aligned Early Childhood Educator Preparation (2016),** *Bradford R. White, Debra Mayconich Baron, Brenda K. Klostermann, and Daniel Q. Duffy*

Major Findings from Study 1

- **Most of the partnerships were moving towards achieving their grant goals**

- **Interviewees felt the grants had a fairly large positive impact, particularly on:**
  - Partnership development;
  - Enhancing articulation pathways between the partners; and
  - Integration of the Gateways credentials into programs and the transfer process.

- **Views regarding the grant system and the partnerships were not universally positive**
  - The grant system perpetuated existing perceived biases
  - The short timeframe was sometimes viewed in a negative light
  - Some partnership were already strong and the grant did not lead to significant change

Major Findings from Study 2

Crosscutting Catalysts & Motivations

1. **EPPI grant** served as catalyst for longstanding desire to work together

2. **Demands from the field** for larger, more highly qualified, and more diverse workforce

3. **Desire to minimize credit loss and related costs** for prospective teachers

4. **State and national policy**, including Gateways credentialing requirements

   – Provided not only the motivation, but also the *structure* for innovation.

7 Primary Areas of Innovation

1) Articulation arrangements

2) Alignment of assessments

3) Advising and supporting students

4) Early math

5) English Language Learner instruction

6) Infant and toddler programs

7) Improving field experiences

Articulation: Motivation and Innovation

- **Motivation:** to make it easier for students to transfer from 2Y to 4Y without losing credits and or taking more time to complete
- **Innovations:**
  - **Intentional continuums** beginning in high school through graduate school
  - **Cohort bridge programs** allowing students to obtain a bachelor degree on the campus of a two-year college
  - **Leveling bridge courses** to reconcile differences in the level of coursework between institutions
  - **ECE-specific 2 + 2 articulation agreements** allowing Associate degree holders to obtain a bachelor degree in two years
  - **New non-licensure programs** for students not planning to work in public school settings
  - **Holistic AAS transfer** with blanket acceptance of all AAS credits toward non-licensure programs
  - **Transferology** online transfer assistance program through statewide iTransfer initiative

Articulation:
Features, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

- **Common features:**
  - Formal agreements
  - Involved a broad array of stakeholders
  - Learning more about partner's program
  - Required changes at *both* the 2Y and 4Y level

- **Challenges:**
  - *Time* to get plans approved by all levels at each institution
  - *Institutional culture* between 2Y and 4Y
  - *Limited capacity for reform* due to competing priorities

- **Lessons learned:**
  - Use of **Gateways system**, along with Illinois Articulation Initiative and Transferology, to adopt common learning standards and credentialing requirements and increase # of articulated courses

Alignment of Assessments

- **Motivation:** to make it easier to transfer credits for students taking courses at multiple institutions
- **Innovations:**
  - **Cross-Institutional Assessment System** (CIAS) based on ~ 50 "uber competencies" aligning existing systems with the Gateways' credentials to create a seamless and stackable credentialing system
  - **Bridge assessments** to match competencies across levels
  - **Common portfolio software** to house artifacts related to EdTPA
  - **Similar documents and shared assignments** to ensure alignment
- **Common Features:**
  - Prepare students for edTPA
  - Incorporate **Gateways credentials** and IL Early Learning and Development Standards
- **Challenges:**
  - Some key assessments had to "live" at the 4Y
  - Continuous documentation of edTPA requirements
- **Lessons Learned:** Focus on *competencies* rather than *credit hours*

Advising & Support

- **Motivation:** to improve retention and completion by helping students become academically and culturally oriented to their new settings

- **Innovations:**
  - **Cross-advising** in which four-year advisors meet with students at the two-year campus
  - **Advising guides** to communicate degree and credential requirements to both students and advisors
  - **Bridge programs** to create smoother transitions between the two- and four-year programs

- **Common features:** reducing complexity and strengthening communication (institution ← → institution & institution ← → student)

- **Challenges:** state budget & status of profession

- **Lessons Learned:**
  - Involve advisors, their supervisors, and other faculty and administrators
  - *Expand their understanding of ECE* and *gain different perspectives* on transfer issues and institutional supports

IERC

Early Math

- **Motivation:**
  – Improve quality of early math instruction
  – Remedy math anxiety and low math competency amongst educators

- **Innovations:**
  – **Coursework and professional development** focused on developing skills in numeracy for current and prospective teachers
  – **Site visits** to provide students with experience in early childhood centers that were implementing success math strategies

- **Common features:**
  – Aligned to common standards (IL ELDS, Gateways, NAEYC)
  – Utilize technology, external experts, and purchased curriculum

- **Challenges:**
  – Scheduling PD time
  – Faculty turnover

- **Lessons learned:**
  – Need partners who also prioritize early math
  – Need for scaling and dissemination

English Language Learner Instruction

- **Motivation:** demographic and policy shifts greatly increasing demand

- **Innovations:**
  - **Embedding the bilingual/ESL endorsement** in ECE programs
  - **PD to ensure that in-service** early education professionals have the high quality training that current candidates are receiving.

- **Common features:** standards (WIDA, IL ENL PTS, TESOL)

- **Challenges:**
  - Recruiting students
  - Findings quality field placements

Infant and Toddler Programs

- **Motivations:**
  - High demand from the field
  - Desire to improve qualifications/quality

- **Innovation**:
  - **Non-licensure degree programs**, because programs serving infant and toddlers are typically situated outside of public schools and don't require licensure

- **Common features:**
  - Articulation between 2Y and 4Y
  - Alignment with Gateways credentials

- **Challenges:**
  - Lower pay and lower status → difficulties recruiting and retaining candidates

Improving Field Experiences

- **Motivation:**
  - Quality of placement sites varied, often selected out of convenience rather than quality
  - Formal procedures were needed to ensure more consistent and higher quality field experiences
- **Innovations:**
  - **Increased networking** and **more intentional site selection,** including **criteria for home day care placements** that serve as a signal of quality
  - **Improved training and support for mentor teachers** to improve the quality of supervision and mentorship, including the **Gateways Technical Assistance Credential,**
- **Common features:**
  - **Embedded field experiences** within courses to reinforce coursework immediately with more practical application
  - **Expanding the variety** of settings for early childhood placements to provide candidates experience working across public and private providers, student age groups, and family demographics
  - **Technology** to record student teaching and improve the instruction through **feedback**
  - **Needs assessments** to identify focus areas for improving their field experiences
- **Challenges:**
  - Employers reluctant to let employees take off time for **full-time** field experiences
  - Growing need for high quality field placement sites
- **Lessons learned:**
  - Could **use stipends** to support candidates to complete field placements
  - Cooperating teachers and schools could **receive credit** to encourage participation

Crosscutting Challenges

- **Lack of alignment and communication between institutions** limited collaboration amongst programs, particularly between the two- and four-year levels

- **Excessive or restrictive bureaucracy** leading to institutional gridlock

- **State budget issues and frequent policy changes** made it difficult to plan and sustain reforms

- **Perceptions about the low status and low prioritization of ECE** – efforts such as EPPI needed to elevate the profession and help others recognize its importance

- **Student and institutional characteristics** limited the time and money students had to invest in coursework, prolonged their timelines, and hindered collaboration

- **Increased funding** is needed to buy the **time** required to do this work

- **Sustainability and scalability** will be a challenge, but most programs were convinced that they would be able to continue their efforts

Conclusions and Implications

1. **Communication and Alignment**
    – Alignment is an *ongoing* process that requires continuous communication as programs and state regulations evolve over time. In order to bring this work to scale, programs must continue to expand their collaborations to institutions that were not initially part of the grant.

2. **Meeting the Needs of ECE Candidates and the ECE Workforce**
    – Early childhood educator preparation programs should create structures that attract qualified and diverse students by offering courses that are accessible and acknowledge multiple on- and off-ramps, while providing the financial and academic supports students need to succeed.

3. **Early Childhood Educator Quality**
    – Amidst efforts to improve the postsecondary experiences of students preparing to become early childhood educators, programs should not lose sight of improving the quality of educational experiences of children aged birth through 8

Conclusions and Implications (continued)

4. **State and National Policy Initiatives and Context**
   - Programs and policies need to take context into account and seek to align and leverage ongoing initiatives so they complement one another.

5. **Sharing Resources and Experiences**
   - Institutions should learn from the efforts of the EPPI grantees and borrow the materials and artifacts created by these programs to facilitate implementation and ensuring the scalability and sustainability of reform.

6. **The EPPI grantees were able to make substantial progress with fairly small grant awards in a tight timeframe**
   - However, the data used in this study have not been triangulated with additional sources, and further research is needed to track the outcomes of these innovations.
   - Data on the social-emotional and academic impact of this work on ECE students will be vital to examining whether these changes have been successful
   - A logical next step would then be to increase our investment in those strategies that have proven successful and have the potential to be scaled statewide

ILLINOIS EDUCATION RESEARCH COUNCIL
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY EDWARDSVILLE
http://ierc.education

BRADFORD R. WHITE, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
BRAWHIT@SIUE.EDU

@IERC_SIUE