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

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

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Goals of the Educator Preparation Program Innovation (EPPI) Grant Initiative

- Develop models of effective early childhood educator preparation
- Foster partnership development between two- and four-year preparation programs and other community-based organizations
- Promote articulation
- Incorporate Gateways entitlement
- 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 program implementation
2014-2016 EPPI Grant Process

• Partners included OECD, The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning, IBHE, ISBE, ICCB, INCRRA, and others

• Cohorts in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016
  – Applications from institutions across sectors and all regions of the state
  – Grantees include 20 partnerships of two- and four-year institutions, representing 70% of state’s ECE programs
  – All awards $50,000 or less
  – Grant periods of approximately 10 months
2014-15 & 2015-16 Partnerships
Qualitative Implementation Study

• Identify innovative and promising initiatives coming out of the 2- and 4-year institutional partnerships to develop ECE preparation models and to build capacity in key areas of need:
  – Flexible pathways for degree/credential attainment
  – Aligning assessments
  – Supporting & advising transfer students
  – Improving quality field experiences
  – Teaching early math
  – Working with English language learners
  – Developing infant and toddler programs
Study Goals

• Using a case-study approach, examine the innovative and promising practices implemented by the grantees

• Determine what progress the EPPI grant recipients are making, with particular attention to partnership activities

• Determine challenges and strategies used to overcome them

• Establish policy recommendations for promising practices for future early childhood partnerships
Participants

• Each 4yr principal investigator was invited to be interviewed
  – 16 of 20 responded
  – Asked for at least 1 additional member to interview

• Participants
  – 33 individuals from 17 separate partnerships
    • 16 = PIs from 4yr
    • 16 = partners from 2yr
    • 1 = community agency
  – 7 partnerships from public institutions; 10 from non-public institutions
Methodology

• Reviewed proposal narratives and project artifacts

• Conducted semi-structured interviews (50-90 minutes)
  – Brief description of major activities
  – Catalysts, barriers, strategies
  – Tailored questions to match innovation
  – Core components needed for success
  – Sustainability of grant activities
  – Policy and practice implications

• Summarized and reviewed for accuracy

• Coded analyzed interviews to identify overarching themes
Catalysts & Motivations

- **Change in the status quo** between two-year and four-year institutions of higher education
  - Increase in the number of students attending community colleges
  - Demand in the field for bachelor’s degree and EC credentials, but not necessarily a professional educator license
  - To meet the interests of the current workforce

- **Adoption of the new Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards, state mandates** regarding redesign of teacher preparation programs, and the increased demand for **Gateways credentials**
  - Provided not only the motivation, but also the *structure* for innovations.

- Opportunity to **address moral concerns** by preventing retaking courses and to address the related costs, lost time, and negative energy experienced by transfer students.
Innovation Highlights

• Flexibility of the EPPI grants encouraged the partnerships to work around the difficulties with articulation and to overcome existing “brick walls”

• **New pathways** intended to address many of the prior difficulties faced by students who obtained an AAS degree and then decided that they wanted to go on for a bachelor’s degree.
  
  – New transfer agreements, cross advising, and bridge programs

• Through participation in EPPI project meetings and related communication, many participants became aware of how to take better advantage of **statewide initiatives** aimed at improving transfer options
  
  – iTransfer initiative, particularly Transferology and the Illinois Articulation Initiative
Critical Components

• Learning about each other’s programs

• Involving other faculty, administrators, advising personnel, community partners, and other stakeholders early and throughout the process

• Acknowledging that the need to make modifications goes both ways between 2yr and 4yr programs

• Incorporating common credentialing requirements and learning standards

• Taking advantage of resources developed by others

• Drafting formal agreements
Articulation Innovations

• Intentional continuums – beginning in high school through graduate school

• New ECE specific 2 + 2 articulation agreements

• New non-licensure programs – with Infant/Toddler and/or Center Director focus

• Holistic AAS transfer

• Cohort bridge program

• Leveling bridge program
Alignment of Assessments Innovations

• In an effort to align with the edTPA process, several partnerships have begun to:
  – Develop common assessments
  – Use the same software, e.g., LiveText, to house student portfolios that demonstrate the key competencies required

• Establish the Cross-Institutional Assessment System (CIAS), based on approximately 50 “uber competencies,” aimed at better aligning existing systems of higher education and the Gateways’ credentials to create a more seamless, stackable credentialing system

• Utilize similar documents and shared assignments

• Offer a “leveling bridge” course
Support & Advising Innovations

- Cross-advising in person in which 4-yr advisors & faculty go to community colleges to meet with students to discuss what they needed to do to transfer

- Advising sheets/guides incorporating the 2-yr and 4-yr programs, showing the entire 4-year continuum

- Bridge programs

- Improving access
  - Online courses
  - Part-time, evening and Saturday classes
  - Co-location of classes at the 2yr
  - Scholarships
  - Test of Academic Proficiency preparation
Field Experience Innovations

• Providing training and support for field placement mentor/coordinating teachers were identified by a number of partnerships as a means for:

  – Improving the quality of field experiences for pre-service teachers
  
  – Expanding the availability of placement sites with diverse early learners, particularly infants, toddlers, and dual language learners
Content Innovations

• Early math learning
  – Improvements focused on providing quality field experiences for pre-service teachers and PD for those already working in the field

• Bilingual/English language learning
  – Many 4-yr programs added an ESL/Bilingual endorsement to their ECE licensure degrees
  – Some 2-yr partners have begun to create lower level courses to prepare their students to be able to transfer into these programs

• Infants & Toddlers
  – In response to needs in the field, several 4-yr partners have begun to develop new programs that build upon those offered at the 2-yr institutions and do not include ISBE licensure requirements
Challenges

• Getting institutional approval for changes/articulation agreements

• Other institutional issues

• State requirements & accreditation issues

• Broader issues in the ECE field

• Funding to sustain changes, especially for cross-advising

• Time to do this work
Preliminary Recommendations for Policy and Practice

• Require 2yr - 4yr partnerships during redesign process

• Provide resources to “buy-out” faculty time to work on partnership activities

• Establish state guidelines to reduce the variation in articulation and equivalency among institutions

• Adopt state policy guidelines to encourage increased collaboration/communication between EC programs and advising offices to improve the students’ transition

• Continue to provide opportunities for sharing knowledge and experience among grantees and other interested institutions
Illinois Education Research Council
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Janet Holt, Executive Director
janholt@siue.edu

http://ierc.education

@IERC_SIUE