

REVIEW OF THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION POLICY

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Research and Service Center: Education, Educational Administration and Supervision

OVERVIEW

The Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University was formed in 1995 through the merger of two research and public service centers at the University. The Center for the Study of Education Policy is administratively located in the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations within the College of Education. The center was formed to conduct research and provide public service related to current and emerging policy issues affecting kindergarten through college education. That scope has since been broadened to include programs from pre-school through graduate school education.

The mission of the Center for the Study of Education Policy is to positively influence education policy and practice through applied research, evaluation, public service, and consulting. The center engages in activities that inform and support education policy development at the local, state, and national levels. Work of the center is funded through state and federal grants, state and private contracts, and private foundation grants.

Current goals of the center are to promote smooth transitions for students as they move along the educational pathway that begins with pre-kindergarten and continues through post-secondary education (i.e., the P-20 pathway), with special emphases on early learning, the interface between high school and college, and the transition from education to employment; to highlight the key roles school and school district leaders play in improving student outcomes and to promote ways to support high quality preparation and professional growth of those leaders; to support teachers and teacher teams pursuing National Board Teacher Certification; to conduct policy research and facilitate policy development with multiple stakeholders; to embed high-quality evaluation processes within cycles of continuous improvement; and to use collective impact principles to implement collaborative education projects.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY

Self-study process. The Center for the Study of Education Policy undertook its program review self-study through a combination of activities: an all-staff retreat; identification and analysis of center strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; review of grant and contract evaluations and products; and internal audit findings.

Accomplishments since the prior program review. Since its 2011-2012 program review, the Center for the Study of Education policy has been active in research, program evaluation, and policy development in three primary education sectors: early childhood education, K-12 education, and teaching and leadership. Education issues addressed by the center through its work during this program review cycle have included alignment of the education system from birth to grade three, the transition of students from high school to college, elementary and secondary school leadership, development of child-parent centers, and teacher evaluation. Projects conducted by teams of CSEP researchers include an external evaluation of the Response to Intervention program of the Illinois State Board of Education, which involves providing high-quality instruction and intervention matched to student need, monitoring student progress to identify the need for changes in instruction or goals, and using child response data to inform educational decisions; a study to validate the Charlotte Danielson Early Learning Framework in PreK-third grade classrooms in seven districts and early childhood centers in Illinois and to explore the Illinois teacher evaluation system in early learning classrooms; and a study for the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) which attempts to derive general lessons from results of individual projects for improving teacher quality funded through the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Funders of center initiatives during this period have included the Illinois State Board of Education, the U.S. Department of Education, IBHE, the Joyce Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, and the Wallace Foundation.

In 2014 the Education Commission of the States awarded the State of Illinois the Frank Newman Award for State Innovation for its work to improve preparation and certification of elementary and secondary school principals in the state. The award recognizes the Illinois State Board of Education, IBHE, and CSEP for their collaboration in building broad support across the state for improving training of school principals. Multiple-year efforts of the three entities led to changes in principal licensure requirements promulgated by the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board of the Illinois State Board of Education.

In addition to its influence on training school principals in Illinois, CSEP has influenced changes to sections of the Illinois School Code pertaining to early childhood teacher preparation and school superintendent preparation. Early childhood teacher preparation program standards and requirements have been revised to align with revised state academic standards. Superintendent preparation provisions have been revised to match the rigor of the new principal preparation provisions of the Illinois School Code.

The *Grapevine* higher education funding database maintained by CSEP has become a core component of the State Higher Education Finance (SHEF) report compiled annually by the State Higher Education Executive Officers. The SHEF report is intended to broaden understanding among educators, policy makers, and the general public regarding state and national post-secondary funding and enrollment trends and to make possible analyses of those trends. The SHEF report is highly cited in higher education publications and in mainstream news sources.

The National Board Resource Center (NBRC) at Illinois State University was established in 1999 as one of five national centers by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the only such center in the Midwest. NBRC at Illinois State University became part of the Center for the Study of Education Policy about the time of the 2011-2012 program review. NBRC has helped hundreds of elementary and secondary school teachers in Illinois develop their teaching expertise and attain National Board Certified Teacher status, which recognizes advanced knowledge, skills, and practices in the field. Approximately 6,000 Illinois teachers are now certified. Chicago Public Schools ranks second among school districts in the United States with respect to the number of board certified teachers. Educators across the country access the NBRC website for high quality training materials and for information to develop their own training programs. NBRC also publishes information regarding the impact of national board teacher certification on student learning at the elementary and secondary education levels.

CSEP staff members contribute their expertise to the education sector of Illinois through service on numerous boards and councils, including the Illinois P-20 Council, the Illinois Education Research Council, and the Early Learning Council. The 30 members of the Illinois P-20 Council are appointed either by the Governor or by Illinois House and Senate majority and minority leaders. The P-20 Council is charged with working to improve birth to adulthood education in Illinois, to maximize students' educational attainment, opportunities for success in the workforce, and contributions to their local communities. The Illinois Education Research Council provides education research in support of P-20 education policy making and program development in Illinois. Based at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, the council is charged by the Illinois legislature to provide and coordinate research to inform the Illinois P-20 Council. The Early Learning Council is a public-private partnership created by state statutes and charged with strengthening, coordinating, and expanding programs and services for children, birth through five, in Illinois. Members of the council include senior state officials and non-government stakeholders appointed by the Governor.

Resources of the center. The Center for the Study of Education Policy, in collaboration with the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations to which it reports, is annually among the top units at Illinois State University in terms of external funds received. External grant funds of the center in Fiscal 2016 totaled approximately \$3.2 million across 14 grants and were supplemented by about \$245,000 in non-grant support from the University. CSEP employees supported with these funds include a part-time director, three full-time research associates, a tenure track professor at 25 percent time, seven part-time research associates, two part-time secretaries, and one part-time office assistant. The Department of Educational Administration and Foundations provides fiscal and personnel management services to the center.

Responses to previous program review recommendations. The 2011-2012 review of the Center for the Study of Education Policy resulted in four recommendations by the Academic Planning Committee. The center has since addressed all four. First, the Academic Planning Committee recommended that the center create an advisory board that would provide input on future projects, contracts, and directions and solicit feedback from key stakeholders.

After investigating advisory boards at peer centers, CSEP staff decided not to establish such a board but to instead continue using existing mechanisms for seeking feedback and guidance from stakeholders. Staff determined that stakeholders who would likely be asked to serve on a CSEP advisory board already serve on numerous boards together and dialogue with each other about educational policy initiatives on a regular basis through those venues. Second, the Academic Planning Committee recommended that center staff continue to seek external grants to ensure funding stability for the center. Staff has done so. Of the 14 external grants managed by CSEP in Fiscal 2016, many provided funding for center initiatives over multiple years. While external funding will never be fully stable, the outlook for obtaining additional external grants and contracts is positive at this time. Third, the Academic Planning Committee asked the center to develop a strategic plan. The center has done so as part of this program review self-study process. The new plan covers the period 2016-2021. Fourth, the Academic Planning Committee asked the center to formalize and implement an assessment strategy for evaluating the quality, impact, and effectiveness of programs and services provided by the center. For each major project, the center has developed an evaluation plan that serves two primary purposes: to guide continuous improvement of project implementation and to assess attainment of project goals. Projects are often mapped in the assessment plans using logic models that illustrate relationships among project resources, activities, products, and effects.

Major findings of this self-study. The Center for the Study of Education Policy continues to further its mission of positively influencing education policy and practice through applied research, evaluation, public service, and consulting. CSEP continues to be unique among educational research entities in Illinois in its broad coverage of the pre-kindergarten through post-secondary education (P-20) spectrum. As a result, staff and work products of the center are in demand as resources for education improvement efforts on the local, state, and national levels. The center maintains close working relationships with key stakeholders in the Illinois education sector, including IBHE, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the Illinois P-20 Council. The strong track record of the center in meeting its contractual research obligations has helped the center continue to garner external funding support, often through multiple-year grants. The work of CSEP continues to strongly align with and support both *Educating Illinois* (the university strategic plan) and *The Illinois Public Agenda* (the strategic plan for higher education in the state).

Initiatives for the next program review cycle. Based on findings of this program review self-study, center staff has prioritized the following initiatives for the next program review cycle. The center must continuously seek external grant and contract opportunities. To position the center for success in obtaining external funds, the center must continue to be vigilant about the quality, efficiency, and timeliness of its research projects, as is the case with any externally-funded unit. To help ensure efficient administration of projects, the center needs to establish a permanent position for general fund management to supplement assistance currently provided by staff of the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. Ongoing attention to collaboration with stakeholders in the education sector is important for maintaining a center that is relevant, productive, and sustainable. CSEP staff should broaden and strengthen network connections and continue to build positive long-term relationships with policymakers, funders, and practitioners. The center should especially seek additional opportunities for collaborative work with regional entities to help strengthen the impact of Illinois State University on local educational attainment and economic development. Such entities include the McLean County Chamber of Commerce, the Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council, Regional Office of Education #17, the Bloomington Area Career Center, Heartland Community College, the United Way of McLean County, and the McLean County Community Compact. To increase visibility of center projects and their impact on the education sector, center staff should seek opportunities for publishing research and policy findings in peer-reviewed journals and other respected academic venues, to supplement ongoing efforts by the center to disseminate center research and findings to education stakeholders and the general public.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the Center for the Study of Education Policy to be in Good Standing.

The committee thanks the center for a self-study report that evidences involvement of all staff in evaluating work of the center and in developing a new strategic plan to guide the center through much of the next review cycle. The committee appreciates submission by the center of a revised report per the committee's request. The revised report clarifies points made in the first submission and does so in an accessible style.

The committee commends the center for its ongoing contributions to educational policy and practice, particularly in Illinois, through applied research, program evaluations, and research and policy consultations. Collectively the many efforts of the center further student learning in elementary and secondary schools throughout Illinois and beyond. The committee particularly recognizes the center for its long-time collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Board of Higher Education to improve the quality of elementary and secondary school leadership and to recruit highly qualified professionals for principal positions. The committee congratulates the center for recognition of this effort in 2014 by receiving the Frank Newman Award for State Innovations from the Education Commission of the States. The committee also commends the center for its work to improve the quality of teaching in elementary and secondary schools through its support for teachers and teacher teams pursuing national board teacher certification. Since its last program review, the center has fully integrated the National Board Resource Center, which leads this effort, into center operations.

In addition to contributions of the center to educational policy and practice on the state level, the committee recognizes impacts of the center locally and nationally. Since its last program review, the center has expanded its work with local and regional education, community, and business organizations through initiatives such as McLean County 60 x 25. That project seeks to increase the percentage of working adults in the county with post-secondary credentials and to better match those credentials with employer needs. Through publications, presentations in other states, and projects such as the *Grapevine* higher education funding database, center staff has engaged nationally in conversations regarding educational policy and practice.

Making these contributions possible is continued success by center staff in obtaining funds from state and federal agencies and from private foundations. Most center funds come from these external sources, with grant receipts exceeding \$3.2 million in Fiscal 2016 alone. The reputation of the center for the quality and impact of its initiatives contributes to this fundraising success. Helping maintain the quality of center initiatives is ongoing attention to continuous improvement through assessment. The approach to assessment adopted by the center is unique in its mapping of center goals to center initiatives and development of an assessment plan for each initiative based on logic modeling.

Based on its review of the self-study report, the committee perceives that the primary focus of the center is outward through its extensive work with educational entities and policy makers across the state. However, the committee believes it is important for the center, as a unit of Illinois State University, to continue looking inward as well. Because center initiatives may directly or indirectly impact the University in the long term, it is especially important that faculty, administrators, and staff in units and programs at the University, particularly those in the College of Education, have opportunities to learn about the initiatives and provide peer-review input and feedback regarding them. Engaging internal stakeholders and considering their perspectives and insights can also positively impact center initiatives and support for them in the broader educational community.

In 2016 the center introduced an online newsletter, *The Exchange*, to provide its stakeholders news regarding education policy including work of the center. The committee appreciates this effort and encourages the center to explore additional venues for internal communication and collaboration as well as peer review of center policy recommendations. Several committee suggestions for doing so are set forth in the section below. However, the approach the committee believes could have the greatest impact is establishment of a center advisory board. This same recommendation was made by the Academic Planning Committee in 2012. In its 2016 self-study report, the center noted that it considered but decided against establishing such a board. The committee asks the center to again investigate doing so. While most advisory boards associated with research and service centers or academic programs at Illinois State are primarily intended to engage external stakeholders, the committee asks the center to investigate establishing a board primarily intended to engage stakeholders internal to the University. The center might investigate other venues for doing so as well. The committee asks the center to report findings of its investigations and to report actions either taken or planned to be taken in a follow-up report submitted to the Office of the Provost by December 15, 2017.

Recommendations. The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next center review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2020, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- The self-study report mentions student involvement in the center through participation in center-sponsored research, development of social media channels for the center, and monitoring center communications. The report also notes that faculty members affiliated with the center serve on dissertation committees in the college. The committee commends these efforts. The committee urges the center to imbed means of involving Illinois State University students in the work of each center initiative whenever possible, to communicate opportunities for students to contribute to center initiatives, and to document and publicize those student contributions.
- The committee concurs with the strategy of broadening and strengthening relationships with external stakeholders including policy makers. Broader and stronger relationships can help the center maintain programs and services that are relevant and responsive to needs of the educational sector of the state. Those relationships might also help center staff remain current regarding external funding opportunities. That said, given ongoing interactions between state policy makers and numerous other Illinois State University officials, the committee urges continued vigilance on the part of center staff when communicating with policy makers to prevent confusion between center positions and official university positions. Depending on its composition, an internally-focused advisory board could provide a venue for information sharing regarding those positions.
- The committee commends efforts of the center to facilitate participation by local and regional entities in statewide educational initiatives. One example is the aforementioned McLean County 60 x 25 project. The committee supports efforts of the center to expand such involvement, whether through participation in statewide initiatives or through locally developed and implemented projects.
- In 2012 the committee recommended that the center continue to seek external grants to bring funding sources and stability to the work of the center. Center staff has done so. The committee recommends continued vigilance regarding external funding opportunities and threats, especially to state-sponsored grants. The committee supports the center target of maintaining the ratio of external funding to internal funding above 80 percent during the next center review cycle.
- While recognizing the many reports and presentations by center staff since the last program review, the committee supports the center goal of supplementing them with original research communicated through peer-reviewed journals or other academic venues. The committee also recognizes the challenges in achieving this goal, given the many initiatives administered by center staff and the need for ongoing attention to securing external funds. One approach to this challenge already deployed by the center is collaboration among center staff in communicating results and implications of center initiatives through publications and presentations. This approach could be extended to research collaborations among center staff. Staff might also consider collaborating with faculty and students who are not affiliated with the center. For guidance with collaborative research efforts, staff might investigate research models adopted by other centers at the University, such as supporting research associates or fellows.
- The committee urges the center to continue implementing the assessment plans it has developed for its individual initiatives and to develop similar plans for new initiatives as they are established. The committee also urges the center to use findings from assessment of individual initiatives to assess progress of the center toward meeting its broader center goals. Finally, the committee urges the center to make changes to its individual initiatives and to center operations based on the assessment findings and to document its assessment efforts and outcomes.