TECH PREP IN ILLINOIS

ON-SITE REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

2001-2002 CYCLE

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Executive Summary

An On-Site Review and Improvement Process was first piloted in 1999-2000, designed to provide effective feedback to the consortia in Illinois on their progress in implementing Tech Prep. Thereafter, a system was established bringing in a team of experts to review each consortium in the state once every five years. They were charged with conducting an assessment of the level of implementation of Tech Prep in the consortium, leading to recommendations for improvement in the years that followed. During the 2001-2002 academic year, On-Site Reviews were conducted at eight local consortia in the state of Illinois. These visits represented the second year that the system was implemented on a statewide scale.

In this report, we present findings from a cross-consortium analysis of the eight consortium reports prepared by the leaders of each review team, all staff of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Career Development Division. To carry out the cross-consortium analysis, we conducted a careful independent review of each of the reports and identified major themes or issues that emerged. Following this step, we looked across the eight consortia to identify patterns that helped to describe or explain factors occurring across the sites, and concluded with a set of recommendations.

The review process is structured around the analysis of eight essential elements, based on the Perkins III legislation, and seven supporting elements, identified through the 1999-2000 pilot project. Detailed findings are presented for these elements, with each rated according to its level of implementation: not evident, planning/development, progress in implementation, mature implementation, or advanced implementation. In summary:

- Among the essential elements, 91% were rated as mature or progressing, with most (75%) rated as progressing.
- Among the supporting elements, 64% were rated as mature or progressing, with almost half (48%) rated as progressing.
- No one consortium did everything well or poorly; nor was any element implemented consistently well or poorly across the state.
- The strongest elements in 2001-2002 were “leadership,” “articulation,” and “equal access.” The weakest elements were “evaluation” and “student identification.”

Analysis of strengths and areas for improvement showed that Tech Prep in Illinois has made significant progress since its inception. Specifically, the following were noted to be areas of strength in at least half of the consortia visited during 2001-2002:

- Leadership and administrative support (8 mentions)
- Work based learning (5)
- Dedicated staff and teachers (5)
- Dual and articulated credit (4)
- Integrated and applied teaching methods (4)
- Professional development (4)
- Business support (4)
- Collaboration (4)

There continued to be areas in which Tech Prep programs needed improvement, in large part because they are wide-ranging initiatives with limited resources. The following areas were identified in at least half of the reports as needing improvement:

- Evaluation and/or continuous improvement systems (7 mentions)
- Identification and tracking of Tech Prep students (6)
- Aspects of curriculum development (5)
- Secondary/postsecondary collaboration (5)
- Career awareness and/or guidance (5)
- Use of standard definitions related to Tech Prep (4)
- Articulation agreements (4)
- Student transition (4)
- Professional development (4)
- Marketing/ increasing awareness of Tech Prep (4)

The following recommendations are offered to encourage the continued advancement of high quality Tech Prep programs in Illinois. They were developed by the University of Illinois’ OCCRL evaluation team based on their synthesis of the information in the eight consortium reports and their experiences observing the development of Tech Prep over time.

**Student identification and monitoring**— We recommend that the state establish a set of guidelines to be used by schools and colleges enroll and then monitor students participating in Tech Prep programs of study. It is also important to keep track of the numbers of students who are affected by Tech Prep program activities in other ways.

**Secondary/ postsecondary collaboration**— We recommend that consortia prioritize the establishment of systems and settings in which work can be accomplished on multi-institutional (or consortium-wide) programs of study and articulation agreements, as well as structures for the provision of dual credit and improved student transition.

**Dual credit/enrollment**— We encourage that more information be shared on how to establish effective dual credit/enrollment programs, with strong quality controls, and immediately transcripted credit. Colleges that use articulated credit systems may want to re-consider their merit when compared with dual credit systems.

**Curriculum development**— We recommend that: 1) significant resources be devoted to providing teachers with time to work on curriculum development, 2) whenever possible, programs of study be developed consortium-wide, 3) plans be developed at each consortium to create or review a fixed number of curriculum pathways each year, and 4)
inservices be offered to help faculty to stay abreast of current theories and practices related to curriculum, including contextual, integrated and applied methods.

**Marketing**— We recommend that the new marketing materials developed by ISBE be used widely in a coordinated way to promote the true value of a Tech Prep education—as leading to emerging careers, as rigorous, as blending academic and career-technical training, as preparing students for real-life workplaces, and most importantly, as leading to postsecondary education.

**Professional development**— We recommend that professional development be expanded in the following ways: 1) providing information on Tech Prep to every new staff member as a part of his/her initial orientation; 2) including Tech Prep as a standing agenda item in routine meetings; 3) sending out regular updates on Tech Prep to mailing lists; and 4) offering Tech Prep topics as part of regular training events.

**Maximizing the Connections Conference**— We recommend that all new attendees be expected to attend an “Orientation to Tech Prep” session, that one of the keynote speakers focus on Tech Prep at every conference, and that conference topics be framed in terms of Tech Prep essential elements whenever possible.

**Centralization of Tech Prep resources**— We recommend the development of a computer-based resource bank of Illinois Tech Prep program models and materials for use statewide (and nationally).

**Tech Prep enrollment and guidance system**— We recommend the development of an enrollment and guidance packet for counselors to use with each student who decides to enroll in a Tech Prep career pathway.

**Student transition**—We recommend that Tech Prep consortia increase their role in addressing students’ widespread need for remediation upon entry into college. Perhaps the most important actions that can be initiated are: 1) to ensure Tech Prep students engage in a rigorous, college-oriented course of study in secondary education, and 2) widespread college placement testing of high school students, with feedback on their readiness going to the students and to their schools.

**Tech Prep manual**— We applaud ISBE’s work in preparing this important resource and recommend that it be further developed and distributed to all Tech Prep Coordinators in the state.

**Program evaluation**— We recommend that consortium boards identify the data needed to monitor progress toward achievement of consortium goals, and work with the Coordinators to obtain it. Data collection should be limited to those items that are most meaningful for decision-making, and should take into account the time required for collection.