CROSS-CONGORTIUM RESULTS

ILLINOIS’ TECH PREP ON-SITE REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT PROCESS FOR 2000-2001

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

JoHyun Kim
Debra D. Bragg
Elisabeth Barnett

Office of Community College Research and Leadership
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Champaign, Illinois

In collaboration with:

Illinois State Board of Education
And
Illinois Community College Board
Springfield, Illinois

August, 2001
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1998, the Office of Community College Research and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign received support from the Illinois State Board of Education to develop an evaluation system for Tech Prep in Illinois. The On-Site Review portion of the first Tech Prep Evaluation System for Illinois (TPESI) was piloted in 1999-2000, with assessments conducted at four consortia, resulting in data useful for program improvement.

During the 2000-2001 academic year, the full On-Site Review and Improvement Process portion of TPESI was implemented with eight consortia in the state. These consortia were selected by ISBE, with consideration given to a range of representation according to level of implementation, demographics, and geographical distribution. This document presents the findings of a cross-consortium analysis of the results of the On-site Review Process, as well as individual site reports describing the status of Tech Prep at each locale.

Background on Tech Prep Implementation

Tech Prep enrollment has continued to rise for the state of Illinois, with a change of 19% from 1996-97 to 1998-99. In the 1998-99 academic year, there were 11,112 Tech Prep students in the state, representing about a quarter of all high school students in the area served by the consortia studied. This data hides significant variations in growth patterns among consortia. However, these results do not fully reveal the wide diversity in enrollment among consortia, nor do they fully illustrate the pervasive nationwide and local difficulties in defining and tracking Tech Prep students.

As this group of consortia looked at their priorities for future development, several areas stood out, among them:

- Curriculum development, especially emphasizing the integration of academic and technical content, promoting higher-level academic course work, incorporating of new technologies, and tailoring curricula to labor market needs.

- Marketing of Tech Prep in order to create greater community awareness and to attract additional students.

- Improved identification and tracking of Tech Prep students, particularly in the transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

Progress on Essential and Supporting Elements

When looking at how the elements are implemented across the consortia, the following trends emerged:

- The essential elements are generally more fully developed than the supporting elements that have been identified through the TPES process and is crucial for full-scale implementation of Tech Prep.

- There is more variability in the ratings of the supporting elements than essential elements among consortia.

- In general, most consortia showed strengths in: 1) leadership, organization and administrative support, 2) business/labor/community involvement, and 3) inservice training, especially of counselors.

- Less fully implemented elements include: 1) parental support, 2) identification and accurate reporting of Tech Prep students, 3) evaluation and program improvement, and 4) student transition from the secondary to postsecondary levels.

- Most consortia blend strengths and weaknesses, i.e. no consortia was doing uniformly well or poorly on all of the elements.
Strengths

Major strengths shown in the majority of consortia included: the involvement of business and industry, the quality of leadership, the range of professional development opportunities offered, and the ongoing work to improve and expand curricular offerings.

The level of business and industry support was particularly striking and was a major factor, for a number of consortia, in their success in key programmatic areas. Business input was an important influence on curriculum development, including both content and methods of instruction. It also facilitated strong professional development opportunities (especially AIPs and VIPs) and varied, high quality work-based learning placements for students.

Areas for Improvement

There are several areas in which further work is needed. The ongoing challenge of identifying, monitoring, and tracking students needs to be addressed, including finding ways to standardize workable statewide definitions of a Tech Prep student as well as tracking systems that take into account transitions from secondary to postsecondary school. Many articulation agreements are in need of review and updating, and further articulation agreements, covering new areas of study, are needed. Despite progress in professional development, more is clearly needed, with a particular focus on helping all school personnel to understand Tech Prep. Finally, misconceptions about Tech Prep may be contributing to lack of parental involvement, which could be addressed with better marketing and information sharing.

Recommendations

Implementation of the following recommendations would contribute to the continued growth of a superior Tech Prep system in the state of Illinois:

- Local consortia should be encouraged to further align their programs with the state’s Tech Prep definitions, policies and goals.
- Articulation agreements should be reviewed and revised on a regular basis by local consortia. Barriers to utilization of dual credits should be removed whenever possible.
- Further improvements are needed in professional development systems to ensure that all school personnel understand and fully participate in the Tech Prep initiative.
- Teachers may, in some cases, play an important role in student career guidance, along with counselors.
- Better secondary and postsecondary collaboration is needed in order to improve student experiences with transition, reduce the amount of remedial education needed, and to insure strong articulated course sequences.
- Parental involvement could be enhanced through strategic marketing, information on emerging career opportunities, and promoting their early participation in career planning.
- Better local evaluation is needed, especially with regard to the collection of data on Tech Prep student outcomes.
- Improved preparatory services, including career guidance, are needed to enroll students who can most benefit from Tech Prep courses of study and to help reduce the number of students requiring remedial course work.
- More attention should be paid to encouraging special populations and non-traditional students to participate in Tech Prep, including the use of programs offering assistance and support.
- Work is needed to distinguish Tech Prep from other initiatives. While there are many advantages to cooperative implementation, some aspects of the program could be better developed with a greater degree of separation.