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Principles to Guide Career Pathways and Programs of Study Implementation and Improvement

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SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

All students need pathways that enable their success in college and careers. This lofty but necessary goal is important to supporting all of Illinois' citizens in achieving productive and fulfilling lives.

Illinois has had a strong commitment to pathways for many years. The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 helped to launch the state's career pathways work, and other initiatives have added momentum. Shifting Gears, Accelerating Opportunity, the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways, Complete College America, and others have reinforced the career pathways approach. Three factors explain the state's commitment to pathways.

Career pathways empower students to make smart choices about college that lead to wise decisions about careers, citizenship, and life.

Career pathways support student success. Roadmaps help students navigate the education system, from K-12 through college, and master ever higher levels of academic and career-technical competencies to obtain careers, become productive citizens, and assume fulfilling lives.

Career pathways clarify the educational experience. Structured and sequenced programs of study enable students to obtain the stackable, industry-validated credentials they need to enter and progress in family living-wage jobs. Entry, exit and re-entry enable learners to participate in education and training throughout their lifetimes.

Career pathways improve outcomes and performance. Using evidence, the pathways approach measures student progression through college and careers and resolves inequities in education and employment outcomes among diverse student groups.

The following guiding principles and design elements help educators and their partners to enable all students to achieve their desired college and career goals. By ensuring student success for all, everyone wins.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Leadership, Organization and Support

Career pathways, career pathway systems, and programs of study are led and supported by P-20 educators and collaborative partners.

Design Elements

1. Leaders form and sustain collaborative partnerships involving P-20 educators, employers, workforce partners, community-based organization partners, students, parents, and others who support student transition through postsecondary education and into employment.
2. Leaders formalize partnerships with memoranda of understanding that communicate roles, shared responsibilities, and vision, goals and strategies that align with local, state, and federal policies.
3. Leaders provide the guidance, cross-system alignment and resources needed for pathways to span the entire P-20 education system, the workforce, and other public and private systems.
4. Leaders use labor market data, advise on and engage in curriculum development, and provide students with quality instruction within and beyond formal educational settings, including work-based learning.
5. Leaders appreciate and use program quality indicators and outcome measures to monitor and continuously improve student performance.
6. Leaders leverage and braid resources (e.g., personnel, money, curriculum, technology) to support student success.

Access, Equity, and Opportunity

All students have access to educational opportunities at multiple entry points and receive support services that lead to equitable outcomes.

Design Elements

1. Barriers to initial entry or reentry are identified and overcome to ensure that students having diverse backgrounds and experiences have the opportunity to enroll and succeed in their chosen pathways.
2. Flexible formats, locations, and times are offered to make learning accessible and achievable for all student populations.
3. Comprehensive and proactive support services are offered to ensure students' needs are met as they navigate pathways.
4. Networks are used intentionally to assist all students with course navigation, academic and career advising, work-based learning, internships, and employment.
5. Universal design principles for physical and virtual spaces and learning are used to promote access and support the successful transition of students through pathways.
6. Evidence is collected, shared, and used continuously to identify and eliminate barriers to student access and success.

Alignment and Transition

Curriculum, programs, and credentials are aligned to facilitate student preparation, progression, and success.

Design Elements

1. Students learn about college and careers and are supported in making informed decisions about education and employment opportunities.
2. Pathways offer non-duplicative curriculum, course sequences, and relevant assessments to maximize credit attainment and increase student success.
3. Pathways accelerate the mastery of competencies that are aligned with relevant educational, state, and industry standards and credentials, including stackable certificates and degrees.
4. Articulation agreements support credit attainment and transfer of credits that facilitate successful student progression and completion.
5. Pathways lead to further education and training, including the baccalaureate and higher degrees (i.e. stackable credentials).
6. Pathways lead to increasingly high-skill, high-wage, or high-demand occupations.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and pedagogy offer rigorous and relevant instruction that enhances learning and enables students to master competencies that align with industry-recognized standards and credentials.

Design Elements

1. Pathways use assessments that are known to be valid and meaningful for culturally and experientially diverse student populations.
2. Pathways integrate contextualized coursework that aligns with workforce needs, engages student interest, and improves learning outcomes.
3. Applied learning is infused throughout pathways to help students understand the logic and relevance of curriculum that leads to informed career choices.
4. Pathways promote learner-focused instruction that involves employers and other partners in classrooms, work-based learning, mentoring, and student service and leadership development.
5. Technology-enabled, online, and hybrid delivery is integrated into pathways to foster student mastery of academic and technical competencies.
6. Pathways encourage dual-credit and advanced placement that supports progression through college to completion.

Professional Preparation and Development

Comprehensive and continuous professional development is delivered to enhance the recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified instructional, support, and administrative personnel.

Design Elements

1. Professional development is high quality, sustained, intensive, and participant-focused and includes opportunities for all educators and partners to collaborate in implementing pathways.
2. Leaders conduct and use needs assessments to design professional development and involve partners in collaborative planning.
3. Professional development is designed to improve the quality of classroom instruction and assessment and raise student achievement.
4. Professional development is offered on topics such as partnerships, student support services, the use of technology, evaluation, etc. that helps build, evaluate, and sustain successful pathways.
5. Leaders leverage technology via webinars, open educational resources, and other web-based sources to ensure professional development is widely accessible and affordable to diverse types of faculty and staff.
6. Professional development includes the sharing of evidence-based, promising practices that demonstrate pathway effectiveness and contribute to continuous improvement.

Program Improvement & Accountability

Data are collected, shared, and utilized to map student progression through pathways, improve student outcomes, and demonstrate accountability.

Design Elements

1. Pathways are evaluated using multiple forms of data (e.g., qualitative and quantitative) obtained from local, state, and federal systems and from industry and workforce partners.
2. Partners establish data-sharing agreements, common language, and valid and reliable measures of student progress through college and careers.
3. Partners set measureable goals to ensure equitable student outcomes, and they share responsibility for meeting those goals.
4. Student-level data are disaggregated to identify inequities in performance among student groups and improve the outcomes of different student groups.
5. Students are recognized as a primary stakeholder and their perspectives are actively obtained and used to inform pathway implementation and improvement.
6. Outcomes are displayed and shared in multiple ways to help partners understand results, improve accountability, and continuously improve.

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