

## **The Illinois Collaborative for Education Policy Research**

Illinois has taken an unprecedented step to engage its public and private colleges and universities in a formal collaborative endeavor that focuses higher education faculty and resources on critical challenges facing P-20 education. This initiative matches Illinois' talented university researchers to problems of educational policy and practice and capitalizes on the power of Illinois' integrated P-20 longitudinal data system.

The Illinois Collaborative for Education Policy Research (ICEPR) will (a) identify and define policy issues facing P-20 education, (b) facilitate planning, communication of priorities, and recruitment of researchers to conduct top priority studies, (c) facilitate data-sharing agreements and administration of research, (d) engage local and state entities in research that expedites change in policy and practice, (e) assist local entities in developing research capacity and building communities of practice, including using technology to support collaboration among researchers and practitioners; and (f) secure funding for projects aligned with state priorities.

### **Collaborative Structure**

ICEPR's advisory group will work closely with state agencies, colleges and universities, and other education stakeholders. The ICEPR will draw upon the breadth and depth of expertise of university faculty throughout the state, including Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville's Illinois Education Research Council (IERC), which has a legislated mandate and strong track record with longitudinal research; the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR), which has led the nation in groundbreaking research on urban education involving Chicago Public Schools; Illinois State Universities' Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP), which studies innovations in school leadership and funds the Grapevine Project on higher education finance; Northern Illinois University's leadership on the Interactive Illinois Report Card, a school improvement information system; the University of Illinois at Chicago's innovative research and development on urban school leadership; and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Forum on the Future of Public Education, which draws on faculty experts in literacy, learning outcomes assessment, college transition, and STEM education. Each of these organizations will be represented on a Steering Committee that will work hand-in-hand with state agencies to guide ICEPR's agenda. The ICEPR Board will consist of 15-20 members, including the Steering Committee and representatives of the state agencies, along with other public and private colleges and universities, practitioner organizations, geographically diverse school districts including Chicago Public Schools, private foundations, and independent research and policy organizations.

### **Research Agendas and Prioritization**

The state of Illinois has already begun identifying research priorities with the P-20 Longitudinal Policy Research Summit held November 17, 2009 and sponsored by the Forum on the Future of Public Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This event engaged over 80 university researchers, state agency leaders, policy analysts, and others in plans to capitalize on the current window of opportunity to engage in research that matters to the future of Illinois. In the coming months, the Forum will work with its partners to deepen and extend discussion about the P-20 Educational Policy Research Agenda to practitioners, policy makers, funders, and other stakeholders. Recognizing that the Research Agenda is a living document, current and proposed activities help to launch an enduring process of research prioritization and collaboration. On-going review of the Research Agenda will involve extensive outreach to diverse stakeholders, facilitated by the ICEPR Steering Committee. Defining the state's research priorities will help channel resources and provide the stability to conduct high-quality longitudinal research.

The Research Agenda will guide the state's efforts to shape educational policy, engage in research that addresses critical problems, and support capacity building at the state and local levels. The Agenda will focus Illinois' research on the following areas:

- **Teacher and Leadership Preparation, Development and Support** – Researching, developing and refining systems that prepare, recruit, and retain highly effective teachers and school leaders. Using research to model and create new teacher preparation and professional development methods that help

to provide highly qualified teachers in high needs schools and eliminate teacher shortages in areas such as special education, early childhood, math and science, and language and literacy.

- **College, Career and Workforce Readiness-** Assessing education and employment outcomes with respect to the alignment of individual, organizational, and public policy goals, expectations and processes. Studying strategies that facilitate transition to college and careers and prepare students for employment, including closing leaks in the P-20 pipeline that reduce access and impede student transition, particularly for students at risk for non-completion.
- **School and District Turnaround-** Researching and evaluating strategies for substantially improving student achievement and other critical outcomes, including developing and refining organizational, instructional, and assessment processes in chronically underperforming schools and districts.
- **Assessment and Management for Learning-** Evaluating performance management systems that utilize formative and summative assessment, student records, and other school data to inform teachers and leaders and target curriculum, instruction, and additional interventions in ways that enhance student learning outcomes.
- **Equitable Outcomes in Math, Science, and Literacy-** Researching and evaluating innovative approaches to teaching math and science, including STEM education, and language and literacy. Examining how particular academic pathways and supplemental services can enhance positive outcomes for traditionally low achieving student groups.

### **Research Management and Facilitation**

ICEPR will manage an RFP process to select and fund research that answers key policy questions. It will draw on its knowledge of highly qualified researchers and practitioner organizations to enhance the quality and impact of proposed projects. Final decisions on project funding will be made by state agencies, but the recommendations of the ICEPR board will be closely consulted and highly regarded. ICEPR will also encourage and support the pursuit of external funding for projects aligned with the Research Agenda. Once specific projects are funded, ICEPR will facilitate project implementation by assisting with administrative hurdles. For example, the ICEPR will hold a comprehensive license for access to state educational data and have authority to grant limited sub-licenses to institutional researchers. ICEPR will also assist researchers with the IRB and consent process for their projects. When research projects are completed, ICEPR will facilitate widespread dissemination of findings to stakeholders and media outlets, and it will document the impact that research results are having on changing policy and practice.

### **Practitioner Engagement and Capacity Building**

State leaders recognize that even the most sophisticated data systems cannot answer all of the policy questions facing educational practitioners if those practitioners do not possess the expertise to pose the right questions and execute quality research. Drawing on the Consortium on Chicago School Research at University of Chicago and the Center for Education in Small Urban Communities at University of Illinois, the ICEPR will reach out to large and small urban districts to encourage and support the use of the P-20 longitudinal data system, including designing and disseminating tools for practitioners such as dropout risk indicator systems. These organizations will develop communities of practice that engage university researchers and local practitioners in hands-on research of importance to day-to-day practice. In so doing, the ability of schools, colleges and universities to develop and use evidence to improve practice is enhanced. Drawing on community colleges, Regional Offices of Education, and the Cooperative Extensive Service, systems geographically distributed throughout the state, the ICEPR will support research endeavors that contribute to organizational learning and build local capacity to implement effective practices. Statewide, ICEPR will help to analyze problems, evaluate interventions, and continuously improve systems. The ICEPR will encourage and support sophisticated designs, including experimental and quasi-experimental designs, that make causal inferences, and qualitative, ethnographic studies that provide rich description and interpretation of implementation and impact. Multi-level data collection will be employed that enables researchers to assess student outcomes, taking into account the effects of communities, schools, teachers and students. Results from these diverse forms of research will be used to shape public policy, inform the state and local entities on the wise investment of federal, state, and local dollars; and to continuously improve the capacity of educational institutions to meet students' needs and support effective learning outcomes.