



EVOLVING PARTNERSHIPS

to Enhance Transition: Meeting POS Expectations

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BY KRISTY MORELOCK

Finding the best way for students to learn and achieve success is of utmost importance to the State of Illinois and the nation as a whole. College and career success is critical to our national and state economy. Career and technical education (CTE) has been central to this call for greater college completion, and the credentials that CTE provides to both traditional and nontraditional student populations have emerged as one of the most important elements in the completion agenda throughout the country. The Illinois Programs of Study (POS) framework uniquely positions the state to achieve the goal of fully articulated curriculum from secondary to postsecondary education, and to ultimately meet the call for greater college and career success.

POS Implementation in Illinois

A few years ago, Illinois was struggling with the implementation of Programs of Study. The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) recognized the need for a specific vehicle for such implementation on a statewide basis. The board

drew upon longstanding relationships with both state education and workforce stakeholders and the robust community college CTE system. The aim was to build a framework that recognized POS implementation requires strong engagement from partners, should be locally driven, and must be a continuous process with both equity and outcomes at the center of both development and delivery of programs. Further, the process has a strong basis in the use of data of both state and local origin. Federal law demands improvement in data and accountability—and POS relies on it—not only for federal and state compliance, but also to make informed decisions at the state and local levels. Much of the POS implementation process is reflected in the state's Guiding Principles and Design Elements summarized in Figure 2 on page 46.

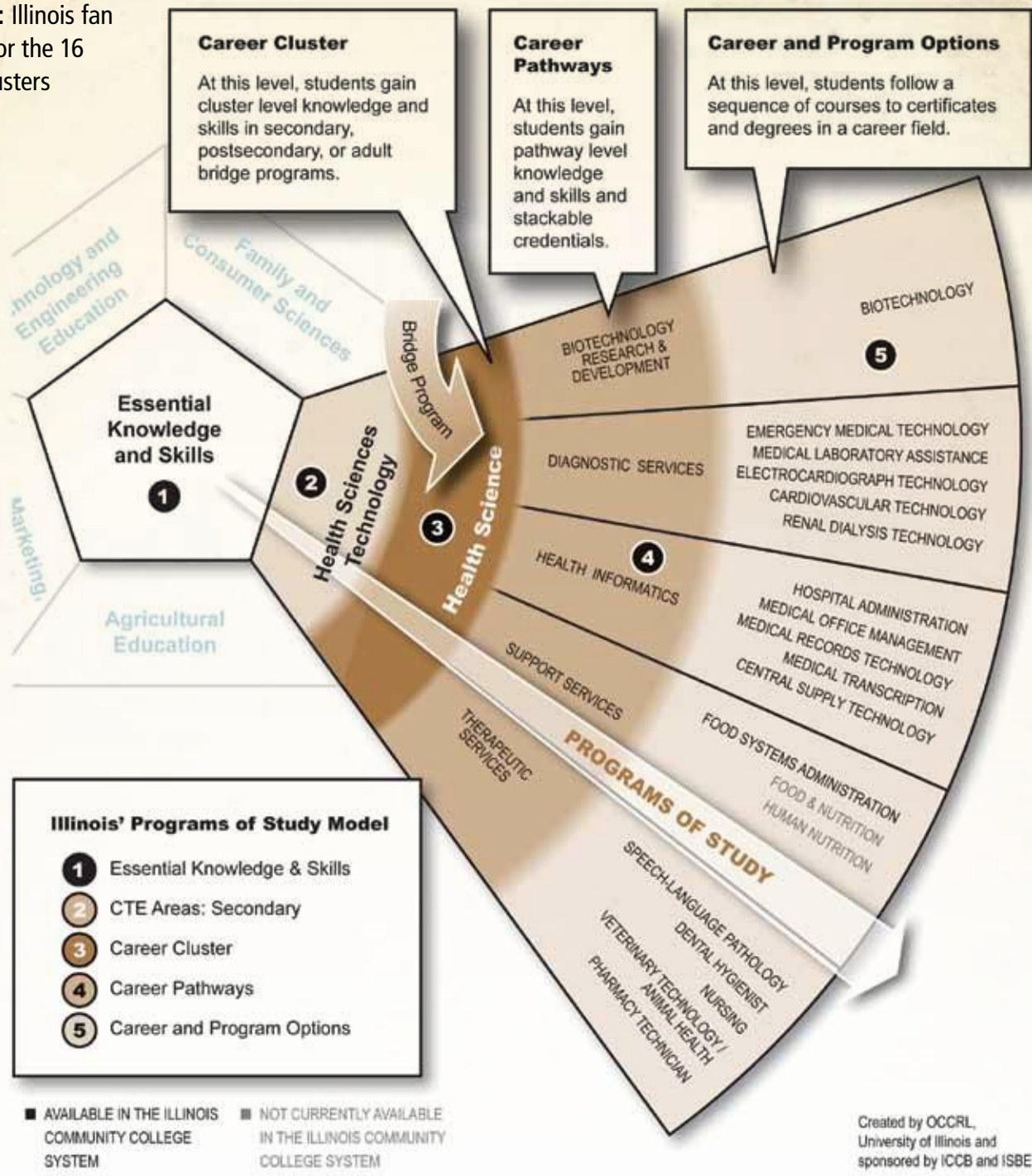
A key component of POS development and implementation within the state continues to center on the collaborations between secondary institutions, postsecondary institutions that award certificates and degrees, and business and industry representatives. Consistent with the

Perkins IV legislation, the Illinois POS initiative strives to “develop more fully the academic and career and technical skills of secondary education students and postsecondary education students...” (Perkins IV, Title I, Career and Technical Education Assistance to the States, Sec. 2., Purpose). In Illinois, POS reach far beyond the federal definition and aim to involve education on all levels, fully engaging partnerships and programs to maximize student outcomes at every level.

In partnership with the University of Illinois' Office of Community College Leadership (OCCRL), Illinois also developed a fan graphic for all 16 career clusters (see Figure 1 on page 45). This graphic provides a representation of the five CTE areas in secondary education, the 16 career clusters and the related POS in the Illinois system.

The fan also illustrates entry points for adults—including bridge programs that integrate occupational cluster knowledge and skills into adult education and developmental education course content. Bridge programs are designed to prepare students to transition to postsecondary

Figure 1: Illinois fan graphic for the 16 career clusters



credit instruction in a career pathway. The fan also provides an understanding of the transition process through which traditional students proceed through a sequence of courses—ones taken at multiple levels that lead to certificate and degree attainment and into employment.

Sections of the fan blur into one another to indicate the importance of student transition from the cluster to the pathway to the Program of Study. As noted on the graphic, secondary students can access postsecondary-level coursework through dual credit. Also worth mentioning is that

the arrow labeled “Programs of Study” extends beyond the boundaries of the fan, indicating that education and career development continue throughout a person’s lifespan. The POS arrow also denotes that individuals can earn education credentials beyond the traditional associate

and baccalaureate degree levels.

The fan itself has a direct link to the 48 community colleges within Illinois, and provides program-specific information on programs being offered within each cluster and pathway. Those programs

listed are just a mere snapshot of the array of programs within each cluster and pathway area. Note that the career pathways and career and program options shown in bold text are those that are currently available in the Illinois Community College System. Where a career and program option is missing, no program has been developed as of yet within the system.

designed as a process that capitalizes on local practitioners and partners to engage in a systematic problem-solving process, one that identifies sustainable solutions to improve student outcomes.

Through this process there are a number of objectives, including:

1. Integration of career cluster-based regional skill planning with the implementation of POS.
2. Development and implementation of a continuous improvement process that targets opportunities for program improvement and enhanced outcomes.
3. Improvement of key career pathway transition outcomes, including student transition outcomes.
4. Improvement of community colleges' access to data and tools to support continuous improvement.
5. Improvement of equity in access and results for students.

PTR consists of five distinct phases, represented in Figure 3. Two key features

Figure 2

ILLINOIS' PROGRAMS OF STUDY GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND DESIGN ELEMENTS

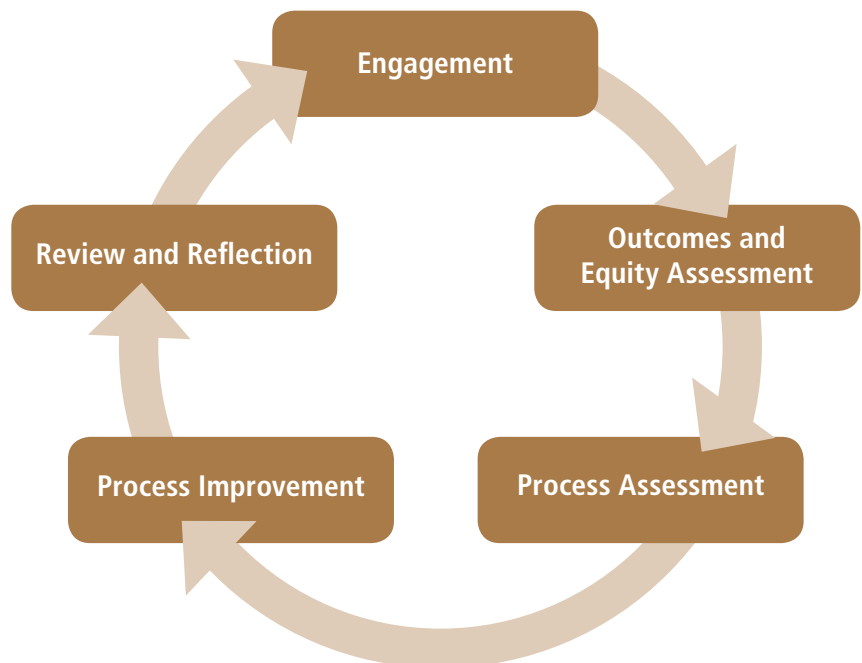
- 1. Leadership, organization and support**—Programs are developed and supported with input from collaborative partners.
- 2. Access and opportunity**—Each and every student has access to educational opportunities and services that enable their success.
- 3. Alignment and transition**—Education and training providers, with input from business and industry, enhance alignment that facilitates student transition through the educational pipeline.
- 4. Enhanced curriculum and instruction**—Curriculum and pedagogy involve rigorous and relevant instruction and career development that enhances learning and enables students to attain credentials.
- 5. Professional preparation and development**—Teacher preparation, recruitment and selection of qualified instructional staff, and the delivery of quality professional development.
- 6. Accountability and program improvement**—Data are collected and shared to demonstrate accountability, program improvement and student outcomes.

For a full description of Illinois' Framework for Programs of Study, including the six guiding principles and design elements, see <http://occril.illinois.edu/projects/pos/principles>.

Continuous Improvement and Pathways to Results

Illinois recognized that in order for Programs of Study to truly be viable for CTE reform, educational programs and services had to be developed and improved continuously. By adopting this premise, local area practitioners were given the opportunity to experiment when examining program-related problems to develop solutions. In order to fully understand true program improvement within POS, the use of measures that allowed for data-driven examination and change were employed through the Pathways to Results process (PTR)—developed in partnership with the OCCRL. PTR is

Figure 3: Pathways to Results consists of five phases:



of PTR include the focus on using an equity lens to examine problems at institutions, and the focus on explicit, formalized partnerships. The focus on equity is consistent with both the Perkins IV legislation and the larger community college mission. Also, PTR cannot work if partners are not committed to working through the entire process, engaging at each phase with materials and data to assist in furthering the work to solve the identified problem in a program area.

Since the fall of 2009, local area partnerships have been engaged in the PTR initiative through a Local Programs of Study Implementation Grant. A total of 18 sites have participated as part of this continuous improvement project thus far. Across all previous projects, high schools, colleges/universities and industry partners have been especially prevalent.

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, the Illinois Community College Board funded four demonstration sites that will continue to progress in the PTR process, as well as new sites that will engage in the PTR process for the first time—learning lessons from previously funded applicants. Additionally, PTR was part of the FY12 Postsecondary Perkins Grant applications, with community colleges being required to identify a problem in a program area that could potentially be a subject of a PTR project focus.

The next step for continued work in PTR would be a wider inclusion in Perkins IV implementation. PTR's focus on data-driven decision-making, partnerships and the equity component, provide an opportunity for demonstrating outcomes in POS. Its wider inclusion in Perkins IV in Illinois will ensure that CTE in Illinois will be able to illustrate results at many levels.

Looking Ahead

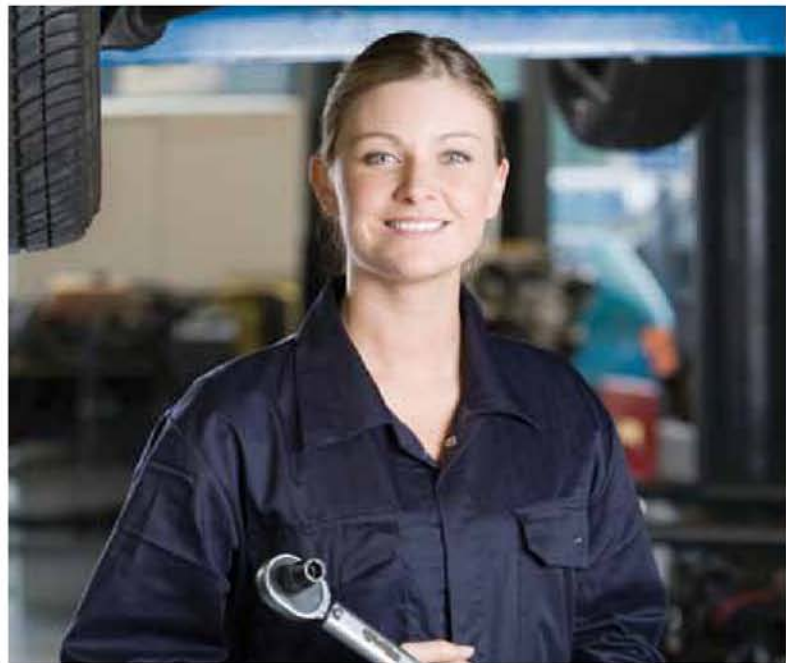
Illinois CTE educators are a diverse group of individuals across the system. By

engaging them directly in partnerships, keeping the focus on equity and outcomes, and by recognizing that POS development is a continuous process, the ICCB has thus far successfully been a change agent in the CTE system. This work simply would not be possible without the dedication of these diverse professionals throughout our great community college system. **I**

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