

IMPROVING THE COLLECTION OF PERKINS SECONDARY COMPLETION DATA IN ILLINOIS

Submitted by:

MPR Associates, Inc.
2150 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 800
Berkeley, California 94704

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Contact:
Steven Klein (sklein@mprinc.com)
503-675-6619

BACKGROUND

To support states in improving the quality of their Perkins accountability data, in September 2005 the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), US Department of Education, invited State Directors of Career-Technical Education to submit requests for individualized technical assistance. In response, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) submitted an application for support in improving the collection of its secondary Perkins data in several areas. Specific topics included:

- Measure 1S1: Academic Achievement—the state has created a developmental measure to assess secondary concentrator performance in reading and mathematics on the state's Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE). Preliminary analysis of performance data, using three distinct cohorts, appears to indicate that students concentrating in career technical education (CTE) perform at lower levels than those sampling from the CTE curriculum. An external review of scope, procedures, and results would assist in improvement planning.
- Measure 2S1 High School Completion—OVAE is currently working with states to revise the construction of the high school completion measure to more closely tie it to the federal *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) high school graduation rate. Since ISBE's current 2S1 indicator is not synchronized with the state's NCLB graduation rate, assistance is needed in developing collection procedures and training materials for use at the local level.
- Tech-Prep—Illinois data on student participation in Tech Prep programs does not capture information on all relevant students. Legal issues also restrict the ability of state administrators to conduct administrative record matches across secondary and postsecondary levels. An external look at these data and identifying best practices from other states may lead toward substantial improvements.

To support ISBE in improving state data collection capacity, in January 2006 Dr. Steven Klein of MPR Associates, Inc. visited Illinois to meet with ISBE administrators and review the status of the state's Perkins measures.

To assist the state in interpreting its PSAE data, MPR provided ISBE administrators with an analysis of state exam outcomes. A review indicates that, although testing results for concentrators differ from those of investors and explorers, variation is likely due to differences in the underlying population of students. In particular, CTE concentrators are more likely to have special population characteristics that might be expected to negatively affect their test scores.

Dr. Klein also consulted with ISBE administrators and Dr. Scott Parke at the Illinois Board of Regents to develop data collection strategies and examples of programming instructions that could be used to improve the identification of Tech Prep student. ISBE administrations are currently conducting a further review with both secondary and postsecondary entities on how to properly share Tech Prep data within FERPA interpretations

Delivery of a third product—this memo assessing the feasibility and necessity of aligning Perkins 2S1 reporting with the state's NCLB graduation measure—was delayed to permit researchers and ISBE team members to attend the June regional Data Quality Institutes (DQI) hosted by OVAE. During the regional meetings, states worked with OVAE to identify a consensus set of measures for Perkins, and in particular, to finalize the structure of the 2S1 measure. This memo, which builds off on meeting discussions, provides guidance to assist ISBE staff in tailoring their state's 2S1 measure to reflect the measurement approach gaining support at the regional meetings.

2S1—Secondary Completion

Illinois currently bases reporting on the number of CTE concentrators in a given graduation cohort who received a high school diploma in the graduation year, compared to all CTE concentrators in the graduation cohort. To qualify as a CTE concentrator, a secondary student must earn two Carnegie units of credit at the training level in a program area (typically grades 11 and 12).

Prior to the OVAE-sponsored regional conferences, ISBE administrators expressed concern that the state's 2S1 measure is not synchronized with the NCLB high school graduation rate. In particular, although the state requires local school districts to input data on student drop-out, transfer, late graduation, and expulsion, the state is unable to construct a comparable four-year graduation rate for CTE concentrators, in part because students do not achieve concentrator status until late in their high school program, and in part because local districts have difficulty tracking mobile students.

Regional Conference Meetings

The OVAE-sponsored regional conferences, held in Phoenix (June 14-16th) and Atlanta (June 21-23), offered states an opportunity to review draft measures developed at the February 2006 Data Quality Institute held in Washington D.C. During the June meetings, state administrators reviewed the proposed construction of the 2S1 measure and cast their final ballots for the design of the new measure.

At the time this memo was drafted, OVAE was continuing to synthesize state comments provided at the June regional meetings. State participants were, however, able to achieve consensus on a number of issues that have implications for measure drafting in Illinois. While it is possible that OVAE staff could overrule state consensus proposals, and will likely decide—in consultation with state directors—on issues for which consensus was not achieved, it is anticipated that OVAE will support options for which overwhelming state support has been achieved. Consequently, it is likely that ISBE administrators will be able to adapt recommendations contained in this report to draft their own state measures.

Issues under consideration at the OVAE conferences included:

1. Alignment of Secondary Completion Measure with NCLB Graduation Rate Measure

Prior to the February 2006 DQI, OVAE had recommended that states apply the same graduation rate calculation method for Perkins as that proposed by the National Governors' Association in their June 2005 report: *Graduation Counts: A Report of the NGA Task Force on State High School Graduation Data*. Under this approach, states would only count as successes those on-time CTE concentrators who received a regular high school diploma in the standard numbers of years stipulated in the NCLB measure (i.e., based on first-time entering ninth graders identified four years earlier).

This suggested approach initially concerned ISBE administrators, who reported that district administrators have difficulty tracking students who transfer across schools, a problem compounded for CTE students, many of whom do not attain concentrator status until their junior or senior years.

State balloting at the Washington DQI, revealed that a majority of states (42 states) preferred or could live with restricting reporting to high school seniors in a graduating cohort. A smaller number of states (22) reported that they would prefer or could live with using the NCLB approach for calculating graduation rates, provided that standard time began at the point when students first became concentrators. For example, a student who achieved CTE concentrator status in their junior year would be considered graduating in the standard number of years if he or she received their regular high school diploma in two years.

This latter proposal was similar to that offered by Dr. Steven Klein during his presentation at to ISBE administrators in February 2006. Specifically:

2-Year Perkins Graduation Rate Synchronized with NCLB

$$\text{Graduation Rate} = (A / (B - C + D)) * 100$$

A = On-time Graduates: Current school year

B = First-time entering juniors (Number of students entering grade 11, two years earlier)

C = Transferred out or deceased

D = Transferred in or early graduation

Exclude students in A, C, or D who drop out, are expelled, or lack credits to graduate

Although OVAE has yet to finalize guidance on aligning Perkins to NCLB, initial findings from the June regional conference meetings suggests that an overwhelming majority of states favor limiting Perkins 1S2 measurement to senior concentrators eligible for graduation in the reporting year. Should OVAE endorse this state consensus recommendation, then ISBE administrators will be able to focus reporting on senior concentrators regardless of whether they received their diploma in the standard number of years.

2. Measures of High School Completion

In an effort to standardize state reporting for NCLB, the National Governors Association task force made the following recommendation for identifying high school graduates:

Graduates are those earning high school diplomas. Students earning modified diplomas, such as a special education diploma, count as graduates if the modified diploma is the standard that the state and the school system set for the student in an individualized education plan, for example. Students earning high school credentials by passing General Educational Development (GED) tests are not considered graduates for the purpose of this definition. Students receiving a certificate of completion or other alternative to a diploma, including special education students who receive a non-diploma credential, also are not graduates for this purpose.

During the Washington DQI, a majority of states voted to restrict Perkins measures of completion to students receiving a regular high school diploma. During the subsequent June regional institutes, a majority of states favored including special education diplomas as a measure of high school completion, so long as the modified diploma reflects the state standard established for students with an individualized education plan.

Constructing a Perkins 2S1 Measure of Completion in Illinois

Preliminary feedback from the June DQI regional institutes suggests that ISBE administrators should encounter few new challenges in constructing their state measure of high school completion following Perkins reauthorization. Assuming OVAE endorses state proposed approaches, it is likely that state administrators will need to make only minor modifications to their existing Perkins measure.

Based on current information, MPR proposes that ISBE administrators consider the following measure construction:

Measure Construction: 2S1 Secondary Completion

Numerator:

Number of senior CTE concentrators who (1) receive a high school diploma, or who (2) receive a special education diploma and have left secondary education in the reporting year.

Denominator:

Number of senior CTE concentrators who have left secondary education in the reporting year.

Clarifications

Senior CTE concentrator—Include in the denominator all 12th grade students who have reached the state threshold for CTE concentration in the current reporting year, or who achieved concentrator status prior to the 12th grade. Exclude seniors who are ineligible to graduate in the reporting year, but who remain enrolled and juniors who graduate early.

Diploma—Include all students who earn a regular high school diploma or a special education diploma, if the modified diploma reflects the state standard and that of the school system, and is identified as the culminating diploma in the student's individualized education plan. Exclude General Educational Development (GED) certificates, certificates of completion, or other non-recognized alternative credentials or awards.

Notes:

It is anticipated that OVAE will issue guidance to assist states in designing their Perkins measures for reauthorization; consequently, MPR recommends that ISBE administrators consult OVAE guidelines once they are released to resolve any concerns with the current measure formulation or any other outstanding issues.

Technical Assistance to Local Providers

During consultations with MPR researchers, ISBE administrators raised concerns about data quality related to student mobility. Specifically, school district administrators often have difficulty differentiating students who transfer to another district from those who drop out prior to graduating.

Under the current measure construction, educators would restrict reporting to high school seniors who have achieved CTE concentrator status during or prior to the reporting year. This means that district staff would be required to have access to student transcript records for individuals who transfer into their school during or prior to the start of their senior year, but would not be obligated to track the number of years a student took to achieve senior status. Educators would also be required for differentiating between 12th grade CTE concentrators who drop out or transfer during their senior year, although it is unlikely that that a large number of students would be affected by this requirement.

ISBE administrators would have a number of options to address this latter circumstance. One first step would be for state administrators to conduct a study of dropout behaviors among 12th grade CTE concentrators, as well as district capacity to distinguish between transfers and dropouts. If it is determined that only a small number of concentrators dropout out during their senior year

and/or districts are able to distinguish transfers from dropouts among a high percentage of these students, state administrators could decide to ignore this effect, meaning that the state would not invest resources in providing technical assistance to local districts.

Alternatively, state administrators could work with local district staff to develop a strategy for tracking students who transfer during their senior year. For example, the state could request district staff to report identifying information on all 12th grade CTE concentrators who exited or entered high school at any point during their senior year. State data administrators could construct a statewide database containing this information, conduct state-level analyses to distinguish transfers from dropouts, and correct district completion rates based on available data.

Generally, ISBE administrators are hindered in their ability to conduct even simple analyses of student performance due to the lack of a statewide, longitudinal, student-level data system. For example, the state would be able to track student mobility across districts if the state were to assign a unique statewide student identifier to all students that would travel with students when they transfer among in-state public schools.

According to a 2005 nationwide survey of state data systems conducted by the National Center for Educational Accountability, Illinois is one of only three states (including Montana and New Jersey) that currently does not collect or maintain any of the 10 essential elements identified as critical to the operation of a longitudinal data system. These elements include:

1. A unique statewide student identifier
2. Student-level enrollment, demographic and program participation information
3. The ability to match individual students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth
4. Information on untested students
5. A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students
6. Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned
7. Student-level college readiness test scores
8. Student-level graduation and dropout data
9. The ability to match student records between the PreK–12 and higher education systems
10. A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity and reliability

While it is unlikely that federal Perkins accountability requirements will, by themselves, drive the state to adopt a standardized, longitudinal data system for K-12 education, the lack of consistent state data undermines the development of educational policy and program improvement efforts. Consequently, MPR recommends that ISBE administrators familiarize themselves with the issues underlying adoption of a statewide longitudinal data system for education. See <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/> for more information.