ADVANCING EQUITY IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS

By Dr. Chaddrick James-Gallaway,

Jason A. Keist, and Dr. Marci Rockey

With the implementation of the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) legislation, special populations were expanded and now include:

- Individuals with disabilities;
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including low-income youth and adults;
- Individuals preparing for nontraditional fields;
- Single parents, including single pregnant women;
- Out-of-workforce individuals;
- English learners;
- Homeless individuals;
- Youth who are in, or who have aged out of, the foster care system;
- And youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty (Advance CTE & Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018).

Perkins V also calls for the disaggregation of data at the state and local levels to identify equity gaps for populations that have been historically underserved by higher education and raises accountability for closing these gaps (National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, n.d.). The Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) has a longstanding relationship with the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) to develop tools and resources that support community college faculty and practitioners in conducting equity-centered evaluations of programs of study. This is especially relevant given the state's disinvestment in higher education that has put college further out of reach for Black students, Latinx students, and rural students across the state (Partnership for College Completion, 2020).

As gains for opportunities to secure good jobs without a baccalaureate degree in Illinois are growing in skilled services such as health and financial services, there have been decreases in the manufacturing sector, which has historically offered these opportunities

(Carnevale et al., 2017). Hence, community college CTE programs are critical to advancing equity and meeting workforce needs. As institutions are increasingly being asked to analyze disaggregated data, identify specific equity gaps, and implement and evaluate changes to redress these gaps, three OCCRL projects have been central to building capacity for equity-conscious evaluation of CTE programs of study.

Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA)

The comprehensive local-needs assessment (CLNA) required by Perkins V facilitates equity-minded analysis of CTE programs toward continuous improvement at the local level. The purpose of completing this process is to utilize the findings to prioritize action steps toward closing equity gaps in the Perkins V local funding application. Informed by the Association for Career and Technical Education (2019), OCCRL developed the CLNA template for Illinois community colleges to "facilitate a data-informed, continuous improvement process for community colleges to biannually assess the extent to which their career and technical education (CTE) programs and programs of study are aligned with local workforce and economic needs in six key areas: 1) student performance data; 2) size, scope, and quality as defined by the state plan; 3) labor market alignment; 4) progress toward implementing CTE programs of study; 5) recruitment, retention, and training of faculty and staff; and 6) progress toward improving access and equity (Welton et al., 2019, p. 1)."

The CLNA template and associated supports that are provided by OCCRL challenge practitioners to move beyond a compliance mindset that focuses on merely reporting data. Effectively communicating what the data means is critical to institutional improvement efforts (Jankowski and Cain, 2015). Students, regions, and institutions are not well served by simply copying and pasting data charts that do not contain the critical analysis necessary to inform change efforts that can disrupt inequitable systems and meet

COMMUNITY COLLEGE CTE PROGRAMS ARE CRITICAL TO ADVANCING EQUITY AND MEETING WORKFORCE NEEDS.

changing workforce needs. Hence, OCCRL has provided webinars, briefs, coaching, and professional development academies to engage stakeholders in meaningful data analysis, which can inform action steps and be utilized to garner support for CTE programs and students.

Pathways to Results (PTR)

The Pathways to Results (PTR) framework is utilized by practitioners to advance equitable student outcomes in programs of study at Illinois community colleges. The process includes engaging stakeholders, analyzing disaggregated data, assessing institutional processes and practices, implementing improvement and evaluation, and engaging in critical reflection. Within the context of CTE, this process assists practitioners in identifying equity gaps and working toward implementing, evaluating, and sustaining change to close these gaps for special populations and racially minoritized students. PTR projects at Illinois community colleges have focused on improving retention and completion of men of color (Graham, 2016b); advancing retention and completion for CTE students (Rockey, 2016); alleviating barriers associated with developmental education (Gallaway & Rockey, 2017; Rockey, 2017); addressing inequitable outcomes for racially minoritized students in health professions programs (Gallaway, 2018; Graham, 2016a; Rockey, 2019); and dismantling white supremacist capitalistic patriarchy to identify and close racial equity gaps for Students of Color (James-Gallaway, 2019). These projects have two concepts in common: first, all of them focused on identifying and alleviating burdens put in place by the institutions themselves; and second, data-informed improvement efforts were initiated by PTR team leaders expressly to rectify institutional inequities.

Program Review Illinois (PRI)

Program Review Illinois (PRI) is tasked with eliciting formative feedback from community college practitioners across diverse contexts pertaining to state level program review processes. According to the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB),

> The purpose of Statewide Program Review is to: 1) support strategic campus-level planning and decision-making related to instructional programming and academic support services; 2) support program improvement; and 3) support the delivery of locally responsive, cost-effective, high quality programs and services across Illinois' community college system (ICCB, p. 2).

With support from ICCB and partner colleges across Illinois, OCCRL conducted a participatory focus group study aimed at better understanding the substantive challenges that impact the design, implementation, and impact of the program review process for CTE programs at Illinois community colleges, and how these challenges might be remedied (Fox, Thrill, & Keist, 2008). Focus group participants from 49 community colleges provided invaluable expert feedback to assist stakeholders in fostering and promoting a culture of evidence, addressed challenges faced during program review, and evaluated factors specific to their institutional and local contexts.

Informed by data gathered from the aforementioned study, OCCRL led efforts to form the inaugural cohort of board members for the Illinois Community College Program Review Advisory Committee (PRAC). Board members represent community college professionals across the state of Illinois who are on the front lines of their institutions' program review process. Accordingly, the committee strives to identify and promote equitable and evidence-based program review practices and processes that promote rigorous and exceptional outcomes for students and institutions. The advisees also play an important role in assisting institutions with sharing experiences, resources, and feedback that is germane to program review.

Conclusion

Inherent in all three of these projects is an explicit focus on equity. Guided by this focus and informed by the PRAC, OCCRL planned two separate Equity Academies at the Illini Center (Chicago, Illinois) and Kaskaskia College (Centralia, Illinois). These academies sought to connect community college professionals to encourage knowledge-sharing practices. Additionally, both events engaged practitioners in discussions and activities aimed at centering racial equity within processes of continuous program improvement and campus-level decision-making to address equity gaps. Lastly, the academies hosted keynote speakers and held simultaneous breakout sessions, which were designed for the unique interests of attendees who wanted to apply evidence-based storytelling techniques to inform program-level reporting and planning efforts that contribute to completion of Program Review and the CLNA.

Moving beyond the special populations prescribed by Perkins V, OCCRL has specifically worked to advance race consciousness in CTE program evaluation., which pushes community college stakeholders to critically examine the influence of social identifiers (e.g., race, gender, age, veteran status) on student outcomes. While former PTR team leaders have success stories relative to increasing equity-guided practices within their CTE programs (Rockey & James-Gallaway, 2019), the combination of Perkins V and the PTR framework will further improve how community college practitioners continue to seek out and close equity gaps at their institutions.

PTR was specifically designed to support the CTE program review process in the state of Illinois and has informed institutional approaches to the five-year program review cycle (Bragg, 2017; Rockey, 2018). If PTR is the means by which program review is facilitated, the resulting analysis naturally flows into the CLNA process, which leads to an easier lift for community college stakeholders and more meaningful results.

In closing, as institutions are increasingly being held accountable for closing equity gaps in student outcomes for CTE programs of study, these projects and their associated tools can easily be incorporated into institutional improvement processes to ensure they are data-driven and equity-minded.

Dr. Chaddrick James-Gallaway can be reached at cdjgway@tamu.edu

Jason A. Keist can be reached at jkeist2@illinois.edu

Dr. Marci Rockey can be reached at rockey2@illinois.edu

References

Advance CTE & Association for Career and Technical Education (2018). *Legislative summary and analysis: Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V).*

Association for Career and Technical Education (2019). *Maximizing Perkins V's comprehensive local needs assessment and local application to drive CTE program quality and equity.*

Bragg, D. D. (2017). The case for evaluating student outcomes and equity gaps to improve pathways and programs of study. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 178*, 55-66.

Carnevale, A. P., Strohl, J., Cheah, B., & Ridley, N. (2017). *Good jobs that pay without a BA.* Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

Fox, H. L., Thrill, C. R., & Keist, J. (2018). *Advancing program review: Evaluating and envisioning the future of program review at Illinois community colleges.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Gallaway, C., & Rockey, M. (2017). *Engaging CTE and math faculty in curricular change at Black Hawk College and Kishwaukee College.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Gallaway, C. (2018). *Reaching for equity in dental assistance: Solving issues of access for in-district students at Prairie State College.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Graham, E, (2016a). *Employing content-based curricula in nursing at Illinois Central College to improve equity and outcomes for students.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Graham, E. (2016b). *Ready and interested: Harry S Truman College's multipronged approach to improving retention and completion among males of color.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Illinois Community College Board (n.d.). *Program Review Manual. Fiscal Year 2017-2021.*

James-Gallaway, C. (2019). *Dismantling white patriarchal hegemony through institutional professional development.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Jankowski, N. A. & Cain, T. R. (2015). From compliance reporting to effective communication: Assessment and transparency. In In G. D. Kuh et al. (Eds.), *Using evidence of student learning to improve higher education* (pp. 201-219). Jossey-Bass.

National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (n.d.). *Special populations in Perkins V.*

Partnership for College Completion (2020). *College affordability for students in Illinois.*

Rockey, M. (2019). *Advancing equitable access to select admissions health professions programs.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Rockey, M. (2017). *Accelerated pathways through developmental reading and writing at Lincoln Land Community College.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Rockey, M. (2018). *Institutionalizing pathways to results in career and technical education programs (CTE) at Illinois Eastern Community Colleges and Rock Valley College.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Rockey, M. (2016). *Improving CTE student retention and transfer at Rend Lake College with degree audit and reengagement strategies.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Rockey, M., & James-Gallaway, C. (2019). *Advancing practitioner understandings of equity in Illinois community colleges.* Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Welton, A. D., Rockey, M., & James-Gallaway, C. (2019). *An equity-centered, comprehensive local needs assessment.* Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.