

Quick Takes

from Early Pathways into the Education Profession: A Comprehensive Evaluation Framework



Like much of the nation, Illinois faces teacher shortages by geographic location, subject matter, grade level, and teacher demographics. There are a number of state agency, school district, and education sector-initiated programs aimed at alleviating the shortages and a concerted focus on increasing the supply of qualified individuals through strategic pathways—initiatives that build or support routes into the educator workforce. Within the construct of strategic pathways are early pathways, high school programs that expose students to the teaching profession through defined course sequences and experiential learning to promote college and career readiness. This study presents (1) an evaluation framework for early pathways, (2) an investigation into the feasibility of using the Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS) to analyze early pathways outcomes, and (3) an early pathways pilot study using 2022 Illinois Report Card data and interviews with high school and university administrators.

Evaluation Framework

A robust framework for evaluating early pathways is essential for analyzing, investing in, and enhancing Illinois' teacher workforce preparation so that all children attend schools that are not only fully staffed but also boast a diverse and skilled teaching team capable of delivering high-quality education to a wide range of learners. With multiple cohorts having completed early pathways programs there are enough participants to understand the initial impacts on the teaching pipeline. Understanding which programs are working, who they are working for, and what the opportunities for improvement are will help ensure early pathways work as intended.

The framework includes four areas to systematically understand early pathways programs in Illinois:

1. the **implementation** of early pathways programs,
2. **access** to early pathways programs,
3. **who completes** early pathways programs, and
4. the **impact** of early pathways participation and completion.



RESOURCE

Based on [a study](#) conducted by researchers from the College of Education at Northern Illinois University.



EVALUATION KEY TAKEAWAY

Illinois needs an evaluation of its investments in early pathways for educator preparation.

Feasibility of Using the ILDS

Understanding how early pathways programs impact teacher shortages necessitates having data that follows both participants and non-participants through the educational system and into the workforce. The ILDS represents a centralized system where data can be linked, and unit records can be tracked across agencies and time to answer early pathways outcomes questions, though supplemental data collection will be necessary to answer questions about implementation and participant experiences. As the ILDS currently exists, however, there are limitations that are hindering its use as the main source of administrative data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create resources for users to navigate the application process so evaluation can proceed efficiently.
2. Create curated codebooks and business rules for each standing dataset to facilitate application, data preparation, and analysis.
3. Publish guidance on the virtual environment, including available statistical software.

Early Pathways Pilot Study

- Larger buildings are more likely to offer CTE education pathways.
- Statewide, there is a slight overrepresentation of white students.
- Underrepresented student populations are less likely to move from CTE participation to concentration.
- Schools with greater proportions of white students were less likely to have received grants from the [Illinois State Board of Education](#) (ISBE) and/or EdSystems' [Scaling Education Pathways in Illinois](#) (SEPI) initiative to fund CTE education pathways.
- Schools that received grants were more likely to have Hispanic/Latinx participants than schools that did not receive grants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider targeted support for early pathways in smaller schools.
2. Ensure students have opportunities for clinical experiences in secondary environments and can access advanced coursework while participating in a pathway.
3. Provide guidance for schools to offer certifications in addition to the CCPE for students who complete an early education pathway.



ILDS KEY TAKEAWAY

The ILDS has the potential to facilitate data analyses to answer some of the early pathway evaluation questions, though there are current limitations.



EARLY PATHWAYS KEY TAKEAWAYS

African American, multiracial, and low-income students are more likely to participate in a school's CTE education pathway.

Evidence suggests ISBE and SEPI grants are increasing the diversity of students engaged in early education pathways.