

Scaling Education Pathways in Illinois (SEPI) Analysis

Promising Practices for Intermediary Organizations | August 2021

Education Systems Center, as an intermediary organization, has played a crucial role in supporting the expansion of education pathways in Illinois high schools. Working with its initial nine collaboratives, it helped to pave the way for implementation of the College and Career Pathway Endorsement (CCPE) requirements through providing access to best practices, convening communities of practice, and guiding participants through the endorsement process. EdSystems also collaborated with other state agencies to develop several online resources. Through this initial work collaboratives were able to launch education pathways, and as a result of their success many secured significant additional Career and Technical Education funding from the Illinois State Board of Education for expansion and sustainability. Most recently, EdSystems is working with organizations and institutions around the state to encourage attaching currency to the CCPE in Education so students who demonstrate capacity and commitment to a career are recognized.

Focus group participants and interviewees were asked about EdSystems contributions. Several promising practices and lessons learned emerged which may be helpful for other intermediary organizations embarking on similar work.

- **Endorsement Currency:** The most widely appreciated assistance is the growing list of organizations attaching currency to the endorsement, particularly Golden Apple Scholars advancing students with endorsements to the final stage of its selection process.
- **Collaboration Opportunities:** Focus group participants noted that it has been valuable to have EdSystems convene districts to share their pathways work. “We need a backbone organization, somebody to help us share and carry out the work. Otherwise, it falls to the free time that we have. We make time to share out, but that’s not a scalable, sustainable way.” Also, it is helpful to learn about “who is making what work” and “having the ability to meet and talk with other schools and share best practices and challenges.”
- **Thought Partner:** Participants said that EdSystems is a “great thought partner” and has “helped us find resources and research for problems we are trying to solve.”

- **Funding:** Intermediaries can help collaboratives build the structure and dynamics to leverage more and larger funding streams. One collaborative said the “pilot project funding has also been critical to developing our different pathways programs.”
- **Additional Assistance:** Some participants mentioned that they could use additional assistance fulfilling the endorsement requirements and the mechanics of securing the endorsement. To a question about how EdSystems could be more useful, one participant wrote, “Provide more structure and guidance on development.”
- **Pathway Mechanics:** A few participants expressed frustration about dual credit. They are looking for someone to “work to facilitate standards for all higher learning institutions to accept dual credit courses or these pathways for college credit if possible; more like AP perhaps.”
- **Data Systems and Coordination:** One collaborative mentioned that there is a “need to get the data systems talking to each other and all the education pathway initiatives working together.” This has implications for continued state-level work to connect K-12 and postsecondary data systems to evaluate pathway progressions and outcomes.

