



## Comments on Draft 2 of the Perkins V Transition Plan

Submitted by Susan Stanton on behalf of the ACT Now Coalition, January 30, 2020

### A. Our Organization

The Afterschool for Children and Teens Now Coalition (ACT Now) is a statewide organization that works to ensure that young people in Illinois have access to quality and affordable afterschool and youth development programs. We believe that an increased commitment to young people beyond the traditional school day is a crucial part of their growth into healthy and productive individuals. ACT Now is a diverse coalition supported by Illinois families, educators, business leaders, community advocates, youth organizations, and policymakers from across the state. Afterschool is a critical partner for workforce development. On behalf of our 1,600 members statewide, we ask for the greater inclusion of afterschool programs in ISBE and ICCB's Perkins V Transition Plan.

### B. Background on Afterschool Programs in Illinois and Preparing Youth for the Workforce

In Illinois, we have successful afterschool programs in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> Century), administered by ISBE, and the Teen REACH program, administered by the Department of Human Services. Afterschool programs and out-of-school supports, like 21<sup>st</sup> Century and Teen REACH, are critical for the success of children, families, and communities all across Illinois. Afterschool programs make learning fun, provide a safe and welcoming environment for youth, and support the workforce of today and tomorrow.

Afterschool programs promote academic success and career-connected learning. Studies show that afterschool programs are sparking students' interest in school leading to better school attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and behavior.<sup>1</sup> Data collected by ISBE shows that 21<sup>st</sup> Century programs improve academic outcomes for students. In the 2017 to 2018 school year, over 70 percent of 21<sup>st</sup> Century participants improved their academic performance.<sup>2</sup> Surveys of 21<sup>st</sup> Century participants' teachers indicated that 53 percent of elementary students and 56 percent of middle/high school students improved class attendance.<sup>3</sup> 99.3 percent of Teen REACH high school seniors graduate, as opposed to the statewide average of only 86 percent graduation within seven years.<sup>4</sup> Further, data collected from Teen REACH sites shows that 73 percent of Teen REACH youth improved school attendance, and 93 percent of Teen REACH students improved their grades within a year.<sup>5</sup>

Afterschool programs can also help prepare the future workforce of Illinois by teaching career skills, exposing youth to new careers, and inspiring youth to reach their full potential. Afterschool and summer learning programs teach leadership, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, responsibility, and time

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<sup>1</sup> Durlak, J.A. & Weissberg R.P. (2010). *Afterschool programs that follow evidence-based practices to promote social and emotional development are effective*. Retrieved from

[http://www.expandinglearning.org/docs/Durlak&Weissberg\\_Final.pdf](http://www.expandinglearning.org/docs/Durlak&Weissberg_Final.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Goodyear, L., Mansori, S., Cox, J., & Rodriguez S. (2019). *Illinois state board of education 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program: State level program evaluation year 2017-2018*. Retrieved from

<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/21-CCLC-FY18-Evaluation-Report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Illinois Department of Human Services. (n.d.). *Teen responsibility, education, achievement, caring, and hope (Teen REACH)*. Retrieved from <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30777>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

management, which youth need to be successful in the workforce. Studies show that cognitive skills such as these are significantly more important in determining economic outcomes than school attainment.<sup>6</sup> The afterschool hours offer time for apprenticeships, guest speakers, and project-based activities that build workforce skills and promote career exploration.<sup>7</sup> These activities, which many schools do not have the time and resources to provide, are key to helping students become college and career ready and make a successful transition after high school.<sup>8</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> Century grantees report that 52 percent of elementary programs, 71 percent of middle school programs, and 91 percent of high school programs offer opportunities for career exploration.<sup>9</sup> In ACT Now's Afterschool Map and Database, 47 percent of programs statewide report offering career and college preparation in their programs.<sup>10</sup>

**C. Opportunities to Partner with Out-of-School Time Programs in the Draft Perkins V Transition Plan**

In the reauthorization of the Perkins CTE law, there is a lot of language that fosters connections between CTE and out-of-school time learning to provide greater support for career-connected learning. ISBE and ICCB missed many of these opportunities in its plan drafts. We hope that the final version of the plan will better take into consideration equity and inclusiveness by incorporating afterschool programs, explicitly sharing how districts can work with community-based organizations as a strategic partner, and better promote career exploration. The following are areas that we hope ISBE and ICCB pay particular attention to in drafting its final version of the plan:

- **Adult Education**: We commend ISBE and ICCB for including community-based organizations (CBOs) as a partner in adult education and literacy (page 17). We suggest adding language about districts collaborating with or using the community schools model in this work. Community schools offer adult education classes in K-12 buildings, which often provide more comfort to adult learners and are conveniently located in their communities. Using these partnerships could help close the gap for adult learners.
- **Outlining How Community-Based Organizations Can Assist in Closing Equity Gaps**: Multiple times throughout the plan, ISBE and ICCB mention how CBOs can help address inequities (for example page 25). We appreciate this language as these organizations are often best positioned to meet these needs. However, we fear that simply mentioning CBOs without further instruction will mean districts and community colleges will not take advantage of these partnerships or will not do so meaningfully. There needs to be additional information in these sections. We also suggest ISBE add collaboration with CBOs and how to do so to its Special Populations Recruitment and Support Strategies Briefs (page 42).
- **State Leadership Activities and Career Exploration**: We propose that ISBE fund afterschool programs that promote CTE exploration as a state leadership activity. Perkins V expands eligible uses of funds to allow for career exploration in grades five and up. We do not feel that the current

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<sup>6</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2009). *Afterschool: Opening doors to work and careers*. Retrieved from <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/Workforce%20Brief%2036%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2011). *Afterschool: Supporting career and college pathways for middle school age youth*. Retrieved from [http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/issue\\_briefs/issue\\_collegeCareer\\_46.pdf](http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/issue_briefs/issue_collegeCareer_46.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Goodyear, Mansori, Cox, & Rodriguez, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Stanton, S. (2018). *The state of afterschool in Illinois*. Retrieved from [http://www.actnowillinois.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/10.23-ACT-Now\\_pages.pdf](http://www.actnowillinois.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/10.23-ACT-Now_pages.pdf).

state plan takes a strong enough advantage of this asset. Partnering with afterschool programs in the middle grades will help expose youth to careers earlier and inspire them to choose CTE pathways in high school. It is much easier to peak youth's interest if this work starts younger. Many afterschool programs have already proven incredibly effective in career exploration. These programs have the flexibility and high interest programming to execute this work well. Further, these programs often serve the target populations that ISBE and ICCB seek to serve. By interesting youth in target populations in CTE at a younger age, these youth will be more likely to stay on track and choose CTE pathways.

- **Communication Strategies:** Perkins V has an emphasis on reaching special populations, including individuals from economically disadvantaged families, English learners, and homeless youth. We do not feel that the Illinois plan goes far enough to reach these populations (page 38). The methods of communication outlined will not effectively reach these groups. Many parents and youth do not read the Superintendent's Newsletter, are not looped in with CTE structures, and may not yet be working with School Counselors. Further, these groups need knowledge of their options before the high school years, in order to ensure they take advantage of them. We suggest disseminating this information through afterschool programs and community-based organizations because they are trusted sources that are much more connected to community needs. Afterschool programs in Illinois are already serving a high percentage of low-income and at-risk youth. These programs have close relationships with families and community members, often employing people from the community that may speak the same language and have similar personal backgrounds. We request that ISBE specifically suggest that school districts partner with afterschool programs in order to ensure they reach special populations.
- **Incorporating Afterschool and Career Exploration into RFPs and Competitive Grants:** Given afterschool programs as a proven effective partner in career exploration and employability skill development, we suggest that ISBE incorporate partnerships with afterschool programs and career exploration into its RFPs, in order to make sure CTE grantees are implementing programming in an effective and inclusive way. Additionally, we suggest career exploration and working with afterschool programs to be an allowable use of funds for the competitive grant with the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.
- **Eligible Uses of Local Funds:** Perkins V for the first time explicitly lists partnerships with community-based and youth-serving organizations as eligible uses of local funds. Using this funding to allow partnerships with afterschool programs can help to start youth thinking about their careers younger. We request that ISBE and ICCB specifically call this out in its draft plan (page 59).
- **Employability Skills:** Perkins V mentions the importance of employability skills in career development. Afterschool programs are well-positioned to help teach these skills at a young age. The activities and lessons conducted in afterschool programs teach skills like leadership, critical thinking, working in teams and much more. Afterschool programs have the flexibility not provided in the school day to specifically address this need. We suggest adding language about the value of exploring employability skills before the high school years and forming partnerships with afterschool programs and community-based organizations to execute this work.

*Please feel free to reach out to ACT Now Network Lead, Susan Stanton, with any questions related to these comments: [stantons@actnowillinois.org](mailto:stantons@actnowillinois.org) or 312-877-0725.*