

**Wisconsin Special Education
State Improvement Grant**

**Evaluation Report
Stage II**

Executive Overview

Vital Sign Questionnaire Results

**Prepared by
James R. Frasier, Ph.D.
Center on Education and Work
University of Wisconsin-Madison**

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Overview

The Wisconsin Special Education State Improvement Grant (SIG) is a five-year \$6.5 million award from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The Wisconsin SIG provides the Department of Public Instruction with funding to reform and to improve systems that provide professional development, technical assistance, and dissemination of knowledge for children and youth with disabilities.

Wisconsin's SIG is a collaborative effort of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), parents, schools and community members, as well as institutes of higher education, CESA's and other agencies to improve the outcomes and opportunities for birth to 21 children with disabilities. Specific SIG projects are targeted to improve results for children with disabilities in three areas: Early Childhood (Birth to 5), Early On-Going Collaboration and Assistance (K-12), and Effective Transition Activities to Post Secondary Education and Employment (ages 14-21). Of particular note, parents are a valued partner within and across all three areas of Wisconsin's SIG projects.

The SIG has three goals. These goals are congruent with and supportive of the Wisconsin State Improvement Plan for Special Education.

Goal I. Conduct professional development and technical assistance for all stakeholders to increase and enhance inclusive early learning environments, improve student outcomes, and enable successful transitions of students with disabilities from school to post-school life.

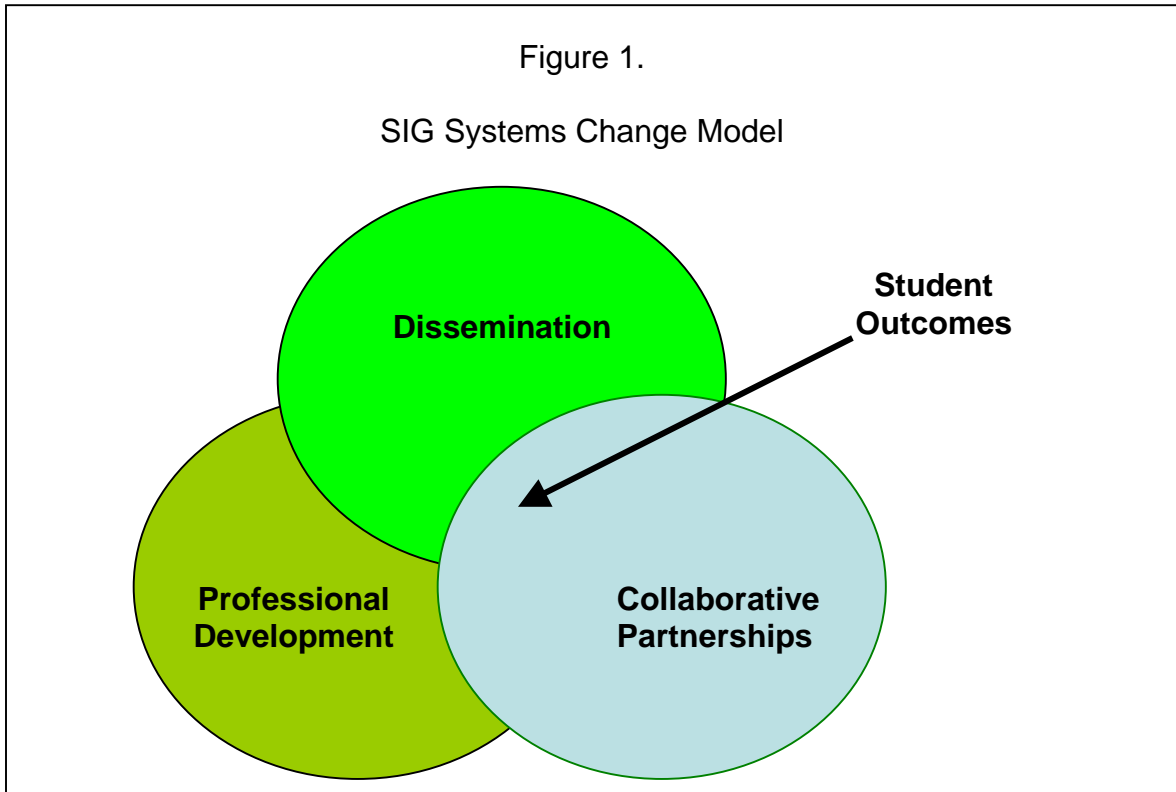
Goal II. Develop a statewide interagency service system that supports children with disabilities, birth-to-21, by forming critical collaborative partnerships.

Goal III. Implement a coordinated state dissemination system that provides educators, parents, collaborative partners, and other stakeholders with timely information and training on best practices and research-based strategies to improve teaching, learning, and results for children and youth with disabilities.

Among the US Office of Special Education Program's specifications for awarding SIGs is the "call for collaboration of multiple individuals, agencies, and institutions with a shared commitment to systemic reform. According to the 1997 Amendments to IDEA, certain contractual partnerships are required – specifically, those with LEAs and with state agencies other than the SEA".¹ In order to reform and improve its systems for providing educational, early intervention, and transitional services, the Wisconsin DPI is using a *systems change model* (shown in Figure 1 on the next page) to influence how its partners (i.e., contractors) work together throughout the 5 years of SIG funding. First, the Wisconsin SIG proposes to deliver research-based reform activities through uniquely designed professional development, collaborative partnerships that build seamless coordination of birth to 21 services and dissemination systems that ensure the products and research-based practices continue to be

¹ Evaluation of State Program Improvement Grant (SIG) Program: Year 3. Prince, M., Tanner, A., Bryant, K., and Fiore, T. August 2003. Report prepared by WESTAT under Grant #H329A000003 from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education.

promoted and used beyond the grant period. Second, the Wisconsin System Change Model acknowledges that “technical assistance” and “dissemination” projects are integral components of work. The third component of the systems change model seeks to improve how SIG technical assistance and dissemination projects are conducted by requiring SIG partners to “collaborate” with other SIG partners. This emphasis on collaboration is a dramatic change from how work has been performed by Wisconsin’s DPI consultants, as well as the individuals who are responsible for SIG related work contacts. That is, the emphasis is on changing how work has traditionally been performed using *individual* project work groups *to* work being performed using *collaborative* project work groups.



During the first two years, 23 SIG projects were contracted with selected individuals, organizations, and institutions of higher education throughout Wisconsin. Responsibility for managing each cluster of projects is the responsibility of three Special Education Consultants who form the Wisconsin SIG management Team: 1) the DPI Special Education Early Childhood (Birth to 5) Consultant, 2) Early On-Going Collaboration and Assistance (EOCA) Consultant, and 3) the Effective Transition Activities to Post Secondary Education and Employment Consultant.

Evaluation

Purpose

The Center on Education and Work (CEW) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has been contracted to provide a 5-year evaluation of Wisconsin’s SIG. The evaluation has two purposes:

- To provide the Wisconsin State Director of Special Education and the SIG Management Team Leader with information that will inform their decisions regarding on-going implementation of the SIG over five years.
- To provide Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction information to determine the efficacy of Wisconsin's SIG Systems Change Model.

The primary audience is the Director of Special Education and the SIG Team Leader. The secondary audience is the three SIG special education consultants and the DPI Special Education Consultant for Parental Involvement.

Evaluation Design

The major challenge in evaluating Wisconsin's SIG is to determine across all SIG projects whether what was *intended* to be accomplished was *actually* accomplished. To capture the intensity and complexity of SIG project-related activity, the Wisconsin SIG Evaluation's Design is guided by two conceptual frameworks: a generic project life cycle model and an adaptation of Stufflebeam's CIPP Evaluation Model (1971). When viewed as a whole, the life cycle of Wisconsin's SIG project can be graphically represented in three stages as shown in Figure 2 on the next page.

Stage I is the "start up" period. During the first-to-second years, the focus is on negotiating work, refining project activities, negotiating unexpected changes in personnel, and recruiting and hiring appropriate personnel. The efforts are directed to getting things settled and started so the work can begin. In this stage the first efforts to validate the quality and appropriateness of SIG products are initiated, pilots of products are conducted in real field settings, and the first product releases begin to appear within 18-24 months of the SIG launch.

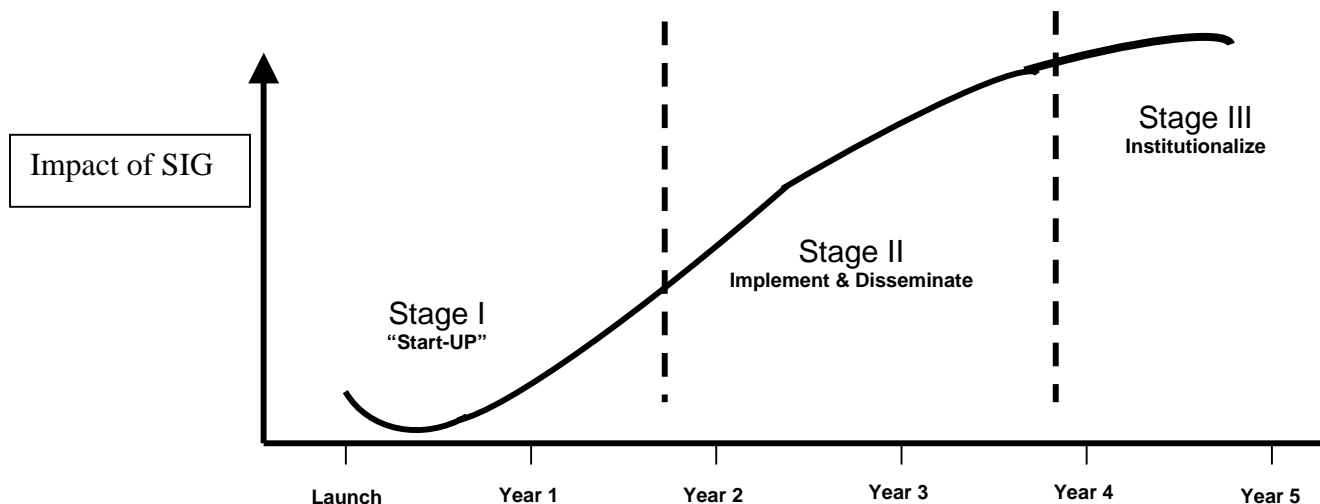
Stage II is the "ramp up" of product implementation and dissemination activities throughout Wisconsin. Management efforts are devoted to facilitating quality of work related to dissemination, maintaining high quality of delivery, responsiveness to consumer feedback and satisfaction ratings, and refinement of products. This stage seeks to make as much of the target audience as possible informed and/or engaged in activities that have been designed especially to support project goals and measurable outcomes.

Stage III focuses on institutionalization of project activities and products. The concern at this stage is on collecting data to support acceptance and integration of the SIG professional development activities and dissemination of products into the work life of those exposed to the SIG initiatives. The emphasis is to determine whether the value of the effort is so intense that the momentum of SIG will be continued without funding from federal or state sources.

An adaptation of the CIPP Evaluation Model provides a conceptual framework for structuring the focus of data collection throughout the five-year SIG life cycle. Each component of the CIPP Evaluation Model is congruent with each stage of the Wisconsin's SIG life cycle. The four components of evaluation activity are: *Context* (C), *Input* (I), *Process* (P), and *Product* (P). With the addition of "*Impact*" (I), the CIPP Evaluation Model is expanded to five components as is graphically shown in Figure 3 on page 5.

Figure 2.

Three Stages of SIG Evaluation

**Vital Signs**

The concept of vital signs is taken from the generic medical model that has 7 vital signs for assessing the immediate health of an individual (such as heart rate, vision, hearing, reflexes, blood pressure, etc.) to determine whether there is a discrepancy between what is normal and the person's current physical condition. The Discrepancy Evaluation Model (Provus, 1971) provides a framework for constructing individual "vital signs" to secure information about individual SIG-funded projects:

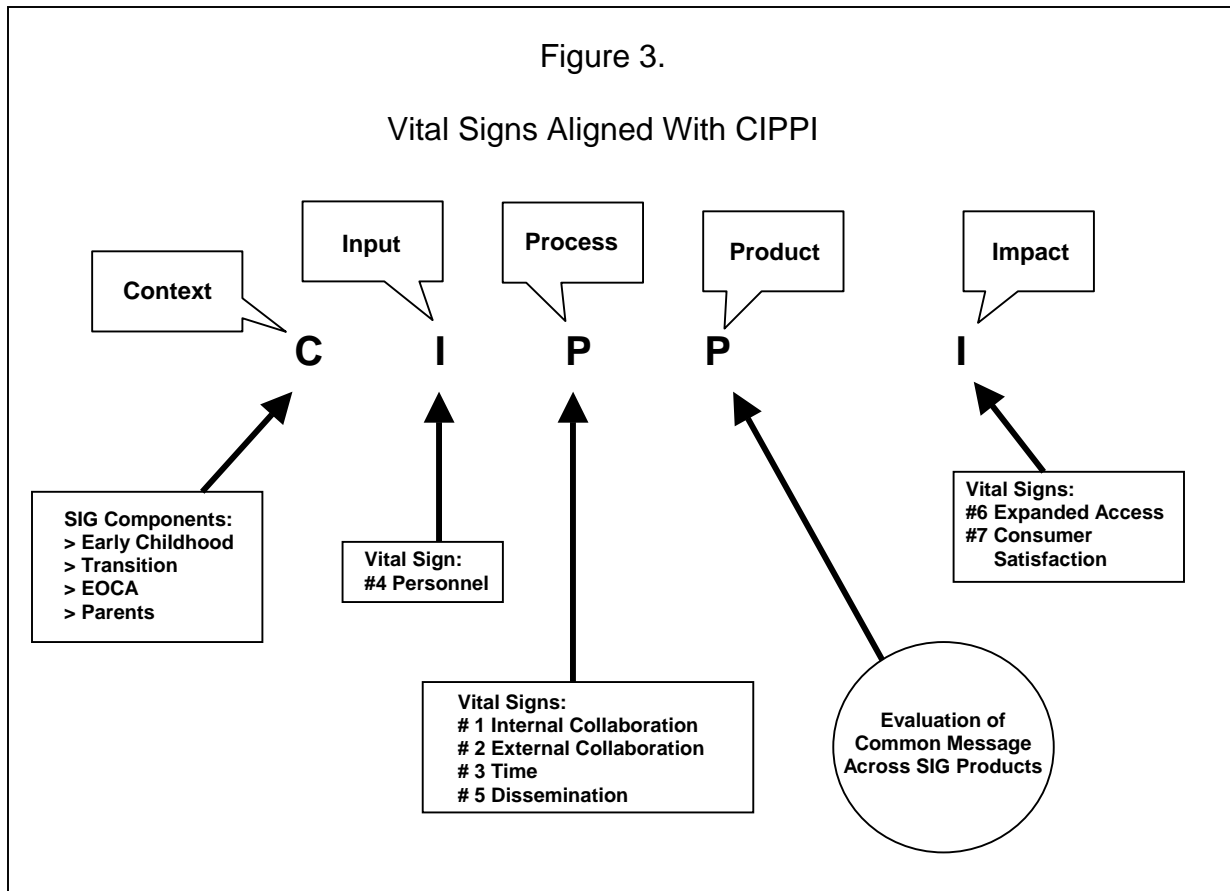
1. Discrepancies between program implementation plans and actual program operations.
2. Discrepancies between anticipated and actual program outcomes.
3. Discrepancies between and/or among individual groups at all levels of authority.

To secure information about the quality and intensity of SIG work related activities during each of the three SIG life cycle stages, "Vital Signs" focus data collection activities relevant to each of the 23 project's inputs (I), work processes (P), and impact (I). The collection of data for informing each vital sign, especially identified and unique to each stage of the SIG life cycle, provides on-going information to:

- Determine the extent to which what was *intended* to be accomplished was *actually* accomplished, and
- Determine the efficacy of the SIG Systems Change Model.

The SIG Management Team identified seven vital signs related to minimizing discrepancies between *what was intended to be accomplished and what was actually accomplished*. These 7 vital signs are aligned with three components of the CIPPI evaluation model and find expression of importance within each of the three stages of the SIG's life cycle. The seven vital signs (graphically shown in alignment with their respective components of the CIPPI

evaluation model on page 7) are: Input (I) --- Project Personnel; Process (P) --- Internal Collaboration, External Collaboration, Time, and Dissemination; Impact (I) --- Expanded Access, and Consumer Satisfaction.



Vital Signs 1- 5

Results of Vital Sign Questionnaire

The SIG Vital Sign Questionnaire has been administered on three separate occasions to all contractors who were directly responsible for one of the SIG projects; during the 4th quarter of SIG Project Year 1 and the 3rd quarter of Project Year 2; and during the 3rd quarter of Project Year 3. Results presented in Table 1 on the next page are aggregate data from the each administration of the Questionnaire.

Vital Sign #1: Internal Collaboration

Calculation of collaboration ratings. The following procedures were followed to calculate Average Ratings for Project Leader and Peer Project Leader Quality of effort to collaborate.

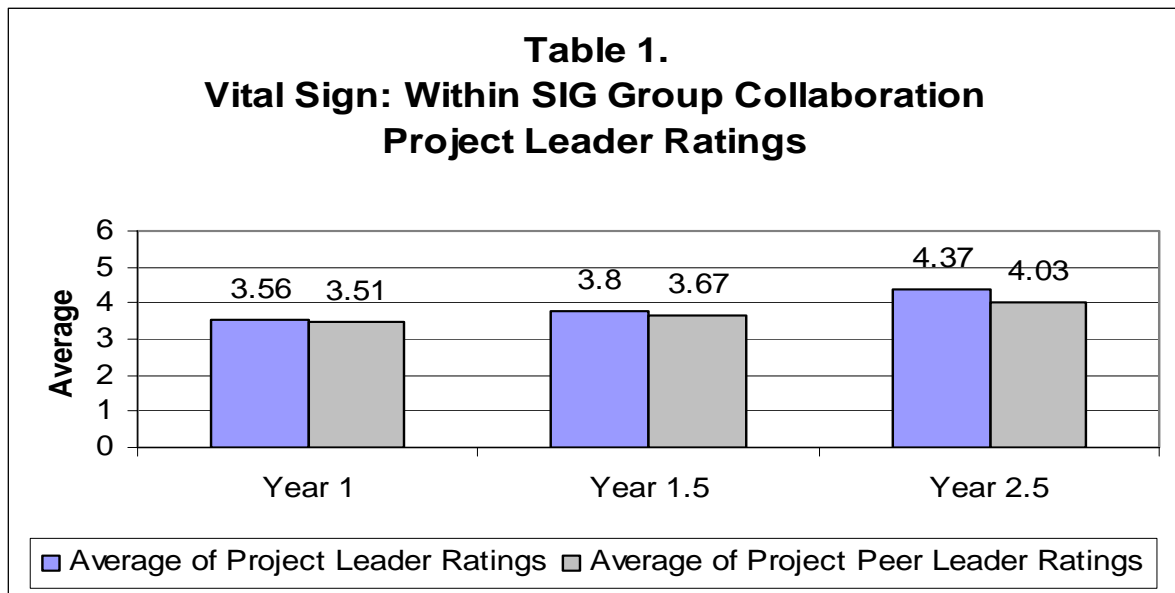
1. The qualitative response to each question for Vital Signs 1 – 5 (the respondent circled one of six answers) was converted into a numeric value using the following scale:

- 1 = No collaboration
- 2 = Not sufficient collaboration to rate the quality of effort to collaborate
- 3 = Poor Quality
- 4 = Good Quality
- 5 = Very Good Quality
- 6 = Excellent Quality

2. Calculation of Project Leader average ratings for all SIG projects involved three steps: 1) adding the converted numeric values for every individual identified as a person with whom the Project Leader was expected to collaborate with; 2) dividing the total by the number of individuals providing the rating; and 3) recording the resultant number as being the overall average for the SIG Project Leaders' Quality of Effort to collaborate with other Project Leaders about their SIG project related work.

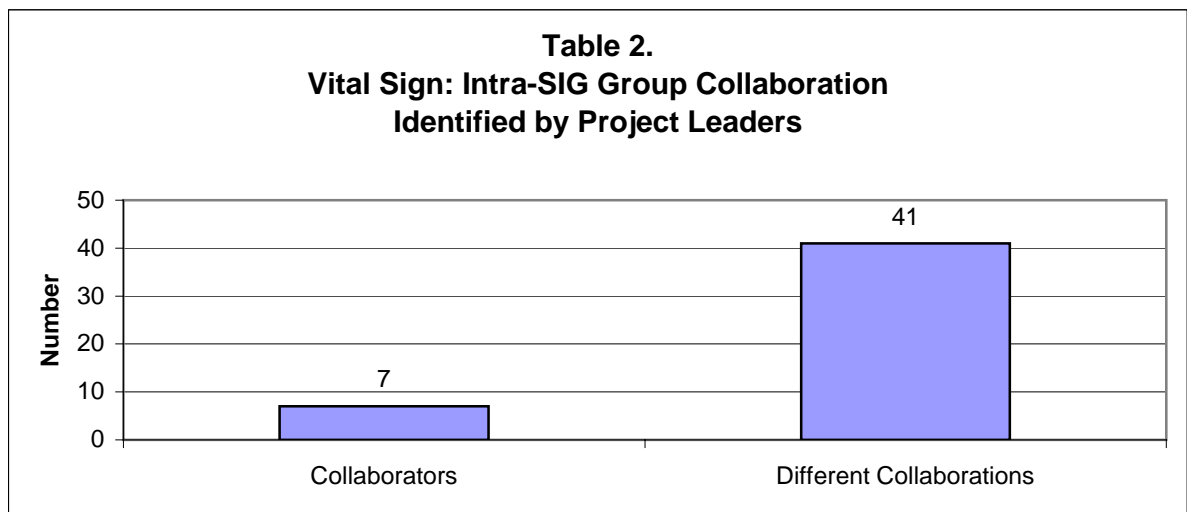
3. Calculation of Project Leaders' Quality of Effort to Collaborate as experienced by other Project Leaders (i.e., Peer Project Leaders) involved three steps: 1) adding the converted numeric values of Peer Project Leader ratings of Project Leaders who were expected to collaborate with them about their projects; 2) dividing the total by the number of individuals providing the rating; and 3) recording the resultant number as being the overall average for the SIG Project Peer Leaders' rating of other Project Leaders' Quality of Effort to collaborate with them about their projects.

Vital Sign #1: Results The gain in collaboration within all 3 SIG Work Group continues to be incrementally positive and has reached a level of “Good” Internal Collaboration.

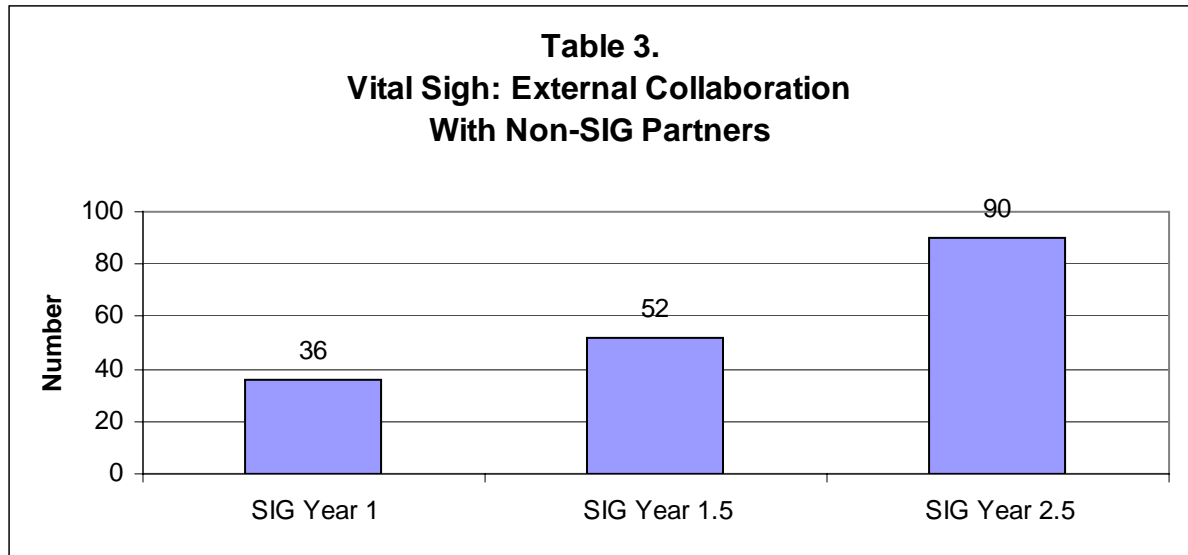


Vital Sign #2: Intra-Group Collaboration The 3rd administration of the Vital Sign Questionnaire asked Project leaders to identify by name the Project Leaders “outside” of their work group with whom they had collaborated about their respective project.--- that is, Project Leaders in the other two SIG Work Groups.

As shown in Table 2, seven of eleven 23 Project Leaders (unduplicated count) at mid-point in the 5-Year SIG identified 41 (duplicated count because some individuals were collaborated with more than once and by more than one project leader) with Project Leaders outside of their immediate work group.

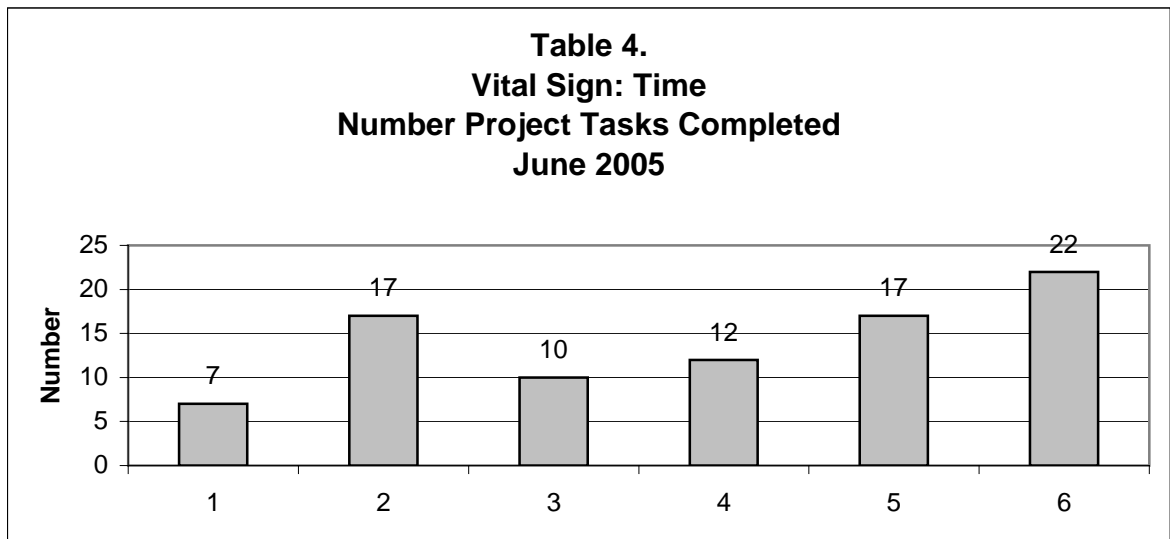


Vital Sign #2: Additional External Collaborations SIG Project Leaders continued to report an expansion of their efforts to extend collaborative efforts to others outside of the immediate SIG work groups for the purpose of strengthening the quality of their SIG-related work. At mid-point in the 5-Year implementation of SIG, Project Leaders named 90 different external collaborations with individuals (unduplicated count) between SIG Years 1.5 and Year 2.5.



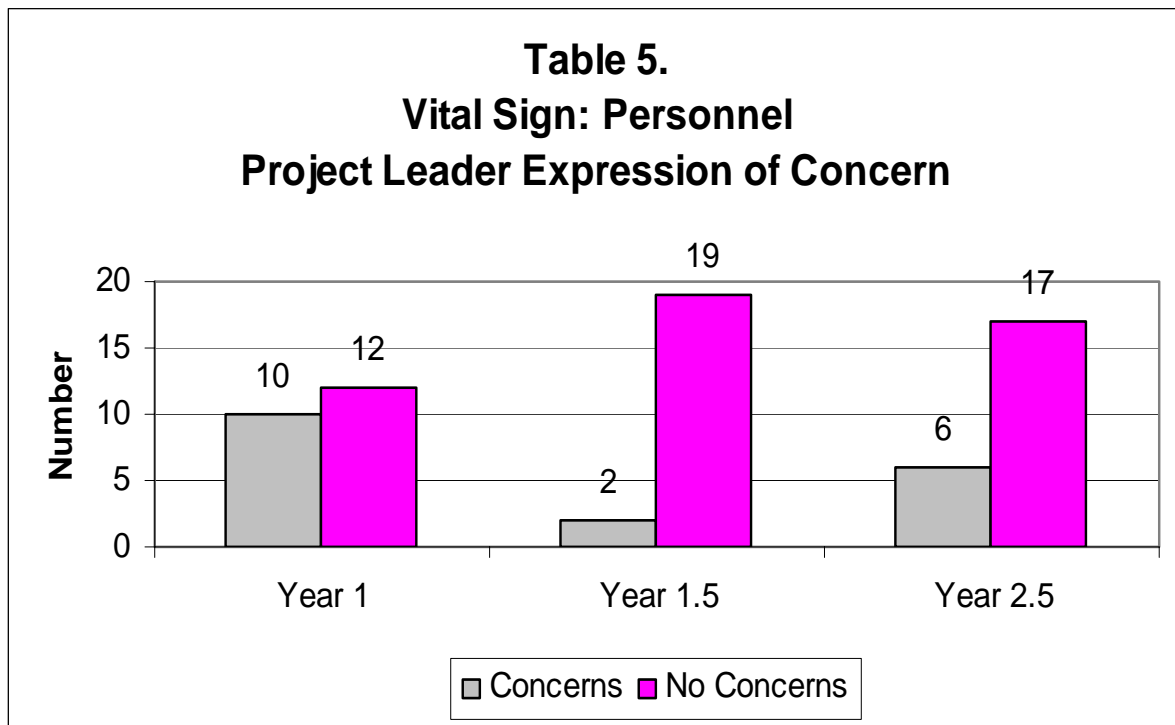
Vital Sign #3: Time In the 4th quarter of Project Year 1, Project Leaders reported 18 of 22 projects (one project leader did not report) were either “on-time” or within \pm one month of being “on-time”. In the 3rd quarter of Project Year 2, Project Leaders reported 17 of 21 projects were either “on-time” or within \pm one month of being “on-time”. Three projects were more than 3 months behind schedule, and one project was 2 months ahead of schedule.

After 2.5 years of working, as shown in Table 4 below, 51 of 85 project tasks (60%) across the 23 SIG projects were identified by project leaders as being 70% or more completed.



Vital Sign #4: Personnel.

The Vital Sign Questionnaire has four questions requesting specific information about each project: adequate number of staff for the project, adequacy of project staff skills, need for additional project staff training, and anticipated project staff retention over time. At the 3rd administration of the questionnaire, three of the six concerns expressed related to planning for replacement of individuals who announced they were retiring in September 2005.



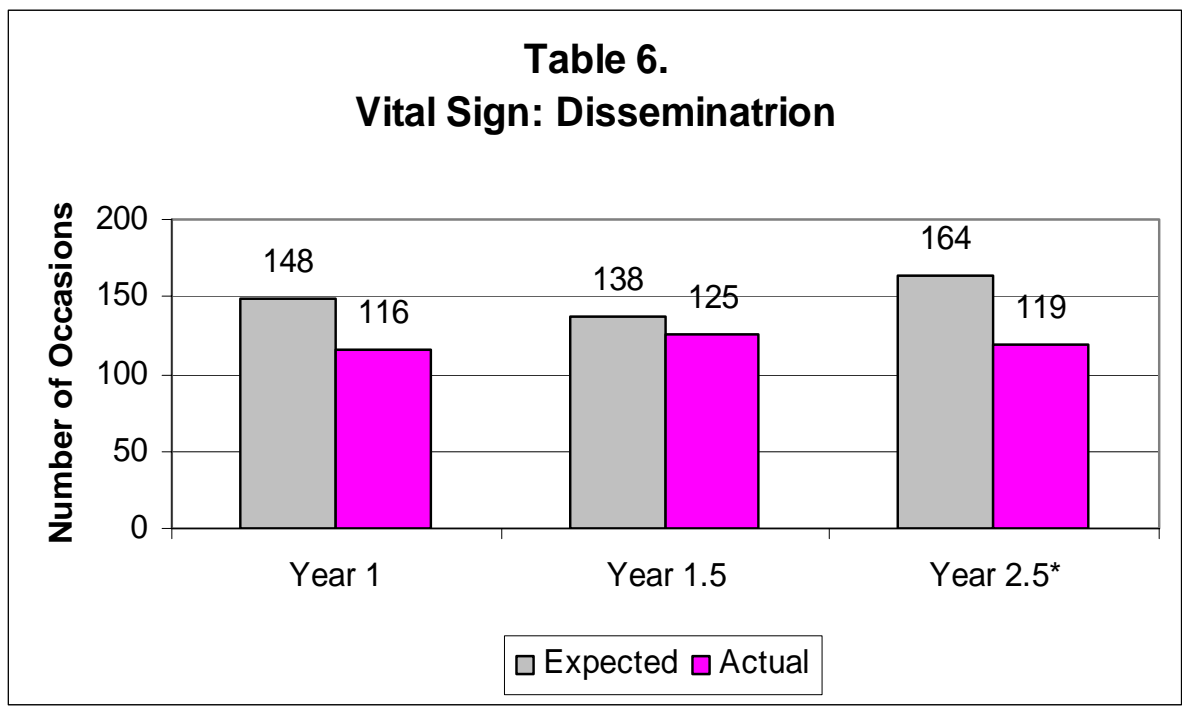
Vital Sign #5: Dissemination

Goal III of the SIG grant seeks to implement a coordinated state dissemination system that provides educators, parents, collaborative partners, and other stakeholders with timely information and training on best practices and research-based strategies to improve teaching, learning, and results for children and youth with disabilities.

During Stage I of the SIG project life cycle, dissemination activity was targeted to *informing* key stakeholder groups about their respective SIG project, information and training materials currently under development and plans for implementation of research-based training and distribution of materials. A list of key stakeholder groups, target audiences, annual state meetings, LEA meetings, annual conferences, and other information distribution channels was generated for the 3rd Administration of the Vital Sign Survey by each Project Leader's SIG Manager.

This tracking of dissemination activity at the beginning of SIG Project Year-4 will be changing as more products are released by each of the SIG Work Groups. That is,

dissemination will begin to track actual numbers of individuals receiving technical assistance and/or training events that utilize SIG products developed in Stage I.



Recommendations

Recommendation #1. The SIG Management Team Data Retreat scheduled for Quarter 4 of Project Year 3 should discuss and select specific strategies for reversing the continued delay in project development that appears to have occurred across many of the SIG partners (i.e., contractors). See Table 4 on page 12.

Recommendation #2. A mapping of external collaborators (resources) for scaling-up technical assistance and/or training that will be using each of the SIG Work Group products should be initiated for the specific purpose of “making up lost time” that has been caused by product development delays. That is, to strengthen the probability that each SIG Work Group’s Outcomes will be achieved.

References

Provus, Malcolm. 1971. *Discrepancy Evaluation*. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan

Stufflebeam, D. L., Foley, W., Gephart, W., Hammond, R., Merriman, H., Provus, M., & (Phi Delta Kappa National Study Committee on Evaluation). (1971). *Educational evaluation & decision making*. Itasca, Ill.: Peacock.