

Wisconsin Special Education  
State Improvement Grant (SIG)

SIG Evaluation: Conceptual Framework

Prepared by

Center on Education and Work  
James R. Frasier, Ph.D.

November 22, 2004

## 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 (DPI) 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, Wisconsin Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (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 (EOCA) ages K-12, and Effective Transition Activities to Post Secondary Education and Employment (ages 14-21). Of particular note, parents are a valued work-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.

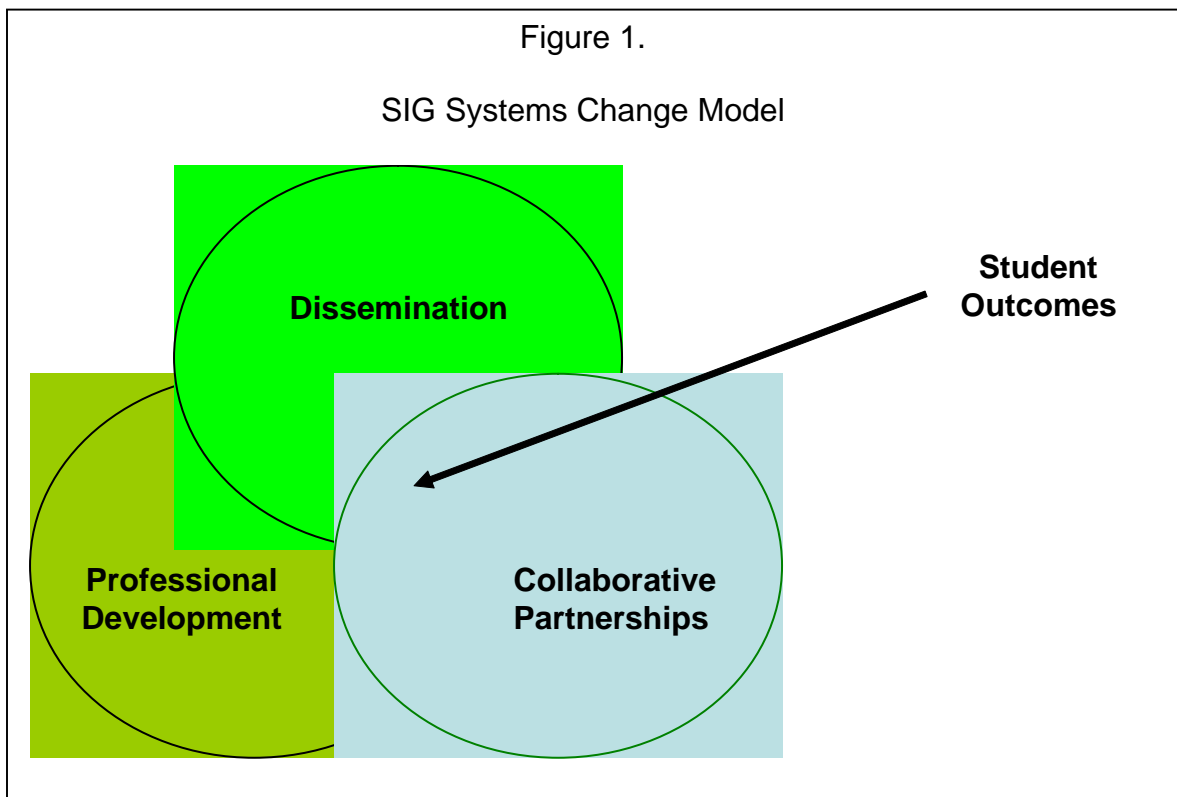
*Goal III.* Implement a coordinated state dissemination system that provides educators, parents, collaborative partners, and other stakeholders with timely information and training on best practices and research-based strategies to improve teaching, learning, and results for children and youth with disabilities.

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 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), certain contractual partnerships are required – specifically, those with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and with state agencies other than the State Education Agency (SEA)”.<sup>1</sup> In order to reform and improve its systems for providing educational, early intervention, and transitional services, the Wisconsin DPI is implementing the Wisconsin SIG 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 promoted and used beyond the grant period. Second, the Wisconsin SIG System Change Model acknowledges that technical assistance (professional development and training, and dissemination projects) are integral

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.

The Wisconsin SIG is a complex and multi-faceted undertaking that encompasses twenty-three interdependent --- yet independent --- SIG projects. Each project is led by an individual(s) retained with a separately negotiated work contract. Actual project-related work is conducted in geographically distributed locations within Wisconsin. Work contexts vary from individual contractor homes in small rural towns to the offices of a parents' organization within the inner city of Milwaukee.

A major challenge of the evaluation is to develop a strategy for periodically gathering and analyzing data to provide information about each project's performance and progress towards achieving intended SIG outcomes. The 23 SIG projects by project cluster and by project title are listed on the next page.

### **Purpose of Evaluation**

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 power of Wisconsin's SIG Systems Change Model to positively impact work productivity and desired outcomes.

### **List of 2002 – 2004 SIG Projects**

#### Early Childhood Projects:

1. Pre-Service Training Programs
2. Centralized Professional Development System
3. Parent Leadership through PALS and Pre-Service Partnerships
4. Parent Education
5. Early Childhood Program Support
6. Birth to 3 Transition Project
7. Expansion of LRE Planning and Implementation Mini-Grants
8. Expansion of Pre-School Options Project
9. Expansion of Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI)

#### EOCA Projects

10. Develop and administer needs assessment survey
11. Training for Historically underserved families/parents
12. EOCA Professional Development and Tool Assistance Kit
13. Develop research-based Teaching Intervention Toolkits
14. Develop “Use of Data in EOCA” Training Kit
15. Conduct EOCA Action Research Training
16. Develop guide for involving parents in EOCA

#### Transition Projects

17. Parents in Partnership Training
18. Development of Opening Doors To Transition Guides
  - >Introductory Handbook
  - >Transition and the IEP
  - >Transition and Community Services
19. Opening Doors to Self-Determination and Self-Adequacy
20. Expand Capacity of Wisconsin Technical College System Transition Specialists
21. Expand Capacity of Wisconsin Secondary Transition Initiative
22. Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy
23. Training Employers to Increase Employment of Graduates with Disabilities

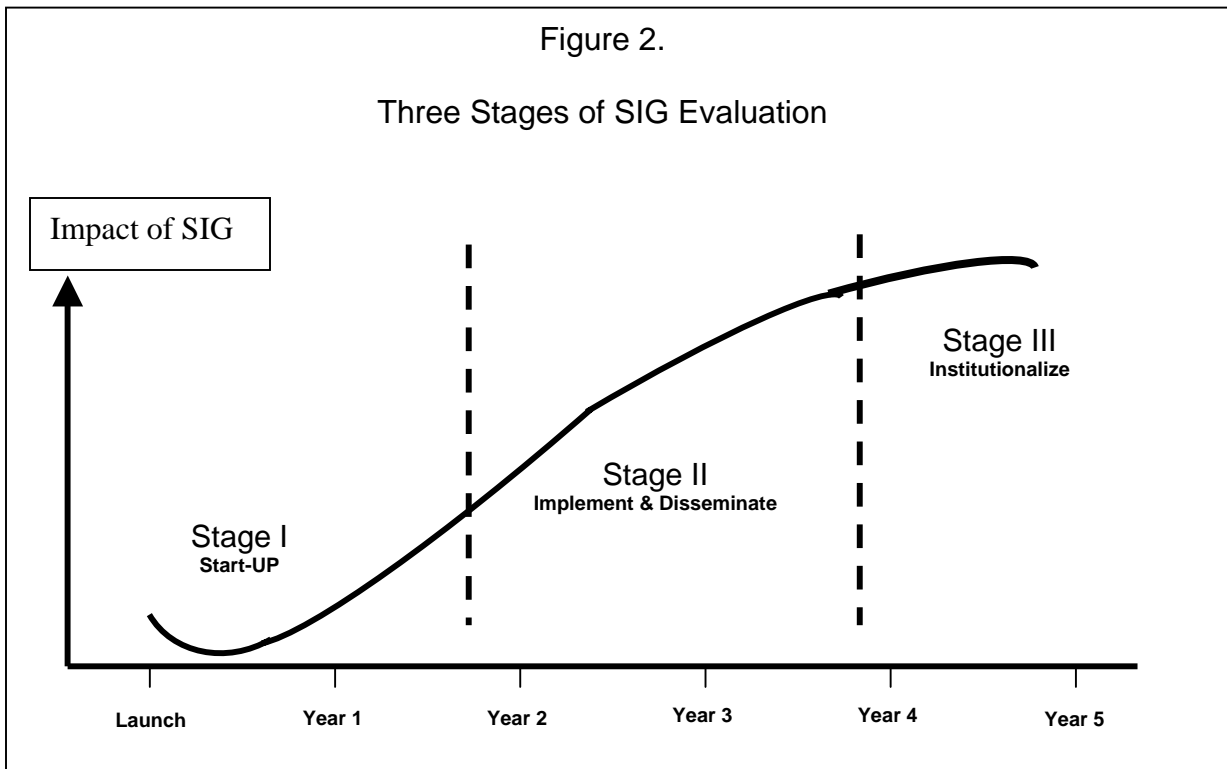
### **Recipients of Evaluation Reports**

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

## Evaluation Design

A major challenge in evaluating Wisconsin's SIG is to determine across all 23 SIG projects whether what was *intended* to be accomplished was *actually* accomplished. During the five years of SIG funding, individual contracts for work may be terminated, new work contracts negotiated, unforeseen changes in project personnel, and quality and timely production and implementation of products. To capture the intensity and complexity of SIG project-related activity, the Wisconsin SIG Evaluation's Design is guided by three conceptual frameworks: a generic project life cycle model; an adaptation of Stufflebeam's CIPP Evaluation Model (1971); and an adaptation of Provus (1971) Discrepancy Evaluation Model, *vital signs*.

*Conceptual Framework #1.* When viewed as a whole, the life cycle of Wisconsin's SIG has three stages (shown in Figure 2 below): Start Up, Implementation and Dissemination, and Institutionalization.

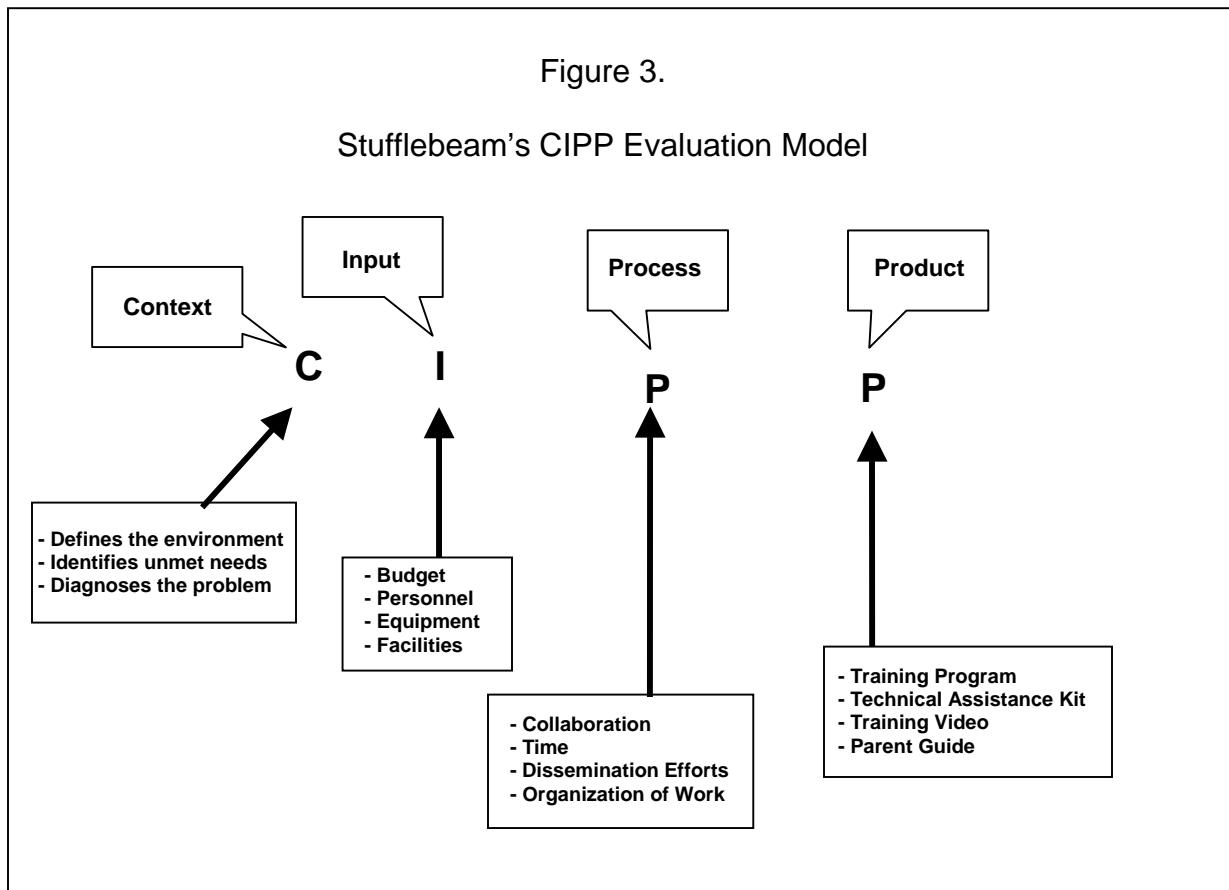


Stage I is the start up period. During the first 6 – 9 months, the focus is on negotiating work, refining project activities, negotiating unexpected changes in personnel, and recruiting and hiring appropriate personnel. The efforts are directed to getting things settled and started so the work can begin. 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 implementation and dissemination of products and technical assistance developed in Stage I. 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 (i.e., sustainability) of project activities and products. The concern at this stage is on collecting data about the extent to which SIG professional development and product disseminations have been accepted and integrated into the work life of key stakeholder groups. The emphasis of evaluation efforts is on determining the extent to which the numerous SIG projects are valued by stakeholders and have the strength to be continued without funding from federal or state sources.

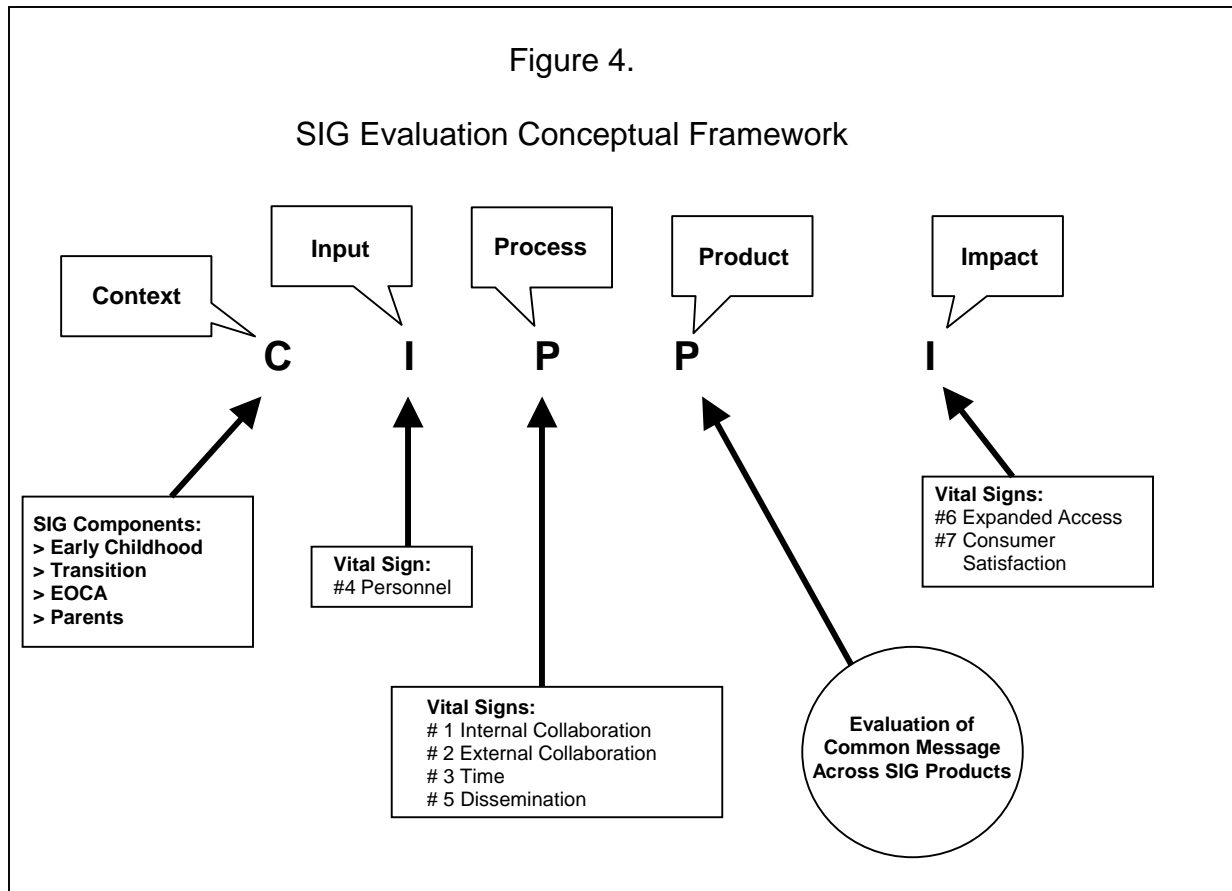
*Conceptual Framework #2.* Four types of evaluation used in large and complex educational projects suggested by (Stufflebeam, 1971 p. 218) will be used as the architecture for Wisconsin's SIG evaluation. The CIPP Model graphically shown in Figure 4 on the next page identifies the four types of evaluation activity: *Context (C)*, *Input (I)*, *Process (P)*, and *Product (P)*.



*Context* evaluation defines the environment, identifies unmet needs, diagnoses the problem(s), etc. *Input* evaluation focuses on budget, personnel, equipment, facilities, etc. *Process* evaluation informs implementation decisions by providing data about such work processes as collaboration and organization of work, management of work to-plan (i.e., Time), and dissemination efforts. *Product* evaluation focuses on the quality of project attainments such as a training program, technical assistance kit, training video, parent guide, etc.

With the addition of “*Impact*” (I), the CIPP Evaluation Model is expanded to five components. *Impact* evaluation informs decisions by providing feedback about consumer satisfaction, expanded access, project outcomes, etc. An adaptation of the CIPP Evaluation

Model shown below in Figure 4 provides the conceptual framework for evaluating Wisconsin's SIG over the 5-year funding period.



*Conceptual Framework #3: 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) provided the 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 in the first 6 months of Project Year 1, 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):       Vital Sign #4 - *Project Personnel*
- Process (P):    Vital Sign #1 - *Internal Collaboration*  
                           Vital Sign #2 - *External Collaboration*  
                           Vital Sign #3 - *Time*  
                           Vital Sign #5 - *Dissemination*;
- Impact (I):     Vital Sign #6 - *Expanded Access*  
                           Vital Sign #7 - *Consumer Satisfaction*.