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**Evaluation Findings Inform Wisconsin's
Special Education Personnel Development System**

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Background

Passage of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) marked a significant shift in federal funding of professional development activities by authorizing *State Program Improvement Grants for Children with Disabilities*. Previous to this legislation, institutions of higher education (IHEs) were the federal government's apparent preferred provider of professional development and received the bulk of federal funds for professional development programs. The immediate impact of authorizing *State Program Improvement Grants for Children with Disabilities* was the diversification of professional development program funding to include funding for State Education Agencies (SEAs) to address "personnel needs of States as identified and defined by States, not the Federal Government" (p. 37).¹ When creating this new avenue for SEA involvement, Congress expected SEAs would also change how professional development programs were administered by undertaking systemic reform that emphasized collaboration among multiple individuals, agencies, and institutions in the identification, design, development and delivery of personnel training.² Three specific systems were identified in IDEA '97 for change: professional development, technical assistance, and dissemination of information.³ To administer the *State Program Improvement Grants for Children with Disabilities*, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) established the State Improvement Grant (SIG) Program. Between fiscal years 1998 and 2000, OSEP funded 36 successful SIG Program applications. In fiscal year 2001, OSEP awarded Wisconsin's State Education Agency (SEA) with one of eight new SIG program awards; \$6.5 million dollars for a period of five years.

Wisconsin SIG Overview

The OSEP award of Wisconsin's SIG provided funding for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to systemically change over a five-year period the professional development, technical assistance, and dissemination of knowledge systems for the purpose of improving results for children with disabilities served by both general and special education personnel. The primary focus of Wisconsin's SIG application (2002) was to undertake these systemic changes through initiating multiple collaborative efforts between the Wisconsin DPI, parents, schools, institutes of higher education, Wisconsin's parent center (i.e. FACETS), Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs), and other agencies in **creating a shared vision focused on improving the outcomes and opportunities for children with disabilities and their families from birth to 21.**

The Wisconsin SIG application (2002) identified three goals that were congruent with and supportive of the Wisconsin State Improvement Plan for Special Education 2000-2004.⁴

¹ Senate Report No. 105-17 (1997) p. 37.

² Senate Report No. 105-17 (1997) p. 37.

³ IDEA, 1997, Part D, Subpart 1, Sec. 651(b)

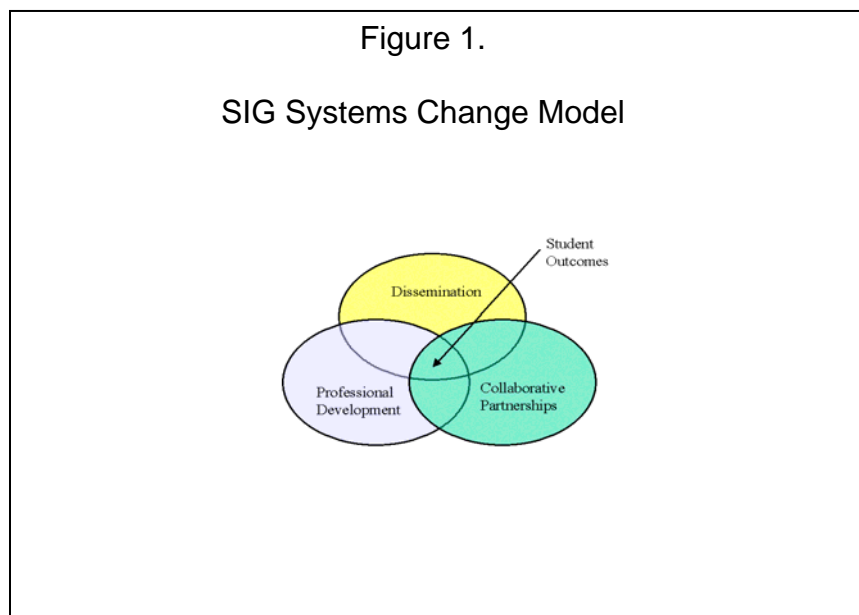
⁴ The 2000-2004 State Improvement Plan (SIP) represented the shared vision of how to improve educational results for children with disabilities in Wisconsin. The SIP was a five-year plan designed to support Wisconsin's existing state education reform efforts as well as federal legislation included in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 and the reauthorized IDEA 2004. The intent was to enhance cross-program linkages, improve planning and service delivery, and encourage the integration of program services to increase student achievement. The SIP was Wisconsin's vehicle for providing statewide direction and leadership in the education of children with disabilities. At the

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.

To provide a conceptual framework for guiding the change and improvement of Wisconsin's professional development systems throughout the 5 years of SIG funding, the Wisconsin DPI developed a SIG Systems Change Model to Improve Results for Student with Disabilities (shown in Figure 1). As graphically shown in the Model, synergy among three interrelated components – Professional Development, Collaboration, and Dissemination – was envisioned for improving student with disabilities outcomes.



Professional Develop Component: The Wisconsin SIG application proposed to identify, design, develop, and deliver research-based professional development activities. During the first four project years, the Wisconsin SIG was almost exclusively dedicated to design and development of the 23 SIG projects that were contracted with selected individuals, organizations, and institutions of higher education throughout Wisconsin. Each project was led by an individual(s) retained with a separately negotiated work contract. Actual project-related work was conducted in geographically distributed locations within Wisconsin. Work contexts varied from individual contractor homes in small rural towns to the offices of a parents' organization within the inner city of Milwaukee. Managing each cluster of projects was the responsibility of Wisconsin DPI Special Education Consultants who formed the Wisconsin SIG management Team. The 23 SIG projects organized by project cluster and by project title are shown in Table 1 on the next page.

Collaborative Partnerships Component: The Wisconsin SIG application proposed to develop and sustain collaborative partnerships among key stakeholder groups. The intention was to nurture these collaborative partnerships so they would incrementally strengthen over the five-year grant period. The expectation was that these collaborative partnerships would ultimately develop an infrastructure for the seamless coordination of birth to 21 services and dissemination systems that would continue beyond the grant period. This emphasis on collaboration was a dramatic change from how work had been performed by Wisconsin's DPI consultants, as well as the individuals who were responsible for SIG related work contracts. That is, the focus was on changing how work has traditionally been performed using *individual* project work groups to work being performed using *collaborative* project work groups. **Such change could not, did not happen overnight and was not done by simply tweaking parts of the system in isolation, but only occurred by impacting change across all aspects of the system.**

Dissemination Component: The Wisconsin SIG application proposed to develop a statewide special education dissemination system to connect the information/training needs of collaborating partners to best-practices and research-based strategies that had been proven to impact teaching, learning, and improve student outcomes. The major vehicle for integrating various components of the statewide special education dissemination system was a specially developed and maintained Wisconsin SIG Website.

The State Director of Special Education served as the Wisconsin's SIG Project Manager throughout the five-year grant award and provided oversight of ongoing implementation operations and activities including; approval of contracts, annual budget, hiring, work plans, and supervision of the SIG Management Team. The SIG Management Team, led by a specially recruited SIG Coordinator appointed by the State Director of Special Education, met monthly during the initial start-up of the Wisconsin SIG and eventually quarterly throughout implementation of the SIG funding period to facilitate a collaborative implementation of their respective work objectives, review upcoming SIG related events (such as semi-annual celebrations involving all SIG contractors), and anticipate or resolve problems related to implementation of the SIG Systems Change Model. The Wisconsin SIG Steering Committee of some twenty members chaired by the SIG Coordinator met semi-annually throughout the five-year funding period and provided strategic advice to the SIG Coordinator, Management Team, and State Director of Special Education about work related matters including; review and feedback about the implementation of SIG related work, allocation of resources to meet SIG goals and objectives, and new directions in response to emerging professional development needs.

Evaluation

The Wisconsin DPI contracted with the Center on Education and Work (CEW) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (hereafter referred to as the Evaluator) to conduct a formative evaluation of Wisconsin's five-year SIG. The primary purpose of the evaluation was to periodically provide the Wisconsin State Director of Special Education, the SIG Management Team Leader, and the three DPI Management Teams of special education consultants with information for more fully informing their understandings about:

- The extent to which what was *intended* to be accomplished was *actually* being accomplished during implementation of the Wisconsin SIG.
- The extent of internal and external collaboration within and across SIG workgroups to produce the 23 professional development products.

Table 1. List of 2002 – 2005 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

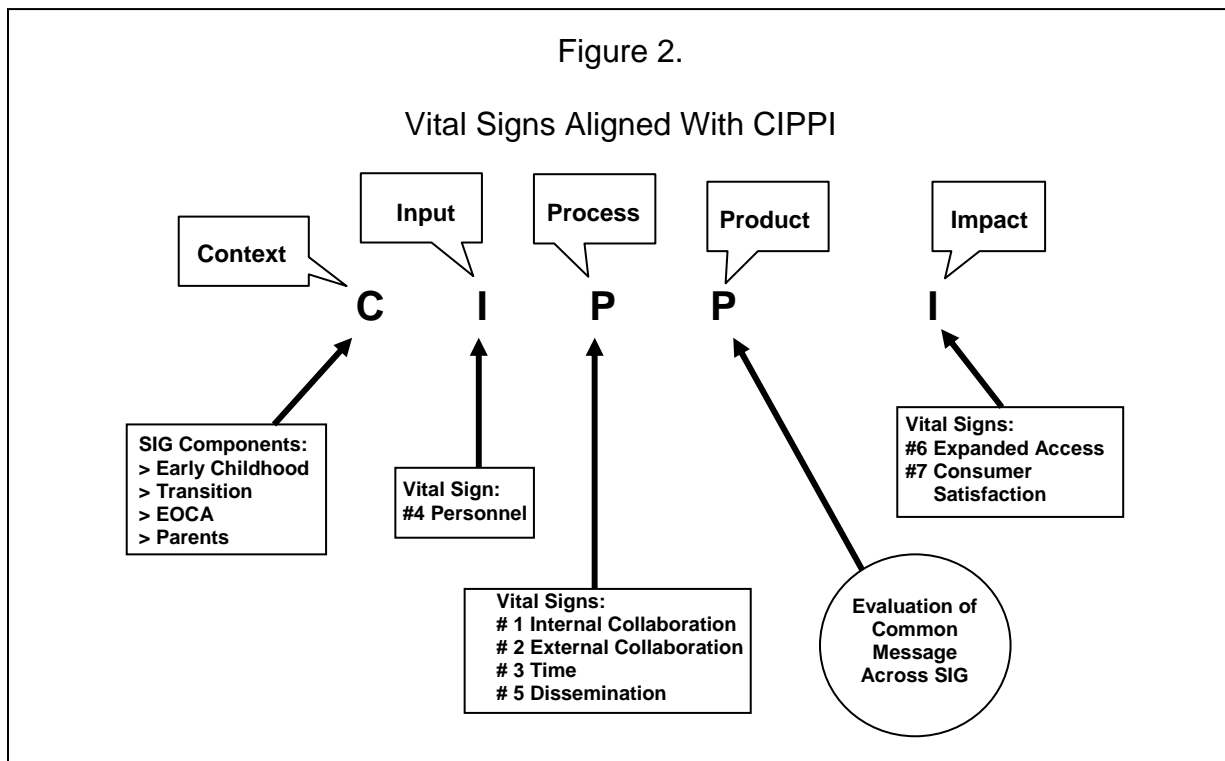
10. Develop and administer needs assessment survey
11. Training for Historically underserved families/parents
12. EOCA Professional Development and Tool Assistance Kit
13. Develop research-based Teaching Intervention Toolkits
14. Develop "Use of Data in EOCA" Training Kit
15. Conduct EOCA Action Research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

Evaluation: Conceptual Framework

An adaptation of the CIPP Evaluation Model⁵ provided a conceptual framework for focusing data collection activities throughout the five-year SIG funding period. The four components of evaluation activity were: *Context* (C), *Input* (I), *Process* (P), and *Product* (P). With the addition of “*Impact*” (I), the CIPP Evaluation Model was extended to five components and is graphically shown in Figure 3 on the next page. The identification of SPDG vital signs (i.e., indicators of particular importance within each CIPPI evaluation component) for the five CIPPI components draws on the analogy of the physician examining a patient’s vital signs to make preliminary judgments about a person’s health. Vital signs below expected levels can then be investigated by the physician in more depth by asking additional questions, ordering specific tests, and/or involving the medical expertise of other physicians.⁶ Seven Wisconsin SPDG Vital Signs were identified through a series of structured personal interviews conducted by the evaluator with each member of Wisconsin’s SIG Management Team as shown in Figure 2 below. The 7 vital signs are aligned with three components of the CIPPI evaluation model (i.e., Input, Process, and Impact).



⁵ Daniel L. Stufflebeam. The 21st Century CIPP Model: Origins, Development, and Use. In Marvin C. Alkin (Editor). *Evaluation Roots: Tracing Theorists' Views and Influences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 2004. See also, 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.

⁶ Tim. L. Wentling and Chris A. Roegge, Development of a Computer-Aided Evaluation System for Vocational Education Programs, *Journal of Vocational Education Research*, Fall 1989, Vol. 14, No. 4. 1 – 14. See also, Tim L. Wentling and Chris A. Roegge, Computer-Assisted Outcomes-Based Evaluation for School Programs, *Evaluation Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3, June 1991 378-392.

Evaluation: Data Collection

Working one-on-one with each member of the SIG Management Team to determine what data sources (e.g., parents, collaborating partners, dissemination records, etc.) would be requested to provide information, the Evaluator created a survey template that provided for flexibility and customization of individual surveys for each of the 23 SIG projects. Use of the template provided a structured format for collecting information and data analyses relevant to each vital sign, within each SIG project cluster, and across all 23 projects. Each survey was formatively developed by the evaluator in close collaboration with each member of the SIG Management Team. The Vital Sign Survey was administered via mail on 5 separate occasions during the 3rd quarter of Wisconsin's SIG Project Years 1 through 5 to surface data for informing: a) The extent to which what was *intended* to be accomplished was *actually* being accomplished during implementation of the Wisconsin SIG, and b) The extent of internal and external collaboration within and across SIG workgroups to produce the 23 professional development products.

The Evaluator also developed three Internet-based reports for the Early Childhood Work Team in Project Year 2 to collect longitudinal data related to determining annual progress in their professional development project related activities, and an Internet-based survey for the Transition Work Group in Project Year 5 to determine the impact of professional development initiatives to increase the formation and functioning of Transition Advisory Councils in each of the 72 Wisconsin counties. In addition, evaluation data were collected by the Evaluator throughout the five-year funding period by: 1) conducting informal and structured personal interviews with key stakeholders throughout the five-year funding period; 2) observing and participating in all Wisconsin SIG semi-annual and annual celebrations held with SIG internal and external collaborating partners; 3) meeting monthly with the Wisconsin SIG Management Team Leader; and 4) observing and participating in semi-annual SIG Steering Committee meetings.

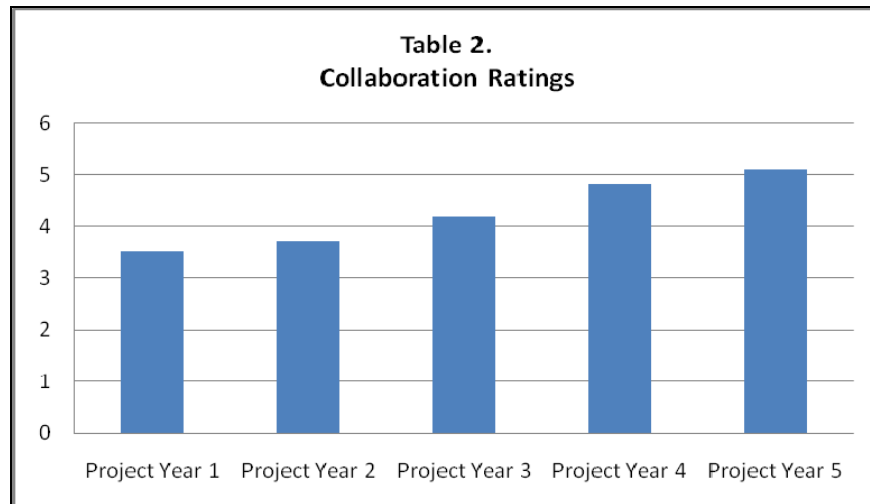
Evaluation: Reports

During the 4th quarter of each SIG Project Year, the Evaluator prepared a full Wisconsin SIG Evaluation Report that was presented to the State Director of Special Education and the SIG Management Team Leader. This report contained an executive summary, aggregate Vital Signs Survey results for the three Wisconsin SIG workgroups (Early Childhood, EOCA, and Transition), and disaggregated data reports for each of the three SIG workgroups. During the 4th quarter of each SIG Project Year, the Evaluator also prepared and presented a separate, disaggregated, evaluation report to each of the DPI Management Team Special Education Consultants responsible for the SIG workgroups. The Evaluator presented SIG Evaluation summaries and updates at annual SIG Celebrations and at annual SIG Steering Committee meetings. In addition, the Evaluator made three invited session presentations that reported on Wisconsin's SIG Evaluation activities at the National OSEP Project Directors' Meetings in Washington DC in 2003, 2004 and 2006.

Evaluation Findings

The Wisconsin SIG application proposed to develop and sustain collaborative partnerships among key stakeholder groups. The expectation was that these collaborative partnerships would ultimately develop an infrastructure for the seamless coordination of birth to 21 services and dissemination systems that would continue beyond the grant period. This emphasis on collaboration was a dramatic change from how work had been performed by Wisconsin's DPI

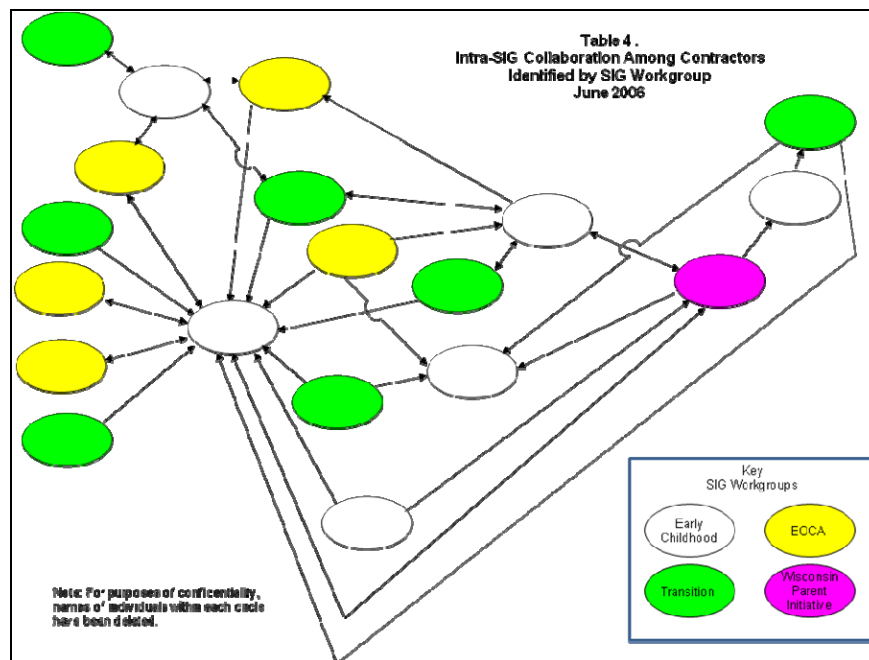
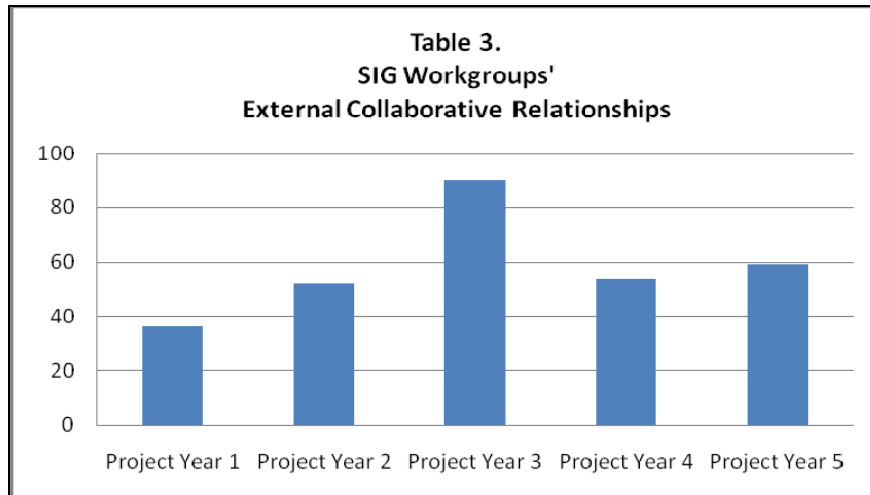
consultants, as well as the individuals who were responsible for SIG related work contracts. That is, the focus was on changing how work has traditionally been performed using *individual* project work groups to work being performed using *collaborative* project work groups. Results from the Vital Signs Survey annually administered to the 23 Project Leaders directly responsible for SIG professional development projects provide evidence of the Wisconsin SIG having incrementally established over the five-year grant period collaborative partnerships within and among their respective SIG Workgroups (see Table 2).



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

A similar pattern of SIG Workgroups establishing collaborative relationships with individuals in numerous state agencies, advocacy groups, and disability service providers during the development and dissemination of their professional development products was also evident in the annual number of External Collaborative Relationships established by SIG Workgroups throughout the 5 year award period (summarized in Table 3 on the next page).

Additionally, and perhaps most critical to the overall successful implementation of collaboration for the purposes of developing interagency collaboration and achieving systemic change in the way work is accomplished, Intra-SIG Workgroup collaboration incrementally matured each year throughout the five year award period. An example from an Annual SIG Evaluation Report graphically demonstrates collaborative working relationship patterns among individual members across boundaries of SIG Workgroup responsibility is shown in Table 4 on the next page.



Utilization of Evaluation Results

The major outcome of Wisconsin's first 5-year OSEP funded state personnel development grant was a decision among Early Childhood, EOCA/REACH, Transition, and Parent Initiative Special Education Division Consultants to change how special education personnel development activities are administered and sustained within and among their special education key stakeholder groups. Using evaluation results from a 5-year Office of Special Education Programs Grant that affirmed the strength of collaboration to bring about systemic change, the Division has constructed a Wisconsin Personnel Development Model for Special Education. Implementation of this Model shifts the delivery of special education personnel development activities *away from* "volunteer" or one-off participation in training events *towards*

a format of individuals participating as a collaborative cohort/group in locally identified personnel development activities.

More specifically, the Early Childhood, EOCA/REACH, Transition, and Parent Initiative Special Education Division Consultants agreed to focus the 2nd 5-year OSEP funded personnel development grant on: (1) sustaining collaboration among internal and external key stakeholder groups in identifying, delivering, and supporting implementation of their respective special education personnel development activities; and (2) concurrently implementing a newly designed and highly collaborative Wisconsin Personnel Development Model with the goal of moving *away from* “volunteer” or one-off participation in personnel development events *towards* the format of a local education agency formed collaborative group(s) participating in personnel development activities.

The Wisconsin Personnel Development Model

Personnel development is the means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students. (NSDC, 2001) Personnel Development involves the improvement of practice through job-embedded activities, is school-based, teacher driven and directed, standards-based and related to what teachers do in their classrooms and schools. The ultimate indicator of effective professional development is improved student outcomes. In essence, professional development efforts must be embedded in a continuous improvement cycle and focused on the improvement of practice resulting in measurable advances in the learning of students.

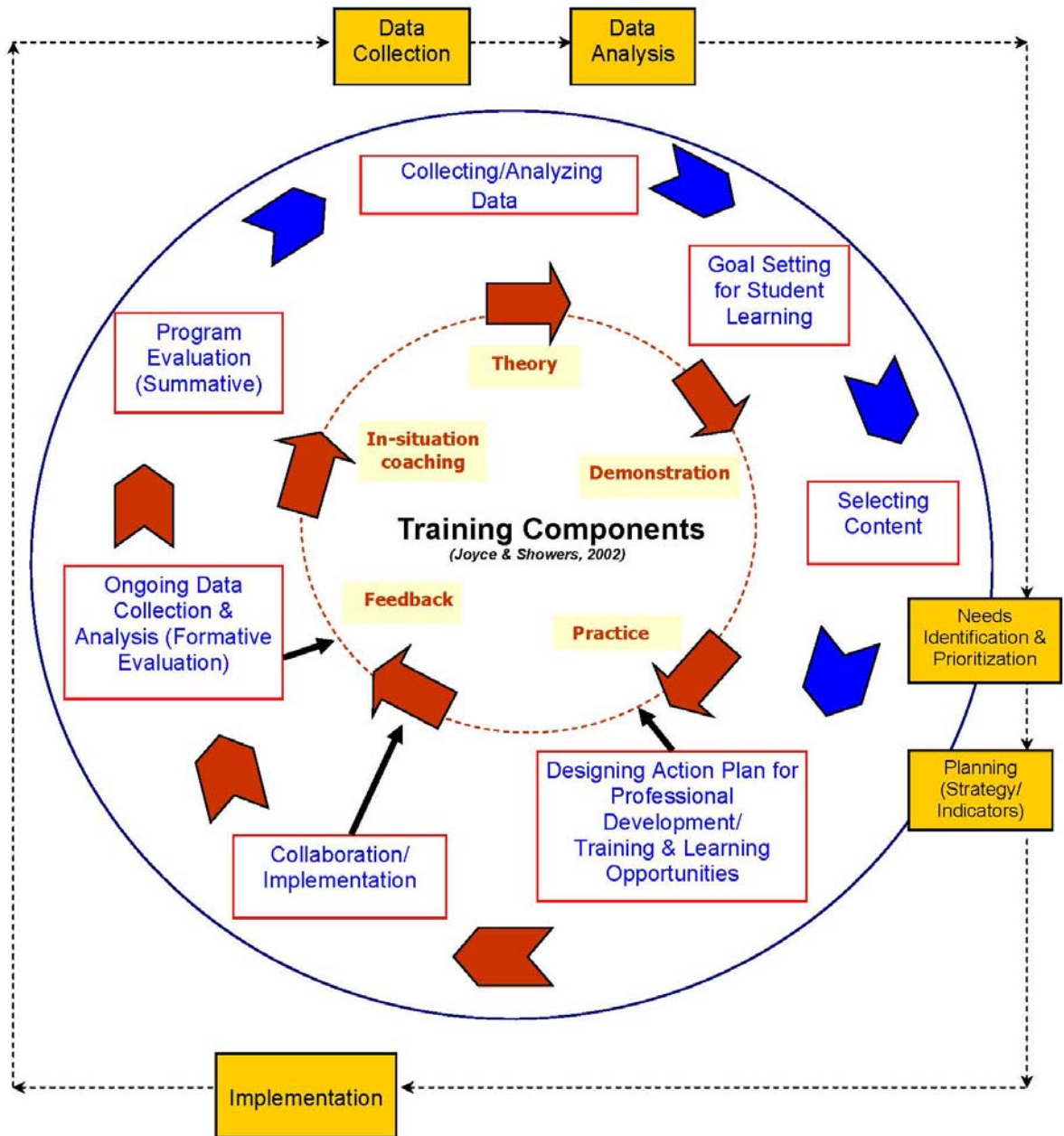
The Wisconsin Personnel Development Model (WPDM) conceptualizes a process for engaging school communities in the identification of effective professional development delivery strategies that focus on learning, include shared vision and collaborative decision-making, and involve a commitment to continuous improvement with a results orientation. Utilization of the WPDM (graphically shown on the next two pages) by local school districts provides guidance for designing, implementing, and evaluating a system-wide professional development plan as well as individual teacher professional development plans. The WPDM is cyclical and organized by seven steps:

1. Collecting and analyzing data
2. Goal setting for student and adult learning
3. Selecting content
4. Designing a professional development action plan including training and learning opportunities
5. Collaboration and implementation
6. Ongoing data collection and analysis (formative evaluation)
7. Program evaluation (summative)

Of particular importance, The WPDM provides a process that focuses on improving student learning and engages all teachers in collective professional development. aligned with the National Staff Development Council Standards The WPDM is also aligned with the National Staff Development Standards. More specifically, the WPDM addresses the organization, system, or culture in which the new learning will be implemented (context); refers to the “how” of staff development-describes the means for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills (process); and

The Wisconsin Personnel Development Model

(Adapted from the Iowa Model of Professional Development)



WISCONSIN PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Phase II



refers to the actual skills and knowledge effective educators need to possess or acquire through staff development (content).

In addition, the WPDM:

- aligns with the Wisconsin Teaching Standards;
- focuses on research-based instructional strategies aligned with the school district's student achievement needs and the long-range and annual improvement goals established by the district;
- delivers professional development that is targeted at instructional improvement and designed with training and learning opportunities including:
 - theory
 - demonstration
 - practice and feedback
 - coaching
- includes an evaluation component that documents the improvement in instructional practice and the effect on student learning; and the professional development needs of individual teachers.