

Improving the Special Education System in California A State Improvement Grants Program, CFDA 84.323A

In 2004, California received its second State Improvement Grant (SIG2), a three-year award from the federal Office of Special Education Projects (OSEP). The intended **outcomes** of this grant are:

- 1) Improved quality of personnel working with students with disabilities
- 2) Improved educational service coordination for students with disabilities
- 3) Improved academic outcomes for students with disabilities
- 4) Improved behavioral supports and outcomes for students with disabilities
- 5) Improved participation of parents/family members of students with disabilities
- 6) Improved data collection and data dissemination

To achieve these outcomes, SIG2 includes the following **activities** that were selected based on OSEP requirements for: 1) their contribution to important and quantifiable systemic change, 2) their strong foundation in research and effective practice, and 3) their capacity to be “scaled up” to meet the needs of California’s large and diverse population:

- Core Message Learning Community Program: Leadership Sites and Promising Practices Sites are competitively selected in the objective areas and share best practices through institutes and technical assistance to the field.
- Statewide Leadership Institute: The institute brings together the core message Leadership Sites and Promising Practices Sites in a learning community designed for continuous improvement.
- Regional Leadership Sites: These institutes provide training and technical assistance in a learning community environment and are designed to meet local and regional needs in the objective areas.
- Core Message Technical Assistance: This comprehensive, centralized TA program will be targeted in the SIG2 to the “core messages” reflected in the objectives. These core messages have been developed based on an extensive literature search and represent research-based and effective practice strategies. In addition to the comprehensive TA program, two special programs will operate:
 - Site-to-Site Technical Assistance: A specialized type of TA will be provided through Leadership Sites that will be funded to assist other schools, districts, and SELPAs to improve their practice.
 - California’s BEST Technical Assistance: California has a cadre of trainers/TA providers who are experts in the BEST positive behavioral management program and who will provide ongoing support to the large and growing number of BEST sites in California.
- Family Participation Fund: The fund provides support for parents of students in special education to participate in special/general education systems change committees at the local, regional, and state levels.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the activities in achieving the intended outcomes, specific **objectives** have been developed to serve as measurable indicators of progress in each outcome area. These objectives were written in alignment with the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) standards.

Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Personnel Working with Students with Disabilities

Objective 1. To increase the quality of personnel through the provision of core message, research-based, in-service professional development through technical assistance (TA) and regional institutes, as demonstrated by:

- 1.a. Increasing knowledge of the targeted core message subject areas disseminated by at least 15 percent for all TA and regional institute participants, as measured by end-of-event surveys completed by all participants
- 1.b. Increasing implementation of the core message, research-based knowledge/skills disseminated, as demonstrated by at least 50 percent of TA and regional institute participants who report having repeatedly implemented their learning in practice, as measured by a 3-month follow-up survey administered to all participants via email
- 1.c. Increasing dissemination of the core message, research-based knowledge/skills targeted, as demonstrated by at least 50 percent of TA and regional institute participants who report having repeatedly shared the knowledge/skills learned with other professional or parents, as measured by a 3-month follow-up survey administered to all participants via email

Outcome 2: Improved Educational Service Coordination for Students with Disabilities

Objective 2. To improve collaboration between special education (SE) and general education (GE) by:

- 2.a. Increasing the degree of collaboration in the areas of assessment, intervention, core curriculum, and teaming by at least 20 percent for the core message Leadership Sites and school/district sites that receive three or more days of site-to-site TA in collaboration and have at least one year of involvement in these SIG2 activities, as determined through follow-up surveys
- 2.2. *Collaborative Sites Research Project.* Collaboration between SE and GE is related in the research and literature to positive outcomes in other SIG objectives, specifically objectives 2--service coordination, 3—student achievement, and 6—use of data. To examine the relationship and bridge these objectives, the SIG plans a research project looking at the effects of a collaborative service model on student achievement by conducting an analysis of the API and CST ELA data on collaborative sites, particularly in comparison to similar schools, and include case study interviews. By recommendation of the SIG Evaluation Task Force on October 5, 2005 this project was shifted from a focus on Desert Mountain SELPA collaborative sites to all SIG 2 collaborative sites.

Outcome 3: Improved Academic Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Objective 3. To increase the academic performance of students with disabilities, as demonstrated by:

- 3.a. Increasing proficiency in reading for middle/high school students—resulting in an average five percentage point increase in all students, and students with disabilities as a subgroup, who score “proficient/advanced” on the California Standards Test, English Language Arts—at all reading Leadership Sites and school/district sites that receive at least three days of TA in reading and have at least two years of involvement in these SIG2 activities
- 3.b. Increasing proficiency in reading for middle/high school students—resulting in an average ten percentage point decrease in all students, and students with disabilities as a subgroup, who score “Far Below Basic” on the California Standards Test, English Language Arts—at all reading Leadership Sites and school/district sites that receive at least three days of TA in reading and have at least two years of involvement in these SIG2 activities
- 3.c. Increasing academic literacy and overall knowledge/skills—resulting in increases of at least 40 points on the California Academic Performance Indicator (API) scores of school/district sites for all students, and the students with disabilities subgroup—when comparing the baseline year (2003–2004) with the final year (2006–2007) in at least 75 percent of the Leadership Sites and schools/districts that receive at least three days of TA and have at least two years of involvement in these SIG2 activities
- 3.d. Increasing academic literacy and overall academic knowledge/skills—resulting in increases of at least two decile levels in the site’s Similar Schools Ranking on the California Academic Performance Indicator (API) scores when comparing the baseline year (2003–2004) with the final year (2006–2007)—for at least 50 percent of the Leadership Sites with at least two years of involvement in these SIG2 activities

Outcome 4: Improved Behavioral Supports and Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Objective 4. To improve behavior supports and outcomes for students with disabilities, as demonstrated by:

- 4.a. Increasing by at least 50 percent the number of California cadre-trained BEST school sites that have fully implemented BEST, comparing the baseline year (2003–2004) with the final year (2006–2007) using the BEST Combined Self-Assessment Survey and the System-wide Evaluation Tool (SET)
- 4.b. Decreasing by at least 30 percent the office discipline referrals and discipline suspensions for at least 50 percent of the cadre-trained BEST school sites, comparing the baseline year (2003–2004) with the final year (2006–2007), as measured through the annual School Profile Report

Outcome 5: Improved Participation of Parents/Family Members of Students with Disabilities

Objective 5. To increase the participation of parents/family members of children with disabilities in the systems change process by:

- 5.a. Increasing the participation of parents/family members of students with disabilities in TA and regional institutes, resulting in an average of 7 percent of participants being parents/family members annually, as determined through event sign-in sheet
- 5.b. Increasing the participation of parents/family members as part of site teams at State Leadership Institutes, resulting in 80 percent of site teams having a parent/family team member, as determined through team's event registrations
- 5.c. Increasing the participation of low income parents/family members of students with disabilities in local/regional special education advisory bodies, resulting in five Community Advisory Committees (CACs) serving high poverty areas demonstrating a 30 percent increase in active low income members, as determined through CAC progress reports
- 5.d. Increasing the participation of low income parents/family members in non-special education decision-making committees by ensuring that at least 15 percent of the Family Participation Fund is used to support parent/family member participation in local, regional, or statewide general education committees, such as school site councils, bilingual advisory committees, and task forces, as determined through examination of fund invoices
- 5.e. Increasing the influence of parents/family members of students with disabilities in advisory and decision-making committees at the local, regional, and statewide levels, resulting in 50 percent of all Family Participation Fund recipients that have participated in three or more committee meetings reporting that their participation has made a difference, as determined by end-of-event feedback forms and phone interviews

Outcome 6: Improved Data Collection/Use of Data in Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities

Objective 6. To improve data collection and the use of data by local educational agencies in identifying and addressing the need for T/TA to support the continuous improvement of outcomes for students with disabilities by:

- 6.a. Increasing the number of Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) organizations, County Offices of Education (COEs), and school districts using databases to monitor: 1) their T/TA offerings, including the core message areas being covered; 2) the district and school site origins of their attendees; and 3) the roles of the participants at those sites, resulting in at least 20 agencies adopting the Training Evaluation Database (TED) and using it to track trainings, as determined by annual TED pilot site reports and analysis of their electronic data