

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the purpose of this evaluation three methods were utilized: Site Studies, HESC Document Analysis and Formative Assistance, and IHE Focus Group and Interviews.

For the first method, *School Site Visits*, five school districts were designated as functional and received site visits by the evaluation team. Qualitative information was gathered from across all five sites through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The specific purposes of these site visits were to identify the effects and impact of the training, and the resources that were provided to the school district, as well as to document the level of assistance these districts are receiving from the Regional School Support Center (RSSC), Special Education Training and Resources Center (SETRC), Institutes of Higher Education (IHE), and Parent Organizations.

In order to meet the various evaluation objectives, a two-phase qualitative methodology was utilized. In Phase One, key individuals from RSSC, IHE, SETRC, and the school district were identified and initial interviews conducted. In Phase Two, each school received a day-long on-site visit from the evaluation team, and interviews with primary stakeholders were conducted.

In the second evaluation method, *HESC Document Analysis and Formative Assistance*, the Office of Professional Development reviewed summaries of the FS 10s/grant applications and IHE/school district agreements. The purpose of the review was to provide the VESID and HESC project staff with data related to the goals of the district, the activities proposed by the school district and the activities in the IHE/school district agreement.

The third evaluation method was the *IHE Focus Group and Interviews*. In April of this year, the OPD evaluation team reviewed documents outlining of the goals and activities of each school district and IHE. In addition, baseline information concerning the types of resources and technical assistance the HESC has provided to the IHEs was analyzed to determine the helpfulness of HESC efforts to date.

Executive Summary Findings: Site Visits

Presented below are themes that emerged in examining the qualitative interview data across the five sites by the following areas: *Collaboration and Communication*, *Lessons Learned*, and *Challenges*.

Collaboration and Communication

- Overall, a higher-level of collaboration and communication between districts and RSSC, SETRC and IHE was reported.
- A higher level of communication and collaboration amongst stakeholders at building and/or district level was reported.

Lessons Learned/Ingredients for Success

- All districts noted the importance of utilizing local consultants (those with knowledge of the local context and the needs of the local population) to provide professional development for school staff.

- All districts reported that a lesson they learned through their involvement with the grant was that planning for school improvement should be long term.
- Districts are conducting a wide range of activities in order to increase the involvement of parents in school activities, as well as encouraging parents to take an active role in their student's academic experiences.
- Although stakeholders believe the SIG is a major undertaking, they are pleased with the results they have seen to date. In particular, schools appear positive about changes in staff knowledge and attitude. School personnel also commented on the initial implementation of many 'new' practices and approaches learned through SIG professional development opportunities.
- Across all districts, stakeholders noted that one ingredient for success was the examination of curriculum alignment across grade levels as well as across buildings.

Challenges

- School administration and staff noted that one of the major barriers in conducting planned activities was the 'late' receipt of designated SIG funding.
- Although Dunkirk and Beacon, two districts serving Spanish speaking communities, are working to develop a parent handbook in both English and Spanish, these districts note that the main challenge for the district is to provide materials in both English and Spanish.
- Districts report that one challenge that they are facing is the low attendance of teachers in professional development training opportunities.
- Stakeholders reported that there continues to be a need for districts to share knowledge about promising practices. School districts appear anxious to "adopt" or "adapt" strategies and activities that have been successful in other locations in order to meet their own identified needs.

Executive Summary Findings for HESC Document Analysis and Formative Assistance

- An increase in the formation of partnerships between districts and IHEs is evident. Existing partnerships continue to strengthen and there has also been an increase in assigned matches and completed agreements.
- A growing clarity exists amongst IHEs regarding the objectives of HESC, the changes desired within IHEs, and the role of the school district as a change agent. There are, however, some districts that need to expand their focus to encompass a wider breadth of objectives and goals.
- There are still a number of IHEs who are not assigned to school districts or who do not have written agreements with their assigned school district.
- The delay in receiving allocated monies is having an impact on some districts' willingness &/or ability to move forward with their proposed activities. Maintaining momentum after funding ceases may also prove to be a challenge.

- Almost one-half of identified districts that have approved grants still do not refer to goals or activities involving parents.
- The HESC appears to be doing a good job of facilitating linkages. HESC staff continue to attend regional meetings and provide over-the-phone technical assistance and advice on a variety of issues.
- The three initiatives that were funded and implemented this summer met the goal of serving as the impetus for IHE planning in three areas:
 - Co-teaching (general and special education) to further inclusive teacher education and preparation,
 - Partnership exploration between IHE and targeted school districts, to encourage the formulation of written agreements,
 - Strengthening regional connections between IHE and districts, particularly focusing on pre-service preparation as well as in-service professional development for quality inclusive classroom teaching and other issues in high need schools that impact student learning. Two of the eight applicants for this initiative included parents as participants in the proposed activities.
- Three regions of the state did not submit applications for any of the initiatives. Technical assistance from the HESC, VESID, the RSSCs, and other stakeholders in those regions should be prioritized in the coming project year.

Executive Summary Findings for IHE Focus Group and Interviews

- The HESC is doing a good job of facilitating linkages, both on the regional level and statewide among the IHEs.
- As new faculty and additional IHEs join the process they may need an orientation to bring them up to speed.
- Task Force members indicated a desire to increase awareness amongst colleagues who are not directly involved in the SIG initiative.
- The membership make up of the Task Force should be examined to ascertain the ratio of special education to general education faculty. Special education faculty note difficulties in carrying the 'message' of the SIG initiative back to their IHEs. They suggest that greater involvement and representation by general education faculty in the Taskforce would be a useful support in this effort.