

III. Project Status

This Project Status section is divided into two major areas. First, the report includes a summary of the activities, accomplishments, and outcomes related to the seven objectives set forth in the original grant application. Second, the report provides information on how the project's activities to date correspond with GPRA Program Performance Indicators.

A. Project Objectives with Corresponding Activities, Accomplishments, and Outcomes

Substantial progress has been made on all objectives on projected timelines. Listed below is information that pertains exclusively to this current performance-reporting period (October 1, 2002 - May 6, 2003).

Objective 1:

To identify and describe a series of existing service delivery support strategies that have not yet been sufficiently described in the professional literature, and are underutilized.

Corresponding Activities, Accomplishments, and Outcomes:

In an effort to identify examples of existing service delivery support strategies around the country that provide alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals, a corresponding data collection questionnaire was developed. It was distributed through: (a) our project web site, (b) an email letter (with questionnaire attachment) sent to several hundred special education colleagues across the country, and (c) our Vermont and national advising partners. The actual questionnaire is posted at

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/alternativestrategies.html> under a link labeled, *"Help Us To Identify Service Delivery Alternatives."* This search yielded several public school examples which were summarized into an online document called, *Alternatives to Overreliance on Inappropriate Utilization of Paraprofessionals in Special Education*, and posted on our project web site at the following URL:

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/alternativeinfo.html>. Availability of this information about service delivery alternatives is also embedded as an integral component of the project's planning guidelines (Step 4 of *Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals*). In April 2003 the Project visited a school in New York state where a particularly innovative alternative was in place. A report of that visit has been written and is currently being reviewed by the program's developers to ensure accuracy before web posting. The task of identifying alternative service delivery options will continue throughout the project.

Objective 2:

To develop and refine a self-assessment tool to assist schools to reflect on their own status regarding service delivery strategies designed to support students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Objective 3:

To develop and refine a model planning process (based on an adaptation of validated problem-solving methods), to assist schools to identify locally relevant solutions by: (a) adopting existing strategies, (b) adapting existing

strategies, or (c) inventing new strategies, that facilitate the education of students with disabilities in general education settings.

Corresponding Activities, Accomplishments, and Outcomes:

Objectives 2 and 3 were addressed together in the development of a 10-step school-based self-assessment and model planning process called, *Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals (Version 1.0)*.

Planning Steps:

1. Establish a planning team.
2. *SCREENING "Is our school overreliant on paraprofessionals or utilizing them inappropriately?"*
If "Yes," continue with the next steps.
3. Rank the four problem clusters to help establish the school's local focus.
4. Become knowledgeable about existing alternatives to current overreliance or inappropriate utilization of paraprofessionals.
5. Engage in self-assessment of the school's current practices.
6. Prioritize the areas of greatest need the team intends to work on first.
7. Consider possibilities to adopt, adapt or invent alternatives to address selected priorities.
8. Develop an Action Plan & Evaluation Plan.
9. Review data and summarize the plan's impact.

10. Communicate activities, progress, and outcomes to the school community.

This 37-page document was developed by the project staff and sent for review to Vermont and national advising partners as well as school leaders (i.e., special and general education administrators from field-test sites) for review and feedback. A complete initial version is currently in use. The document is available online in two formats. A text version is available as a pdf document at <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/gsa.html> and is it also available in a series of audio files at <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/gsaaudio.html>.

Objective 4:

To collect evaluative data on the process, implementation, and outcomes of schools' planning regarding service delivery support strategies to facilitate the education of students with disabilities in general education settings.

Corresponding Activities, Accomplishments, and Outcomes:

Early in the project period, and consistent with the original project design, an initial set of Vermont schools was identified to field-test the project's self-assessment and planning model. For the 02-03 school year, participating schools include:

1. Enosburg Elementary
2. Green Street Elementary
3. Poultney Elementary
4. Rutland Intermediate

5. St. Albans Elementary
6. Swanton Elementary
7. Twinfield Central
8. Williston Central

Sites were selected with the assistance of the Vermont Advising Partners using a application process and rubric that are available online in our web site archive <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/archives.html>. Each of these school has developed schoolwide planning team, typically consisting of the following members: (a) general education administrator (e.g., principal), (b) special education administrator, (c) parent of a child with a disability, (d) general education teacher, (e) special education teacher, (f) paraprofessional, (g) consumer (e.g., student or adult with a disability), and (h) a "critical friend". After forming, each team participated in large group meetings facilitated by the project staff in November 02 and April 03. The final meeting of the 2002-03 school year is scheduled for June 4, 2003.

Each school has been field-testing the 10-step self-assessment and planning process, *Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals (Version 1.0)*. All of the schools are have completed Steps 1 through 7 and anticipate completing Step 8 by the end of June 03.

Two primary types of data have been collected from a wide range of people associated with each school during the project period: (a) baseline school demographic data, and (b) demographic data and descriptive information about school practices from 591 individuals affiliated with the schools (i.e., 290 teachers, 124 special education paraprofessionals, 106 parents who have children with disabilities, 47 special educators, and 24 school administrators). Questionnaires used to collect data are online in the forms used by the school and a generic form at <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/materials.html> and <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/surveys.html>, respectively. In the second year of the project each school is slated to identify a replication site within their school system. The aforementioned questionnaires are being used to collect the same information at these replication schools in June 03. All currently collected data has been coded and input into a SAS program on the university mainframe computer for initial analysis.

A third form of data has been collected during the initial performance period. As each team has completed its self-assessment and planning process steps, they have handed in completed versions of the forms from the *Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals*. These data, which come from each school's planning team, provide a wealth of information about the practices in these schools that has led

to their overreliance on paraprofessionals. We will continue to collect this type of data on further process steps as they are completed.

At present, a new application process has been initiated to identify six new "national" field-test sites (i.e., in states other than Vermont). An application information, forms, and selection rubric are online at:

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/applicationqanat.html>

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/applicationnat.html>

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/applicationrubricnat.html>

Objective 5:

To collaborate with a national and statewide coalition of advisory partners to improve the quality of project activities and relevance to service providers, policy makers, families, and self-advocates.

Corresponding Activities, Accomplishments, and Outcomes:

The project has established both Vermont and National Advisory groups.

The Vermont Advising Partners include individuals representing the following organizations:

Vermont Department of Education

Green Mountain Self-Advocates

Vermont Parent Information Center

Vermont Council of Administrators of Special Education

Vermont Superintendents Association

Vermont Principals Association

Vermont School Boards Association

Vermont NEA Paraeducator Task Force

Northeast Regional Resource Center

This set of Advising Partners has met three times this year, first in August to assist in the selection of Vermont field-test sites, and then in November and April, in conjunction with meetings that included field-test site team members. Additionally, the Project Director has maintained email, phone, and mail correspondence with the Vermont Advising Partners to keep them informed about project activities and to solicit their input.

The project also established a set of National Advising Partners. This set consists of representatives of the following organization, the majority of whom comprise the *IDEA Partnerships* members:

National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services

CEC-ASPIIRE: Association of Service Providers Implementing IDEA Reforms in Education

CEC-ILIAD: IDEA Local Implementation by Partnerships Local Administrators

*PMP: Policymaker Partnership (National Association of State Directors of
Special Education)*

Communication with National Advising Partners has been exclusively through email, phone, and mail correspondence to keep them informed about project activities and to solicit their input. In one case there has been substantive interaction between members of the Vermont and National Advising Groups in reference to the issue of how schools finance alternatives. The National Advising Group also has a designated role to assist in the dissemination of information about the project through their networks of consumers and partners.

Objective 6:

To maintain and extend a web site to provide up-to-date information regarding service delivery support strategies to facilitate the education of students with disabilities in general education settings.

Corresponding Activities, Accomplishments, and Outcomes:

A web site dedicated to Project EVOLVE has established at www.uvm.edu/~cdci/evolve/. This site contains a host of project-related information, documents, tools, and links to other sites, nearly 60 html pages or multi-page pdf documents. The site is updated regularly and includes both recent and archived project materials.

Objective 7:

To disseminate the project's model steps, tools, and findings nationally through a variety of outlets and in a variety of media and formats.

Corresponding Activities, Accomplishments, and Outcomes:

Project information has been disseminated in a variety of ways in addition to the aforementioned web site in multiple media (e.g., pdf, audio). Articles about the project, written by project faculty, have appeared in two national newsletters, *CEC Today* (2003) and the *TASH Connections Newsletter* (2003). An article that included information about the project appeared in a recently published issue of *Research Connection in Special Education* (Spring 2003, Number 12), published by ERIC/OSEP.

Presentations about the project, or including information about the project have been made at: (a) the national *TASH Conference*, Boston (Dec. 2002); (b) a research conference sponsored by the *National Center on Low Incidence Disabilities*, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO (Oct. 2002); (c) a full-day research-to-practice conference sponsored by the *University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability* (Feb. 03); (d) a workshop sponsored by the *Vermont Department of Education* (March 03); (e) graduate classes at the University of Vermont (Spring semester 2003); and (f) the OSEP Research Project Director's Conference (scheduled for July 2003).

B. Project Performance Using GPRA Program Performance Indicators

The following sections list the five *GPRA National Activities to Improve Education of Children with Disabilities* and briefly describe how the project's activities relate to them.

Objective 1: Programs respond to critical needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Project EVOLVE responds to a critical need of children with disabilities and their families by exploring and examining alternatives that ensure that students with disabilities receive their education from qualified personnel. As described in detail in the original grant application, many students with disabilities (especially those with the most intensive special education needs) receive much of their education from under-qualified

paraprofessionals who are inadequately trained and supervised. Model of service delivery that simply attempt to do a better job of preparing more highly qualified paraprofessionals still represent double-standards when compared to educational service delivery for students who do not have disabilities. Project EVOLVE's focus on alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals or their inappropriate use is a key element to improving educational supports and outcomes for students with disabilities and assisting their families in becoming more effective consumers of services.

Objective 2: Projects use high quality methods and materials.

Project EVOLVE's efforts to provide high quality methods and materials is first evidenced by the literature review and integrated process and content components that form the basis for the *Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals*. Next materials undergo the review of advising partners and school consumers. A formal data collection effort to get feedback on product quality is scheduled for June 2003.

Objective 3: Projects communicate appropriately and products are used to improve results for children with disabilities and their families.

See Objective A7 (Dissemination). Additionally, the dissemination of the *Guidelines for Selecting Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals* and corresponding materials is designed

specifically to improve results for children with disabilities and their families. Specifically, Step 8 of the *Guidelines...* includes an Action-Planning component that relies, in part, on logic modeling to assist teams in identifying a "Chain of Reasoning" leading from proposed actions to be taken in a school to students' outcomes.

Objective 4: Personnel are prepared to serve students with disabilities.

Project EVOLVE addresses this GPRA objective indirectly. Although the project does not specifically address personnel preparation, items include in the contents of the self-assessment address personnel preparation issues that schools may decide to include in their action-plans. For example, some schools are identifying the need for general education and special educators to have more training in differentiated instruction and other methods that allow them to teach mixed-ability groups within the context of typical class activities.

Objective 5: Families receive information about services for children with disabilities.

Beyond the dissemination activities mentioned previously (e.g., web site, national newsletters, audio formats), Project EVOLVE is involving families and consumers (i.e., people with disabilities) in direct, substantive ways. First, through the project's Vermont Advising partners, families and consumers are well represented. We

have been especially pleased to have ongoing interaction with *Green Mountain Self-Advocates*, a group of adults with intellectual disabilities and the *Vermont Parent Information Network*. Additionally, all eight participating schools (and hopefully future schools) have a parent of a child with a disability on their schoolwide planning teams. About half of the teams also include a student with a disability and we are continually encouraging schools to add student members so that they can have an appropriate voice in decision-making. We are continuing to collect data on the project from family members and plan to target future dissemination efforts toward them as data and findings become available.

Concluding Comment

Project EVOLVE has had a very busy and productive seven months since its inception on October 1, 2002. Timelines and all major tasks have been completed as outlined in the original grant application. Our staff, advising partners, and school partners look forward to the coming performance period. During that time we intend to grow from 8 field-test sites to approximately 30. While we collect implementation from out-of-state sites, we plan to visit Vermont sites to collect more in depth observational and interview data to more fully understand and describe the schoolwide changes the schools are planning to enact.