FINAL REPORT: HOW DISTRICT-WIDE SYSTEMS CHANGE IMPACTED LRE FOR STUDENTS WITH SEvere DISABILITIES

This report documents the work of NIUSI for Urban School Improvement that focused on supporting systems change in 11 of the largest urban school districts in the U.S. The report focuses primarily on the final five years of funding.

Funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, U. S. Department of Education
Advisory Board

- Lorenzo Aragon, BUENO Center for Multicultural Education
- Michael Armstrong, Ohio State Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children
- Bobby Coward, Capitol Area ADAPT
- Beverly E. Cross, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
- Ingrid Draper, Education Development Center, Inc.
- Ray Gerke, National Coalition on Self-Determination
- Marquita Grenot-Scheyer, California State University-Long Beach
- Kathy Chapman, The Alliance for Systems Change and Mid-South Regional Resource Center
- Donna Martinez, National Coalition on Self-Determination
- Evelyne Milorin, Parent
- Henry Milorin, Parent
- Hyun Sook Park, San Jose State University
- James M. Patton, The College of William and Mary
- Rachel Quenemoen, National Center for Educational Outcomes
- Judith Rizzo, Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy
- Ramon Villareal, Interwest Equity Assistance Center
- Nancy Weiss, TASH
- Stephanie Yates, Parent

Project Staff

- Suzanne Arnold, Professional Learning
- Rhona Jackson, Administrative Assistant
- Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins, Professional Learning
- Sherise Kerford, Events Planning
- Elizabeth B. Kozleski, Project Director
- Deidre Magee, Professional Learning
- Omar Montgomery, Evaluation
- Carolyn Moore, Events Planning
- Barbara Sparks, Evaluation
- Amanda Sullivan, Evaluation
- Wendy Sandoval, Administrative Assistant
- Janell Sueltz, Professional Learning
- Kate Templeton, Marketing
- Wendy Wyman, Evaluation
- Shelley Zion, Project Associate Director
- Theodore Zion, Technology Support

Project Officer

- Anne Smith, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs

1 Staff list recognizes people who have worked on this project since its inception in 2002 but may not have continued over the course of the project.
Impact ................................................................................................................................................... 36
Conclusion............................................................................................................................................. 37
References ............................................................................................................................................. 40
Product List ..................................
INTRODUCTION

This final report chronicles the outcomes of the second generation National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI), Award Number # H326B020002. Built on the previous five years of innovative work from 1997-2002 (a $5 million award), NIUSI’s second round of funding ($3.5 million) produced important results that offer a district-wide blueprint for the design and delivery of least restrictive environments and access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities with significant support needs. Seven principles emerged from this work that will be described in detail in subsequent sections of the report:

1. The delivery of special education services must be conceptualized as a seamless system of supports and services delivered within the context of an equitable and inclusive general education system.
2. Practitioners (including principals, general and special educators, instructional coaches, and related services personnel) must see themselves as members of transdisciplinary teams that share and expand each others’ knowledge, skills, and roles in order to design and support comprehensive learning environments for students.
3. Practitioners and families must build a shared vision of education anchored in the concepts of universal design, personalization, formative assessment, and continuous improvement.
4. Equity in terms of opportunities to learn, accountability, and the distribution of resources defines inclusive systems.
5. Inquiry for improving learning is part of a healthy, innovative, and equitable education system.
6. Improvements on behalf of any group of students must be conceptualized as a systems change endeavor. Failure to do so creates bureaucratic silos of inefficiency, sluggish communication, and “work arounds” that can mire a system for reasons that are lost in institutional memory but reified in practice.
7. State and local education contexts vary widely because of historical and contemporary political, social, and economic factors that intersect and complicate institutional, group, and individual regulatory and behavioral actions. Notions of transportable, universal research and policy solutions must be tempered by this understanding and emphasis placed on local solutions.

Our work with 10 urban school systems provided the crucible in which we learned together with our district partners. These school systems were part of NIUSI’s two fold strategy. First, we needed to test our ideas and implementation strategies in diverse LEAs in various contexts (large and small states, different demographics, unique political configurations, varying levels of expertise in the design and delivery of inclusive education, and varying external influences and confluences). Second, the LEAs offered opportunities to link with other districts so that our work could be disseminated through LEA networks. From intense, sustained interaction with district partners, the NIUSI team built a set of tools for change that can be implemented with U.S. school systems as disparate as Puerto Rico and Pullman, Washington or Memphis, Tennessee and Madison, Wisconsin. The emphasis in our work has been to provide systems for change that can travel and create the impetus for locally embedded, systems work that results in improving educational outcomes for students with severe disabilities while simultaneously improving contexts and results for other students as well. In subsequent sections, this report provides a background description of the NIUSI project and then describes NIUSI’s work in four arenas: Continuous Improvement, Research and Development, Professional Learning,
NUISI’s History

While comprehensive school reform initiatives flowered in the nineties, few of those initiatives focused on bringing special education services into the mix. And, fewer still focused per se on urban schools. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded a technical assistance center, called the National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NUISI) to target assistance to urban school systems across the country to improve access to general education for students with disabilities. NUISI’s mission was to build the capacity of urban schools and systems to serve students in inclusive classrooms and schools. This was complicated because two separate, special education dialogues were being engaged: (a) disproportionality with its perspectives on the troubling numbers of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds being inappropriately placed in special education, and (b) inclusive education with its focus on social justice and pushing students with disabilities into the general education system (Artiles, 2003). An important question being raised was “inclusion into what?” since general education was also producing poor outcomes for students of color (Erikson, 1996).

As has been noted in other studies, despite growing consensus around definitions, inclusive education models and practices have little similarity from context to context beyond surface markers (Kozleski, Artiles, Fletcher, & Engelbrecht, 2007). This is shaped in part by the significant heterogeneity of the sociocultural contexts in which the idea of inclusive education is enacted (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). Similarly to the ways in which disproportionality seems to play out against regional differences, so inclusive education has experienced different levels of engagement depending on state and local context. There has been little discourse about the impact of these local and regional differences on principles, policies, or practices of inclusive education. Further, the impact of these universal mandates on how families and children from indigenous and minority cultures and experiences negotiated schooling remained unexamined.

In 1997, when NUISI was initially funded, most urban school systems in the country served students with disabilities in clustered programs that pulled students with disabilities out of their home schools and bused them to center programs for students with disabilities. Clustering of students meant that districts could provide onsite specialized services such as physical and occupational therapies, speech/language, mental health support, and other specialized therapies. This practice was widespread throughout the country despite relatively poor results for students in terms of meeting curriculum standards, social networking, and opportunities for participation in school activities. In New York City, for example, District 75 was designed to offer such services as a separate system and did so for about 22,000 students in the city.

In spite of data from the first National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner et al, 1993), small qualitative studies, and examples of inclusive education systems in a few parts of the country that demonstrated the widespread benefits of inclusive education, special education services were conceptualized and delivered apart (for the most part) for students with disabilities. Data from the 1997-98 school year, reported by state to the U.S. Department of Education, showed that about 48% of all students with disabilities (n = 6 million) were educated in general education classrooms. However, in urban school systems, this percentage was as low as 10% of the special education population.
In a comparison between the ‘96-'97 and '06-'07 academic years, in three disability categories used in federal statute to identify students with disabilities (learning disability, emotional disturbance, and mental retardation), the number of states that reported serving more than 50% of their students in general education for 80% or more of the time increased for students with learning disabilities (from 24 states to 33 states) and for students with emotional disabilities (from 3 states to 7 states) (see NIUSI data maps online). But, for students with mental retardation labels, only one state reported serving those students in general education more than 80% of the time as opposed to two states reporting serving students with MR in general education classrooms in 1996-1997. This comparison is somewhat compromised by changes in the ways in which data are reported to the U. S. Department of Education. In the '96-'97 academic year, states were reporting the percentage of students served in special education classrooms less than 21% of the time while in '06-'07, states were reporting the percentage of students served in general education more than 80% of the time. However, it does suggest that some states are progressing in some categories while the vast majority of states have remained relatively static in the ways in which they provide special education services.

The Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS), a study of over 11,000 school-age students funded by the OSEP, suggests that continued concern about where a student with disabilities is educated is important. The SEELS data indicate that overall, students with disabilities who spend more time in general education classrooms tend to be absent less, perform closer to grade level than their peers in pull-out settings, and have higher achievement test scores (African-Blackorby, et al., 2005). This finding was corroborated by the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2) which found that secondary students with disabilities who take more general education classes have lower GPAs than their peers in pull-out academic settings, but score closer to grade level than their peers in math and science even when disability classification is taken into consideration (Wagner, et al. 2003). In spite of these findings, as the OSEP study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of IDEA (SLIIDEA) indicates, progress towards more and more robust, effective instruction in the general education environment seems to be hampered by a lack of systemic, sustained programmatic attention to teacher education, professional learning, the use of data driven decision-making, and school capacity development (Schiller et al., 2006). In a longitudinal evaluation of progress in seven school systems Schiller et al. (2006) found that the majority of the systems they studied relied on the individual expertise of teachers rather than district-level policy tools related to issuing guidelines, allocating resources, and supporting professional development and training.

Class action suits on behalf of students with disabilities were settled in Chicago and Los Angeles requiring massive effort to redesign services for students with disabilities to ensure their access to general education classrooms and curriculum. More recently, several other class action suits have been settled for states (e.g., Pennsylvania and Connecticut) and other cities (e.g., San Francisco). Against this backdrop, NIUSI began its work by creating a conceptual framework to help school systems, administrators, practitioners, and families understand the complexity of change that was required to make principled, structural, and practice changes in large, urban bureaucracies.

**NIUSI’S Systemic Change Framework**

The Systemic Change Framework (Ferguson, Kozleski, & Smith, 2003; Shanklin, Kozleski, Meagher, Sands, Joseph & Wyman, 2003) visually represents the varying levels of effort that combine to impact student achievement and learning in urban schools (see Figure 4). Because of our focus on inclusive education, the
framework was designed to bring together the work of practitioners into a unified system of teaching and learning in which the learning contexts for students are organized in ways that engage the students at the margins, such as those with disabilities, as well as those in mainstream. In doing this work, we sought to reduce the number of students inappropriately placed in special education and enhance general education curricular frameworks and assessments so that learning can be individualized within the context of classroom communities. NIUSI began with a unified framework to reduce the boundaries that are often observed between the work of special and general educators.

The Systemic Change Framework provides a common language among school professionals whose specialization often creates barriers to common interests. Further, since these elements describe the work of teaching for students with and without disabilities, schools can integrate inclusionary practices with other reform goals to form a coherent approach to change and renew educational processes. Five levels of the framework are interconnected, represented by shared borders between levels. The Systemic Change Framework was used to assess district and school needs for professional learning as well as a scaffold for guiding the planning of school improvement efforts. The Systemic Change Framework owes much to Bronfenbrenner’s nested ecological model (1979). Students comprise the central position, bringing their cultural histories into classrooms and other school environments, participating in the construction of the dynamic cultures that are constructed within classrooms (Gallegos, Cole & LCHC, 2001). Teachers and their professional worlds are actively engaged in shaping and organizing these cultural contexts through an amalgam of their individual and collective cultural histories that have been molded by professional, personal, and community exchanges. Schools, where teachers and students create these worlds together, form the mesosystems in which overlapping cultures collide, collaborate and negotiate participation, values, and outcomes. Beyond schools, lie the regulatory constraints imposed by school systems mediating between local communities and state and federal policy.

Students. Most observers would agree that students are at the heart of schooling, conceptualized not by their individual set of psychological characteristics, but by the interplay between those characteristics, the cultural histories that serve as vehicles through which students view and interact with the world, and the participatory demands of the classroom itself (Cole, 1996). As Rogoff (2003) writes,

“In the emerging sociocultural perspective, culture is not an entity that influences individuals. Instead, people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people. Thus, individual and cultural processes are mutually constituting rather than defined separately for each other (p. 51).”

Students expend effort as they seek to make meaning of schooling experiences. This effort recognizes the dynamic nature of learning as a cultural practice that is inhibited or accelerated by individual and institutional responses (Sternberg, 2007). Therefore, the inner circle of the Systemic Change Framework represents student learning and student effort.

Practitioners. The next layer consists of professional elements that affect student effort and learning. How learning environments are established and maintained rests on the technical and relational skills, intellectual creativity and curiosity, and cultural perspectives of teachers and other practitioners. These efforts were organized into five dimensions: (a) learning standards, (b) teaching design and practices, (c) family
participation in teaching & learning, (d) group practice, and (e) learning assessment. Through everyday negotiation based on the interplay among students, families, and practitioners these elements are reconfigured and shaped into idiosyncratic activity arenas called classrooms.

Schools. The next layer of the Systemic Change Framework contains school-level elements. It is here that structures and processes are established to frame and support the work of educators and students. Six dimensions categorize activity at this level: (a) governance and leadership, (b) structure and use of time, (c) resource development and allocation, (d) school/community relations, (e) culture of change and improvement, and (f) physical environment and facilities. In all cases, schools are influenced by the activity arenas of the student and practitioner levels and by the mandates and structures of the districts in which they reside. Yet, schools also influence these other arenas by the ways in which administrators connect practitioners, reach out to families, use and distribute resources and structure time, meetings, and agendas.

School Districts. The next level identifies the systemic elements at the district-level. At this level, seven elements emerge, and each of these is conceived as important to the district’s efforts for supporting what schools do: student services, inquiry on schools and schooling, organizational supports, resource development and allocation, systemic infrastructure, culture of renewal and improvement, and district/community partnerships. State law, regulation, and technical assistance shape the work of school systems as does the education policies of the U.S. Department of Education.

This nested view of schooling and the work of urban students and educators guided our practice during the 11 years that NIUSI was funded. In the systems that we partnered with, our work focused on bringing coherence to the district, school, and classroom levels of practice. In doing so, we developed a set of tools for shaping the structural, cultural, and learning work of school organizations. In this report, we explore the results of that work in order to better understand how policy and systems changes influence and change fundamental assumptions about teaching and learning and the activity arenas we call classrooms.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

NIUSI for Urban School Improvement (NUISI) was designed to develop powerful networks of urban local education agencies (LEAs) and schools that embrace and implement a data-based, continuous improvement approach for inclusive practices through existing and new partnerships. A national technical assistance and dissemination center, NIUSI’s goal was to help the 100 largest school districts in the US become more inclusive in their delivery of services to students with significant support needs. The work addressed five broad goals that together supported the capacity of urban schools and school districts to engage students with disabilities in high quality curriculum and learning experiences that improve their ability to succeed in school. These goals included (1) a focus on CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT; (2) continued RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT; (3) coherent and culturally responsive PROFESSIONAL LEARNING; (4) national NETWORKING AND DISSEMINATION; and (5) PARTICIPATORY AND MULTI-METHOD EVALUATION.

Mission & Goals

NIUSI’s mission was to partner with Regional Resource Centers (RRCS) to develop powerful networks of urban LEAs and schools that embrace and implement a data-based, continuous improvement approach for
inclusive practices. NIUSI was committed to evidence-based practice in early intervening, universal design, literacy, and positive behavior supports. NIUSI was organized to address five goals:

**Goal 1: Continuous Improvement:** Increase knowledge and understanding through evaluation of current practice, change efforts and impact. The National Institute’s powerful networks were anchored by 10 urban LEAs, distributed by region, across the United States. These synergy sites provided leadership to linking sites within their region and, collectively, influence the practices of a broad network of urban school district sites across the country. Synergy sites also provided the evidence that grounded the products and dissemination efforts of the National Institute.

**Goal 2: Research and Development:** Synthesize and expand the research & inclusive practices literature. In collaboration with practitioners and researchers across the country, the National Institute continued to produce policy briefs, syntheses of urban research, multicultural education, inclusive practices and results of in depth studies of students, teachers, schools and districts on the move.

**Goal 3: Professional Development:** Leverage continued improvement of inclusive practices in urban schools through regional technical assistance plans, collaborative work with leading urban districts focusing on research validated practices in early intervention, reading, behavior, and Universal Design. Synergy sites worked closely with the National Institute implementing leadership academies, on-line professional development and chat rooms for technical assistance networks among practitioners, and used video and student work samples to hone classroom and school-based practices.

**Goal 4: Networking and Dissemination:** Engage national discourse in urban, professional practice and policy communities on improving educational outcomes. The National Institute networked to nearly 3,000 professional and family organizations and leaders who focus their efforts on improving outcomes for students in urban schools. Our role in unifying the general and special education communities in urban schools resulted in the inaugural 2001 National Inclusive Schools Week celebrations across the United States as well as around the world. Ongoing threaded discussions, web-based school improvement tools, site-based progress, on-line action research groups and other networking activities will continue to be hosted on our award-winning, Bobby-approved Web site.

**Goal 5: Participatory and Multi-Method Evaluation:** Engage sites in examining patterns in the impact of change efforts on the placement and outcomes for students with severe disabilities and their general education peers in participating sites. Regional teams composed of Regional Resource, Equity Assistance, and NCLB technical assistance Institute staff, along with site liaisons from the synergy sites and nationally recognized researchers, linked to other urban sites within the region providing technical assistance for professional development, research and development, and continuous improvement cycles of practice.

Rather than work through state education agencies (SEAs) to impact urban districts, NIUSI’s directive was to work directly with local education agencies (LEAs) and partner with the Regional Resource Centers (RRCs), also funded by OSEP to disseminate results of the work to empower other school systems. In large urban districts in particular, the politics between state and local education agencies are complicated because LEAs are likely to have strong, highly regarded superintendents with mandates from local school boards to make immediate improvements in student outcomes. These local mandates may or may not reflect the strategic
directions that SEAs are attempting to lead and are being held responsible for reporting. Coupled with large bureaucracies that are often larger and more complex than SEAs, urban districts are less likely to have collaborative relationships with their SEAs than smaller districts that need the outside assistance that SEAs can offer. Thus, NIUSI’s role in providing information, technical assistance (TA), and professional learning directly to the LEAs was in contrast to most of the Office of Special Education Programs’ (OSEP) TA efforts that are directed toward SEAs. This mission made it difficult to collaborate productively with RRCs since their primary link is SEAs, not LEAs. NIUSI had to create pathways into local districts that capitalized on local mandates for reform and improvement and, in doing so, ensure that students with disabilities were well served by those change efforts.

Leadership

To engage in the work of change and reform requires successful experience in large-scale school reform, the ability to capitalize on existing linkages across the country, and a broad, active network of scholars and activists who can work together effectively in pursuit of equity agendas around race, ability, and socio-economic status. While the original proposal had a team composed of faculty and researchers from the University of Oregon, the Education Development Center, Inc., the Vermont Institute for Math and Science Technologies, and the Juniper Gardens Children’s Project, University of Kansas, within 18 months, we scaled back our collaboration and maintained the core project functions first at the University of Colorado – Denver where the Project Director was a special education professor (Years 1 to 4) and then at ASU when the Project Director moved to a new faculty position (Years 5 and 6, a no-cost extension year). A strong, collaborative relationship between the project director, the project officer, TASH, and participating districts worked effectively to keep all sites involved. Additionally, we met annually with the NIUSI Advisory Board, and a remarkable collection of innovative staff at Denver and later at ASU was able to produce a set of products that included tools for change that proved invaluable to NIUSI’s ability to deliver its commitments on time and with high quality.

What we learned was that the effort required to keep three teams running at peak efficiency in three settings (Oregon, Vermont, and Kansas) took too much time from the work in local systems. By setting up a strong, central team that collaborated daily in face to face meetings we were able to better serve our districts and diminish the “noise” of three teams working in three systems in parallel.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

DESCRIPTION

NIUSI’s networks were anchored by ten urban LEAs, distributed by region, across the United States: (1) Chicago; (2) Cincinnati, OH; (3) Denver, CO; (4) Las Vegas, NV (Clark County); (5) Houston; (6) Madison, WI; (7) Memphis, TN; (8) Miami-Dade; (9) New York City, Region 10, and (10) Washington, D. C. These synergy sites provided evidence-based leadership to linking sites within their region and, collectively, were intended to influence the practices of a broad network of urban school district sites across the country. Data from the synergy sites on school accountability for all students, including students with
disabilities, aligned curricula and standards, and student performance were uploaded and analyzed using a set of web-based tools for data mining and display.

As sites selected and chose their NIUSI networked schools, we offered them a set of tools to examine both school levels of adoption and fidelity of implementation of culturally responsive and inclusive practices in reading, behavior, universal design, and early intervention and progress in achieving improvements. Involving expanded membership in team based analysis of the data was a first step towards developing a powerful and well-networked change team in the site cities. Invoking the power of web-based data management and analysis systems, these teams remained connected by constant access to web data and city portfolios that provide sensitive markers of change and improvement. These teams convened annually in a face-to-face synergy site meeting in Washington, D.C. to assess and reformulate their technical assistance plans to ensure that technical assistance and professional development plans targeted (1) shifts in students from restrictive environments to general education settings; (2) professional learning for teachers and teacher candidates (general and special) to build their skills in collaborating to provide high quality reading and other academic subjects for all students; (3) the development of whole school positive behavior supports; and (4) support for families and their children’s’ education.

GOALS

NIUSI’s continuous improvement goals were designed to (1) create a system of continuous, data-based improvement to serve students with significant support needs in general education settings and curricula; (2) disseminate the system to other school districts through a regionalized dissemination strategy; and (3) develop a system of monitoring disproportionality and inclusive practices that focused on widespread screening and effective early intervention, reading, and behavioral programs.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Annual Board Meetings. The annual NIUSI Advisory Board meetings were held each year at the beginning of the summer. The meetings provided an important opportunity for members of the Advisory Board to inform NIUSI’s work by sharing their own perspectives and experiences. They also served as a sounding board as they critiqued NIUSI’s accomplishments. While the Board was an important source of internal validation and improvement for the NIUSI work, the Board was less successful in promoting and disseminating NIUSI work through member networks. The Board met after the Synergy Site meetings so that it could be informed by observing and participating in the Synergy Site meeting. In spite of this opportunity to work directly with districts, the Board’s input was less valuable to the NIUSI staff than feedback from the sites themselves.

Synergy Sites. Urban school districts are complex organizations. Each district is unique. Each has a history of challenges and changes that has shaped its own culture of practice and operation. As NIUSI developed working relationships with each district, we tried to explore and understand the similarities and differences among them to customize our partnerships and maximize outcomes for students.

NIUSI supported the work of identified inclusive schools in 10 partner districts in order to (1) ensure that their efforts became sustainable and (2) influence systemic reform efforts across each school district. In
collaboration with district and school-based leaders, the NIUSI developed a set of Leadership Academies; offered professional learning opportunities; and ensured district, state and national dissemination of the progressive work in which these school districts were engaged. Over 340 individual school sites in partner districts received direct support from NIUSI. Project support occurred through a variety of strategies that included the following:

- An annual synergy site meeting
- An annual coaching meeting
- Coaching and mentoring by NIUSI staff
- Access to network of experts through the partner district site liaisons
- A set of 10, nine-hour professional learning experiences that were designed to be delivered to teams of school personnel implementing inclusive practices including access to the general education curriculum (90 hours total of highly interactive, experiential leadership education).
- 15 practitioner briefs designed for families and teachers to better understand and implement inclusive practices in local schools
- Data maps that tracked changes in LRE and disproportionality by disability categories and student ethnicities
- A highly regarded website, listserv, and monthly enews

Synergy Sites annually sent teams of educators to Washington DC in late spring to become familiar with NIUSI. Teams from all Synergy Sites were brought together for two purposes: 1) To design synergy site specific action plans for technical assistance and professional development to improve inclusive practices in each district; 2) To identify goals both within and across synergy site districts that link school improvement efforts with inclusive education for students with disabilities. After these meetings, Site Liaisons continued to meet on a regular basis and plans and activities grow and evolve. A sample agenda from a recent Synergy Site Meeting is located in Appendix L.

At the meetings, an extensive process directed by NIUSI staff led to the following outcomes: 1) Coherent district level plans developed for subsequent years; 2) An action calendar is established for networking activities; 3) Long and short term Professional Development goals are developed to include teacher development and leadership, use of scientifically-based research and practices, and the role of inquiry in school improvement; and 4) District specific key assets are identified. Significant follow up work was done with a number of sites in September to assist in launching of plans.

**Site Liaisons.** Site liaisons provided an important link between NIUSI and the school district. The person who served in this capacity supported both NIUSI and the Synergy Site in obtaining the outcomes of our joint work. Site liaisons were required to have the following knowledge base in order to assist their district to leverage change and provide quality education to all students: systems change, partnership development, leadership development, inclusive learning environment, network development and leveraging, urban culture and issues, instructional and curricular expertise, policy development and implementation (see site liaison project tool).

The site liaisons held a wide range of positions in their respective districts. All held professional positions in their Departments of Special Education, Divisions of Exceptional Students or Departments of Student...
Six were Directors of those divisions. The remainder were coordinators and/or managers. Because NIUSI recognized that two-way communication was critical to its work, multiple systems were established to effectively and efficiently maintain these relationships. The systems included weekly telephone communication to each site, ongoing coaching and support, and weekly electronic communication to each site. A group e-mail system was established which allows continued networking among sites.

The large meeting of Synergy Site Teams was followed each June with a working retreat between Site Liaisons and NIUSI staff to grapple with specifics of site plans generated at the Synergy Site Meeting and to continue momentum toward successful implementation in the next school year.

General Technical Assistance was provided to all partner sites to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge and Skills for Inclusive Education</th>
<th>Tools and Products for Further Development</th>
<th>Tools for Inquiry, Assessment, and Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Identify and coach schools engaged in becoming inclusive sites for the delivery of special and general education</td>
<td>• Distribution of bi-monthly newsletter called <em>The Liaison</em></td>
<td>• Develop and modify forms needed to capture site accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide training, mentoring, and coaching to implement activities</td>
<td>• Update site liaison roles &amp; responsibilities</td>
<td>• Provide tools for evaluation of activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support site liaisons in district planning and implementation</td>
<td>• Develop Professional Development Modules</td>
<td>• Collect data on site progress toward goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide weekly calls to site liaisons</td>
<td>• Update NIUSI library to include current research</td>
<td>• Work with sites on data collection and data mapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop and monitor site work plans</td>
<td>• Participate in the National Inclusive Schools Week Celebration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hold quarterly site liaison professional development meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work with district teams to disseminate the knowledge and skills for multicultural access to the general education curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide annual site retreat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide support to district teams to design leadership academies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide assistance in presenting Leadership academies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Site Liaisons submitted indicators that became a key means of documenting progress toward established goals. Work plans for the current school year were reviewed in terms of successes, and barriers to date related to professional development, systems change issues, the use of online technology for training, communication, and data analysis purposes. Site specific technical assistance calendars were established. Site Liaison professional development meetings were held quarterly. Each meeting included a school site visit.

Sites were engaged in numerous activities throughout the school year, the following can be highlighted from each. This list is in no way exhaustive, but it is a snapshot of what was accomplished:

**Chicago (33 sites)** NIUSI worked with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to design and develop a research project to include 33 schools over three years. The work involved modifying existing district processes for data collection, analysis and dissemination of critical data needed to assess progress on school change data collection and draft maps. Chicago Public Schools hosted a site liaison meeting that included discussion with principals, teachers, parent advocates, parents and assistant principals.

Chicago Public Schools and NIUSI collaborated on several levels to bring services to CPS. Chicago introduced 11 schools each year for the three years of the CPS/NIUSI partnership, with a total of 33 schools participating. In addition to National Institute staff site visits, Chicago hosted a Site Liaison meeting, developed a schedule for the summer leadership academy, and designed and developed participation in the research project for over three years. In concert with the research project, CPS also modified the existing district level data collection, analysis and dissemination of critical data needed to assess progress on school change.

**Cincinnati (10 sites)** The NIUSI held multiple discussions clarifying the relationships between NIUSI goals and district strategic plans. Assets mapping conducted by NIUSI and the district identified key partners to participate in Institute strategies. The district made a commitment to implementing positive behavioral support strategies, participating in National Inclusive Schools Week, participating in newspaper and television coverage in 5 schools, hiring two inclusive practice coaches, developing an interdepartmental newsletter, conducting a targeted awareness campaign in Universal Design for Learning, and identifying 2 model schools in addition to 5-10 partner schools. NIUSI also supported the district with recommendations for a comprehensive district-wide service delivery plan for students.

**Clark County Schools (37 sites)** NIUSI held a leadership retreat with senior level district administrators and engaged school and district level leadership in ongoing leadership academies on differentiated instruction. The district worked with NIUSI to host a site liaison professional development meeting that included a site visit to Cram Middle School. A parent advisory group was established in the district to work on Institute strategies and a synergy advisory board was established. A direct link to the NIUSI website was placed on the student services exchange on the district web site. This link provided folders for professional reading, teacher dialogue, announcements and other pertinent web links on district web site. All 300 schools in Clark County participated in National Inclusive Schools Week. Additionally the district worked with NIUSI to ensure that surveys/observations were conducted to measure implementation of initiatives to date. NIUSI provided financial support for participation of 5 National Board Certified Teachers to become NIUSI coaches.
Denver (10 sites). Leadership academies on inclusive education were conducted by NIUSI and follow-up plans for ongoing professional development were created. Additionally, NIUSI provided assistance with design team meetings, facilitation for professional development, and statistical analysis of data for the northeast school collaborative within the district. NIUSI wrote and received a Rose Foundation award to educate families who speak Spanish as their primary language about inclusive schools.

District of Columbia (10 sites) The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) was a synergy site with NIUSI for 7 years. Site work in DCPS focused on the development of building leadership teams in 10 schools to implement inclusive practices, early literacy, and positive behavioral supports. The building leadership teams from each school attended leadership academies each quarter at which they refine and evaluate their school improvement plans using the rubrics provided by NIUSI. NIUSI also implemented parent training academies in DCPS.

Houston (9 sites) NUISI supported the design and development of five year plan for implementation beginning in 2004-2005. The district participated in the National Inclusive Schools Week (NISW) with support from a proclamation of the week from the Mayor, a statement of support from Houston’s Congresswoman, and extensive media coverage. The district launched an initiative to provide support for middle school special education students and conducted a Best Practices Institute for general education early childhood teachers and special education teachers. Houston Public Schools also conducted an Inclusive Schools Grants in celebration of NISW and is participating in “Schools for a New Society”.

Miami-Dade (55 sites) Miami-Dade School District collaborated with NIUSI on data collection to design data maps. Over 55 schools applied for and were awarded “All Students All School Inclusion Development Grants” and over 160 schools received training in and implemented inclusive educational programs and reported increases of over 200% participation. NIUSI provided technical assistance to approximately 12 schools implementing inclusive practices in September, 2000, fielded over 120 calls regarding logistics of implementing programs and conducted a presentation to over 60 principals of ACCESSII on district efforts, and presented to the Superintendent’s Advisory Panel on district action plans.

New York City (7 sites) NIUSI conducted a leadership retreat with all levels of administration District 75 & District 10. Additionally NIUSI leaders and staff made site visits to PS 33. The district hosted a site liaison meeting for the site liaisons from across all of the NUISI sites. NIUSI also supported the district in running a leadership academy on positive behavior supports and with training on “Collaboration and Teaming” for special education teacher support services providers from participating schools.

Data Site

The NIUSI Data Site is a sophisticated repository of national, state and district level data from readily available public resources brought together in order to facilitate a focus on systems change. Data from sources such as IDEA, Title 2, OCR and NCES have been added. Summaries can be added from any public analysis of these and other sources of data that have a bearing on school improvement. This data warehouse allows users to examine ethnic diversity of students in special education in participating districts as well as districts’ particular special education labels and cross tab these data with referral, placement and achievement.
In addition, school by school levels of adoption and fidelity of implementation track for implementing practices in reading, behavior and early intervention and progress in achieving improvements. NIUSI has data from Chicago, Miami, the District of Columbia, Clark County Schools (Las Vegas), Denver Public Schools, Hacienda la Puente (Los Angeles), Madison (WI), and Memphis. An important breakthrough in technology was the successful development and installation of a security system enabling Chicago, Miami, and District Columbia data, and data from future sites, to be uploaded directly from the local site to the NIUSI site.

An introductory presentation about the maps assists users in understanding and using the site. Interactive maps and tables on the site present the distributions of students with disabilities across various disability categories by ethnic/racial category and teacher qualifications to help practitioners and policy makers at the local and state levels understand their own status in relationship to disproportionate representation in special education.

Maps and tables are available by state as well as by some key cities. The key cities maps illustrate what districts can do to visualize their data at a finer grained level of analysis than is available at the state level. These tables of data are also interactive. That is, users can sort and order columns of information to help see their state data in a variety of contexts. Users can also make choices and then see (or print) trend graphs and comparative histogram graphs at the state level.

**Site Profiles**

A profile for each site has been completed containing a variety of data sets and other benchmarks of each site’s status related to the NIUSI System’s Change Framework. Evidences are chronicled according to such categories as IHE support to teachers, levels of inquiry-based professional development, support for student inquiry, existence and progress of building leadership teams/site governance structures, existence and effectiveness of continuous improvement focus, an ethic of and processes for collaborative problem solving, teacher involvement in district decision making, support for teachers in the use of information systems linked to refinement of practice, extent to which increasingly more at-risk students are served successfully by classroom teachers, teacher involvement in school accountability processes focused on school improvement and increased success for all students. Profiles also include specific information about demographics, leadership structure, and historical and current policy, economic and social context of each site.

**Data Maps**

Data maps were used to track how students with significant support needs were served in the least restrictive environment, compared by racial or ethnic category. These maps were invaluable for looking at patterns of performance over time.
**IMPACT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Community of Practice Sites – One for each synergy site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>City Profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>397</td>
<td>NIUSI Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Large Urban districts committed to full implementation of inclusive schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Districts contributing individual student record data on their schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>Individual student records in our GIS database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;100</td>
<td>GIS maps portraying disproportionality and LRE distributions at the LEA and school level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>State requesting NIUSI data mapping of all cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Linking State Sites using NIUSI materials in a contractual agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidences of impact were both quantitative and qualitative. Data both quantitative and qualitative were collected on cycles that varied from weekly reports through status updates; three month data compilations through quarterly reports and annual district profiles. These reporting structures created opportunities for ongoing reflection of the evidences collected. Informal opportunities to visit the existing evidences enabled site liaisons to plan for future activities and brought greater consciousness to our efforts.

NIUSI tracked the impact and influence of our work in a systematic way so that we learned from our efforts and communicated effectively with one another and the sites. There were several components to this system of tracking the activities at the site level:

- Weekly site logs - these logs chronicled the events, activities and episodes that occurred in the daily lives of our site liaisons as they helped to implement our target interventions
- Weekly Coordinator planning tool - Coordinators completed a weekly tool that helped them identify the impact of the activity in each site and its success in moving the site closer to high fidelity implementation of our interventions
- Coordinator phone logs - a record keeping device to track coaching and mentoring activities. These phone logs were kept on file to assist in monthly and quarterly data compilations
- Monthly compilations - These monthly matrices were organized by intervention level (district, building and practice)
- Quarterly reports - quarterly report to the project officer and leadership team provide synopses of the activities accomplished in each of our sites
• Semiannual Spotlights – these glimpses of our districts’ progress were published and disseminated to the participating sites.

**Culture of Change**

Nationally, NIUSI looked for evidence that national, regional, and state education reform networks recognized NIUSI as a resource on inclusive education practice in urban schools. Additionally, evidence was sought that national, regional, and state education reform networks were collaborating with NIUSI. This impact was measured by the degree to which other networks disseminated NIUSI’s publications, linked to its web site, and invited Institute leadership to participate in their activities. Finally, NIUSI also tracked information that evidenced the degree to which national, regional, and state reform networks, the U.S. Department of Education, private non-profits, and other organizations leading reform in urban communities shared information and systemic approaches to reform with and through NIUSI.

**OVERALL IMPACT**

• Leadership Academies in all districts built teacher capacity to improve learning for all students by providing content on differentiated instruction, working in collaborative teams, data mining to track student progress, examining models for supporting students with disabilities and their access to the general education curriculum.

• Evaluations from the Leadership Academies were extremely positive and led to changes in the districts’ approaches to organizing and providing professional development targeted at school improvement, particularly around the education of students with disabilities.

• Whole school improvement teams, networked meetings within districts, and site liaison quarterly meetings leveraged change and continued improvement.

• Online forums, research journals and discussions that utilized NIUSI’s web site were a major influence on internal work and served as an important dissemination and linkage tool for professional development.

**Sources of barriers**

The biggest challenges that we faced in districts were the number of separate initiatives that districts were trying to implement simultaneously. Working with site liaisons within the system helped a great deal. Janell Sueltz, Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins, Deidre McGee, and Suzanne Arnold each played a key role in keeping NIUSI on the play board at all times and maintaining a focus on the NIUSI agenda. Since each district had a different tradition for professional development, the role of schools in leading initiatives, beliefs about learning networks, the districts have responded differently to the work. For instance, we used outside leverage to get work moving more consistently in New York City. On the other hand, in Clark County, we worked closely with internal leadership to make sure that schools were clear about how the NIUSI initiative should be balanced with other district initiatives. Thus, context had as much to do with success in large scale initiatives as it did in trying to influence change at individual schools. Further, senior central administrators and school boards focused on NCLB agenda were leery of addressing LRE issues for fear of taking their eyes off annual school improvement.
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

RATIONALE: NEEDS & PURPOSE

NIUSI’s collaborative work on knowledge synthesis and product development resulted in the development and dissemination of a variety of products, ranging from On Point topical publications for practitioners to topical briefs for policy audiences to press releases that inform the general public. Many of our products were (and are still) available electronically both online on NIUSI’s web site and on CDs, in Spanish and English. Our products were designed to be accessible for a variety of audiences.

Many of our products draw on existing research regarding what works in schools, synthesized into sets of products that speak to the policy, research, practitioner, family, and lay audiences. The developers accessed existing and ongoing databases, research syntheses, and currently funded projects addressing the intersection of general education restructuring, culturally and linguistically diverse students and inclusive schooling practices to summarize current information. We targeted searches of major computerized research databases in education, disability studies, and general social sciences. This activity helped provide the references needed to summarize the current research and led to syntheses of important topics as they relate to urban and inclusive education.

NIUSI’s products focused on topics related to the intersection of race, ethnicity, culture and ability and the practice of special education. All products were accessible and based on universal design principles. We used three criteria in our review. First, were the products available and accessible? (1) Materials should be accessible through alternate formats to people with disabilities and to Spanish speakers; (2) Products were developed for multiple audiences, with a focus on: Community Members, Practitioners, & Scholars; (3) Products were disseminated in multiple formats through a variety of media and (4) the number of products disseminated reflected growth of usership. Second, we examined our products in terms of their praxis or their linkage between research and practice. Did the products reflect a synthesis of knowledge from research and practice? Were the products responsive: Were the information and tools supplied to sites responsive to their needs? Were the products reciprocal? Was there an exchange of information and knowledge taking place between NIUSI and communities of users? Third, our products must meet a standard of authenticity. Were products fair? Did they accurately and fairly represent a broad range of issues and perspectives? Were the products educative? Did they contribute to a richer and deeper understanding of the issues? Were the products catalytic? Did they encourage users to move to action?

After working with the synergy sites, NIUSI staff worked to design research studies that asked important questions about the improvement strategies that various sites were initiating. The collection of robust data became a part of the memorandum of understanding that specific districts signed. These research efforts increased the power of our research syntheses to fill in some of the missing evidence that surrounds the use of culturally responsive, inclusive practices in schools. For instance, to what extent did the involvement of families in identifying appropriate classroom behavior lead to teacher tolerance of a broader range of activity levels in young African American and Latino boys and decreased referrals to the discipline office (e.g., Utley, Kozleski, Smith & Draper, 2002)? Other questions remain about the nature of resiliency in minority students’ and families’ lives, how best urban educators can communicate and collaborate with students’
families, understandings of institutional processes and factors that can enable or constrain minorities’ performance in various school contexts, and leadership issues in the administration of urban and suburban schools in the midst of multiple reforms. While the funding of NIUSI only permitted a small number of co-constructed and co-investigated research projects in our synergy sites, we believe that this work was key to building an evidence of practice.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Family/School Linkages Project products

The Family/School Linkages Project (FSL) was a funded companion project of NIUSI and was led by Dianne Ferguson. It addressed ways in which improvements to the results and outcomes for children with disabilities could be achieved by investigating and reporting specific ways in which families of students with and without disabilities could contribute more substantively to schools’ educational mission and outcomes. Specifically, the project was a participatory research effort to identify, refine and disseminate successful approaches to strengthening linkages between families and schools in urban settings with regard to participation in IEPs as well as general education curriculum planning. The proposal’s focus emerged from the work of NIUSI for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI) to embed inclusive educational practices within larger initiatives for whole school reform. Our experience working with teachers, administrators, students and families convinced us that: (1) sustainable reform can only occur in a context of strong collaboration and partnership between school and home, and (2) successful inclusion of students with disabilities must also address the inclusion of the families of those students in the life and goals of the school. While these prerequisites are true of schools everywhere, it is especially true for the schools in our nation’s cities.

The project goals were to: (1) help school personnel to better understand the families of their students, (2) assist school personnel to seek feedback from families about the school and find out what families want to contribute to the school’s mission and operations, (3) develop responses to the information from and about families that make a difference for schools and student learning and (4) assess the impact of developing new and novel school/family linkages.

This Project used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Project staff recruited “inquiry teams” of families and teachers to collect data on specific questions, learn data collection strategies and engage in research. Team members contributed the equivalent of a day a month to the Project and were modestly compensated. Teams were supported by a Team Leader and project staff to analyze data, summarize findings, develop a range of products, and share the data with school and stakeholders.

Five school-based inquiry teams in Colorado and seven in Louisiana participated in the FSL Project. These schools and districts represented quite a range of settings and communities. There were eight elementary, two middle schools and one high school. With only two exceptions, these schools were either urban or urban ring districts. However, only one school had fewer than 30% of their students receiving free or reduced lunch. Most were above 50% and five were above 70%. The schools had student populations that ranged from 379 to 1,484. In four schools there were a majority of Latino students and in three others, African American students. Three schools had a majority of Caucasian students.
Each school formed an Inquiry Team that included 2-3 teachers or other school personnel and 3-4 family members. These teams began working together in January 2003 in Denver and in October 2003 in Louisiana. Teams were supported by Project staff to (1) complete an assets map of the school, and later, the community; (2) develop an inquiry focus in collaboration with the school’s leadership team; (3) collect, compile, analyze, and interpret data to respond to the inquiry focus; (4) share what the teams learn with other program improvement and governance structures in the school for action planning; and (5) chronicle results of efforts by the school to make changes in family/school linkages through case accounts.

Several products resulted from this project: FSL Manuals, Individual School Case Accounts, TASH Connections Article, and a Did You Know series and a Let’s Try series, which provide research and activities for engaging families.

**Tools for Change**

The following tools for change were developed, field tested, and validated by NIUSI staff in a variety of school settings. They are available on the website at [http://www.urbanschools.org/professional/tools.html](http://www.urbanschools.org/professional/tools.html).

1. ITEMS Decision Tool for Instruction
2. Learning from Speakers Protocol
3. NIUSI Accreditation Standards: A Blueprint for Inclusive Schools
4. School Improvement Survey
6. The School Improvement Planning Booklet
8. Tuning Protocol
9. Walkthrough Planning Guide
10. Work Plan for School Improvement

**Knowledge Development**

21 practitioner briefs are available on line. Authors include Adelman, Ferguson, Fierros, Galindo, Milorin, Riegor and McGrail, McGregor, Salisbury, Wilder, Zion, and many others.

**Published Work**


**Technical Reports**


PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

RATIONALE: NEEDS & PURPOSE

Synergy sites worked closely with NIUSI by implementing leadership academies, online professional development, and chat rooms for technical assistance networks among practitioners, and by using video and student work samples to hone classroom and school-based practices. NIUSI’s approach to professional development was comprehensive and began with planning for student results that are measurable. NIUSI’s approach included careful consideration of the content for professional development, adult learning principles, and careful selection of teams for professional development who can support and bolster their team members’ learning and practice. By selecting the best fit among these various considerations, professional development built on converged needs, created a sense of common purpose or mutuality, and extended the creativity and skill of practitioners. This approach to professional development required ongoing coaching and mentoring among peers and master practitioners who could support and shape skill and conceptual development. NIUSI developed and provided leadership academies at the local level that focused on the development of both technical and interpersonal knowledge, skills, and practices that lead to culturally responsive educational systems in urban schools and school districts. Our collaborative efforts leveraged the impact of these change efforts, infusing multiple networks with information and learning technologies around culturally competent systems.

We created an online community where our web site content served as a springboard to meaningful, interactive conversations and events. To accomplish this goal, we created a unique Campus on our web site, an online work space to build and sustain a national network of working groups that went beyond online discussions alone. This Campus provided all the necessary tools and space needed to maximize collaborative learning and knowledge development at a distance. Our Campus supported both an Intranet (password protected to be used only with specified groups) and Internet (to be accessible by a broad, national audience of scholars, practitioners, consumers, and policymakers). Our web site also provided a unique Professional Learning Portfolio (PLP) program (or online mentoring tool), as a vehicle for individuals and groups to assess achievement, provide and receive critical feedback from trusted advisors, and build electronic portfolios of work.
Various objectives and activities were implemented to ensure that professional development goals were met. These included the following: 1) Identifying the professional development needs to meet district and school education goals; 2) Designing and tailoring professional development opportunities to support district/school targets and using a variety of strategies/technologies to meet the needs of educators; 3) Focusing on ensuring that professional development materials helped educators understand the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture, language, social class, and disability influence student learning (Banks, 2001);(4) Identify resources and technological capacity for professional development services across the community, district, school, and practice levels of the system; and 5) Providing online forums, research journals and discussions that utilized NIUSI’s web site as an important dissemination and linkage tool for professional development. The professional development team also developed a strategic information system improvement plan with the design team to provide for continuous evaluation and refinement. In addition, they assisted partnering districts in using multiple technologies and strategies that informed and supported system community members in interpreting and using data. This ensured that effective interaction about progress was maintained among and between the practitioner, school, LEA and SEA contexts.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Leadership Academies
Our priority was to provide the highest level of quality professional development modules for K-12 teachers on topics such as inclusion, assessment and classroom management. To do this, we recruited experts in the subjects of our professional development training, ensuring accurate, comprehensive and exceptional modules. Employing a wide range of subject matter experts allowed us to offer an extensive and varying list of modules. Although the modules were all unique in their subject, they were all similar in their presentation and adhered to NIUSI’s professional development values and beliefs.

The similarities in presentation were very important for our professional development approach. All professional development modules had the same visual layout and support materials, as well as the same presentation format. We believe this provided structure for developing quality modules as each one had predetermined criteria for subject matter experts to “fill in”, and layouts for handouts and presentations that ensured all modules were uniform.

This likeness is also important so the modules could be distinctively identified as NIUSI modules. The participants who attended professional development modules by NIUSI were immediately aware by the uniformity that the module they were taking is going to be similar in quality as any other module they had taken.

Model
The format of the NIUSI modules was simple. All of NIUSI’s three-hour academies were the same: the layout consisted of three activities broken up by two lecturettes. Every module was designed with three academies that built knowledge, skills, and practices clustered around particular aspects of school wide improvement such as inclusion. The intent was simple: Build a common vision, vocabulary, and skill set around essential
elements of school improvement. Academies were offered in sequence from academies 1 – 3 and spaced about four weeks apart, so that some application could occur between sessions.

To obtain modules that had the layout and structure wanted, we designed a development system for subject matter experts to use alone or in partnership with the NIUSI instructional designer. As soon as the subject matter expert was identified, s/he worked closely with the instructional designer to ensure that the module progressed smoothly, on time and as to specifications. This relationship was especially important so the subject matter expert did not feel overwhelmed by the amount of work, did not lose track of the purpose of the module and retained the NIUSI layout and format.

The base for this system was a document called the PD Academy Matrix. This brainstorming tool listed the title of the module and academy, the summary of the academy and the objectives of the academy. These provided a visual reminder of the purpose of the academy. Below these data, the matrix was divided into five columns, three for activities and two for lecturettes. This was the space for brainstorming the content of the activity. How were the objectives of the academy going to be met? What activities would provide participants with skills and knowledge the academy promised? What did they need to learn between the activities – what did we need to teach them in the short lecturettes as scaffolding for the next activity? Every academy had the following features: (1) Participant Outcomes; (2) Warm up and introduction to the key ideas; (3) 2 lecturettes; (4) 3 participant activities designed to be accomplished in small teams; (5) an evaluation and (6) an annotated reference list.

This tool was the first step in creating a module. It was used in collaboration with the NIUSI instructional designer so the outline of the module, the activities and the lecturettes, were mutually acceptable in both content and scope. Once this scaffolding was complete, the subject matter expert could either complete the module independently, or use the instructional design team at NIUSI to help format some or the entire module. Experts had varying levels of technical expertise and were comfortable in some or all of the formatting requirements of the module. For example: An expert may have wished to simply write the module in script form in a document and send the module to NIUSI. The team at NIUSI could take the script and transfer it into the preformatted template, create PowerPoints for the lecturettes and design handouts for the activities.

Developing quality modules also took thoughtful planning. The following principles, developed by teachers and teacher educators, directed the planning process and assisted subject matter experts to balance considerations of format, learning outcome, and learning demands for professional development.

**Principle 1: Child and Youth Centered:** The purpose of professional development for educators is ultimately to make a difference in the learning and lives of students. Any effective professional development system must keep this point in focus and help participants connect their learning to student outcomes.

**Principle 2: Educator/Learner Focused:** Effective professional development is about educators learning and exploring new ideas they can then apply in their own practice. The educator/learner must be “in charge” of designing their own professional development experiences in ways that benefit their own learning, application and reflection.
Principle 3: In-depth: Effective professional development creates the opportunity for educators to take the time needed to work extensively with new ideas and information. Only such in-depth learning can be adequately integrated into practice in ways that benefit both educators and students.

Principle 4: Continuous: Professional development never ends. Effective educators pursue learning and growth continuously. Professional development systems should be structured in a fashion so educators can periodically revisit and redesign those professional development experiences that support their continued growth.

Principle 5: Context Sensitive: Every educator’s professional experiences are unique. Professional development experiences should be designed in light of the particular educator’s students, school, and district in order to be most effective and responsive.

Principle 6: Focused on Group Practice: Educators do not work alone. Increasingly, meeting the needs of Oregon’s children and youth require groups of educators and others to design together effective learning. Professional development should promote and provide experiences with this kind of interdependent group learning and purpose.

Principle 7: Research Oriented: The knowledge base of teaching and learning continues to grow and change because of the efforts of university-based and field-based educators and community members. Effective professional development should draw upon and in turn contribute to, this growing knowledge base.

Combining both consistent formatting and planning ensures that all modules developed for NIUSI are both distinctive and exceptional. Anyone attending a NIUSI professional development module can be assured that their experience will result in better learning and life experiences for educators and their students.

**IMPACT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Monthly, electronic newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Publications translated into Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>On Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Family School Linkages Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Professional Learning Leadership Academies = 6 Modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Tools for Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Technical Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Systemic Change Framework Guide for Whole School Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 page Annotated Bibliography of research-based articles that align with the Systemic Change Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Edited special edition of TASH Connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NETWORKING & DISSEMINATION**

**RATIONALE: NEEDS & PURPOSE**

NIUSI was networked to nearly 10,000 professional and family organizations and leaders who focused their efforts on improving outcomes for students in urban schools. Our role in unifying the general and special education communities in urban schools resulted in National Inclusive Schools Week celebrations for four years across the United States, as well as around the world. Ongoing threaded discussions, web-based school improvement tools, site-based progress, online action research groups and other networking activities were hosted on our award-winning, Bobby-approved web site. The web site capitalized on existing meetings and organizational networks through national and regional meetings, in collaboration with other Technical Assistance Centers (including the Elementary and Middle School Technical Assistance Center), Federal/Regional Resource Center Network, Regional Educational Laboratories, Equity Assistance Centers, and Clearinghouses.

The web site had four related purposes. First, it was a venue for data collection, analysis and dissemination by our audiences as they worked together to reduce the numbers of minority children placed in special education as well as the historically segregated placement of those students. Second, it provided a place for building community through computer-mediated communication (CMC) and interactive dialogue and activities, encouraging collaboration and support among pre-defined and emerging audiences. Third, it was a virtual meeting place to provide online technical assistance to states and LEAs. Fourth, it provided a space for online mentoring, receiving critical feedback, and building e-portfolios of work. About 1,000 individuals visited the website daily. Our products were downloaded about 1000 times per month.

We linked to our Technical Assistance Center companions and vigorously upgraded our products. This included: (1) developing schedules for editorial and technical management; (2) developing new discussion forums; (3) responding to user needs and inquiries; (4) marketing new components of the site; (5) evaluating the effectiveness of the site for our target audiences; (6) identifying and meeting evolutionary goals; and (7) ensuring that all findings are disseminated to our audiences over the life of the project in multiple, fully-accessible formats.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

NIUSI was charged with promoting a national dialogue regarding students with disabilities and education reform. Assisting NIUSI to engage this national discourse in local, family, professional, and policy communities were members of the Networking and Dissemination Core Team. A means of achieving our objective was through NIUSI’s continued dissemination of products and events to NIUSI synergy sites, media, and multiple other audiences via a range of communication tools, such as press releases, announcements, articles, flyers, brochures, CDs, among others. A strategic networking and dissemination plan was developed by NIUSI and consisted of four levels with an increasing focus. See Appendix O for further information.

Through our various public relations and marketing efforts, both online and off-line, NIUSI received an abundance of orders for its products. The two most popular publications were the booklet *Improving Education: The Promise of Inclusive Schooling* and the OnPoint series. For example, a number of member districts of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, a partner organization, ordered additional copies of National Institute products for dissemination throughout their school districts after receiving copies at Collaborative meetings. See Appendix P for details on the number of downloads and print orders NIUSI received.

Meetings with National Partners

The annual NIUSI Advisory Board meetings were held each year at the beginning of the summer. The meetings provided an important opportunity for members of the advisory board to give information about themselves to NIUSI staff and to ask questions about the presentation of NIUSI’s work & accomplishments. Advisory board members presented to NIUSI staff and other Board members what talents/expertise they could provide to NIUSI and what supports they would need from NIUSI.

Presentations


**WEBSITE**

NIUSI’s Web site (www.inclusiveschools.org) was particularly successful as a result of the public relations efforts detailed in the strategic dissemination and networking plan. It was continually updated, monitored, and refined, especially the sections that housed our products and *National Inclusive Schools Week*. Appendix R details the number of hits, page views, and unique visitors our Web site has received on a quarterly basis since October 2002.

In conjunction with *National Inclusive Schools Week*, NIUSI sponsored two well-attended online events. "All Means All: Including Children with Severe Disabilities in Home, School, and Community Life" and "Transitions: Managing Change Through and After School" provided families and educators with a place to connect and share stories, information, and resources. Over the course of both events, more than 200 people audited the discussion and 110 messages were posted.

In addition to the online events, two teleseminars were organized and conducted by NIUSI. "Strategies for Improving Inclusive Practices at the Secondary Level" and “Building Reciprocal Relationships with Families: Accountability, Personalism, and Culture in Special Education” were held during the *Week*. The then-Assistant Secretary of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Dr. Robert Pasternack opened the first event, and Stephanie Lee, Director of the Office of Special Education Programs, opened the second. Over 300 people attended the seminars from 55 sites across the United States.
Campus

The Web site contained a “Campus,” an area open to the public and a working area reserved for staff and selected others. The Campus facilitated cross-sharing and project-wide communications and documentation. In addition, a “Virtual Database” was also available via the Web site. This searchable online library had over 3,000 new resources, and used an advanced “Semantic Web” engine to relate resources to one another and allow an individual to develop a personal collection of “most used” resources. The site was equipped and ready for application of an assessment or survey that could then customize the resource collection to the needs expressed in the assessment. The site was also capable of accepting “nominated resources” from working groups, which could then be reviewed and edited for inclusion in the collection. This technology supported collaboration around the use and distribution of the resources.

As previously mentioned, our companion TA&D centers received information regarding all of our products and events in the general broadcast described under Level One of the strategic networking and dissemination plan. Additionally, NIUSI spotlighted the Web site of a TA&D center via E-News, our free, monthly electronic newsletter, and as the “Web site of the Month” on our Web site.

Database

In conjunction with our strategic networking and dissemination plan, NIUSI built our database of strategic alliances, consisting of approximately 2,500 school districts, higher education institutions, associations, organizations, family and parent networks, government agencies, policymakers, and media outlets.

Collaboration

Information regarding NIUSI’s products and activities was further disseminated via articles in print newsletters sponsored by other organizations. National Institute staff completed articles for Urban Perspectives, produced by the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative. Copies were mailed to over 2,000 leaders and decision-makers in urban special education, and it was accessible from the Collaborative’s Web site at www.urbancollaborative.org.

Lastly, NIUSI publicized product and activity information at several regional and national conferences, including those of the Council for Exceptional Children, the ILIAD Partnership, Linking Academic Scholars to Educational Resources, National Staff Development Council, Northeast Regional Resource Center, and the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, among others.

eNews Listserv

NIUSI collaborated with multiple audiences through a variety of strategies. E-News was designed to keep subscribers informed of new developments in urban education and inclusive schooling. NIUSI encouraged the reproduction and dissemination of our issues, as well as suggestions for information for future issues. In addition, NIUSI posted information about NIUSI’s products and activities to targeted listservs.
Communities of Practice

National Inclusive Schools Week

A second means of promoting a national dialogue was National Inclusive Schools Week, which was NIUSI’s most visible message marketing strategy. The purpose of the Week was to highlight our nation’s progress in providing a supportive and quality education to an increasingly diverse student population, particularly students with disabilities. National Inclusive Schools Week also provided an important opportunity for students, families, and educators to discuss what else needed to be done in order to continue to ensure that their schools successfully educate all children.

Each year the Week was an overwhelming success, garnering support from thousands of schools and communities across the country. In December of 2003, President George W. Bush issued a Presidential Message acknowledging the Week’s participants and highlighting the importance of the Individuals with Disabilities Act in ensuring that students with disabilities attend school along with their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, participants commented that, as a result of the Week, their communities realized that developing inclusive schools is a national initiative. As NIUSI hoped, and as testimonials indicated, the influence of National Inclusive Schools Week extended beyond a single week and has, in fact, helped change educational practice in schools and classrooms. The concept of the Week also reached beyond the borders of the United States. For example, Canada celebrated its own National Inclusive Education Week, which the Canadian Association for Community Living launched after learning about NIUSI’s inaugural celebration. In 2003, Canada’s Governor General supported the November celebration of the Canadian Week. In addition, NIUSI received inquiries from professionals and family members in other countries. See Appendix Q for further information regarding National Inclusive Schools Week statistics, testimonials, and celebrations.

Teleconferences

In cooperation with the Northeast Regional Resource Center, NIUSI began coordinating activities for the LRE Part B Community of OSEP’s Communities of Practice initiative. A series of telephone seminars was organized and held. These seminars covered topics such as LRE Policy and Effective Change, New Mexico’s Multi-Strategy LRE Initiatives, LRE Systems Change as a Result of a Consent Decree in Los Angeles, and Connecting Access to General Education to State Standards and Assessments.

IMPACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>National Inclusive Schools Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NIUSI Teleconferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Advisory Board Meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

Any discussion of urban education and urban community must occur with clarity about the underlying assumptions that value some conditions and perspectives while marginalizing others. What urban reality is being observed, dissected, and improved? In the eyes of Jonathan Kozol (2005), it is the reality of structural and economic inequalities that conscribe some children to disadvantage while describing the same children as having richly developed powers of observation, a variety of intellectual, social, and artistic capacities, and a network of relationships that sustain them over time, despite the poverty of the institutional settings that are designed to educate them. Poverty, in particular, is linked to poor school outcomes and, as family circumstance improves, children’s performance in school appears to improve as well (Berliner, 2006). And yet, children and families who live in a context of economic poverty have amazing sets of assets that are rarely recognized or built upon in the school curriculum (Lewis et al., 2008). Little consideration is given to the social networks and connections that exist within urban neighborhoods and communities (Harry, 2008).

These deficit views translate into observations of what children cannot do, rather than understandings of the assets they bring with them to school (González, Moll, & Amati, 2005). Further, the historical legacies of racism, the differential treatment of immigrants and English language learners (adults as well as children) intersect with poverty in complex ways that continue to confound public educational policies and practices. As Anthony (2008) demonstrates, risk and protective factors are nested within cultural histories, psychosocial development, families, and neighborhoods, producing very different outcomes for children who grow up in
similar but not the same circumstances. So, urban educators, students and families are confronted with disconcerting and competing realities that are inadequate explained by the dominant narratives of culture, child development, teaching, and learning (Rogoff, 2003).

Artiles (1998) challenged the binary debate that frames explanations for why students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are over-represented in programs such as special education as either the result of the detrimental effects of certain socio-demographic and economic factors (e.g., poverty) or structural bias. Instead, Artiles and Dyson (2005) propose a scaffold for exploring the intersections of structure, sociology, and economics within systems. They describe three dimensions within systems that require analysis: the participant, cultural, and outcomes dimensions. Because of the interplay between power differentials and regulative functions, community cultures fluctuate between friction and cohesion. Indeed, people use their agency to navigate situations and interactions applying the regulative rules of their cultural communities, but also improvising in response to other participants and the goals of the activity arenas in which they find themselves (Cole, 1996). This view of systems offers a multidimensional perspective in which activities are mediated through several continuously operating exchanges that transform policy in unanticipated ways. This perspective has particular merit as we examine urban educational practices and policies. It offers new possibilities for embedding social justice initiatives within complex systems.

In the Color of School Reform, Henig Hula, Orr and Pedescleaux (1999) analyze urban education as a place where contested identity politics, sociopolitical agendas, and economic stratification conspire from within and outside school systems to prevent potential reforms from gaining traction and crush the hope of the people who have chosen to work within the system. As Dixson and Rousseau (2005) suggest, “we are still not saved.” The use of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to explore the notion of cultural capital as a property right marked a watershed in the ways in which race, class, and culture were viewed by many researchers. Rather than view race as a variable within a research study or project, a critical view of race suggests that the current condition of schooling is connected to a historical legacy of exclusion and inclusion that is a logical progression of a normative view of contexts (Minow, 1990). The normative view necessitates a particular vantage point upon which normalcy is constructed. When that normative view is what Glass (2008) calls the “hyper consuming mainstream US population driven by a desire for comfort and security,” what constitutes dis/ability and dis/advantage must be called into question.

In NIUSI we used a conceptual framework for examining the work of students, teachers, and schools to organize our engagement with partner districts. Central to this work were our efforts to help schools reconceptualize their core work as learning for, in and about practice that is designed for inclusivity (Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn & Christensen, 2007; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). Through networks of urban schools within school systems, we engaged school teams in (a) learning more about their own practice using participatory action research, (b) participating in a set of linked learning opportunities that explore both how teams work together and for what purposes, (c) designing and implementing change initiatives focused on issues that emerged from their own needs analyses, and (d) provided tools for them to change practice over time. As importantly, what we learned from this work was used to build tools for other urban educators across the country.

The most powerful impact of this effort has been the delivery of on-line products that help local schools and systems build their own capacity for change. Our constant communication with people in the field, the
learning that came from our work in systems has lead to our conclusion that the work of change lies in the hands of people working within their unique contexts at the school and district level. Technical assistance centers like NIUSI and other national content centers provide just-in-time information that can inform, influence, and support the change that occurs locally. A second critical aspect of our success was our capacity to provide data in formats that helped people understand that their local contexts were not necessarily representative of the nation as whole or even other systems within their states. This understanding propelled change since local leaders became increasingly cognizant of local layers of complexity that needed to be understood and changed in order for transformative practices and policies to anchor forward movement.

This final report ends with summarizing key principles for helping urban school systems to address the serious equity issues that continue to plague their systems through the use and misuse of special education as a vehicle for supporting (or segregating) students who struggle to learn because of a history of lack of opportunity:

1. The delivery of special education services must be conceptualized as a seamless system of supports and services delivered within the context of an equitable and inclusive general education system.
2. Practitioners (including principals, general and special educators, instructional coaches, and related services personnel) must see themselves as members of transdisciplinary teams that share knowledge, skills, and roles in order to design and support comprehensive learning environments for students.
3. Practitioners and families must build a shared vision of education anchored in the concepts of universal design, personalization, formative assessment, and continuous improvement.
4. Equity in terms of opportunities to learn, accountability, and the distribution of resources is essential to inclusive systems.
5. Inquiry for improving learning grounded in evidence based practice is part of a healthy, innovative, and equitable education system.
6. Improvements on behalf of any group of students must be conceptualized as a systems change endeavor. Failure to do so creates bureaucratic silos of inefficiency, sluggish communication, and “work arounds” that can mire a system for reasons that are lost in institutional memory but reified in practice.
7. State and local education contexts vary widely because of historical and contemporary political, social, and economic factors that intersect and complicate institutional, group, and individual regulatory and behavioral actions. Notions of transportable, universal research and policy solutions must be tempered by this understanding and emphasis placed on local solutions.
REFERENCES


Dixson, A. D. & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. Race, Ethnicity & Education. 8, 1, 7-27.


## PRODUCT LIST

### TOPICAL BRIEFS

| 1.  | Understanding Culture |
| 2.  | Cultural Identity and Teaching |
| 3.  | Principals of Inclusive Schools |
| 4.  | Addressing Homelessness in Urban Schools |
| 5.  | Understanding English Language Learners’ Needs and the Language Acquisition Process |
| 6.  | Mental Health in Urban Schools |
| 7.  | Skilled Dialogue |
| 8.  | Keeping the Faith & Climbing One Mountain at a Time: Reflections of Two Mothers on Their Children’s Educational Journeys |
| 10. | Immigration Then and Now: Old Face, New Story |
| 11. | The Building Leadership Team |
| 12. | The School Improvement Process |
| 13. | Conducting Focus Groups to Develop a Comprehensive School Portrait |
| 14. | On the Nexus of Race, Disability, and Overrepresentation |
| 15. | On infusing Disability Studies into the General Curriculum |
| 16. | On Time and How to Get More of It |
| 17. | On Inclusion and the Other Kids: Here’s What Research Shows so Far About Inclusion’s Effect on Nondisabled Students |
| 18. | On Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities |
| 19. | Preparing Teachers for the Future |
| 21. | On Working Together: Groupwork, Teamwork, and Collaborative Work Among Educators |

### TOOLS AND ASSESSMENTS

| 1.  | On Transformed Inclusive Schools and Improving Education: The Promise of Inclusive Schooling |
| 2.  | Motion Charts |
| 3.  | Data Maps |
| 4.  | The School Improvement Planning Booklet |
| 5.  | NIUSI Accreditation Standards: A Blueprint for Inclusive Schools |
| 7.  | ITEMS Decision Making Tool for Instruction |
| 8.  | Work Plan Tool |
| 10. | A Logic Model for Whole School Special Education Reform |
11. Meeting Planner Tool
12. School Improvement Survey
13. Toolkit for Inclusive School Improvement

**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MODULES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Building Leadership Teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mining Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Inclusive Schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Universal Designs for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Co-teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Understanding Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Culturally Responsive Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>