CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Systems-Oriented Plan for Academic Achievement

Most would agree that the primary mission of schools is to promote student learning. On a daily basis, the vast majority of school staff work hard to achieve this mission, often bringing work home, putting in extra hours, and worrying about those students who are experiencing difficulty. Yet it often seems that schools are struggling against the odds. They are asked to do more with less, for an increasingly diverse population of students.

Statistics also highlight this concern about student achievement and the difficulty schools face serving the needs of all children. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) indicate that only 33% of fourth graders score at or above the proficiency level in reading, and 34% score *below* the basic level. For eighth graders, 30% score at or above proficiency, and 26% perform below the basic level. Unfortunately, the NAEP figures are only slightly better in the area of mathematics, with only 39% of all fourth graders and 34% of all eighth graders scoring at or above proficiency.

> **Current education statistics in the United States reveal that *less than 40%* of fourth- and eighth-grade students score at or above the proficient level in reading and math.**

For U.S. students living in conditions of poverty (i.e., the 41% of school-age children who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), the academic achievement statistics are even more concerning. For example, 81% of these fourth-grade students read below the proficiency level, and 49% read below the basic level. Figures from the *Condition of Education* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) also report the diverse needs of American school children. For example, the percent of school-age children who speak a language other than English in the home has increased from 9 to 21% in the past 30 years. Also, nearly 13% of all U.S. children are identified as having a disability requiring special education services, and this figure excludes children who are referred for special education but then are not identified for services. In sum, although most schools aim to serve all students, they may fall short of that goal, simply because they are overwhelmed by the range of individual differences and needs of the children who attend school.

For decades many solutions have been to proposed the challenges faced by teachers and other educators in assuring that students master academic content. Often externally proposed

(or imposed), these solutions are wide ranging. Some examples include new teacher education requirements, increased accountability for individual schools and teachers, more charter schools, universal preschool, parent outreach, and more technology in the classroom (Coplon, 2010; David & Cuban, 2010; McDonnell, 2004).

In addition, nearly all schools make at least some attempt to assist struggling learners before those students reach the upper elementary grades and/or are referred for special education services. In the most recent decades, problem-solving efforts such as prereferral intervention teams (Buck, Polloway, Smith-Thomas, & Cook, 2003; Graden, 1989), professional learning communities (PLCs; DuFour, Eaker, Karhanek, & DuFour, 2004), and more recently, multilevel models of response to intervention (RTI; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010) have emerged as important advances in the ways educators try to remediate students' academic difficulties. However, despite some promising indicators of academic improvement as a result of these approaches (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005; Burns & Symington, 2002), many schools continue to face pragmatic challenges in applying these approaches to best assist struggling learners. For example, based on our research and years of work with teachers and schools (e.g., Begeny & Martens, 2006a; Johnson & Street, 2004; Osborne & Schulte, 2001), and based on the work of many others in the field of education (e.g., Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2006; Doll et al., 2005; Hirsch & Church, 2009), we suspect that most educators can relate to at least some, if not many, of the following 10 challenges associated with addressing students' learning difficulties.

1. There is an effective schoolwide system in place to identify students with learning difficulties, but most teachers in the school do not have the training and/or resources to select and use a research-based intervention.
2. Students with learning difficulties are identified with valid assessments, research-based interventions are available to teachers, but teachers do not have the time to learn or implement the interventions consistently and accurately (i.e., with integrity).
3. School-based teams *can be* effective in addressing students' learning difficulties, but often too much time elapses between the time the teacher raises the concern, the team meets to discuss it, the intervention is implemented, and the team can meet again to determine its effectiveness.
4. School-based teams have been developed to assist teachers with struggling learners, but no one educator in the school has the time, or perhaps sufficient knowledge, to ensure that the designed intervention plan is carried out by the teacher (or others) as it should be.
5. School-based teams have been developed to assist teachers with struggling learners, but they require too much time from too many educators. For example, the school does not always need a team of four or more educators to effectively develop an intervention plan for a struggling learner. Having too many educators spending time in meetings for which fewer persons are necessary to address the issue takes their time away from instruction or instructional planning.
6. Teachers are required to implement an intervention to assist a struggling learner before the student can be considered by a team or considered for special education, but the school does not have a system for helping the teacher accurately document the intervention provided, or for ensuring that the intervention is adequately carried out according to district or school policy (or according to what could be considered "best practice").
7. There is no established system in the school for identifying all students who struggle in

the core academic areas (reading, math, and writing), so some students continue to "fall between the cracks," with their problems unaddressed until their skill deficits are so severe that they require more resources and are harder to address.

8. There are insufficient resources within the school, or an insufficient system, for monitoring students' progress as a result of intervention. As a result, teachers experience great difficulty determining whether students receiving intervention are actually benefiting from it.

9. Educational leaders in the school have great ideas for addressing both systems-level and student-level challenges (such as those just described), but those leaders do not have the experience, time, and/or resources to integrate those ideas in a way that will be supported by other educators in the school, possibly including the school principal.

10. Educational leaders in the school have great ideas that will help to overcome challenges associated with addressing all students' learning needs, and teachers in the school would likely be supportive of the ideas, but the leaders are unsure how, when, and to what degree they should start implementing their ideas.

To further complicate these types of challenges, national data suggest that schools must increasingly do more with fewer resources. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), the current U.S. recession resulted in substantial budget cuts to K–12 education in 2008 and 2009 in 29 states and the District of Columbia (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2010). For example, Michigan's fiscal year budget for 2010 included a $165 per-pupil spending reduction from the previous year, Hawaii's 2009–2010 school year was shortened by more than 3 weeks, and Massachusetts enacted cuts to early intervention programs and K–12 funding, including cuts to teacher training and services for disabled students (Johnson et al., 2010). In North Carolina, a state not even designated in the 2010 CBPP report as a state with "substantial" cuts to K–12 education, a 2008 survey showed that 87% of North Carolina teachers indicated that K–12 educators desire more time and resources to meet the educational needs of their students (Hirsch & Church, 2009).

In sum, there have been important research, practice, and policy advances over the past several decades, all designed to move schools closer to the goal of effectively addressing the needs of all learners. However, many schools continue to struggle with how to move from where they are to where they want to be. They are interested in implementing innovative practices, but often lack a road map for change.

HOW THIS BOOK MAY HELP SCHOOLS MEET THE NEEDS OF STRUGGLING LEARNERS

This book does not propose any grand solutions to cure the woes of the U.S. education system. However, it does offer a pragmatic plan with which an educator or small group of educators at a single school can begin to systematically implement a number of innovations that have the potential to improve how their school responds to children encountering difficulty in the general education classroom. Our aim is to provide a comprehensive yet time-efficient, resource-efficient, and user-friendly approach to improving students' learning outcomes in reading, math, and writing. In addition, our approach and the materials presented throughout this book are designed to respond to recent changes in how schools are expected to document their efforts to assist struggling learners. For example, the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improve-

ment Act (IDEIA, 2004) requires that a special education referral for a learning disability include "data-based documentation of repeated assessment of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction, which [should be] provided to the child's parents" (p. 34 CFR 300.309(b)(1–2).

Termed the Systems-Oriented Plan for Academic Achievement (SOPAA), this model is designed not only to put evidence-based interventions in the hands of teachers quickly, but also to move toward addressing needs of learners in a systemic, resource-efficient, schoolwide way. This academic consultation model integrates what is known to be effective through both organizational consultation and triadic consultation (both of these basic models of consultation are discussed in Chapter 2) to put into place a program for moving schools toward standardized and systemic procedures for serving all children. In using both organizational and triadic consultation, the SOPAA integrates six key components that should collectively improve how schools respond to the types of challenges described earlier in this chapter. A basic description of each component follows, with further discussion of each component in Chapter 2.

Introduction to the Six SOPAA Components

Targeted Assistance Program for Students

The Targeted Assistance Program for Students (TAPS) is a comprehensive but user-friendly approach to triadic, school-based consultation that is designed to identify and assist a struggling learner through systematic development of an intervention plan that is individualized, evidence-based, well-documented, and implemented with integrity and feasibility. The plan is developed by an expert consultant (i.e., a TAPS Support Teacher, a role described in subsequent chapters) and the classroom teacher. Parent support and/or input is also facilitated during each TAPS case. Also, to help teachers identify evidence-based programs to integrate into a TAPS intervention plan and target the student's specific academic deficit, Chapter 12 of this book provides several evidence-based and learner-verified intervention programs for teachers' consideration.

Assessment for Instruction

Strategies for simple, time-efficient methods to accomplish three assessment goals are provided as part of the SOPAA. Students assisted through the TAPS process receive a brief initial assessment to identify instructional needs and then are monitored with research-based and time-efficient assessment methods to evaluate their responsiveness to individualized TAPS intervention plans. Also, in order to best identify all struggling learners, schools not already using a brief, research-based, schoolwide screening assessment in reading and math are provided with information and resources to help develop such a system over time.

Maximized Intervention Personnel and Resources

This component of the SOPAA ultimately helps schools identify, train, and coordinate school personnel to assist classroom teachers during the TAPS process. Specifically, school personnel assist by occasionally implementing the evidence-based intervention program selected as part of the student's TAPS intervention plan. The school personnel involved in this way will differ depending on the characteristics of a particular school, but may include school volunteers and/or any other available school employee (e.g., teacher assistants, guidance counselors, librarians, and many oth-

ers). Overall, this SOPAA component is designed to best maximize school personnel so that they can effectively assist classroom teachers with remediating students' learning difficulties.

Targeted Professional Development

Many classroom teachers are not adequately prepared to intervene with struggling learners, and many schools do not have a key leader who can always offer expert support and guidance for teachers who need assistance with improving a student's academic difficulty in reading, math, or writing. Targeted SOPAA professional development activities are therefore designed to address these challenges in a practical and systematic way. For example, aligned with SOPAA goals and procedures, professional development workshops are conducted for all teachers (e.g., classroom teachers, teacher assistants) involved with the TAPS process, typically one to three times throughout the school year. Also, systematic and ongoing professional development is feasibly integrated for the one to three specialized support teachers (i.e., the TAPS Support Teachers) within the school who are selected to manage and facilitate TAPS cases in reading, math, or writing.

Methods for Communication and Generating Support

Related to each of the preceding components, this book offers information, steps, and resources for successful communication among all individuals involved with SOPAA implementation (e.g., the school principal, classroom teachers, SOPAA lead facilitators). Through the recommended communication activities that occur at critical times throughout SOPAA implementation, this component is designed to maximize the effectiveness and time efficiency of starting and sustaining implementation.

Adaptable and Incremental Implementation

In developing this model, we recognize that schools operate differently and have varying strengths, needs, and weaknesses. Also, we recognize that systems-level change in schools will usually fail if proper infrastructure and timing variables are not considered well before implementation begins.

Thus, this book describes how schools with varying characteristics can successfully implement the SOPAA in a way, and with a timeline, that is most fitting with the school's specific needs. For example, we describe how to (1) assess the needs, strengths, and characteristics of a school that will either support or prevent SOPAA implementation; (2) adapt SOPAA implementation based on the identified needs and strengths; (3) facilitate leadership of the SOPAA with multidisciplinary co-facilitators; and (4) select options for incrementally but systematically implementing SOPAA components and features over multiple school years.

> **A goal of this book is to describe how schools with varying characteristics can successfully implement the SOPAA in a way that fits with each school's specific strengths and needs.**

IS THE SOPAA SUITABLE FOR YOUR SCHOOL?

When introducing the SOPAA to educators, there are five common questions they ask to determine the extent to which the SOPAA model might be useful for their respective schools. We present these questions and our answers here, knowing that readers may also have these initial questions.

Question 1: Given the six components of the SOPAA, how much time is realistically needed to use and actually benefit from this model?

The key feature of the SOPAA is the TAPS process, and if only one educator in the school serves as the primary facilitator of the SOPAA (and thus of TAPS), she should be able to manage six TAPS cases per month (one or two cases per week) in as little as 6.5 hours per week. Other SOPAA components (e.g., effective communication, training teachers in the school) will require additional time, but with the planning strategies described throughout this book, these tasks can be completed periodically throughout the academic school year so that the time needed to implement the SOPAA remains feasible.

Furthermore, as described in detail in other chapters, for many schools the SOPAA is best implemented by two to four primary facilitators. Thus, the total amount of time needed to implement all components of the SOPAA (including management of all TAPS cases) may require as little as 2–4 hours per week if multiple facilitators are involved. This model is specifically designed to maximize educators' time and resources, which is why it can be implemented in reasonable amounts of time.

The total time needed for SOPAA implementation also depends on the number of components and features integrated into the model during the initial years of implementation. That is, because the SOPAA allows for a systematic but incremental implementation plan, the total time needed for implementation can ultimately be adjusted to levels that are feasible for the school and those leading SOPAA facilitation, while also maintaining a model that will benefit the school in how it addresses students with learning difficulties. Chapter 2 and subsequent chapters explain in detail how much time is likely needed to successfully implement the SOPAA, as well as strategies and guidelines for successfully applying an incremental implementation plan.

Last, it is important to emphasize that the SOPAA is designed in a way that will eventually save schools time and resources once the model has been implemented for 1 or more years. Therefore, as educators throughout the school learn the model and improve their skills in addressing students' learning difficulties, the estimated times mentioned previously should decrease over time. Overall, then, even in the beginning years of SOPAA implementation, the model is designed in a way that is realistic for one to four educators to implement, and as the model is implemented over subsequent school years, implementation time should continue to decrease.

Question 2: Our school already uses a problem-solving model to address students' learning difficulties [e.g., RTI, PLCs, prereferral intervention teams], so how would we benefit from using the SOPAA?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one reason we developed the SOPAA was to help schools address the pragmatic types of challenges they often face even when they use (or attempt to use) a problem-solving model such as RTI, PLCs, or prereferral intervention teams to address students' learning difficulties. As such, the SOPAA model can be used in combination with another type of schoolwide problem-solving system. Using the SOPAA in this way should help schools address the issues presented in the previous list of 10 common challenges (pp. 4–5) schools face when addressing all students' learning needs. In short, some models of academic problem solving and school reform lack a clear step-by-step process; the SOPAA fills that gap by providing both specific procedures and material resources that can be used as part of a system for improving student learning outcomes.

Given the increasing popularity and use of RTI, a section in Chapter 3 also discusses more specifically how the SOPAA is aligned with principles of RTI, but how it differs from RTI and can

be used to actually strengthen a school's model of RTI. That discussion should also have relevance for schools using a problem-solving approach other than RTI, such as PLCs or prereferral intervention teams. Related to these ideas, other chapters in this book should help educators understand that implementing the SOPAA should not be viewed as implementing a "new" model of problem solving. Rather, SOPAA implementation focuses on enhancing a school's existing practices for addressing students' learning difficulties and showing educators in the school how components of the SOPAA are likely to align well with existing practices.

Question 3: Our school has numerous challenges and needs and is probably not ready to use a systems-level model to address students' learning difficulties, so how can the SOPAA help our school?

Although the SOPAA was developed with the knowledge that many schools are already using a type of problem-solving model to address students' learning deficits, it was also developed knowing that many schools have not yet adopted (1) a schoolwide model of problems solving and/or (2) what many consider as best-practice in academic interventions, instruction, and assessment. Therefore, the SOPAA can be used just as effectively and meaningfully in schools without a current schoolwide system for improving students' learning deficits, because it describes a "ground-up" approach for initiating and then sustaining schoolwide change. In essence, as long as the school principal offers support for the SOPAA, this book is applicable because it describes realistic ways for any school to start and sustain SOPAA implementation. Chapter 9 is specifically devoted to helping educators communicate with and elicit support from school administrators such as the principal.

> The SOPAA can be used in combination with another type of schoolwide problem-solving system, such as RTI), or in schools without a schoolwide system for improving students' learning deficits.

Overall, throughout the book the reader should understand how the SOPAA can be used in schools with varying characteristics and how Component 5 (methods for communication and generating support) and Component 6 (adaptable and incremental implementation) should be particularly relevant for schools that do not yet have a schoolwide system for instructional problem solving. In addition, for schools without a current school-wide problem-solving model, the SOPAA can be used as the model, and its sustained implementation may actually help the school later to add a model such as RTI so that a broader spectrum of students is served through an effective method of problem solving and data-based decision making.

Question 4: Is the SOPAA also designed to address student behavior problems?

The goal of the SOPAA is to improve learning outcomes for students who experience difficulties. Thus, although the SOPAA focuses primarily on resolving students' academic deficits, we recognize that student behavior challenges can sometimes exacerbate learning difficulties and/or prevent academic interventions from working most effectively. Although it is beyond the scope of this book to offer specific interventions that will help educators manage behavior problems that occur with students who also experience learning deficits, there are many useful resources already available to help teachers address such behavior problems (e.g., Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Jenson, Rhode, & Reavis, 1994; Shinn, Walker, & Stoner, 2002; Sprick & Howard, 1996; Steege, Watson, & Gresham, 2009). Also, determining whether a student has a behavior problem (and if so, how to address it) is integrated into the TAPS process, ultimately allowing the classroom teacher and the TAPS Teacher to develop an intervention plan that considers (and responds to) student behavior

problems when applicable. Furthermore, the SOPAA model assists TAPS Teachers in handling potential behavior problems associated with a TAPS case through some of the targeted SOPAA professional development activities (discussed in Chapter 7).

Question 5: What are the primary advantages of using the SOPAA?

The specific advantages of using the SOPAA will differ across schools that have different needs and characteristics. For example, schools that do not maximize school volunteers and personnel to address students' learning needs would benefit much more from this SOPAA component, compared to schools that already make the most use of school personnel and volunteers. However, most schools should experience multiple advantages to using the SOPAA. Listed below are several possible advantages.

1. The SOPAA integrates a structured system of problem solving (i.e., through TAPS) and a plan for training and communicating with teachers and administrators about the system. By using a comprehensive, systems-level approach that incorporates research-based interventions, students' learning deficits are more likely to improve and the system for addressing their deficits is more likely to be implemented with consistency and integrity (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

2. The TAPS process allows for systematic implementation, documentation, and evaluation of academic interventions. Increasingly, state and federal agencies are requiring documentation of schools' efforts to assist individual students and the outcomes of those efforts. For example, IDEIA 2004 regulations require that before students can be eligible for special education, schools must document that the students' learning difficulties are not due to lack of appropriate instruction, and also that students' performance in general education were monitored. Schools that fail to provide good documentation of their efforts to serve students in general education may find themselves out of compliance with federal and state requirements, and out of step with the increased emphasis on early intervention that is reflected in recent legislation (Yell & Drasgow, 2007).

3. The SOPAA aims to maximize school personnel and community volunteers in an effort to address students' learning needs. This SOPAA component also helps to

   a. Empower community volunteers.
   b. Extend school resources.
   c. Demonstrate that all school personnel (e.g., school counselors, social workers) can help address the needs of struggling learners.

4. The SOPAA does not require that all educators have mastery-level knowledge of instructional interventions and consultation because:

   a. The model integrates numerous forms of ongoing professional development activities.
   b. This book provides easy-to-use resources for implementation, including suggestions for evidence-based intervention programs across the primary academic areas and subareas.

5. The SOPAA can be implemented by one school-based leader (e.g., administrator, school psychologist, special education teacher) or co-facilitated by two to four educators.

6. The SOPAA easily fits into other contemporary problem-solving models, such as RTI and problem-solving "teams," or it can be implemented without a school's adoption of a separate

problem-solving model. For schools that have not adopted a problem-solving model such as RTI, incremental implementation of the SOPAA may serve as a foundation for later adding an approach such as RTI.

7. The SOPAA is designed to be more time- and resource-efficient than an instructional problem-solving model that relies on school-based teams to address individual student problems. In Chapter 2, we highlight the typical amount of time needed to facilitate the SOPAA.

8. As needed, the SOPAA components can be implemented incrementally, and the model is designed to build upon a school's existing practices, rather than move a school toward completely "new" practices. This approach to implementation should:

   a. Improve the overall success of implementation and sustainability.
   b. Limit stressors and barriers associated with creating schoolwide procedural modifications.
   c. Allow educators to progressively influence systemic change within a school.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF THE SOPAA

Before proceeding to an extended discussion of each SOPAA component and how to effectively implement the SOPAA within a school, it is important to highlight the foundational principles embedded within this model. To effectively implement the SOPAA, the school principal and the

primary SOPAA facilitators (i.e., the one to four educators in the school responsible for implementing the SOPAA) should endorse the following principles. Otherwise, strong differences in educational philosophy and/or principles may hinder effective implementation.

> **The SOPAA should be particularly effective when the school principal and SOPAA facilitators agree with the foundational principles of this model.**

Principle 1: Use Student Outcome Data as an Important Basis for Instructional Decisions

Schools are sometimes characterized as "data rich, but information poor" (Miller, 2009, p. 1). This means that schools often have access to considerable data about student achievement, but do not use it to examine and improve school practices. Gut feelings, educational philosophy, or tradition may be the basis for instructional decisions, often because many educators lack experience in reviewing, manipulating, and interpreting data. A central focus in the SOPAA model is to collect data about students (both individuals and groups) and use the data as a basis for keeping or changing an existing practice. Schools that routinely evaluate what they do and how it is working are more likely to find and sustain practices that work for their student population.

Principle 2: Use Research to Guide Practice

Today, we have considerable evidence about what works and what doesn't work to improve achievement outcomes for students. For example, a number of websites and organizations (see Chapter 12) provides information about which instructional programs incorporate research-based practices or those that have been shown to result in achievement gains for learners. Increasingly, federal legislation and state regulations mandate the use of research-based practices in education (e.g., the

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Although there are still gaps in the research literature, using the available research findings in selecting programs increases the chances that effective programs will be selected, and that the programs can be defended if challenged. However, use of research evidence to select an intervention program does not mean that that program will work for every student. That is why routine use of data to examine the impact of instruction at the local school level is a key foundational principle.

Principle 3: Prevent Learning Problems by Ensuring Strong Core Instructional Programs

In 1895, Joseph Malins wrote a poem, "The Ambulance Down in the Valley" that has since been widely cited (e.g., Loeppke, 2008). The poem told the story of a village on a mountainside with a walkway next to a cliff. After many persons in the village had slipped off the cliff, the villagers began to take a collection to place an ambulance at the bottom of the mountainside to help those who had fallen. One wise villager suggested an alternative: building a fence at the edge of the cliff. How does this analogy apply to schools? Addressing children's learning problems is time consuming. If the core curriculum in a subject area is weak, many children will "fall off the cliff," and educators are likely to be overwhelmed by the task of trying to address these students' needs through targeted small group and individual interventions. Chapter 12 provides a comprehensive analysis of the subskills that should be addressed in a core curriculum for reading, math, and writing and also suggests some core instructional programs that we feel do a good job of targeting those key subskills. Also, the SOPAA model includes staff development to increase educators' knowledge about, and skills in, teaching the core academic areas.

Principle 4: Use a Structured and Standard Approach to Addressing Common Learning Difficulties

Having a structured and standard way of responding to common learning challenges increases the quality of interventions provided and minimizes time spent designing intervention plans. Even with the best core instruction, there are some skills for which a significant percentage of learners in a school are likely to need extra instruction and practice. For example, research estimates show that about 15–20% of early readers will experience difficulty with discriminating and manipulating phonemes, applying phonics rules to decode words, and acquiring a sizable sight-word vocabulary (Torgesen, 2000). Having standard intervention programs that are available at the school level to respond to common learning difficulties allows targeted help for students without asking each classroom teacher to find the time to learn and then deliver multiple interventions for her struggling or at-risk students. Also, having a structured way of getting these intervention programs into the hands of teachers and assisting teachers with using the programs further supports the challenging job of addressing all students' learning needs.

Furthermore, the use of standardized intervention programs delivered by educators who have a specific set of time slots built into their schedule for implementing small-group and one-on-one instruction increases the likelihood that an intervention will be implemented with sufficient integrity, and implemented often enough to have an impact on student achievement. Too many times, we have seen problem-solving teams enthusiastically devise a complex plan that is never implemented or implemented so infrequently that it does not improve student outcomes. Often, this problem emerges because it was falsely assumed that the classroom teacher would somehow find the time to learn and implement the intervention despite limited time and competing demands.

Principle 5: Integrate New Practices with Existing Procedures and Plan for Systems Support to Achieve Sustainability

Years of research show that many innovations, even if they are successful, are not sustained over time (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Rogers, 2003). Often, new practices are incompatible with existing organizational structures, making it easier for educators to return to previous practices even if they were less effective (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, Harris, & Roberts, 1996). New practices should be feasible to use within a school, and the effort involved in learning and implementing those practices should result in sustainability and improved learning outcomes for students. To achieve these goals, a system of implementing new practices should be, for example, (1) aligned with existing strengths and effective practices within the school; (2) valued by those involved with implementation; (3) strategically planned for long-term implementation, but responsive to evaluations of effectiveness and changing organizational structures; and (4) involve professional development and support from leadership (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Furney, Hasazi, Clark-Keefe, & Hartnett, 2003; Gersten, Chard, & Baker, 2000).

OVERVIEW OF THE REMAINING CHAPTERS AND FEATURES TO SUPPORT SOPPA IMPLEMENTATION

In this chapter we sought to introduce the SOPAA model by providing an overview of its primary components and a general rationale for using it. We also commented on its potential advantages and compatibility within a given school, and highlighted five foundational principles embedded within the model. In the following chapter, we expand our description of the SOPAA by defining important terms, providing a historical context for the model, and more fully explaining the six SOPAA components and their interconnected relationship. The specific roles of the SOPAA facilitators are also defined and described in **Chapter 2**.

In **Chapter 3** readers begin to learn how to go about implementing the SOPAA, starting with some preliminary considerations before beginning actual implementation. For example, Chapter 3 should help readers consider a reasonable multiyear timeline for incremental SOPAA implementation, the time and resources needed for successful implementation, and the strengths and barriers within their schools that should influence key implementation decisions. Chapter 3 then concludes with a summary of step-by-step suggestions for using this book to implement the SOPAA. In reviewing these suggestions, readers should quickly understand that this book should be used as a resource or type of "manual" for implementation, rather than a book that can be successfully used after reading it once from start to finish.

Chapters 4–11 comprise Part II of this book and discuss in detail how and when to implement each of the SOPAA components, and a rationale for implementing each component is discussed throughout. More specifically, in **Chapters 4 and 5** we describe how TAPS Support Teachers and classroom teachers work through the TAPS process to assist struggling learners. Because TAPS is central to implementing the overall SOPAA model, information in these chapters is thoroughly detailed to provide educators with guidance and support for each of the steps in the TAPS process. Because assessment is an important feature of TAPS intervention plans, **Chapter 6** describes three places where brief academic assessments can help guide instruction or be used to evaluate student learning outcomes. For example, this chapter describes options for assessments that can be feasibly used as part of the universal screening in the SOPAA, or to evaluate student learning in reading, math, and writing in TAPS.

Although intervention and assessment practices are commonly discussed in books describing models of school-based consultation and schoolwide change, these practices are challenging, if not impossible, to implement without sufficient professional development and staff support. Therefore, in **Chapter 7** we describe a professional development plan that specifically aligns with the SOPAA components, as well as the assessment and instruction practices facilitated during TAPS cases. Throughout Chapter 7 readers will find numerous recommendations for facilitating a meaningful *and* feasible professional development plan for each educator involved with the TAPS process. In **Chapter 8**, we discuss how schools can increase their capacity for assisting struggling learners (and assisting those students' teachers) by including a systematic plan for soliciting and training school volunteers. Chapter 8 provides, for example, guidance for recruiting, training, coordinating, and sustaining school volunteers, as well as the rationale for including school volunteers as part of the SOPAA model. Other considerations for involving school volunteers are also discussed (e.g., screening school volunteers, the desired and reasonable role of school volunteers, and determining the appropriateness and feasibility of utilizing a school volunteer program to support the SOPPA).

As noted above, strong intervention, assessment, professional development, and staff resources are essential to a successful schoolwide model of academic support, but without effective communication with, and generating support from, school leaders and teachers about the model, implementation and sustainability of the model will likely fail. As such, **Chapters 9 and 10** are key features of this book and important resources for implementing the SOPAA model because they describe several aspects of effective communication with school leaders (e.g., the school principal) and teachers. In these chapters, numerous recommendations are provided to help SOPAA facilitators utilize effective communication procedures both prior to and during SOPAA implementation. **Chapter 11** concludes Part II by specifically highlighting how to successfully implement the SOPAA model with two to four co-facilitators. This chapter is important because, although the model can be initiated and directed by only one educator, Chapter 11 explicitly details the benefits and interacting roles that are associated with facilitating the SOPAA with more than one educator in the school.

As Chapters 4–11 discuss how and when to implement each of the SOPAA components, it is important to keep in mind that a key component of the SOPAA is *adaptable and incremental implementation* for each school, depending on the school's specific strengths and needs. Thus, throughout these "how-to" chapters, we describe how schools with varying characteristics can successfully implement the SOPAA in a way, and with a timeline, that is most congruent with the school's particular needs. Also, because the primary goal of this book is to assist educators in meaningfully improving student learning outcomes by initiating, implementing, and sustaining the SOPAA as a systems-level model of academic consultation, we include numerous reproducible resources throughout the appendices to support streamlined and systematic implementation.

Part III of this book offers additional information and guidance for SOPAA implementation, which is intended to supplement what readers learn in the preceding chapters. In **Chapter 12** we describe the key components and subcomponents associated with effective instruction in reading, math, and writing—information that is intended to help educators evaluate their core instruction and intervention programs. This chapter also describes dozens of evidence-based intervention programs (several in each of the three academic areas), which educators may consider using as part of their TAPS process. Overall, Chapter 12 is intended to be an important resource for identifying and implementing the most appropriate instructional programs and interventions in reading, math, and writing.

Throughout the book we offer several brief illustrations and examples of how the SOPPA components and features can be implemented in schools. However, more thorough case illustrations are reserved for **Chapter 13** so that readers can consider these examples after gaining a thorough

understanding of each SOPPA component and feature, all of which are detailed in the preceding chapters. Thus, after discussing the relationships among SOPPA components and how they can often be adapted and implemented incrementally depending on a specific school's characteristics, Chapter 13 describes four schools with varying characteristics and needs, and how the SOPAA is implemented in those schools. There are, of course, no schools with the exact same characteristics, but the case illustrations in Chapter 13, along with the information from the preceding chapters, should further assist readers in recognizing how the SOPAA model could be implemented in their schools.

Finally, creating and sustaining systems-level change requires a relatively sophisticated repertoire of skills, and we believe that such skills should be acquired early in one's career as an educator—ideally as a college/university student. As such, in **Chapter 14** we provide a relatively detailed supplement for university teachers who are responsible for training our future educators. Within this brief chapter, university teachers should find feasible recommendations for how to use this book to help build, for example, the academic assessment, intervention, and consultation skills of soon-to-be educators.

Companion Website

To further support educators' use of the SOPAA model, a companion website is available. By visiting *www.sopaaforschools.org* educators will find various forms and related supplemental materials that, when specifically used with the information provided in this book, should assist them with implementing the SOPAA. Throughout the book several places direct readers to the website in order to access these supplemental materials, and each place is denoted with the icon shown immediately to the right of this text.

In addition to providing supplemental materials, the SOPAA website also serves as a venue on which educators can ask questions and get online support about SOPAA implementation. The SOPAA website is fully funded by the Helps Education Fund, a nonprofit organization that was founded by one of us (J.C.B.) and is devoted to improving educational outcomes for students nationally and internationally. Readers can learn more about each of the website support features by visiting *www.sopaaforschools.org.*

Authors' Note

Throughout this book, the use of masculine and feminine pronouns such as *he, she, his, hers, him, and her* are often used only to be succinct and to avoid the wordiness of overusing, for example, *he or she, him or her.* Text throughout this book that uses a masculine or feminine pronoun should not be interpreted as being relevant only to males or females. In all cases, the pronoun should be interpreted as a gender-neutral shorthand for *he/she, him/her, his/hers,* etc. For example, for consistency we typically refer to the SOPAA facilitators using only female pronouns, but we certainly acknowledge there are many male educators who will facilitate the SOPAA, and this book is equally applicable to educators of both genders.