Conclusion

Special education is not only one of the most regulated areas in education but also one of the most costly. This is partly based on the mandate to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all special needs students. In an effort to ensure that students with special needs receive FAPE, school districts must design service delivery models that can offer a plan on how the students’ needs will be met. This book offered a definition for what service delivery models mean, along with suggestions to aid in the design of various service delivery models for certain exceptionalities. The first step in designing a service delivery model within special education programs is to understand that there is a difference between a continuum of services and a service delivery model. Having a clear understanding of the differences that exist will add context for those school districts hoping to design effective service delivery models for special needs students within their special education programs. Despite all the technology and other resources available to school districts today, there is still a lack of attention paid to the development and implementation of service delivery models for special education students. The most poignant question to be answered at this point is the following: How do we encourage school districts to design innovative service delivery models for special education programs in the 21st century?

In all aspects of special education practices, there is a need to offer consistent and effective training for those involved in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Not only should training be required for the special education director, but it should be stipulated within the mission and vision statements of the special education program itself. Any service provided to a special needs student is based on the individual education plan devised by a team of individuals working with that student throughout the year. Thus, the IEP forms the blueprint for the service delivery model. No service delivery model can be created without a review of all IEPs written within a school system. The special education director is the primary stakeholder responsible for ensuring the proper planning of services during the initial stages of a service delivery model. IDEA (2004) defines the IEP as “a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting in accordance with legal sections within the law” (§ 300.320). Furthermore, the IEP must include the following elements that will add to the service delivery methods prescribed in a model: a statement of the child’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance; and a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to meet the child’s individual needs so that adequate yearly progress can be attained. A statement of the child’s need for related services and supplementary aids and services is provided as well. All academic, social, and functional needs are supported with peer-reviewed research to the greatest extent possible. These portions of the IEP must be considered when developing service delivery models for students with special needs. Transition services are also important to the older students within the special education program, particularly those who are 16 years of age or older. The addition of
transformation services to the service delivery model can add to the content within the model. Teaching older special needs students how to adjust to the social aspects of the community can complicate the planning process, but it is important for the special education director to ensure that related service personnel are available to ensure the proper development of services in this area.

If a school district is having complications with effective IEP development, implementation, and review, then any attempt to use the IEP as a designing tool toward any service delivery model will be negatively affected. Simply put, the service delivery model will be ineffective. This text is filled with resources and ideas that can aid in the development of effective service delivery models. Assurance systems provide a way to:

... look into the quality of the institution’s educational provision and inform stakeholders on the effectiveness of the system [that is] put into place to ensure and improve quality. Such a system should be developed collectively through the participation of key players of the institution. Ideally they should work towards identifying the relevant areas that need addressing by the system as the needs would vary with size and complexity of the institution in consideration. (George, Muigai, & Nyakwara, 2013, p. 106)

The benefits of providing quality assurance to an educational institution are many. One such benefit has to do with the pride the teaching, non-teaching, and professional staff can feel in knowing that they have put forth their best efforts to make the service delivery model at their educational institution the best it can be. Their efforts will not only benefit them but will also prove to all stakeholders that the school and/or district cares about the program and the students. In addition, even though the service delivery model may be a good one or even the best in the state, there is always room for improvement. As such, it is essential that the service delivery model be reviewed on a continuous basis to ensure that the high quality that teachers, non-teaching staff, and administrators think they are providing is in fact the case. Providing quality assurance allows all stakeholders the opportunity to review resources, ensure that they are being used to their full potential, and identify any needs that may become apparent as a result of the evaluation. In this era of budget cuts for all public educational institutions, resources cannot be wasted, and thus consistent program evaluation will be a check and balance for efficiency. Next, the assurance assessment of the service delivery model could serve as a professional development for all stakeholders, especially in the areas that need improvement. The school administrators can bring in outside sources, or the people in the areas that need improvement can attend a class at a local university to learn the necessary skills. Professional development can also take the form of teachers at a school with a good quality assurance test rating hosting a professional development session for other schools in the area who need to improve. Just like students who sometimes learn better from their peers, adult learners do as well. Finally, ensuring that the service delivery model is of the best quality is not the responsibility of one person but is a collaborative effort. As such, it is hoped that all the persons involved will learn tolerance for one another, improve their communication skills, and increase staff morale (Macau University of Science and Technology, 2013).

Each chapter in this book leaves the reader with future trends that will have greater impacts on the field of special education and how it should approach the development of service delivery models. As special education has prided itself in the removal of labels from service minutes on the IEP, it continues to strive for the inclusion of all students with special needs in the least restrictive environment. Not all students with special needs will qualify for services in the regular education environment as a whole; thus, the need for service delivery models in special education will always exist. Other trends that seem
to impact the practice of special education and its influence on service delivery models include using Response to Intervention, training students to become advocates of their own education, and ensuring the fiscal responsibility of special education programs. These trends will continue to be relevant in special education for years to come.

Research shows that blending the practices of special education with regular education can provide a universal approach to the services needed for students with special needs (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2006). Meeting the needs of all students regardless of their disability should be the focus of all schools. A service delivery model that practices the inclusion of special needs students in the regular education setting is best. Best practices according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children are centered on programs that not only educate all children together but also introduce technology into the programs. Service delivery models around the world also support the use of integration methods to improve the development and learning of students with special needs. For example, parents led movements in Austria that in the course of 10 years improved the programs offered to their disabled children (Rutte, n.d.). Even the model devised in this country is based on integration, cooperative classes, small classes, and supporting teachers. Good practice in service delivery models are best approached with integration and proper teacher training.

Future trends in service delivery models will focus on protecting the models from bad practices that can land a state on the needs improvement list generated by the United States Department of Education. Significant due process violations are a sign that a special education program is in trouble. FAPE violations cover a massive portion of special education. A lack of highly qualified teachers, poor statewide assessment results among the special needs population, disproportionality, a lack of related service personnel, and elevated suspensions of special needs students are bad practices that exist in a poorly constructed service delivery model. There are many organizations that can aid those special education programs that suffer from bad practices. Each state has an advisory commission that is there to provide guidance on policies that impact students with special needs and their use of related services. It is the role of the special education director to maintain contact with any organization that offers guidance to support the weaknesses or gaps that may be present in their respective service delivery models. Given the path that special education continues to take today, it is apparent that the trends will continue to lead us in the direction of assistive technology, curriculum that is geared toward the needs of special education students, early detection, classroom integration, and student-led planning (Lynch, 2013). Many inside and outside of the field are keeping their eye on the practices and services rendered in the special education community. The recent results reported by the United States Department of Education regarding test scores and the amount of students with disabilities that are able to read and complete mathematics assessments show that there is a lot of work to be done with our special education students.

Data analyzed from programs that include special needs students alongside other low-achieving students in inclusion classes show the need for instructional interventions that are evidence-based (Virginia Public Schools, 2014). Aligning these interventions with a school’s current curriculum is sure to offer some success. Of course, all schools must make certain that any intervention program selected pairs with their students’ needs. The State of Virginia has seen encouraging results for students in both categories within inclusion programs. Scientifically based instructional interventions and supplemental interventions such as Saxon Mathematics, Success Maker, A Plus, Cognitive Tutor, etc., yielded good results (Virginia Public Schools, 2014). Replicating these interventions and aligning them to their state standards and curriculum resulted in greater ability of the students over time. Both the district and director are responsible for making certain that costs, time, and the needed requirements are met for use in their respective programs.
Conclusion

Schools and special education programs continue to battle with the implementation of the inclusive model for all students. One particular school system managed to implement the following components to meet the needs of students with special needs: neighborhood to school placement; a general education homeroom; no segregated spaces; continual planning; creative teaching based on best practices; a problem-solving mindset; access to afterschool activities and social activities and social relationships; and commitment to making it work (Schwarz, 2007). The neighborhood to school placement may take more effort on the part of the school district but is beneficial to the student with special needs that suffers from proper social skills. Being educated alongside students in the same area in which they live can improve behaviors and socialization skills of students with special needs. Schools must also make it possible for special needs students to feel a part of the school community. They can ensure this by placing students with special needs in a homeroom class. This feeling of belongingness can also be carried over by banishing segregated spaces. Many feel that special needs students should not be sent to the resource room or self-contained room; they should be educated alongside their regular education peers all day. Although students with special needs have plans outlined in their Individualized Education Plan, there is still a need for continuous planning among the regular education teachers that will teach the special needs students. This takes away room for error and a misunderstanding of the practices in the classroom that must exist between special needs students and the teacher. It is during these continuous planning efforts that evidence-based instructional strategies aside from those incorporated during whole group can be used for those special needs students. Curricular adaptations, differentiated instructional strategies, and universal design approaches remain choices for inclusive models (Schwarz, 2007). Whether it be planning efforts or teaching efforts, regular education teachers must move away from viewing the special needs students as the problem; they must learn to transition into a problem-solving mindset so that they discover how to best communicate with special needs students with academic, social, or functional needs. The use of afterschool clubs and activities to improve and increase students with special needs’ ability to socialize with their nondisabled peers is important in inclusive models. Taking an interest inventory of their likes and dislikes can give the school an idea of what activities the special needs student would take part in. The final component that must be included is based on commitment. Schools and leaders must have buy-in from their staff so that the inclusion process can be a success. After all, we must all believe that all students can learn and belong together in an educational environment. These are the tools that make inclusion a success.

School leaders that work as a team with vital stakeholders inside and outside of the special education program tend to see more success. Part of being able to work effectively with any person is being able to assess his or her needs and strengths. Many school systems use the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) to assess the extent to which personnel are adequately prepared to serve students with special needs, variation in personnel preparation, and factors that explain the variations. Using this assessment allows leaders to plan trainings and continue the development of service delivery models for their respective special education programs. So many programs fail to assess the needs of the stakeholders that participate in their programs. Assessing their needs annually takes away the guessing game that surrounds the areas of weaknesses for those that participate. A service delivery model is only as successful as the content that comprises it, and the stakeholders are the ones that enact all parts of the service delivery model. Using assessment tools that are supported with research and are valid lends more weight to the process. When directors create their own documents and tools, participants of the survey tend to take it less seriously. Given the fact that a service delivery model can use activities from
companies and seek the support for related service personnel outside of the school system, it is necessary to take a more research-based approach to the assessment method.

Schools across the country are currently implementing Common Core Standards. This has prompted new and improved evaluation requirements for both teachers and administrators. These evaluations are based partly on the teacher’s ability to effectively instruct students, along with using student-led discussions and lessons. The second component is based on the teacher’s success with standardized test scores, which includes a Value Added Model (VAM) score. Teachers are now held to the expectation that students should take the lead in their education, and special education students should be held to the same standard. Student-led IEPs have been supported in research for a while. This focus must continue so that students can take a more active role in their educational journey, which includes making sure that they are active stakeholders in the service delivery model process. After all, the reasoning behind each aspect of the service delivery process is to ensure that the student receives a free and appropriate public education. Ensuring that students with special needs advocate for their rights is a process that must occur over many years. Certainly, elementary special needs students on a lower level will not be able to speak out as much given their maturity level, but older students with special needs can. Schools can offer training to teach students about their rights, just as they should do for parents. Allowing them to be active participants and advocates for their education and rights will promote their desire to engage in the learning process.

The trend associated with fiscal responsibility in special education programs will continue to grow over the years. As costs rise, the population of students will grow, the need for more intensive and research-based services will increase, and the need for fiscal management of funds from IDEA will intensify as well. Service delivery models must address the needs related to each student’s IEP, and with the constant population growth of students with special needs, there will be an increase in staff necessary to render these services. It is no secret that the federal government has not lived up to its full funding responsibility of services promised under IDEA. Therefore, it is up to the LEA to seek additional funding sources to cover these costs. Given the budget crisis that most if not all schools in the United States are going through, special education programs are on their own when it comes to matching funds needed to make sure FAPE is provided. A special education program lacking the funding needed to guarantee services to its special education students does not earn a pass from implementing FAPE. Special education leaders that search for grants from outside sources often can obtain the additional funding needed to keep the program going.

Overall, service delivery models are needed to ensure appropriate services for students with special needs. Some schools operate without a service delivery model, and this is visible through their lack of success with their special needs students. A service delivery model will not remain the same; it will change as the population of special needs students changes. Constant revisions and reviews are needed by all stakeholders to maintain the effectiveness of the plan. Service delivery models are a practice that will surely increase as special education leaders seek to ensure the implementation of both IDEA and NCLB. IDEA and NCLB may drive the special education community, but it is the use of a service delivery model that ensures the effective implementation of both acts. Special education leaders that begin with a mission and vision for their special education program and have the buy-in of all stakeholders within the school system can constantly build on the strength of their practices. Certainly, service delivery models are not simple to achieve in a step approach. The methods used to create a service delivery model are ongoing, and even once a model is formed, there may continue to be areas of change needed. One aspect that sets this text apart is its use of the PACS framework to guide the service delivery model process.

**Conclusion**
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This framework is universal and can be applied to any content area or focus area. Using this framework alleviates any miscues that the stakeholders may encounter when developing a service delivery model for their program. It is the hope of any leader that their special education program be a success. However, there must be guidelines to aid in that path to success. Research has to continue when it comes to service delivery models within special education programs due to the trends and changes that will continue to impact the special education community.

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REFERENCES


