

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