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Segregated Programs Versus Integrated Comprehensive Service Delivery for All Learners
Assessing the Differences

ELISE FRATTURA AND COLLEEN A. CAPPER

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to address the principles of a comprehensive whole-school restructuring to serve not only students with disabilities educated in inclusive environments but also all learners who have been labeled to receive services from federally mandated programs, such as special education, limited English, at risk, or Title I. The number of students who qualify for such services is growing. Unfortunately, these students often spend the largest part of their day leaving their classroom to receive special instruction, resulting in a disconnected and fragmented day. We address the outcomes of traditional programs and the underlying principles necessary to support inclusive services versus creating segregated programs. The principles are classified into four cornerstones: core principles, location of services, curriculum and instruction, and funding and policy.

In the past decade, the research literature on inclusive education has significantly increased (Peterson & Hittie, 2003). Most of this literature has focused its unit of analysis at the classroom site—for example, on the social and academic outcomes of integrated education (Peterson & Hittie, 2003; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002), collaborative teaching arrangements (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2002), the role of paraprofessionals (Doyle, 2002), the inclusion of students with disabilities in district and state assessments (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998), or ways to integrate curriculum (Rainforth & Kuglemass, 2003). Others have offered a conceptual and ideological analysis of the literature in support of and against inclusive education (Brantlinger, 1997). However, the literature that focuses specifically on the role of school leaders with students who typically struggle (Riehl, 2000) or on the organizational, structural, and cultural conditions necessary for inclusion is significantly less comprehensive. Even book-length works whose title suggests a focus on whole school restructuring to serve students (Sailor, 2002) do not address the school or district level organizational and structural implementation intricacies of serving students in heterogeneous classrooms. The aforementioned literature focuses primarily on students with disability labels and does not take into account how providing services for students with disability labels is similar to and different from addressing the needs of other students who may struggle in school; such as those students for whom English is not the primary language; students considered “at risk”; students considered gifted; or students with lower reading levels. Exceptions to this include works by Burrello, Lashley, and Beatty (2000), Capper, Frattura, and Keyes (2000), and McLeskey and Waldron (2000).

The recent comprehensive school reform (CSR) models, by design, come closest to taking such a whole school approach to raise the academic achievement of all students (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003) However, CSR continues to not set standards for integrated comprehensive
services. Although the literature explains how lower achieving students can experience academic success, it does not articulate how students with disability labels have experienced similar success, nor do we know from this literature to what extent students with disabilities are included in heterogeneous class environments in these models of reform. Furthermore, none of the CSR models take disability as a focus.

The purpose of this article is to address this gap in the literature by taking each school as the unit of analysis and focusing on specific school level organizational conditions necessary for schools to deliver what we call integrated comprehensive services (ICS) in heterogeneous environments for all learners. Integrated environments are the settings that all students—regardless of need or legislative eligibility—access throughout their day in school and nonschool settings. That is, in these settings (e.g., classroom, playground, library, field trips), students with a variety of needs and gifts learn together in both small and large groups. Comprehensive services refers to the array of services and supports centered on a differentiated curriculum and instruction that all students receive to ensure academic and behavioral success. By all learners, we mean especially those learners who have been labeled to receive services, such as students labeled with a disability or labeled “at risk,” “gifted,” “poor reader,” or English language learner (ELL). We will first address why changes in service delivery are vitally necessary, pointing to the current status of special education, including the growing incidence of students labeled with disabilities, the historically poor school and postschool outcomes of special education efforts, and the enormous outlay of financial and other resources into activities with such poor outcomes (Oakes, 2000). We then describe the differences between providing programs for students and bringing services to students via ICS and the principles that should guide the delivery of educational services to all students. What we mean by service delivery are the ways in which students are provided with educational services, including curriculum, instruction, assessments, and any additional supportive services that are necessary for the student to be successful in heterogeneous learning environments.

Outcomes of Segregated Programs

The number of students labeled with a disability has increased 151% since 1989 (Ysseldyke, 2001). Moreover, students of color are significantly overidentified for and overrepresented in special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Quality Counts, 2004; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Unfortunately, these students often spend the largest part of their day leaving their classroom to receive special instruction, resulting in a disconnected and fragmented school day (Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2000). Moreover, these special programs have failed to result in high student achievement, as measured by postschool outcomes or standardized scores. For example, in the United States, despite extensive efforts at providing special education for more than 25 years since the implementation of federal disability law, 22% of students with disability labels have failed to complete high school, compared to 9% of students without labels (National Organization on Disability, 2000).

Equally alarming are the poor long-term outcomes of these special education efforts. For example, according to a study by Blackorby and Wagner (1996), “nearly 1 in 5 youth with disabilities out of school 3 to 5 years still was not employed and was not looking for work” (pp. 402–403), whereas 69% of students from the general population over that same period of time found employment. After providing special education to students for at least 18 years in public schools—and in many cases for 21 years as mandated by the special education law—these school and postschool outcomes are indeed dismal.

Not only are the special education outcomes dismal, but the amount of money that educators have put forth to support these failing efforts is staggering. Special programs costs 130% more than general education. That is, if a school district spends $5,000 per student, then each student labeled for special programs costs district $11,500 (Odden & Picus, 2000). In the 1999–2000 school year, “the 50 states and the District of Columbia spent approximately $50 billion on special education services, amounting to $8,080 per special education student” (Chambers, Parrish, & Harr, 2002, p. v). In comparison, in 1998, total instructional expenditures for students at the elementary and middle school level who were served in the general education classroom was $3,920 (Chambers, Parrish, Lieberman, & Wolman, 1998).

On a related point, the more students are served in more restrictive, segregated placements, the higher the cost of their education. For example, Capper, Frattura, and Keyes (2000) noted that

If we serve students with disability labels 25%–60% outside the regular class, then the cost for this education increases to $5,122. If we provide a program for these students in a separate public facility, like many charter and alternative schools, then the cost increases to $6,399 per student. (pp. 7–8)

That is, the data are clear that the more students are segregated from their peers for instruction, the more costly that instruction. The reason for this is that “a separate program means that students often require separate space, separate materials and infrastructure, a separate teacher, and an administrator not only to manage the program but also to spend time and money on organizing the program (Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2000, p. 7).

Similarly, during the 2000–2001 school year, 10,900 public alternative schools and programs for so-called “at-risk” students were in operation, and 59% of these programs...
were housed in a separate facility. Districts with high percentages of students of color and low-income students tended to have higher enrollments in alternative schools (National Center on Education Statistics, 2002, p. 33). Moreover, educators spend an inordinate amount of time and resources deciding exactly for which program a student may qualify. In the Verona (Wisconsin) school district in 1999, “it cost more than $2,000 to evaluate one student to determine eligibility for special education. [In this case,] a district of 4,500 students averages 225 (5%) evaluations per year for a total of $443,713 spent on evaluations alone” (Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2000, p. 7).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2000), “Slightly under half [of students with disability labels] between the ages of six and seventeen are served in general education settings with their [typical] peers for more than 89% of their school day . . . and the number of students served in general education classrooms is increasing each year” (cited in Causton-Theoharis, 2003, p. 7), due in part to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, which created “a legal presumption in favor of [general education] placement” (Huefner, 2000, p. 242; Causton-Theoharis, 2003). Research has suggested that educating students in these general education environments results in higher academic achievement and more positive social outcomes for students with and without disability labels (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000; Peterson & Hittie, 2003, pp. 37–39; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002), not to mention that it is the most cost-effective way to educate students.

Although more of these students are being educated in heterogeneous educational environments than in previous years, increasingly, students who are being labeled at risk are being placed in segregated alternative classrooms and schools compared to previous years; many students are not served in their neighborhood schools (i.e., the school they would attend if they did not have the disability or other separate program label) and spend large parts of their days out of the general education classroom. These practices are not only failing to meet the needs of these students by resulting in significantly high percentages dropping out of school or not achieving employment after secondary education, but these practices exact an exorbitant financial toll on schools and school districts.

**BRINGING SERVICES TO STUDENTS**

To overcome these costly, dismal outcomes of segregated programs, school leaders (principals, school-based steering committees, site councils, etc.) must focus their efforts on preventing student struggle and must change how students who struggle are educated. In so doing, fewer students will be inappropriately labeled with disability or at-risk labels, and more of these students will be educated in heterogeneous learning environments, resulting in higher student achievement and more promising postschool outcomes.

Placing students in special programs is quite the opposite of providing services to or with students (i.e., ICS). The two approaches differ in four primary ways, defined here as cornerstones of integrated comprehensive services. Those four cornerstones are presented in Figure 1.

**THE FOUR CORNERSTONES OF ICS**

In our work with educators across the country and with our students, we also hear persistent assumptions about the fac-
tors that inhibit change toward ICS. As we describe the differences between special programs and ICS, we also identify these assumptions and describe the evidence-based practices that refute these assumptions.

**Core Principles**

One core principle of segregated special programs is that students do not receive help for their learning needs until after they have failed in some way. This practice is analogous to parking an ambulance at the bottom of a cliff to assist people who fall off the cliff. Special programs are like the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Students are placed in them after they fail academically, socially, or behaviorally.

In contrast, with ICS, the primary aim of teaching and learning in the school is the prevention of student failure. Referring again to the analogy, ICS works at the top of the cliff, setting up supports not only to prevent students from falling off the cliff, but to prevent them from nearing the edge of the cliff in the first place. It is astounding to us that so few educational practices are considered preventative. One activity we conduct in our classes is to have students write out on newsprint their response to the following question: “What happens in your school or classroom when a student struggles, academically, socially, or behaviorally? What are all the practices in place to address this?” Invariably, students easily list an entire conglomeration of “ambulances,” numbering usually a dozen items even in small schools and districts. The list includes items such as homework club, learning centers, peer tutors, adult volunteers, Title 1 reading, Reading Recovery, school within a school, small-group tutoring, Saturday morning remedial club, summer school, calling parents, in and out of school suspension, and the list goes on. Then we ask our students to list all the actions their school or district takes to prevent student academic or behavioral failure or struggling in the first place. This question is usually followed by several minutes of quiet, as such efforts do not readily come to students’ minds. Finally, students will list a few practices such as focused, intensive reading instruction in the early grades or differentiating instruction.

According to Deschene, Cuban, and Tyack (2001), historically, public schools have dealt with student failure in similar ways—by blaming the student. With ICS, the onus of student failure is on the school, and any student failure is viewed as something that is askew in the educational system. The way educators frame student failure (i.e., whether student failure is seen as a student or a systems issue) is the pivotal point of all the remaining assumptions and practices in schools.

As such, the primary aim of ICS is the prevention of student failure, and student failure is prevented by building teacher capacity to be able to teach to a range of diverse student strengths and needs—a second core principle. Every single decision about service delivery must be premised on the question to what extent that decision will increase the capacity of all teachers to teach to a range of students’ diverse learning needs. Segregated special programs, by definition, diminish teacher capacity. When the same student or group of students are routinely removed from the classroom to receive instruction elsewhere, the classroom teacher is released from the responsibility of learning how to teach not only those students, but all future students with similar needs over the rest of that teacher’s career. At the same time, students with and without special needs are denied the opportunity to learn and work with each other, and the students who leave the room are denied a sense of belonging in the classroom.

A third core principle of separate programs is that their efforts do not address individual student needs. Instead, students are made to fit yet another program. Even the language that is used often reflects this idea. That is, we use language such as “We need to program for this student,” “We held a meeting to program for this student,” “We can place the student in the CD program.” “That school houses the ED program.” Finding students to fit into a program is a supreme irony of programs that are created under the assumption that students do not fit into general education, and hence they need something unique and individual—only to be required to fit into yet another program. A persistent assumption with this principle is that it is administratively easier to plug a student into an existing program than to creatively plan how to best meet a student’s academic or behavioral needs (both of which are mandated in special education legislation).

When educators in a school have made significant progress toward restructuring based on ICS principles, one practical way to avoid placing students in prepackaged programs and to meet individual student needs can take place in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. In these meetings, practitioners who are working toward dismantling segregated programs and moving to ICS have found it helpful to assume that no separate programs exist in their schools. They ask themselves the question, “If no such program existed, how would we best meet this student’s needs? And how can that decision ultimately build teacher capacity?”

In addition to the core principles that distinguish ICS from segregated programs, these two different models of service delivery also differ from each other based on location (i.e., where students are taught), curriculum and instruction, staff roles, and funding. We discuss these next.

**Establishing Equitable Structures**

Location—where students are physically placed to learn—is a central distinction between segregated programs and ICS. Under a segregated program model, educators believe that the primary reason for student failure is the student him- or herself, that students cannot be helped until they fail and receive a label of some sort (e.g., at risk, disability, poor reader), and that the student is then best placed into a separate program that is removed from the core teaching and learning of the school. These beliefs and practices then require students to be
separated from their peers by requiring students either to leave the general education classroom to attend a pullout program or to attend a school not in their neighborhood or a school they would not attend if they did not have a special label.

Furthermore, students with a particular label are clustered in a classroom or program in numbers greater than their proportion in the school. In the case of students with disabilities, typically, a special education teacher is assigned to support the students in this classroom and perhaps two to three other classrooms where students with disabilities are clustered. In one of the high schools we studied, students considered “at risk” were all placed in the same “transition” English and “transition” Math classes in their freshman year, taught by a “transition” teacher in a “transition” room. For ELL students, the students are often clustered together and assigned a bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) teacher for nearly their entire day.

The problem with clustering students is that often special education or student services staff are assigned to the students with labels in these classrooms. Although the special education or student services staff may assist other students in the classroom without labels, his or her primary role is student support. That is, in a segregated, clustering arrangement, the primary goal is student support, not building the teaching capacity of general education teachers to teach to a range of students. The result of such an arrangement is increased dependency. Students with labels and the general education teacher become increasingly dependent on the student services staff. Including students with their peers is dependent on the presence of student services staff. In nearly every situation we have studied, when (e.g., because of budget cuts) student services staff time in these classrooms must be reduced, general education teachers claim that they cannot fully meet the needs of students with labels in their classrooms. This occurs especially in coteaching models, where a special education and general education teacher are assigned to coteach a class or course together—arguably one of the most common and most expensive practices in schools today.

In addition to educator convenience, segregated practices persist because many educators believe that it is more cost effective for educators to cluster students with similar labels in particular classrooms or particular schools. Research cited previously in this article has refuted this belief. Moreover, this particular administrative arrangement makes little sense with the current federal support for cross-categorical services. Now, state departments of education are issuing special education teaching licenses for teachers to be able to teach across categories, because these teachers are expected to be able to teach to a range of student needs. Thus, school districts can no longer use the argument that only particular teachers can provide particular support for particular students.

Moreover, with segregated programs, educators persistently assume that they can only provide individual attention and support to students with labels in a setting or situation separate from those students’ peers. Reasons for this assumption include several arguments—for example, that a middle school student would feel embarrassed to receive speech articulation training in front of his or her peers, or that if elementary students require intensive reading instruction, then this instruction requires a separate setting, like a Title I or Reading Recovery room. Educators reason that this saves students embarrassment about reading in front of their more able peers and that a separate room cuts down on classroom distractions. To be sure, it may be appropriate at times, when a student requiring speech articulation skills could benefit from individual instruction outside of the classroom that does not disrupt his or her school day. At the same time, when schools and classrooms function with teams of diverse educators in support of flexible groupings, a student’s need for one-on-one instruction is part of the general movement of the day and does not force the student to be the only student exiting the classroom, for example, during a science class. In the reading example, at the elementary level, successful teachers are able to meet the individual needs of students without those students needing to be pulled from an integrated environment.

At the middle school and high school level, when teachers are faced with students with low reading levels, at times, these students may need intensive reading instruction separate from their peers. The use of a computer-assisted reading program such as Read 180, is one such example. However, based on ICS principles, students choose to access this course or class and are not unilaterally placed in it. Moreover, students who receive this instruction do not change by virtue of their label (e.g., all “at-risk” students assigned to the course, or all “LD” students assigned); rather, a heterogeneous group of students receives the instruction based on need, not label. More important, rather than this same group of students being assigned to other classes together (e.g., they are all assigned to take the same science class), these students are not grouped together for any other part of the school day.

Referring again to a high school example, educators have argued that placing all the students “at risk” in language arts together in a freshman “transition” English class will allow the teacher to use curriculum materials suited to the reading levels of these students and, in so doing, raise the English achievement of these students, enabling them to be integrated with their peers after their freshman year. Aside from the fact that we have yet to find special programs that collect sufficient outcome data, teachers in highly successful schools in the context of ICS are able to teach language arts and other subjects to a range of different learners in heterogeneous classrooms (Jorgensen, 1998).

Ironically, under segregated program assumptions, we have seen inclusive practices evolve into another segregated program—that is, the segregation of inclusion. Segregated inclusion happens when students with disabilities are disproportionately assigned to or clustered in particular classrooms. For example, in a school with four third-grade classrooms, students with disabilities are clustered into one or two of
these classrooms, in numbers that result in a higher percentage of students with disabilities in these classrooms than their overall percentage in the school. Educators have argued that these practices are legitimate, because it then becomes more convenient for special education staff to support students across fewer classrooms. We have witnessed educators in these schools calling these particular classrooms “the inclusive classrooms” or “inclusion programs” and the students with disabilities in these classrooms “inclusion” students. In so doing, these classrooms and students, in the guise of inclusion, inherit yet another set of labels. Educators reason that if a practice is more convenient for staff, then students will receive higher quality services in these segregated arrangements. In the schools we have studied, unfortunately, although clustering students may be more convenient for staff, this model does not build teacher capacity. That is, although the “inclusion” and “transition” teachers increase their capacity to teach to a range of students, all the other teachers in the school are “off the hook,” with no incentive to gain these skills, resulting in higher costs and less effectiveness in the long run.

In contrast, under ICS, all students attend their neighborhood school, or the school they would attend if they did not have a label. This is a basic civil right. Students do not have to leave their peers in their classroom, school, or district to participate in a curriculum and instruction that meets their learning needs. All students are then afforded a rich schedule of flexible, small-group and large-group instruction based on learning needs, interests, and content areas. With ICS at the district level, particular schools would not be designated “the ESL school” or “the school that all the elementary students with severe disabilities attend” or “the middle school that houses the students with severe challenging behaviors.” At the school level, ICS does not preclude students with labels from being clustered in particular classrooms, but only to the extent that the number of these students in any one classroom does not represent a higher percentage than found in the school. Accordingly, with ICS, a school does not have rooms labeled the “resource room,” the “LD room,” the “CD room,” the “ESL room,” or even the “at-risk room.” With ICS, students are flexibly grouped based on the individual needs of the group of learners in the particular classroom and grade. Accordingly, with ICS, all students’ learning takes place in heterogeneous environments. This means that students are never grouped by similar characteristics in the same way all the time. Teachers use flexible grouping patterns throughout the day, depending on the instructional content and student needs. Hence, when a group of students travels on a field trip, it should not just be students with disabilities or students who are “at risk” who are attending. Nor should it just be students without labels attending. The leader will look at any situation and always ask if there is a mix of students involved and, if not, why not?

Under ICS, students are placed in classes according to their natural proportions in the school. For example, if ELL students constitute 20% of the students in a school, then any classroom in the school (e.g., special education) should be composed of no more than 20% of ELL students. If students with disabilities represent 15% of the school population, then no classroom should have more than 15% of its students labeled with a disability. Likewise, using these same numbers and the principle of natural proportions, at least 20% of the student council, 20% of the band and other extracurricular programs, and 20% of the advanced placement courses or gifted programs should be composed of ELL students, and 15% of these same curricular and extracurricular areas should be composed of students with disabilities. To further illustrate, in one of the integrated middle schools we studied, students who were ELLs were clustered in two of the four seventh- and eighth-grade classrooms. However, the percentage of ELL students in these classrooms was less than their percentage in the school. In the high school example, students in need of additional support are dispersed amongst the freshman English classes. When students are placed in natural proportions, it sets the expectation that all school staff be able to teach a range of students. The goal of support staff becomes initially to support students in these settings, but ultimately to build the general educator capacity to teach to a range of students. Over time, one goal of support staff is to fade their involvement in the classroom, because the general classroom teacher has strengthened her or his teaching and learning strategies to meet a range of student needs.

We cannot overemphasize the critical role that location—where students are placed—plays in ICS. As long as segregated settings, classrooms, courses, and schools exist, educators will find reasons to place students in these settings. With segregated programs, these settings reinforce negative assumptions about students and teaching and learning, and not only does this model not build teacher capacity, it breeds teacher and student dependency. Even more important, segregated programs are the most expensive and least effective way to serve students. ICS becomes a proactive means to break the vicious cycle of negative beliefs that then require segregated programs that in turn reinforce negative assumptions and beliefs. When the core principles of ICS suggest that the system needs to adapt to the student, that the primary aim of teaching and learning is the prevention of student failure, that the aim of all educators is to build teacher capacity, and that all services must be grounded in the core teaching and learning of the school, then students must be educated alongside their peers in integrated environments. Student location dictates teacher location, and the location of teachers and students in integrated environments lays the groundwork for all the other aspects of ICS.

Building Teacher Capacity and Curriculum and Instruction

Location. Educator roles in segregated programs are based on teacher specialization and student labels. In segre-
gated programs, staff adhere to their professional, expert roles, which limits adult learning opportunities and professional growth. Moreover, when structures isolate students, they also isolate educators. When educators are isolated from each other, they do not share knowledge and expertise with each other, precluding the development of teacher expertise across a range of learners. For example, in one of the urban high schools we studied, the support staff in a program model were comfortable teaching segregated math and adapted language arts classes, but they were hesitant to provide support in general education classes in science and math, because they were unsure about their ability to do so. Therefore, students with special needs were placed in segregated math classes due to the teaching abilities of staff and denied a rich curriculum in the general education math content classes. In turn, the students performed quite poorly on the math section of the statewide accountability assessment.

A persistent assumption that fuels this adherence to expert roles is the belief that certification in a specialty area means that an educator possesses highly specialized, “magical,” esoteric skills that no one else can ever learn. Professional associations and professional accrediting or certification bodies reinforce this expert view (Skrpic, 1995). For example, in segregated programs, a social worker can be the only person who conducts personal history reviews with students and makes contacts with families, and no other staff person volunteers or is assigned to share in those duties. Likewise, in segregated programs, a middle school guidance counselor provides career guidance to individuals and groups of students, facilitates support groups for students, and meets individually with students with various problems. Rarely do other staff members share these duties.

In segregated programs, if other staff not certified in these areas assumed some of these duties, the social worker or guidance counselor would view these persons as undermining the professionalism of their careers and perhaps even threatening his or her job security. With these assigned duties, neither the social worker nor the guidance counselor is involved in the core curriculum and instruction of the school. In this context, professional development is often targeted to particular staff (e.g., all special education staff), whereas other staff are excused, which further segregates staff from each other and prevents the sharing of expertise.

In contrast, with ICS, in one of the middle schools we studied, the principal drastically changed the roles and responsibilities of the guidance counselors and school social workers. One guidance counselor was assigned to support the sixth grade, and the other was assigned to support the eighth grade, whereas the social worker was assigned to support the seventh grade. The role of the guidance counselors and the social worker changed to include the following tasks: making home visits; sharing door duty; readmitting students; representing on all special education team meetings; supporting staff; collecting and disseminating data on achievement, attendance, and behavior; handling all special education evaluations; teaching units on identity (e.g., race, ethnicity) and bullying; coordinating interns; and coordinating mentoring with local high school students. These roles and shared expertise, tied to the core curriculum and instruction, stand in great contrast to what typically occurs in segregated programs.

Location is where students are assigned and how staff roles are inextricably linked. In segregated programs, the limited expertise of staff contributes to where students are placed, and where students are placed limits the expertise of staff. All students require small- and large-group instruction, and, at times, one-on-one instruction for a student with more severe needs. However, rather than expecting students with educational or behavioral needs to leave the classroom to receive instruction, ICS requires educators to share their knowledge across disciplines (special education, at risk, bilingual, Title I reading, etc.) with their peers and with the students they teach in a range of educational environments.

As such, with ICS, staff roles pivot on developing teacher capacity to teach a range of learners in their classrooms. Given that only 21% of teachers feel well prepared to address the needs of labeled students (U.S. Department of Education, 2000), building teacher capacity becomes the primary goal in ICS. All staff development and all decisions about service delivery are aimed toward building staff capacity to work with a range of student needs.

Curriculum and Instruction. In segregated programs, the curriculum and instruction are separate from the core teaching and learning in the school. For some programs, at one end of the spectrum, it is assumed that the curriculum and instruction have not succeeded with a student; hence, the student needs an entirely different curriculum and instruction. Again, the assumption made is that the school curriculum does not need to change, that it works for most students, and that there is something inherently different about some students who need something entirely different. Moreover, this principle assumes that staff are incapable of teaching to a range of students, that schools are incapable of changing to meet student needs, and that students are more alike than different. Segregated programs also assume that students need to be identified and labeled to access a curriculum that meets their needs. In so doing, these programs deny students access to a content-rich curriculum, which in turn negatively affects student achievement and results in poor performance on standardized assessments. Instruction is based on the classroom majority rather than on individual needs. Alternative schools—whether within schools or out of school buildings—are often created on this assumption. Students who receive “specialized” math, English, or other academic subjects in resource rooms or in classrooms tracked for this purpose are also supported by this assumption.

At the other end of the spectrum in special programs, special education staff assist students who struggle by helping them learn the general education curriculum, but this...
learning takes place outside the general education classroom—in resource rooms, study centers, or study halls. It could be argued that these practices are not separate from the core teaching and learning of the school. However, again, these practices typically do not build teacher capacity to teach to a range of students. Although students are assisted, support staff typically do not share ideas with classroom teachers, who then do not learn new strategies that would prevent their students from needing additional assistance in the first place. Students are then denied access to a content-rich curriculum. In contrast, in ICS, students receive their instruction with their peers in large and small, flexible, heterogeneous groups in integrated school and community settings and are supported to do so. As such, ICS is seamlessly tied to and grounded in the core curriculum and instruction of the school.

In ICS, the curriculum and instruction are built on a culturally relevant (see Ladson-Billings, 1995) and differentiated curriculum (Tomlinson, 2001). Culturally relevant means that the curriculum addresses the various families, cultures, races, and ethnicities of students in the classroom not as an added component but seamlessly woven into the curriculum. Differentiated curriculum is designed to address a range of learner needs and achievement levels. Such curriculum is developed under the principle of universal access (Bremer, Clapper, Hitchcock, Hall, & Kachgal, 2002). Universal access means that a lesson is initially designed for a range of learner needs in the classroom—rather than developing a lesson or curriculum and then deciding as an afterthought how students with different learning needs may access the curriculum. With these curriculum principles, students do not have to qualify or be labeled to receive access to a rich and engaging curriculum.

**Implementing Change**

In segregated programs, separate funding sources are accessed, and policies are written to support each program for each eligibility area, causing replication of services and soaring costs. These policies and programs are focused on fixing student deficits. Often, these policies are compliance driven and not quality driven, meeting the letter of many nondiscrimination regulations but never attaining the spirit in which these regulations were written. As discussed previously, separate programs are costly due to the cost involved in identifying students and the duplication of staff and materials between schools and programs and across programs.

Educators persistently assume that particular funds or resources cannot be commingled, thus reinforcing the creation of segregated programs. For example, in one of the high schools we studied, educators established a learning center that any student could access throughout the day to receive additional support. The center included processes to enable teachers who assisted in the center to provide feedback to students’ teachers on effective strategies to assist students in the classroom and to provide suggestions for curriculum changes.

To reduce the number of students who accessed the center. However, the principal was concerned that because students with disability labels also accessed the center, this practice in some way violated special education law or the use of special education funds (which it did not). Hence, he dismantled this service and, in its place, established a separate support program for students with disabilities.

With ICS, funding sources and policies are merged, with a focus on the prevention of student struggle. Resource reallocation forms the basis of funding decisions (Odden & Archibald, 2001). That is, a school leader takes into account sources of funding at the federal, state, district, and school levels (e.g., minority student achievement, gifted and talented, alcohol and other drug abuse, special education, Title I, at-risk, bilingual, special education) and then combines these funds in such a way as to best serve students in heterogeneous learning environments. Staff are also viewed as resources, staff skills and expertise are considered, and staff are assigned to students and classrooms based on ICS core principles.

**SUMMARY**

To summarize, segregated programs result in some students receiving support, while others do not. With segregated programs, those students who need the most routine, structure, and consistency in their day experience the most disruptions when placed in separate programs, become fringe members of their classroom community, and miss valuable instructional time when traveling to and from separate programs. Once in these programs, students are denied access to a rich and engaging curriculum that could boost their academic achievement. Segregated programs inadvertently blame and label students and marginalize and track students of color and low-income students. Segregated programs prevent the sharing of knowledge and skills by educators, prevent any particular educator from being accountable to these students, and enable educators not to change their practices. The programs themselves and the identification of students for these programs are quite costly.

In contrast, the principles and practices of ICS contribute to five nonnegotiable requirements for service delivery: least restrictive, least intrusive, least disruptive, least expensive, and least enabling. These five nonnegotiable points refer to location, or where students are placed, the curriculum and instruction they experience, and the role of educators in their lives.

All students should have the opportunity to attend their neighborhood school (or the school of their choice in school choice programs) and be placed in heterogeneous classrooms at their grade level alongside their peers. This placement is the least restrictive, least intrusive, and least disruptive in their daily lives; encourages independence in learning and not being overhelped (i.e., least enabling); and ultimately is the least expensive. The curriculum and instruction that students...
receive in these environments should address their learning needs and, at the same time, open the window to a rich, creative, nonrestrictive learning experience. With ICS, their individual learning needs are met; they are met in the least intrusive, most respectful, and least disruptive way; and they are challenged to reach their maximum learning potential (i.e., least enabling). A curriculum and instruction that bears these four nonnegotiable characteristics is ultimately the least expensive option as well.

Finally, with ICS, educators themselves move out of segregated, restrictive teaching environments and provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in ways that tap each learner’s gifts (i.e., least intrusive and least disruptive), that foster student self esteem, and that encourage the student’s positive sense of self as a learner (i.e., most enabling). Again, educators engaged in teaching this way save district resources that can be reallocated to the benefit of all in the school community.

Given the high cost of special education in times of budget crises and the dismal outcomes of segregated programs, educators can no longer ethically justify segregated service delivery. Continuing to label students and place them in segregated programs is indefensible. This is particularly so when these programs are not effective academically and socially and draw resources away from other effective practices. Supported by research, ICS can meet the needs of all students. The core principles, combined with the indisputable importance of location, the curriculum, and the way educators move out of their traditional roles—all supported by the creative reallocation of resources—can pave the way to educational success for all students.

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