

EXPLORING HOW THE FUNCTIONING OF IEP TEAMS ONLINE MEETS THE
NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

by

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Technology

Boise State University

May 2021

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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

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Thesis Title: Exploring How the Functioning of IEP Teams Online Meets the Needs of Students with Disabilities

Date of Final Oral Examination: 03 March 2021

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DEDICATION

For the one who made this and a lifetime of happiness possible.

My husband, Steve.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the faculty in the Boise State University Educational Technology Department with special thanks to my committee members: Dr. Kerry Rice, Dr. Norm Friesen, and Dr. Yu-Chang Hsu. From an early emphasis on quality to cheerleading to the finish line, you have guided me to this highpoint in my educational career for which I am forever grateful.

It is also important for me to acknowledge each of my parents. My mom, who encouraged me early on to get a “sheepskin” and who is so very proud of me. My dad, who taught me that a diploma has nothing to do with character.

ABSTRACT

Students with disabilities (SWD) are participating in supplemental online programs (SOP) and through the provisions of special education must receive specialized instruction to meet their academic potential. These students have a group of individuals, including educators, specialists, school leaders, and their own parents, collaborating to implement learning accommodations for them to support their academic success. This group is known as the Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team). Without accommodations to the learning environment and to their learning activities, the academic achievement of SWD may be adversely impacted. The IEP Team must collaborate to create an effective Individualized Education Program (IEP) that is specially designed for their target student in the student's current educational placement. Special Education Directors (SED) are central to the functioning of IEP Teams as they support SWD in SOP. This relationship, and the resulting provision of special education services, has not been thoroughly researched. The purposes of this mixed methods study were to identify the needs of SWD in SOP, to identify the processes used by IEP Teams to support SWD in SOP, and to determine how those processes meet the needs and support SWD in SOP. The first phase of research was a quantitative online survey of SED followed by a second phase of qualitative semi-structured interviews of selected participants which more fully elucidated current student needs and IEP Team processes that address those needs and support these students. Findings include a confidence in the established IEP Team process and in special education staff, concerns over the ability of

special education staff to support or accommodate SWD in online courses, the perception that the needs of SWD in online educational settings are different than those in face-to-face settings, the perception that the SED give significant guidance to IEP Teams while allowing them independent function, and the use of the Covid-19 related increase in online learning to identify ways to better serve SWD online. This research suggests IEP Teams return to the IEP Team meeting and to the familiar process through which to do the requisite work to support SWD in online educational settings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	i
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	i
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction to the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Theoretical Framework	6
Purpose of Study.....	9
Student Needs Defined for this Research Study.....	10
Overview of Research Methods.....	11
Scholarly Significance	13
Assumptions	14
Delimitations	15
Definition of Terms.....	15
Chapter Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters.....	17
CHAPTER TWO	19

Review of the Literature.....	19
Special Education Definitions and History	21
Special Education Leadership	24
The IEP Team	25
Special Education Online.....	28
Attrition and Failure of Special Education Students in Online Education	31
Supplemental Online Programs	31
Enrollment of Students with Disabilities	33
Needs of Students with Disabilities in Supplemental Online Programs ...	34
Accommodations and Service Delivery	36
Deliberate Course Design and UDL.....	39
Success of SWD in Online Education	42
IEP Teams Online	43
Leadership of IEP Teams of Students in Supplemental Online Programs	44
Processes used by IEP Teams of Students in Supplemental Online Programs	45
Chapter Summary	46
CHAPTER THREE	49
Introduction to Methodology.....	49
Overview of Research Methods	50
Research Questions	50
Study Design.....	51
Phase One Quantitative Survey.....	53
Phase Two Qualitative Interviews.....	57

Chapter Summary	66
CHAPTER FOUR.....	67
Results and Findings.....	67
Overview of Research Method	67
General Questions on IEP Team Management or Leadership	70
Phase Two Qualitative Data Analysis.....	81
Mixing the Results.....	110
Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question One and Theme of Generic Reference to Student Needs	110
Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Two and Theme of Document Sharing	111
Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Two and Theme of Reference to IEP Process	113
Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Three and Theme of Reflection	113
Analysis of Responses Based on Interview Participant Classification ...	114
Chapter Summary.....	120
CHAPTER FIVE	121
Introduction.....	121
Discussion of Findings	122
Implications.....	129
Recommendations for Future Research.....	133
Conclusion	134
REFERENCES	136
APPENDIX A.....	147

APPENDIX B	149
APPENDIX C	151
APPENDIX D	153
APPENDIX E.....	155
APPENDIX F.....	162

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Alignment of research questions to data analysis.	52
Table 3.2	Survey Question Organization and Descriptions.....	54
Table 3.3	Northeastern State School District Classification System by Enrollment	59
Table 3.4	Interview Participant District Size or Other Classification	59
Table 3.5	Interview Questions	61
Table 4.1	Survey Respondent Demographic Information	69
Table 4.2	Cross Tabulation Time in Leadership with Having a Process to Enroll SWD.....	70
Table 4.3	Cross Tabulation Time in Leadership with Having a Process to Guide IEP Teams	71
Table 4.4	Selected Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Number One: What are the needs of SWD enrolled in supplemental online programs? with Response Percentages.....	73
Table 4.5	Selected Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Number Two: What are the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in supplemental online programs? with Response Percentages.....	76
Table 4.6	Selected Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Number Three: Do the processes IEP Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How? with Response Percentages	79
Table 4.7	Survey Questions Used to Identify Potential Interview Participants with Responses	81
Table 4.8	Interview Participant Demographic Information.....	82
Table 4.8	Process Needs and Supports Sub-Code Theme Description.....	86

Table 4.9	Needs Sub-Code Theme Descriptions	87
Table 4.10	Process Sub-Code Theme Descriptions	96
Table 4.11	Case Manager Sub-Code Theme Descriptions	103
Table 4.12	Selected Responses to Each of the Eight Base Interview Questions	115
Table 5.1	Summary of Findings	122
Table E1	Survey Questions Aligned to Literature	156

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Percentage distribution of students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by disability type: School year 2017–18. (NCES, 2018).	23
Figure 3.2	Explanatory sequential design diagram. Creswell (2013, p. 541).....	51
Figure 3.3	A visual model of the coding process in qualitative research. (Creswell, 2013, p.244).	63
Figure 4.1	Survey Question 42 Reponses “Participating in online courses through supplemental online programs gives students with disabilities access to rigorous curriculum, with full continuum of services, in a general education setting.”	81
Figure 4.2	NVivo Codebook.....	85
Figure 4.3	NVivo Code Book Displaying Needs Subcodes with Total References ...	88

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FAPE	Free and Appropriate Public Education
IEP	Individual Education Program
LEA	Local Education Agency
LMS	Learning Management System
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
SED	Special Education Director
SOP	Supplemental Online Program
SVS	State Virtual School
SWD	Student with a Disability/Students with a Disability

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

Students with disabilities (SWD) are participating in all forms of online education. Online education may be simply defined as instruction that is conveyed over the internet (iNACOL, 2011; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010; Molnar et al., 2019). Supplemental online programs (SOP) are courses that are taken through the internet as a replacement for, or in addition to, a traditional load of courses at a student's school of record (iNACOL, 2011). Supplemental courses are available through many different providers and through many different supply methods. State virtual schools (SVS) are a major provider of supplemental online courses and continue to increase their total enrollments (Digital Learning Collaborative, 2019). For schoolyear 2016-17, a single state in the northeastern United States exceeded 500,000 supplemental course enrollments, and seven percent of its K-12 students took at least one online course. In addition to SVS, students and schools have a wide variety of providers from which to select when enrolling in supplemental online programs (SOP). As all students increasingly take all or part of their educational courses online, we would expect SWD, in equal ratios, to be engaged in online education including placement in SOP (Freidhoff, 2018; Rose, Blomyer, & iNACOL, 2007).

Overall data for enrollment in supplemental courses is difficult to ascertain due to data collection differences in different states, and due to the fact that grades from these courses are reported to students' home districts (Basham, Stahl, Ortiz, Rice, & Smith,

2015). Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, & Watson (2015) stated that there was an approximate total of 2.7 million students enrolled in SOP during the school-year 2014-15. Watson, Pape, Murin, Gemin, & Vashaw (2014) put the number of individual online course enrollments at 4.6 million. The increased enrollment in SOP is part of the ongoing growth of online education both within the US and in other countries (Barbour, 2017; Molnar, 2014). The Digital Learning Collaborative (2020) reported 1,015,760 online course enrollments through state virtual schools (SVS) and estimates the total number at several million through all sources for school year 2017-18. The lack of national data available to track the total number of online courses taken was reaffirmed in this report.

SWD who have been evaluated and identified as eligible for special education services have a team of educators, school leaders, and specialists, along with their parents, who work together to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that will establish learning goals for the student and list services and accommodations the student is entitled to in their learning environment. This team is known as the Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team) (IDEA, 2004; Rice & Carter, 2015). Home districts house a student's IEP, and host IEP Team meetings (Repetto, Cavanaugh, Wayer, & Liu, 2010). In the school year 2017-18, 14% of public school students were in special education in the United States (NCES, 2018). While there is no specific data identifying the number of SWD who are taking supplemental online courses, SWD have similar options to participate in these types of classes as do their peers without disabilities.

The IEP Team of a SWD who is participating in an online learning environment as part of their educational program must ensure that it is an appropriate placement and

that effective supports are in place for the student to achieve their maximum academic potential. Students who are placed in online learning environments rely on their IEP Team to take responsibility for the effective implementation of the goals and objectives of the IEP in all of the educational activities that impact that student. This includes those activities that occur face-to-face, online, or a blend of each type. The responsibility for the effective implementation of the IEP lies on each member of the IEP Team, and on both the local education agency (LEA) and any supplemental providers who service the student (Bernstein, 2013; Greer, Harvey, Burdette, & Basham, 2015; Jones, Worthen, Casey & Rose, 2015). The students whose IEP Teams are the target of this research are participating in a SOP as part of an educational program at their traditional, home school or district of record.

This research study sought to identify the needs of SWD in SOP and to describe the processes IEP Teams use to support students enrolled in SOP. These processes are under the purview of special education directors (SED) who oversee the IEP Teams of these students. The perceptions of these SED are of particular interest in this study as they reflect the level of awareness of student needs and of how IEP Teams are currently functioning to support SWD. The role of SED varies widely by state and by school district, so for the purposes of this study the role of SED will be applied to anyone who has authority to lead, manage, or influence the processes used by IEP Teams to support SWD.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDE) broadly defines the role of the SED as potentially ranging from the level of the individual school building to the federal government, and as a person who is responsible for the

successful implementation of educational policies and programs for students with disabilities (NASDSE, 2018). Each state has its own approach to Special Education policy implementation, so part of the role of SED is to ensure that the operations of their school or organization remain compliant with local, state and federal mandates. Federal law empowers the IEP Team to evaluate, assess, and implement a program of support for a SWD. Therefore, it is the IEP Team under the guidance and direction of a SED that is charged with supporting SWD as they participate in SOP. The selection of SED for survey data collection allowed the current needs of SWD in SOP and the processes used by IEP Teams to support those students to be further identified and described (Deschaine, 2018; IDEA, 2004).

The researcher used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design for this study with a quantitative first phase followed by a qualitative second phase. The quantitative first phase was an online survey of SED using purposeful sampling within a state in the northeastern United States which has a large SVS, in addition to a multitude of both public and private options for SOP. The resulting survey data was used to identify respondents who were of particular interest for participation in the qualitative second phase of the study. Phase two consisted of qualitative semi-structured interviews that were further used to answer and elucidate the research questions.

Statement of the Problem

Without IEP Teams being effectively involved in the determination of whether a particular online learning environment or a supplemental course is an appropriate placement for a student with an IEP, SWD may experience skill deficits and course failure. IEP Teams should evaluate the curriculum and delivery methods for their student

and should properly vet supplemental courses for their appropriateness for that particular SWD (Means et al., 2010; Rice & Carter, 2015). This vetting process should include an effective review of the course elements and content. This should include the communication of required IEP accommodations with instructors, on-site mentors, or learning coaches depending on the delivery model of the supplemental course and ongoing evaluation and assessment of the course outcomes for the student. Without appropriate processes in place to communicate the needs of the students between IEP Team and SOP, there is a risk of decreased student achievement and potential student failure in the course (Basham et al., 2015; Calhoun & Scanlon, 2019). These processes and their efficiency are the responsibility of the team members and the SED that is charged with their oversight (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013).

The Supreme Court decision in the Endrew case has set a new standard of responsibility for IEP Teams. Students must be provided with an “appropriately ambitious” IEP that leads to more than a bare minimum of academic progress given the student’s disability. The enrollment of a SWD in an online course must lead to a meaningful benefit to the student (Moore, 2019, p. 2). This standard requires an effective IEP Team so that SWD enrolled in SOP may receive their accommodations in ways that lead to their maximum academic achievement.

A student’s IEP Team must consider whether an online course, with its specific content, is an appropriate place in which to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) to the SWD. The enrollment process should include a determination if current IEP accommodations can be delivered within the online learning environment (Virtual SC, 2019). Academic success is impacted more significantly by quality instruction than

by special education placement. Effective instruction for SWD requires individualized design based on intimate knowledge of the student and their needs (Burgstahler, 2015; Calhoun & Scanlon, 2019; Hocutt, 1996; Marteney & Bernadowski, 2016; Repetto et al., 2010).

SWDs are placed in SOP for the same reasons as their non-disabled peers. Students and parents seeking a personalized alternative to traditional educational environments choose online options that serve to meet individual learning needs (Brown, 2012; Burdette, Greer, & Woods, 2013; Evergreen Education Group, 2015; Marteney & Bernadowski, 2016; Means et al., 2010; Picciano, Seaman, Shea, & Swan, 2012). While each individual SWD has goals and accommodations in their IEP that are uniquely designed for them, SWD enrolled in SOP need support that is both proactive and reactive for the characteristics of that setting. This means course providers, designers and instructors have created learning activities with diverse learners in mind and have anticipated multiple means of course access and of production of desired course outcomes. It also means that SOP providers have anticipated that SWD may have needs that have not previously been identified and have already incorporated corresponding support into their courses. An effective process must be in place for IEP Teams to affect the necessary adjustments to support the student in a time-sensitive and organized manner that allows learning activities to proceed efficiently (Muller, 2010; Rice, 2012; Rose & iNACOL, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory informs this research in that it accepts that all learners are influenced by the cultural and social characteristics of their environment. Therefore,

learners need to be active participants in their learning and have effective support while doing so. Sociocultural theory originated with Lev Vygotsky's work on learning and psychological development and was further developed by many other learning theorists. Learning is not an individual quest that occurs in isolation. The functioning of IEP Teams, in their use of processes and interaction among individuals within the culture, aligns with this theoretical framework because it represents a collective effort at producing new information and effecting practical action (Chang, 2002).

Lev Vygotsky's work, laboratory and theory were closely connected to special education. While current labels and approaches used in special education do not perfectly fit Vygotsky's terminology, he saw the deviations within special education to be a natural environment in which to study the learning process and the themes of culture, language, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). A learner's environment plays an important role in their ability to learn. Vygotsky viewed a child with a disability as developing within the social implications of his or her quantitatively measured condition. Knowledge is acquired and extended when the learner is able to effectively use the symbols and tools of their culture, and that takes place through the interaction the learner has with mature and experienced people around them (Gindis, 1999).

The ZPD is the space between a learner's potential development and that which is actually taking place. All learners are capable of a given level of independent performance. When they are learning skills that require adult assistance, they are within their ZPD. Sociocultural theory can be seen in teacher practice when they concern themselves with how a student's interactions with adults and peers in the learning process are influenced by the culture. IEP Teams and the outcomes of their interactions can use

sociocultural theory's basis in the knowledge and skill students are capable of mastering with guidance to increase the individualized effectiveness of a student's IEP (Sorensen, 2019; Smagorinsky, 2009). The online interactions between SWD and their special education teachers must also provide assistance and methods to ensure these students are able to move to their ZPD within the online learning environment.

Gindis (1999) discussed the application of Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective to special education. It is only through the lens of social context that a disability is perceived as abnormal. Vygotsky's vision for special education sees the service to SWD as addressing the social repercussions of the disability. Special education that focuses on the medical or physical aspects of disability does not empower students to engage in society successfully.

In his concept of ZPD, Vygotsky identified two levels of development. One being that which we attain through natural development, and the other represents the potential we are capable of with the interaction and support of others who are capable and effective. In special education, the use of assessment techniques that identify baseline characteristics and abilities are commonly used but assessing a student's potential is a far more positive and optimistic approach. Although not true for all, many students can benefit from remediation that is designed for them by the effective work of the IEP Team (Rutland & Campbell, 1996). This effective work must take place in any educational placement where IEP Teams must support SWD. This includes online education of all kinds and SOP.

Purpose of Study

There is very little existing research that is practical to guide SED as they lead IEP Teams in the support of SWD in online education and in SOP, in particular. Concrete identification of the specific needs of these students and description of the current functioning of IEP Teams for students in these placements is needed to inform the improvement of the delivery of services to these SWD.

Van Sciver and Conover (2009) reviewed the lack of benefit to SWD from accommodations that are implemented without an effective process for ensuring that accommodations are being selected by prepared, trained members of IEP Teams with persistent application to teaching and evaluation. The use of inappropriate accommodations has shown to have a “disabling” (p. 4) effect on students. Rather than increasing students' abilities to function in academic and social settings, improper or poorly implemented accommodations keep some students in consistent patterns of failure and under-achievement.

The purposes of this study were to identify the needs of SWD in SOP, to identify the processes used by IEP Teams to support SWD in SOP, and to determine if those processes meet the needs and support SWD in SOP. SWD are reliant on their IEP Team to do the requisite work to determine goals, accommodations, and services that will allow the student to reach their individual academic potential. Through this study the researcher sought to identify the functional characteristics of IEP Teams that are successfully proactive and reactive in meeting the academic needs of SWD participating in SOP.

The review of the literature offered little practical help for online educators supporting SWD (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Carter & Rice, 2016; Rice & Carter, 2015a).

In the literature, the role of the IEP Team generally, and even more so in online education, is assumed with almost no evidence of its actual function (Repetto, Cavanaugh, Wayer, & Liu, 2010; Rice, East, & Mellard, 2015). There was no effective description of the reality of the processes used by the IEP Teams as they support SWD in SOP (Catagnus & Hantula, 2011; Rice & Carter, 2015a). The researcher identified a need for quantitative data collection to determine the current state of IEP Team functioning, and, additionally, a need for qualitative research interviews that fostered conversations with people whose role includes the supervision and direction of the members of IEP Teams.

Online course providers, as well as LEAs, often include the language of inclusion and personalization for SWD in their public interface, but the role of their IEP Teams is not fully described or explored (Collins et al., 2015; Rhim, Kowal, & NASDE, 2008). SWD will continue to take supplemental courses and will increasingly participate in online education as part of the continued growth of online education and the legal imperative that SWD engage in a similar continuum of educational placements as their non-disabled peers (Digital Learning Collaborative, 2020; IDEA, 2004). Systems of communication, accommodation implementation and monitoring, and educator training are necessary to effectively meet the needs of SWD as they participate in online learning environments (Brodersen & Melluso, 2017).

Student Needs Defined for this Research Study

The term “needs” as used throughout this research study is applied to the level of the program. These needs may be accurately considered program characteristics. As the researcher reports through the use of the collected data, SED describe their schools or

organizations in terms of characteristic needs that effectively support SWD. This is in contrast to the use of the term to describe characteristics or individual needs that a student may bring with them to any learning environment.

Overview of Research Methods

An explanatory sequential design was used for this research study in order to answer the research questions listed below. This explanatory sequential mixed methods approach has an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

Research Question Number One (RQ1): What are the needs of students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online programs?

Research Question Number Two (RQ2): What are the processes Individual Education Program teams use to support students with disabilities in supplemental online programs?

Research Question Number Three (RQ3): Do the processes Individual Education Program teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How?

The purposes of this study were to identify the needs of SWD in SOP, to identify the processes used by IEP Teams to support SWD in SOP, and to determine if those processes meet the needs and support SWD in SOP. Creswell (2013) described a mixed methods research design as one that merges both quantitative and qualitative research methods into one research study. The purpose of this design in this study was to answer the research questions through both a quantitative survey of SED and through qualitative follow up interviews. The context of this study was the supervisory role SED have over IEP teams of SWD who are enrolled in SOP within a northeastern state in the United

States.

Phase One and Sample

Phase one of this research study was an online quantitative survey that was distributed via email to SED within a single state. This method was chosen because of convenience and ease of sampling, and the researcher's ability to gather significant data describing the perceptions of SED on the current functioning of IEP Teams through the use of a survey. The target population was drawn from multiple geographic areas within one state in the northeastern United States. The participants for the survey were identified from public directories of school district administration within the state and supplemented with an online directory of a professional association of administrators of special education. Additionally, the published list of 417 school districts who had partnered with a large SVS to enroll students in SOP was used to increase the likelihood of inclusion of SED supervising IEP Teams with students enrolled in SOP in the sample population.

SED may have a variety of roles and responsibilities. For this research study, the focus is on the common characteristic of their leadership or management of IEP Teams of SWD in SOP. The survey data were used to identify the needs of SWD enrolled in SOP from the perspective of the SED. Questions were selected or written to support description of the current functioning of IEP Teams as they support students in SOP and work to meet the needs of these students.

Phase Two

Phase two of the research method was a set of qualitative interviews. The researcher used the data collected during phase one to determine the direction and focus

of phase two. The phase two interviews were representative of the particular phenomenon of the SED reporting having a process to either enroll or support a SWD in a SOP. SED whose survey responses identified that they currently had a process for either enrollment or support of SWD in SOP were asked to be included in phase two to more deeply answer the research questions. Interview questions were first drafted by the researcher based on the research questions but were further shaped and narrowed based on the survey outcomes. The interviews further clarified the needs of SWD in SOP. The interviews were also used to further clarify whether or not those needs were being met effectively through the processes IEP Teams use to support SWD. The interviews were recorded either in Zoom or over the phone through Rev.com, and then transcribed either through the NVivo transcription service or through Rev.com. The researcher used the audio recordings to review and edit the transcripts for accuracy. The Rev.com transcripts did not require additional editing, but the NVivo transcripts needed significant work to increase the accuracy of the transcriptions. After transcription, the researcher identified codes and themes from the research questions and identified emergent themes that developed from the data.

Scholarly Significance

The researcher embraced the position that educational research should serve educators and students, and should enhance the relationship among students, parents, teachers, school leaders, specialists, and support staff. This study further informs the processes that are part of the current functioning of IEP Teams as they serve SWD in online learning environments. While this collection of individuals that is the IEP Team is part of an imperfect process to be sure, whose effectiveness varies by school, by staff and

by student, it represents a time and place when people connect to collaborate and create a plan to best serve a student given the data presented. The researcher identified a lack of literature in the area of online support for students with disabilities and the IEP Teams that support them. The researcher seeks to address that gap through this study (Burdette et al., 2013; Greer et al., 2014; Rhim & Kowal, 2008; Vasquez & Straub, 2012).

This research is significant because SWD are participating in online education and being placed in SOP, and they must be effectively supported in their specific learning tasks while in those classes. This significance has been amplified due the dramatic move to online education due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Accommodations for SWD in any learning environment require organized identification and application in order for them to be implemented with fidelity (VanSciver & Conover, 2009). IEP Teams must be directed to evaluate the appropriateness of placing SWD in a SOP and must be directed to identify and implement accommodations using the collective educational skills and experience of the IEP Team. The outcomes of this research study may inform practice leading to increased effectiveness in the meeting of the specific academic needs of these students through the recognition of the need for specific processes to guide the collaborative work of IEP Teams as they develop and implement IEPs for SWD in SOP (Brodersen & Melluso, 2017; Means et al., 2010; Repetto et al., 2010; VanSciver & Conover, 2009).

Assumptions

This research study assumed that SED and IEP Teams are earnest in their work to support SWD and do so with the best possible intentions. Further it is assumed that participants answered the questions honestly and were candid in their assessment of student needs and of current IEP Team processes and effectiveness. The included sample

of SED was assumed to have met the criteria for inclusion in this study by leading or managing IEP Teams of SWD in SOP.

Delimitations

This course of study was chosen because of a desire to see SWD have their needs met in order to participate to the fullest degree possible in online education, including SOP. The researcher was employed by a SVS which plays a significant role in the state. An online survey was chosen for ease of sharing, and questions were developed with the attention and interest of the participant in mind. Special educators who did not have a direct leadership role over IEP Teams were excluded from the sample population of this study.

Definition of Terms

Course Enrollment: “The number of students formally in a course. Course enrollment data are influenced by registration periods, duration of course (semester, year-long, or flexible schedules for competency-based credits), drop/add periods and “count” dates that determine accuracy of number of students enrolled per course and/or attrition rates” (iNACOL, 2011, p. 4).

Disability: “A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities” (IDEA, 2004).

Face to Face: “When two or more people meet in a room” (iNACOL, 2011, p. 5).

Full-Time Online Program: “Full-time online schools, also called cyberschools, work with students who are enrolled primarily (often only) in the online school. Cyberschools typically are responsible for their students’ scores on state assessments required by No Child Left Behind, which is the primary way in which student outcomes,

and school performance, are measured. In some states most full-time online schools are charter schools” (iNACOL, 2011, p. 6)

Individualized Education Program (IEP): “A written plan detailing a student’s special education goals, current educational performance, methods of assessment, and related services required to individualize instruction” (Catagnus & Hantula, 2011, p. 31).

Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team): “A team of professionals including parents, a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, local education agency specialists (LEA), and related services personnel (speech therapists, psychologists, and occupational therapists) must meet, develop, and plan for the education and any related or necessary services required for that student to benefit from a public-school education” (Catagnus & Hantula, 2011, p. 31).

Learning Management System (LMS): “The technology platform through which students access online courses. A LMS generally includes software for creating and editing course content, communication tools, assessment tools, and other features for managing the course” (iNACOL, 2011, p. 7).

Online Learning: “Education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the internet. The term does not include printed-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component. Used interchangeably with Virtual Learning, Cyber Learning, e-learning” (iNACOL, 2011, p. 7), and online education.

Special Education: “Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (IDEA, 2004).

State Virtual Schools: “Virtual schools created by legislation or by a state-level agency, and/or administered by a state education agency, and/or funded by a state appropriation or grant for the purpose of providing online learning opportunities across the state. (They may also receive federal or private foundation grants, and often charge course fees to help cover their costs.)” (iNACOL, 2011, p. 8).

Supplemental Online Program: “An online course provides the entire course content, interaction with the teacher, and curriculum progression via online content, sometimes with additional print materials. Student are engaged entirely online for that portion of their education, while typically taking courses at a brick-and-mortar school in their remaining time” (Digital Learning Collaborative, 2020).

Chapter Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters

As part of an ongoing increase in participation in online education, students with disabilities (SWD) are currently taking part in supplemental online programs (SOP) and will continue to do so. Therefore, it is critically important for a clear description of their needs and the processes used by Individualized Education Program Teams (IEP Teams) to support SWD in SOP, and to determine if those processes meet the needs of and support SWD effectively.

Each of these students has an IEP Team who is charged with developing an effective Individualized Education Program (IEP) that includes the goals, accommodations, and services the student needs to maximize their academic potential.

IEP Teams of students in SOP should be led by their Special Education Director (SED) in processes that serve to support the effective function of the IEP Team in meeting the needs of the SWD. This research study attempts to describe those needs and explore the processes IEP Teams use to meet the needs of SWD in SOP

Chapter two is a review of the literature supporting this research study including a general review of special education and its leadership along with the characteristics and functioning of the IEP Team. SOP will be defined and described including the enrollment of SWD and their needs in that learning placement. Literature addressing attempts to support SWD in online education is overviewed with a focus on SOP along with a review of literature pertaining to the overall success of these students. Chapter three describes in detail the research method including the quantitative survey, the qualitative interview and the tools of data analysis used. Chapter four shares and analyzes the resulting data collected. Chapter five concludes the study with a discussion of the findings with implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

In reviewing the literature surrounding the functioning of the Individual Education Program Team (IEP Team) online and, more specifically, for students with disabilities (SWD) in supplemental online programs (SOP), there appeared an emphasis on inclusion of special education students in all opportunities for education online (Burghstahler, 2015; Repetto & Spitler, 2014; Smith, Burdette, Cheatham, & Harvey, 2016). Often authors included an explanation of federal and state special education law or policy as it applies to online settings (Carter & Rice, 2016; Collins, Green, Nelson, & Mandahar, 2015; COLSD, 2012; Greer et al., 2015; Greer, Rice, & Dykman, 2014). This is similar to what commonly occurs in traditional settings when general educators need to be reminded to follow special education mandates in their instructional practice (Jones, 2012; Rice & Carter, 2015). There is little research that is specific or practical for use by online educators in their support of SWD (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Carter & Rice, 2016; Rice & Carter, 2015a).

The literature review began with identification of relevant search terms, peer-reviewed journals with significance to the topic, and important researchers within the area. There was significant consistency of authors in the research. The broad term *online education* was used with the hope of increased generalizability of potential research findings across delivery methods with diverse students. The majority of articles included

state or imply a dearth of research focused on SWD in online education (Burdette et al., 2013; Greer et al., 2014; Vasquez & Straub, 2012).

The research reflects a broad acceptance that learning management systems (LMS) can be used to implement IEP accommodations, but often the research lacks specific explanation or real-world examples (Brodersen & Melluso, 2017; Keeler & Horney, 2017; Vasquez & Straub, 2012). Some of the research feels like a recitation of what an online learning supplier of LMS might say about their product to increase sales, and to sound good to an education provider or local education agency (LEA) (Coy, Marino, & Serianni, 2014). Greer et al. (2014) conducted a review of research published between 2004 and 2014 with a subject of SWD in online education. They found very little evidence of clear policy for the participation of SWD in online education. One of the identified literature reviews focused on higher education and included ten original articles where little connection was made to SWD (Kim-Rupnow, Dowrick, & Burke, 2001).

This research is clustered around two domains: policy and practice. Policy and practice must be effectively positioned at all levels of service delivery and leadership to ensure that SWD are educated online in an “equally effective and equally integrated manner” (Burdette et al., 2013, p. 70). Their domains reflect ongoing themes that continue to be represented in the current literature. Those who wish to work to improve the academic outcomes of SWD in SOP must balance and embrace both the relational, intimate instruction needed and the overarching legal and moral obligations to students with disabilities. This includes effective accommodations implemented through the use of effective processes of IEP Teams of SWD in SOP (Rice, 2014; VanSciver & Conover,

2009).

The literature review is organized into three major sections. The first is Special Education Definitions and History. This section will review the basic tenants and legal basis for special education including special education leadership, the IEP Team, and special education online with its history of attrition and failure. The second major section is Supplemental Online Programs (SOP). This section will review the enrollment and needs of SWD in SOP along with the accompanying accommodations, service delivery, course design, and outcomes within that online educational setting. The third major section is IEP Teams Online. This section will review the leadership of IEP Teams for SWD in SOP, and the processes used by IEP Teams for those students.

Special Education Definitions and History

Special Education is planned instruction to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities (SWD). Those students who have been deemed eligible to receive special education services have been identified as having one, or more, of thirteen federally recognized disabilities. School age SWD are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), and special education services are provided based on an Individual Education Program (IEP) that is written collaboratively by an eclectic team (Greer et al., 2015; Rice, 2012). The IEP is both the process and the description of the student's FAPE (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2019). A FAPE includes the requirement that public funds will be used for the necessary special education services instead of the financial responsibility resting on parents or private agencies. The concept of appropriateness is more difficult to describe and has become the subject of substantial dispute and litigation (Rhim, Kowal, & NASDE, 2008). Appropriateness broadly requires that schools provide

services, accommodations and modifications that strive to move the student toward grade-level proficiency, and that the provision of services, accommodations and modifications is instructionally beneficial to the student. Several laws govern the education of SWD, but the most significant is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA was first passed in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) and has been reauthorized twice. First in 1997, and again in 2004 (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Steker, 2010; Gregson & Chavez, 2015; IDEA, 2004).

Historically, special education is rooted in the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. This landmark case established that separation in education is inherently unequal. In the 1960s, the concept of least restrictive environment (LRE) gained prominence and was increasingly applied to create a continuum of placements that were deemed necessary as alternatives for students with varying types and degrees of disability (Gregson & Chavez, 2015; Maag, Kauffman, & Simpson, 2018). Maag et al. (2018) state unequivocally that an offering of FAPE must come before concerns for LRE when determining appropriate student placement, but LRE is often the primary consideration. A full inclusion model came later which firmly established the general education classroom as the LRE for all SWD. While some argue the appropriateness of the position, the concept of LRE has been expanded to the point that any placement other than the general education is considered more restrictive, and, in practice, to be avoided if at all possible. LRE is commonly recognized as a place, and not as specially designed instruction that is a service to the SWD.

The intent of special education policy is that SWD are not excluded from the educational experiences and content that students without disabilities encounter as they

progress through school. The expectation is that SWD will achieve the state and national content standards that are required of their non-disabled peers and be provided with accommodations and other services as needed to achieve those standards. The overarching goal is that the education of a SWD occur within the same time frame and in the same location as their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible (Rice, 2012; Rice & Carter, 2015).

The past two decades have seen the percentage of public school students receiving special education services stay close to 13% with slight fluctuations. The largest segment of students in special education have specific learning disabilities which account for over one-third of the special education population. This is followed by Speech and Language Impairment, and Other Health Impairment. The other ten federally recognized categories of special education comprise the remaining 32% of SWD (see Figure 1) (NCES, 2018).

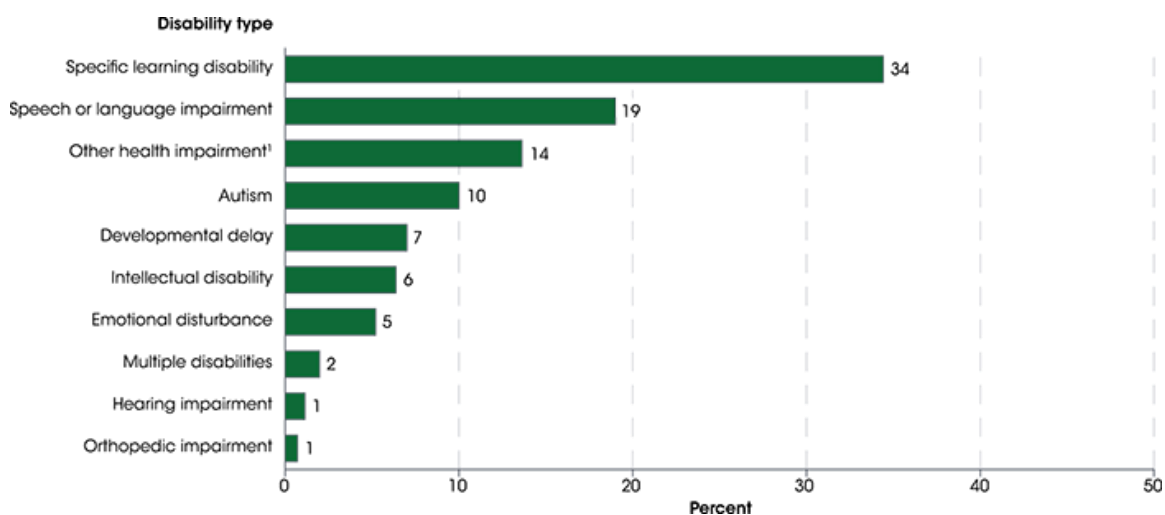


Figure 2.1 Percentage distribution of students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by disability type: School year 2017–18. (NCES, 2018).

Special Education Leadership

Special education leadership is difficult to disaggregate from overall school leadership. Boscardin (2007) suggests that “commingling the knowledge and skill traditions” (p. 189) of general and special administration would benefit all of the leaders who are charged with supervising instruction and improving student outcomes. There is increased expectation and scrutiny in special education, and both special education directors (SED) and building-level principals bear the responsibility. Both are tasked with establishing an environment for effective collaboration among general and special education educators. With the addition of federal school reform policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and more recently Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), to IDEA, school leaders are charged with delivering the same content to all students including those with disabilities while delivering specially designed instruction to those students with IEPs (Bays & Crocket, 2007).

The Center for Exceptional Children (CEC) Policy Manual calls for the organizational and administrative structures of general and special education to be connected in order to increase the school’s capacity to respond to behaviors and to environmental changes. Importantly, this connectedness allows both aspects to support the effective functioning of the other. Special education leadership must have an administrative organization that promotes the attainment of the same educational goals and standards for SWD as has been established for all students. Its main function is to create and sustain an atmosphere where SWD can develop and achieve (CEC, 1997).

The variety of state and local organizational models of schools and school districts prevents a definitive model of special education leadership or administration. It

can be described as distributed as it is spread among principals, assistant principals and teachers within school buildings, and includes district level roles of teacher, director, administrator or supervisor. A distributed approach is an interdependent model in which the title a person bears or role they play is less important than the leadership functions they perform. It is also clear that administrative authority plays a critical role in the accountability and compliance aspects of special education. Special education administrators must ensure that SWD receive the specially designed instruction they require to be successful in the general education curriculum. They must also support their special education staff who are in short supply and who carry a heavy, stressful load in their duties (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Crockett, 2007).

The IEP Team

Students who qualify for special education services must have an IEP. An IEP is a plan that includes the student's present level of performance, goals, accommodations, and services necessary to support their unique learning needs. Further, a group with multidisciplinary expertise is mandated to meet and to develop and implement the IEP for a student who is identified as needing special education services. The Individualized Education Program (IEP Team) must include, at a minimum, a parent, special education case manager, general education teacher, district representative, a person who can interpret evaluation results, any related service specialists (occupational therapists, speech therapists, social workers, etc.), and, if appropriate, the student themselves. The IEP Team designs an educational program that supports the SWD as they progress through the general education curriculum. They identify the services and accommodations that are necessary for the successful attainment of the goals stated in the

IEP, which should be aligned with the identified deficits of the student. Accommodations and modifications to overcome those deficits, and to support student achievement, are listed in the document as well (IDEA, 2004; Kamens, 2004).

After identification that a student qualifies for special education services, states give a narrow timeframe for the IEP Team to meet, develop, and approve a student's IEP. Teachers of SWD are required to be highly qualified in special education and in the content disciplines being taught. According to IDEA, a student's IEP should be based on research that is peer reviewed as much as possible. Teachers and providers must be informed of their responsibilities in the implementation of a student's IEP and take ownership of their individual and collective role (Basham et al., 2015; Catagnus & Hantula, 2011; IDEA, 2004).

The IEP Team members must have knowledge of the student as a multi-faceted individual. Course adaptations should be well understood, and be communicated to the student, parents, mentor, and the entire IEP team. This team is designed to incorporate testing data, student performance, parental concern, and expert, consultant perspectives together in a plan for the student's maximized achievement. Technology should be optimized, but with the acknowledgement of the need for an extended network of interactions between student, home, school, and any online education provider (Carter & Rice, 2016; DeVore, Miolo, & Hader, 2011).

The online teacher independently or through the use of a learning management system (LMS) cannot do the work of the entire IEP team, nor can they function as an instructional designer (Greer, Smith, & Basham, 2014). Special educators are known to expend a significant amount of time fulfilling the requirements of special education law

which is designed to enforce compliance overachieving quantifiable outcomes (Bernstein, 2013). Rice and Carter (2015a) found that relationship building is a priority of online teachers as they support SWD with consistent communication and persistent tracking of progress.

Parents are an integral part of any student's education, and they are part of the decision-making IEP team. Their participation and input vary, but their membership is critical. The role of a parent in supporting their child in online learning environments is amplified by the likelihood that the student will be doing some or all of the work of online education at home. For many parents of SWD the role of parent will blend with that of teacher or mentor. Users of the LMS can access embedded means to communicate student progress with parents as members of the IEP team, and this should lead to more nuanced and valuable communication to support the student. In at least one study of online education, parents of SWD cited increased communication with the teachers when compared to their experiences in traditional schools (Basham et al., 2015; Freidhoff, Borup, Stimson, & DeBruler, 2015; Smith et al., 2016; Rice & Carter, 2015b).

IEP accommodations that are implemented using technology may require extensive collaboration among the IEP team to be effective. Carter and Rice (2016), in their case study, found that online teachers were overloaded when trying to determine how best to provide accommodations using the variety of options available to them and fell back on the features of the LMS in their attempt to provide the requirements of the IEP for each student. The necessarily collaborative nature of the IEP Team decision-making process was found to be cumbersome. The need to respond to local, state, and federal policy simultaneously distributes authority in a way that is not clear or practical.

IEP Teams must continue to advocate for their students but must do so within a network of shared responsibility which reduces efficiency. The IEP Team must coordinate this communication and collaboration. Accommodations and support should ideally propel students forward and help make up for deficits. IEP teams must expand their decision-making process to include meeting student needs online and making a concerted effort to continually inform themselves concerning the specific online learning environments that their caseload of students might encounter (Collins et al., 2015; Rose, Blomyer, & iNACOL, 2007).

Special Education Online

The growth of online education has created a new set of placements for which the degree of restrictiveness is often difficult to assess. An appropriate application of LRE requires a vision and description of online students that is an accurate representation of the experience of general education students in online education to effectively accommodate and implement an IEP for a SWD (Bernstein, 2013; Maag, Kauffman, & Simpson, 2018; Means et al., 2010; Rice, 2012; Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010).

The research places SWD in online education for the same myriad reasons as their general education peers (Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Burdette et al., 2013; Picciano et al., 2012). This is accompanied by a shared responsibility for SWD when their educational program is supplemented with online courses (Jones et al., 2015). State SED were surveyed in 2012 to describe the current state of provision of special education services in online education within the surveyed states. Forty-six states participated. Only seventeen shared publicly available information on special education policy for online education when asked to identify what their stated education agency made available for guidance to

online education. The information provided ranged widely in topic and in depth. Less than a quarter of the respondent states collected any data on SWD in online education, and only five states stated they were collecting data on SWD in supplemental courses. In response to a question about the methods by which IEP information is shared, only 13 states replied with a composite response of disseminating IEP information using a similar process to that done in traditional local education agencies (LEA). Two states included IEP meetings as an issue for concern in their state's ability to comply with providing a free and appropriate education for SWD in online educational settings. The researchers concluded that there existed "ambiguity and variability" among state policies that included the responsibility for the provision of special education services online (Burdette et al., 2013, p.70).

Online learning environments have the potential to be used to both produce and collect data that serves to inform teachers and service providers as they evaluate the effectiveness of accommodations and placements for SWD. This data can be fused with IEP goals and documentation as part of an enhanced communication network serving the student in all of their learning activities. The need for research to inform the experience of SWD online and to improve achievement for these students through informed decision-making by teachers and course designers should be balanced with protections for student data (Stahl & Karger, 2016; Vasquez et al., 2015). Moving IEP information into the online environment in a practical way will require thorough reviews of practice to become effective and will likely necessitate government policy changes and additional training of online special and general educators (Carter & Rice, 2016).

Even though federal law regulating special education predates a vision of online education, an open and inviting approach to enrollment is evident as part of a desire to increase enrollment and build online options for all students. Both LEA and online providers wish to avoid any hint of discriminating against SWD (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Rose et al., 2007). However, challenges, such as ever-present budgetary constraints, decrease the likelihood of vetting courses or screening students who may not successfully complete their courses or assignments online. Balancing openness, access, and choice in education with student potential for success is very difficult. It may also be in opposition to increasing access and rates of participation in online education for SWD (Muller, 2009; Rice & Carter, 2015).

Members of the team have little policy support or guidance to find practical methods for implementing an IEP online or for communicating between the LEA and the online provider or vendor of a SOP (Jones et al., 2015). The IEP Team must always balance the need for the SWD to meet standards of rigor in the general education curriculum with the need to accommodate their learning. SED, case managers, and teachers, who have significant training and experience in the traditional or more common applications of special education, may not be prepared for their roles as they have gone online (Carter & Rice, 2016; Freidhoff et al., 2015). Basham, Carter, Rice, and Ortiz (2016) in their scan of state policies for online education found only twenty-five percent were specific as to responsibility for the special education mandate of a free appropriate education (FAPE). Only thirteen percent suggested a review of IEP requirements before enrolling a SWD. Only a few states officially recognized the need for online-specific IEP accommodations or gave any direction to IEP teams. Parents are an integral part of the

IEP team, and no state had any direction as to how parents of SWD should be involved in the placement or support of their child in online educational settings.

Attrition and Failure of Special Education Students in Online Education

SWD, their schools and families are choosing online education due to its ability to serve multiple ability levels, increase flexibility in an academic schedule, provide immediate feedback to students and teachers, and individualize instruction and pacing. Online education can provide a learning environment with decreased distractions and increased student and parent satisfaction (Beck, Egalite, & Maranto, 2014; Hart, Berger, Jacob, Loeb, & Hill, 2019).

Analyzing the performance outcomes of online education is difficult to disaggregate due to varied state requirements for data collection and reporting as well as varied state and online provider structural differences. Special education data is often not included in reported data (Molnar et al., 2019). In a state in the northeastern United State with a state with a large state virtual school (SVS), only about half of students pass all of their online courses. The students who are unsuccessful in their online classes are described as a “large number” (Freidhoff, 2018).

Supplemental Online Programs

Each state’s approach to providing online education has led to a wide variety of delivery methods and structural organizations (Poureau, 2015). This literature review adopted a broad interpretation of online education for the K-12 school age population. For this reason, the mode of instruction identified within this research by the term “online education” is purposely nebulous. It encompasses schools and programs that are fully online where the student works entirely off-site. It also includes programs where students

have a home school of record and are enrolled in an online course from an outside supplier or vendor as a supplement to their traditional education program on their home school's campus. This type of supplemental online program (SOP) placement means that a student's home school district of record, as well as any online education provider, must follow the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in its entirety including the development and implementation of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Basham et al., 2015; Deschaine, 2018).

The Online Learning Definitions Project described SOP as synonymous with "part-time online program". They define it as when students are allowed by local or state education authorities (LEA or SEA) to take some of their full load of coursework online (iNACOL, 2011). Wicks and iNACOL (2010) describe SOP as enrolling students in "individual courses as opposed to a full course of study." These courses are a supplement to those taken in the face-to-face traditional school record which is the student's home school. SOP vary in their provision of special education services but share the responsibility for providing and supporting IEP requirements (Rice, 2012).

State virtual schools (SVS) are a major provider of supplemental online courses. In fiscal year 2016-17, state virtual schools in the United States, spread across several different states, provided nearly one million supplemental course enrollments. In addition to these courses, SVS provide professional development, technology training and infrastructure. Funding for SVS varies by state, but SVS are either partially or fully funded by public monies. SVS are established by legislation or by state educational agencies. Most are not degree granting; hence, they are providing supplements to the educational programs of LEA. SVS continue to increase their enrollments, but the pace of

enrollment has slowed over the past few years (Digital Learning Collaborative, 2019).

SVS are significant providers of SOPs. Florida Virtual School (FLVS) reported nearly half a million semester course completions for the school year 2017-18 (FLVS, 2018). For the school year 2016-17, a state in the northeastern United States exceeded 500,000 course enrollments, and seven percent of K-12 students took at least one virtual course. Sixty-one percent of this state's virtual course enrollments were not full-time. This means at least 300,000 SOP enrollments in this one state alone. Florida and Michigan have had state virtual schools for well over a decade (FLVS, 2018; Freidhoff, 2018) along with several other states (26 in 2010), but there are other providers of SOPs including individual school districts, district consortiums, universities, and private or public independent vendors. The various iterations of online education make description of particular configurations a difficult and exhaustive task, so the definition provided by iNACOL is a practical and effective means to delineate the placement of students in SOPs (iNACOL, 2010; Wicks & iNACOL, 2010).

Enrollment of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities (SWDs) are participating in online learning environments and taking online classes in ever-increasing numbers. SWD enroll in online courses for the same variety of reasons that their non-disabled peers are enrolled including credit recovery, scheduling convenience, and a desire for variety in course delivery (Muller, 2009). Families of SWD, among others, may feel their individual needs were not being met in their traditional home school, and chose online options (Rhim & Kowal, 2008). Online learning environments may alleviate some of the social pressures or stigmas related to being part of special education and may offer curricular

accommodations and modifications that are particularly effective for some students (Greer et al., 2014). Based on National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data, it can be estimated that 2.7 million students were engaged in online education in 2013, (NCES, 2018). This is a common estimate, but this statistic is not being tracked by all states (Freidhoff, 2018). The decision to take an online course may be the result of intimate discussions held during an Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team) meeting where the needs of the student are carefully considered among a team of professionals, the parents and the student, or it may be the independent choice of a parent or of the student themselves. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) requires that special education students receive their education with general education students to the maximum extent possible. As all students increasingly take all or part of their educational courses online, SWD should, in equal ratios, be engaged in online education (Rose, Blomyer, & iNACOL, 2007).

Needs of Students with Disabilities in Supplemental Online Programs

Rhim and Kowal (2008) cited a “dearth” (p. 9) of research regarding SWD in virtual schools, and described the policy surrounding these enrollments as “evolving” (p. 3). Accessibility and inclusion are the primary goals and concerns of special education legal requirements. In fact, digital content must be accessible even when there are no known disabilities in the user population (Jones et al., 2015).

Basham et al. (2016) list some of the questions facing online enrollment and placement policy for SWD and conclude that issues of responsibility and special education mandates have not been adequately addressed. The enrollment and placement of SWD in SOP may keep the educational activities of SWD close to their home, or they

may be engaging in online education within the walls of their traditional school building surrounded by their peers. The reality of the involvement of SWD with their general education peers is nuanced and requires investigation and analysis in order to confirm that specific educational settings truly represent a student's least restrictive environment (LRE) (Rose et al., 2007).

There is widespread agreement that online settings can be generally appropriate for some SWD and should be considered part of a continuum of placements (Rice & Carter, 2015a). However, the lack of research concerning how best to support SWD in online education is an area of significant concern for many authors and organizations (Basham, Carter, Rice, & Ortiz, 2016; Burgstahler, 2015; Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014; Vasquez & Straub, 2012). The needs of an individual student when learning activities take place with the student in their own home or independently while at school are more difficult to analyze. They may also be difficult to place within the requirements of the IEP. There is appropriate concern that SWD will be isolated from their non-disabled peers even though online learning environments may have a wide variety of opportunities for SWD to interact with peers. It is easy to see online providers considering all their courses to be inclusive with general education peers and therefore conforming to LRE (Rose, Blomyer, & iNACOL, 2007). It might also be easy for many accommodations to be omitted, or embedded, technology-based supports to go unused due to lack of awareness of them or lack of training to use them. If there is no interaction with general education peers, then the intent of LRE is not being honored. Identifying the possible degrees of inclusion and interaction is necessary and is under the purview of the IEP Team (Collins et al., 2015).

Accommodations and Service Delivery

Schools and programs have attempted to address their approach to managing SWD within the limits of the law. However, the inclusion of general statements about universal design for learning (UDL), the matching of technologies to disabilities, or scaffolding of support do little to inform the actual practice of educators of SWD online (Vasquez & Straub, 2012). Accommodations are strategic supports or services that assist a SWD in accessing the general education curriculum, and that give them alternative methods for demonstrating their knowledge and abilities. Accommodations must be designed with the student's grade, development, and ability level in mind in addition to any disability-related learner characteristics (Keeler & Horney, 2007). Accommodations in special education have been envisioned to take place with teacher or support staff in close physical proximity to the student, and many relate to the specific setting in which the learning activity will take place. Common accommodations include those surrounding testing, including tests being read aloud, test question presentation style, and the use of extended time. Instructional accommodations vary greatly from reduced assignments to very general or very specific changes to content delivery to allow and support accessibility to the content. The overall impact on student learning from the use of accommodations is mixed and has sometimes been described as successful without the accompanying support of student outcome data showing improvement (Carter & Rice, 2016; Lin, Childs, & Lin, 2016).

Accommodations through scaffolding, procedural facilitation, transcription, or text-to-speech are commonly associated with online education (Vasquez & Straub, 2012). However, online teachers have reported difficulty in providing accommodations to SWD

(COLSD, 2012). Special education accommodations are often designed to occur with the teacher or support staff in the same physical location as the student, and, therefore, do not always transition effectively to online learning environments (VanSciver & Conover, 2009).

Burdette et al. (2013) surveyed 46 state directors of special education. The authors listed challenges identified by these state directors in their own provision of services to SWDs. The list clearly suggests a lack of preparedness and organization for moving the support system for students with disabilities into online environments. Specifically, they felt unprepared for meeting student needs and for delivering accommodated content. There was also a recognition that they could not provide effective monitoring or accountability for reporting back to educational agencies or the LEA on the implementation of mandated IEPs. Only 17 out of the 46 states surveyed specifically mentioned special education in their guidelines. Only 5 were collecting data on SWDs in SOP. The state directors expressed a concern with coordination of services between online providers and special education service providers, and reiterated the concern that accommodations were not being implemented as required. There remained a lack of evidence of methods for effective monitoring and mutual accountability at the state level and between providers and local educational agencies. They describe a climate of “ambiguity and variability” (p. 70) when trying to determine where responsibility lies for providing special education services online.

Archambault (2015) highlights three themes for student success in online education. The first is that teachers must have knowledge of how technology can transform our existing educational systems and “connect learners and their families with

teachers and schools” (p. 193). Second, support structures are needed that will facilitate parental support of SWD and assist students as they accustom themselves to the online environment for learning. This support might range from hardware needs to specific types of assistance by professional staff. The final theme is the fostering of relationships among all stakeholders which allows for clear identification of a student’s individual needs and then works to ensure student engagement in content and learning activities. All of which require teacher training and necessitate extensive trial and error.

The one critical differentiating characteristic of these online educational experiences is the lack of the physical presence of a teacher. Some online courses may be synchronous and may deliver a relatively high degree of teacher presence, similar to what might be experienced in a traditional classroom. Asynchronous courses provide a widely varying quantity and quality of teacher-student interactions. Online learning environments necessitate a new repertoire of accommodations and modifications with the acceptance that some of them must take place outside of the direct physical or virtual presence of a responsible adult. The tools of the LMS to communicate and collect data must also be used consistently and effectively for data collection to inform student support methods (Carnahan & Fulton, 2015).

Carter and Rice (2016) used the following classification hierarchy when analyzing existing IEP accommodations and the ability to perform them in an online learning environment: requires technology, supported by technology, and provided in shared physical presence. In their case study, the largest set of accommodations were those that required interaction with a special education teacher. Online students may need support and specific accommodations to make steady progress on course pacing guides and to

make the curriculum itself accessible. Experienced online educators prioritize the need to attend to students who do not make adequate progress in the course. Apart from assessment timing conditions, the literature reviewed did not show evidence of the online implementation of specific IEP required accommodations. A student's previous history and skills with technology must be a part of the IEP team's evaluation of a student's current level of proficiency to anticipate the student's ability to engage in an online course successfully (Rice et al., 2015).

Deliberate Course Design and UDL

UDL should be part of course development and design in a more deliberate manner. Course designers who adopt UDL allow students to have a range of input methods, ways to produce work, and means to communicate with their instructor and classmates. UDL applied more broadly can increase the potential for SWD to engage in the general education curriculum in the same way as their general education peers and allows them to access courses with fewer accommodations. This reduction in barriers to access supports increased achievement for all students. Instructors can still embed specific accommodations or provide them outside of the online environment as they are needed and identified to support individual student needs (Burgstahler, 2015; Rose et al., 2007).

UDL standards should include captioning, transcription for audio, and options for content presentations. Linked content should also be reviewed for its accessibility (Rose, Blomyer, & iNACOL, 2007). Course goals and objectives should be clear with learning targets and activities well described. This allows course outcomes to be aligned with student IEP requirements, curricular goals, and the ultimate goal of meeting graduation

requirements in the state. The use of technology in and of itself may give an impression of interest and effectiveness that is not supported by student outcome data. LMS can be used to produce large quantities of data that must be communicated to and processed by the IEP Team, including the student's parents. Part of effective student and teacher support is methodologies to use this data efficiently and rather quickly (Rice, East, & Mellard, 2015; Rose et al., 2007). A survey of attendees at the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) conference showed that only three percent felt they had the knowledge to teach SWD online (Greer et al., 2014a).

A balance of rigor and appropriate cognitive load is inherent in the goals of special education law. This is frequently represented in individualization of the pacing of academic work. IEPs are often written in the language of tangible or visual interaction and observation. IEPs for students enrolled in online courses should include detailed instructional methods, and specific means of implementing accommodations within the LMS and also outside the LMS as mediated by the instructor or support staff. (Collins et al., 2015). As accommodations are identified, particular concern should be placed on the types of interactions that students are likely to have in the LMS. Online courses can certainly support the attainment of many IEP goals, including attention, listening and behavioral goals. Self-advocating is a common theme in IEPs and can be done in multiple ways within online learning environments. Accommodations and modifications must be coupled with communication and the means to establish community. Support systems that reinforce self-regulatory behaviors will reflect a focus on outcomes for SWD rather than be policy driven (Carnahan & Fulton, 2015).

Research that leads to informed decisions on online accommodations, with a

focus on outcomes, can lead to more effective IEPs for students who participate in online education. These outcomes need to be measurable and should be supported with data from and for both the home school and the online provider. The loss of physically meeting in a shared space is often interpreted as a loss of a SWD's inclusion in educational activities with general education peers. This approach fails to recognize and embrace the nature of social interaction as it exists today especially among K-12 students. SWD can collaborate with teachers and peers in online settings, and can receive mentoring and academic support through interaction, modeling, and various communication tools (Chang, 2002; Rice et al., 2015; VanSciver & Conover, 2009).

Technology can exclude even when a student is in a room full of students their own age along with a teacher. Unused accessibility tools signal a loss of a FAPE. If a student uses a device in isolation, and the learning activities or accommodations are not collaborative in nature, the goals of special education to increase socialization with peers are not being honored (Rice, East, & Mellard, 2015). Online strategy instruction necessitates that the adults who support the SWD have training and experience of their own in its use, or that programs are adopted with simple and flexible design for ease of access. Exposure to and incorporation of Web 2.0 tools and open-source software takes time and support but may be integral parts of online accommodations. Multi-Tiered Supports (MTSS) should be embedded during the instructional design phase, but students, teachers and support staff need understanding and awareness of their potential to personalize learning and optimize IEP goal achievement (Jones et al., 2015).

When attempting to delineate what SWD need from online education two broad categories of needs emerge. These two broad categories can be labeled proactive and

reactive. Course designers and online instructors should anticipate the needs of all the potential students of a course. This means presuming a wide variety of learner characteristics and exceptionalities. This anticipatory atmosphere supports the academic achievement of all students. Reactive design allows course designers and instructors to quickly accommodate and adjust the online environment for a specific student need. SWD need their instruction to be adjusted quickly and efficiently, so that precious teaching and learning time is not lost. Teaching methods need to vary based on student characteristics. Some general needs of SWD include ongoing and meaningful communication among educational stakeholders, primarily that between teacher and student (Coy et al., 2014). A course climate with the critical characteristics of embracing students and being accessible is best designed to enhance the performance of SWD (Burghstahler, 2015; Rice, 2012).

Success of SWD in Online Education

For many students, online education offers supports and instructional characteristics that increase engagement, achievement, and positive affective results. These outcomes are available to students with and without disabilities (Marteny & Bernadowski, 2016; Rice, 2012). While online education offers potential for educational individualization and personalized learning to increase academic achievement, SWD are not finding the same levels of success as their non-disabled peers (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014).

Rice and Carter (2016) conducted a case study of special education teachers at a large state sponsored virtual school. These teachers worked in a large virtual school with an enrollment of over 20,000 students. Their research described the phenomenon of

supporting SWD in SOP. This study confirmed the necessity of intensive communication to sustain work completion by students, and the fact that special education teachers often provide emotional support to their students. The SWD who already had self-regulatory abilities were seen to be able to apply those abilities within the online learning environment for academic success. Those students who did not have those abilities before enrollment online were not exposed to processes or instruction that effectively developed self-regulation. The teachers in the study identified that they, and their students, would benefit from having time to reflect on their practice and from using available data to inform that practice.

In a previous study, Rice and Carter (2015a) conducted qualitative research with a variety of people engaged in special education online including administrators, local and building level special education directors, and special education teachers. They used semi-structured interviews to gather information about their roles in supporting SWD in online education. Their findings suggest that online special educators, while acknowledging that the online learning environment is different and requires an evolving approach, are attempting to replicate what they did in traditional school settings in the online placement. Teachers and local level special education directors are focused on relationships with students and parents and successful course completion. School and district level administrators focused on compliance. All of the participant types cited a desire for increased positive parent involvement in their child's education.

IEP Teams Online

Special education in the United States receives a significant amount of the funding and the attention of our educational system. It is imperative that this system have

effective leadership. Calls for leadership are heard across diverse areas in our society. When considering the lifelong impact of what a successful Individual Education Program Team (IEP Team) can do for an individual student the necessity of leadership in this area becomes profound (Carter & Rice, 2016; Chang, 2002).

Lentz (2012) describes a leader of IEP Teams as one “who understands both the letter and the spirit” (p. 5) of special education law. He further describes this leader as having cultivated the involvement of each member of the IEP Team. This includes communicating the role each member must play and expressing the expectation that each member will prepare for the meeting and contribute meaningfully to its outcome. Members of the team who lack confidence to share in the meeting are encouraged and supported to do so. The leadership of IEP Teams starts before the meeting, continues during the meeting, and follows up with meeting outcomes and next steps. The meeting itself is just one part of the Individual Educational Program (IEP) process. The effective, transformational IEP Team leader sees the IEP process as a system that delivers ongoing specially designed instruction to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities (SWD) (Chang, 2002; Boscardin, Rude, Schulze, & Tudryn, 2018; DeVore et al., 2011; VanSciver & Conover, 2009).

Leadership of IEP Teams of Students in Supplemental Online Programs

The IEP Team itself requires that individuals of diverse backgrounds, priorities, education and experience have a framework by which to understand each other, and work together towards common goals (Cavanaugh, Repetto, Wayer, & Spitler, 2013; Kamens, 2004). Greer et al. (2015) interviewed 16 state directors of special education. One of the questions they asked the respondents was “Do you think the average IEP Team has the

knowledge of online education to make decisions about free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in online settings?” (p. 60). The majority (12 out of 15) responded negatively. This one data point is very informative. The highest officials of special education in 15 states do not consider the average IEP Team prepared to do an element of their job that is increasingly commonplace.

Processes used by IEP Teams of Students in Supplemental Online Programs

The literature reviewed yielded very little discussion of distinct leadership or management processes of IEP Teams for online education. There is some suggestion that the learning management system (LMS) tools or social media methods might be successfully applied to IEP communication or function, but without specific examples of such application. In 2009, Project Forum surveyed state education agencies. Most of the 38 state leaders reported that IEPs were handled in the same way in online settings as in traditional schools. There were a variety of responses from the remaining states. Responses included the online school being responsible for the IEP, the responsibility being split between the online school, and the LEA being totally responsible (Muller, 2009).

Greer et al. (2015) interviewed 16 state directors of special education. They asked the respondents “what do you think are the primary factors an IEP Team considers in making decisions about a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in online settings?” (p. 60). The responses varied widely. The responses included a lack of concerns of this type, a lack of vision of providing services to special education students online, and affirmations of the need to determine least restrictive environment (LRE). The state directors did identify that “the average IEP Team” (p. 62) should have further

training in providing education and accommodations online but reaffirmed that IEP Teams are not receiving clear policy support as they work to support students (Muller, 2010). They recognized the need for increased preparation and education to increase the comfort level of both administrators and teachers to follow through on the requirements of their enrolled students' IEPs. Other administrators of SWD in online education admitted that in their organizations it is special education teachers who are selecting the accommodations, strategies and tools used to support SWD. They often identify the LMS features of progress monitoring and frequent feedback as assets when identifying student needs including extended time for tests and alternative test item presentation. There is an abiding assertion that the online learning environment is a significant accommodation in itself. The administrators are clear in identifying their role as supporting teachers. No direct evidence of leadership or management of the IEP Team as a collaborative group was found (Burdette et al., 2013; Carter & Rice 2016; Deschaine, 2018; Rice et al., 2015).

Chapter Summary

There was a distinct, recognizable absence in the research of descriptions of functioning Individual Education Program Team (IEP Teams) as they supported students with disabilities (SWD) online (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Rice & Carter, 2015; Rice & Carter, 2016). There was no delineation of processes used by IEP Teams to effectively collaborate to implement the goals and accommodations of the Individual Educational Program (IEP) for online education. Without direction from any level of government, peer-reviewed research, or local education agency (LEA) policy, IEP Teams must develop and implement an IEP with very little training or past experience to guide them

(Greer et al., 2014a; Muller, 2009). Based on this review of the literature, the IEP Team must navigate responsibility for meeting the student's needs and for the student's overall academic achievement without existing processes to guide them (Greer et al., 2015; Muller, 2010).

Leadership in special education is a combination of delivery of specially designed instruction to students with IEPs and of compliance with local, state, and federal law and policy (Crockett, 2007). While the variety of state and local organization models precludes a singular model of special education, the role of special education director (SED) can be simply defined as administrative authority to enforce accountability and compliance in the area of special education (McElhinny & Pellegrin, 2014; Rice & Carter, 2015).

Special education, while a federal mandate, is centered in the work of a team of educators and the parent, and student when possible, who are tasked with creating a program of education including goals, accommodations, and services to support a SWD. SWD are enrolled in supplemental online programs (SOP) and need their IEP Team to function effectively as they identify and meet student needs in this type of placement (Carter & Rice, 2016). SWD in these courses may be doing their course work in their traditional school building, at home, or a combination of both (Digital Learning Collaborative, 2019). Special education accommodations have traditionally been envisioned to occur with special education staff present with the student. That is likely to not be the case when SWD are enrolled in SOP. There is a clear lack of preparedness to identify and meet the needs of SWD in these courses (Muller, 2010).

Leaders of IEP Teams should encourage the involvement of each team member and communicate the need to prepare for and to fulfill their role in the team (Cavanaugh et al., 2013; Rose, Blomyr, & iNACOL, 2007). Some research studies identified the need for increased training for IEP Teams as they serve students in online education, and there were some examples of LMS features and some discussion of the natural accommodations of the online learning environment. The research did not describe the processes IEP Teams use to support SWD in SOP, or how effectively the needs of SWD are being met in this setting (Burdette et al., 2013; Carter & Rice, 2016).

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction to Methodology

Students with disabilities (SWD) are participating in online education for the same flexibility and personalization it offers to their general education peers (Burdette et al., 2013). This reality is accompanied by a shared responsibility for servicing SWD when their educational program is supplemented with online courses (Jones et al., 2015). The purposes of this study were to identify the needs of SWD in SOP, to identify the processes used by Individual Education Program Teams (IEP Teams) to support SWD in SOP, and to determine if those processes meet the needs and support SWD in SOP.

Without appropriate processes in place to communicate the needs of the students between the IEP Team and supplemental online course providers and other stakeholders, there is a risk of decreased student achievement and potential failure of the course. These processes and their efficacy are the responsibility of the IEP Team members and the special education director (SED) that is charged with their oversight (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013). Without an effective IEP Team, SWD in SOP may not be receiving their accommodations in ways that lead to their maximum academic achievement. SED are strategically placed to develop, implement, and describe those processes as they currently function (Burgstahler, 2015; Repetto et al., 2010).

Conducting research that describes the effective functioning of the IEP Team has the potential to inform the practice of IEP Teams across a wide group of individuals and organizations. This research is significant because SWD are participating in online

education and being placed in SOP, and they must be effectively supported in their learning tasks while in those courses. Effective support of SWD is both a federal mandate and a social imperative.

This chapter will identify the research questions and the research method selected to address them. The research context and sample will be described including the specific criteria for participant eligibility. The main elements of the research design will be discussed including the two phases of research in this explanatory sequential mixed methods study as well as the data collection and analysis strategies.

Overview of Research Methods

An explanatory sequential design was used for this research study in order to answer the research questions listed below. This explanatory sequential mixed methods approach has an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

Research Question Number One (RQ1): What are the needs of SWD enrolled in supplemental online programs?

Research Question Number Two (RQ2): What are the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in supplemental online programs?

Research Question Number Three (RQ3): Do the processes IEP Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How?

Study Design

Creswell (2013) describes an explanatory sequential mixed methods study (See Figure 2) as having data collection occur in two phases: quantitative followed by qualitative. A mixed methods approach was chosen to address the research questions because it allowed the researcher to use the qualitative data to refine the quantitative and go deeper than either method on its own. Taylor and Abernathy (2014) described some evidence of new researchers in special education selecting mixed methods approaches for their studies although mixed methods studies had a lower rate of publication when compared to quantitative or qualitative conducted independently. These new researchers are identifying the benefits to special education research of the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to better understand the quantitative results while giving voice to the study's participants.

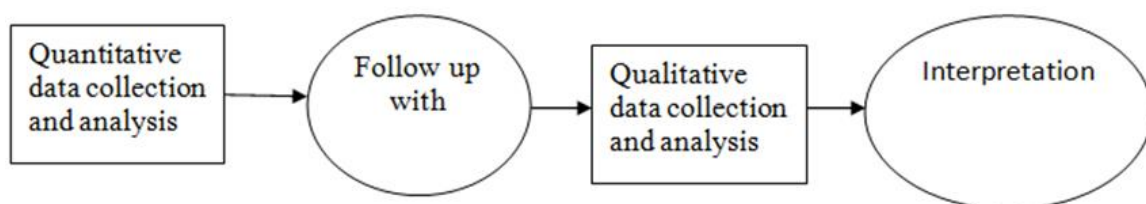


Figure 3.2 Explanatory sequential design diagram. Creswell (2013, p. 541).

In an explanatory sequential mixed methods research study of this type, the first phase of data informs the next phase. The second phase of data collection “refines” the results of the first phase. The two phases of this research study addressed all three of the research questions to varying degrees. In the Chapter Two literature review, the researcher gathered preliminary information on all three research questions and framed the data collection for them as well. The phase one quantitative data was collected through an online survey. The phase two qualitative data was collected through follow up

semi-structured interviews of participants selected due to their specific survey responses.

The data collected from the survey and through the interviews addresses all three

research questions as shown in Table 3.1 (Creswell, 2013).

Table 3.1 Alignment of research questions to data analysis.

Research Questions	Data Collection and Instruments	Data Analysis
1. What are the needs of students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online programs?	Special Education Director Survey Responses	Descriptive Statistics
	Special Education Director Interview Responses	Coding, Thematic Grouping
2. What are the processes Individual Education Program (IEP) teams use to support students with disabilities in supplemental online programs?	Special Education Director Survey Responses	Descriptive Statistics
	Special Education Director Interview Responses	Coding, Thematic Grouping
3. Do the processes Individual Education Program (IEP) Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How?	Special Education Director Survey Responses	Descriptive Statistics
	Special Education Director Interview Responses	Coding, Thematic Grouping

Phase One Quantitative Survey

An online survey was designed to collect demographic data, identify the needs of SWD and to explore what processes IEP Teams use to meet those needs in SOP. The online survey was implemented through Qualtrics Survey Software. This method was selected based on the convenience of online surveys, and the accessibility of participants through their publicly available professional email addresses. Using a survey led to quantitative results which provided an overview of the respondents' current perceptions of the needs of SWD in SOP. The survey data also described the SED perceptions of the functioning of the IEP Team process within their own schools or organizations and allowed for the collection of a larger, more representative data sample.

Throughout the creation of the survey, content validity was addressed by developing the survey items out of the review of the literature concerning special education, SOP, and IEP Teams. Additional items were purposefully selected or adapted from the program review tool *Assessing and Improving Special Education* published by The Center on School Turnaround (Grabill & Rhim, 2017) and from the National Standards for Quality Online Learning (NSQOL, 2019). Further items, also, have the SED participants identify their perception of the existence of current processes in place to support SWD in SOP, and whether or not these processes effectively support these students. The survey was pre-screened by two educators prior to being emailed to potential participants.

The researcher used the survey questions to collect basic demographic data, characteristics of the processes used to place SWD in SOP, ratings of effectiveness of current processes, and ideas regarding implementation of new processes to meet any

identified needs from the SED. The survey data also examined the perceptions of SED concerning the needs of SWD in SOP and identified the current processes that are used to support SWD in SOP (Table 3.2). The survey contained a combination of question styles including short answer, Likert scale, and open ended.

Open-ended questions were included to allow respondents to elaborate on the current processes used by IEP Teams to support SWD, but this type of question was only used sparingly as to not add increased load on the survey respondents.

Table 3.2 Survey Question Organization and Descriptions

Survey Section with Corresponding Question Numbers	Question Description
Questions 1-10	Demographics
Questions 11-20	Enrollment in Supplemental Online Programs
Questions 21-30	IEP Team Processes to Support Students in Supplemental Online Programs
Questions 31-40	Adapted from National Standards for Online Quality Online Courses (NSQOL, 2019)
Questions 41-50	Adopted from Assessing and Improving Special Education (Grabill & Rhim, 2017)

Sample and Setting

The target sample was SED within a state in the northeastern United States. This group may also be described as administrators of special education although some participants may not have administrative status within their own organization. The main criteria for participant inclusion were their oversight of IEP Teams, and their role as or title of SED. The people in this role have the responsibility for the implementation of special education policy over a region, consortium of schools, a school district, or a single school building. This definition was kept purposely broad to support participation

in the study, and to represent the variety of organizational structures through which special education services are delivered.

SED were selected due to the likelihood that they would be able to provide insight into the phenomena being studied due to their position (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The purposeful, convenience sampling began with a published list of school districts serviced with supplemental online courses by a SVS which was cross-referenced with public directories to increase the access to SED who have involvement with SOP. The contact information for the SED of these districts was located in a published directory from the state department of education.

Districts without a titled “special education director” were contacted to identify the person in that role for that district, regardless of title or role, and to get their contact information. All the districts and intermediate school districts in the directory either had the title and contact information available or were called to gather it. A published directory of a professional organization of administrators of special education was used to supplement the contact list. The researcher attempted to maximize the sample size during the time available to decrease sampling error and increase generalizability. The anonymity of the individual SED, including their location and role, was maintained throughout and after the study (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was received on June 2, 2020. The first set of emails containing the recruitment text (Appendix B) were sent out on June 17, 2020. Due to the constraints of the university Qualtrics Survey Software license, the emails had to be sent out in batches one time per week. When the email recipient agreed to complete the survey, they were presented with the consent letter before beginning the survey itself

(Appendix C). After one week had passed, a reminder email with a second opportunity to participate in the survey was sent. After another week the second batch of emails was sent with a corresponding reminder email one week later to all who had not responded as of that time. This brought the total of SED contacted successfully by email to 621. This time frame allowed for participants to be identified and contacted while most schools were in session albeit abnormal circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and for follow up contact with SED during times of potentially lower workload during summer months. The participants were contacted twice to encourage increased rates of returned surveys and interview participation (Umbach, 2005).

Of the 621 specific emails sent to SED within a state in the northeastern United States, 110 (17.7 %) of those invited started the survey. One hundred and five of those respondents made some progress into the survey, but there was significant survey fatigue leading to only 57 respondents replying to survey question 25 (SQ25) (9.1%) and only 44 respondents (7%) replying to the final Likert survey question (SQ50).

Frequencies and bivariate analysis through cross tabulations were conducted on selected survey responses for data analysis. Creswell (2013) suggests a larger sample size for a survey study but recognizes that it is dependent on the situational factors of the setting and target population. The researcher estimated a survey response rate of 10% which is a low response rate but used careful selection and purposeful sampling to compensate. The sample size for this phase was dependent upon the interest of the SED in participating in the survey. Data analysis and organization of findings were completed between August and December of 2020.

Phase Two Qualitative Interviews

Phase two of the research method was a set of qualitative interviews. The data collected during phase one determined the direction and focus of phase two. The phase two semi-structured interviews were representative of the particular phenomenon of having a process to either enroll or support a SWD in a SOP. This type of interview has some organization but gave the researcher freedom to make adjustments based on the participant responses. It requires the interviewer to pay attention during the interview and requires more engagement in the process than mere recording of participant answers (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

The Qualtrics Survey Software system was programmed to identify respondents who had answered affirmatively to either or both of survey questions 14 and 26. These items asked respondents to say whether or not they had processes to enroll SWD in SOP or to guide IEP Teams as they support SWD in SOP. Respondents who answered affirmatively to either or both of these two questions formed the target population for the phase two interviews and were sent a recruitment email for the interview (Appendix D). Those respondents who replied to the recruitment email set a day and time with the researcher and selected the method of recording. The first interview was conducted on July 8, 2020, and the final interview on July 28, 2020. Data analysis and summarizing of outcomes was completed between August and December of 2020.

Using these two questions as gatekeepers to the interview phase created a pool of respondents who had clearly identified that their school or organization had processes in place to enroll SWD in SOP or to guide IEP Teams when they enroll SWD in SOP. The interview questions were intentionally designed to be broad and inclusive to allow the

researcher to identify disparate methods for dealing with this population of students within this specific educational placement. It also allowed for the respondents to self-determine and self-identify the processes they believed were currently in place within their school or organization to enroll SWD in SOP or to guide IEP Teams in their support of these students.

The qualitative data was gathered using two interview methods. Five of the ten respondents chose to have the interview recorded as part of a cell phone conversation using Rev.com, and the other five chose to participate in a Zoom interview that was recorded. The recordings were then transcribed using either NVivo or Rev.com transcription services. The recordings were then transcribed using either NVivo or Rev.com transcription services. Both services required the researcher to edit the transcripts. The NVivo transcripts required significantly more editing than did Rev.com.

The sample size for this phase was dependent upon SED interest in being interviewed and availability. The number of participants sought within this sample was guided by Creswell (2013) to be limited enough to allow the researcher to give an accurate description and to avoid superficial perceptions. The participants were contacted twice to encourage participation in the survey, and two times for participation in the interview to increase the rates of returned surveys and interview participants (Umbach, 2005).

Thirty-one survey respondents answered affirmatively to either survey question 14 or 26 (or both). These 31 respondents were sent an emailed request for an interview (Appendix D). Of the 31, ten eventually participated in an interview (32%). The remaining 21 received a follow up email to encourage participation which included a

hard copy of the interview questions that they could respond to at their leisure. None of the 21 who received the hard copy returned it.

Interview Participants

The interview participants were organized based on the characteristics of their role and work setting. There was one state level (S), one county level (C), and eight district level SED. Using a district classification system in use in the northeastern state (Table 3.3) in the United States, the district level interview participants could be grouped based on the size of the district they represented.

Table 3.3 Northeastern State School District Classification System by Enrollment

District Classification	Enrollment Cutoffs
Class A	863 and Above
Class B	395 – 862
Class C	189 – 394
Class D	188 and Below

Only Class A and Class B school districts were represented in the interview sample (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Interview Participant District Size or Other Classification

Participant Classification	Total Participants by Classification	
State Level (S)	1	
County Level (C)	1	*Serves a Class A School District, a Charter School and an Alternative High School within a single county
Class A (A)	4	
Class B (B)	4	

Interview questions were first drafted and then a final set of questions was developed out of the survey responses (Table 3.5). Some of the prepared interview questions had nested, follow-up questions to be asked based on the responses given. During the phase two interviews, the researcher specifically asked about the processes used by the IEP Teams under the influence of SED. This included how the SED managed the IEP Teams, and how they supported communication. Questions explored the methods of communication, the analysis of ongoing feedback, and the implementation of accommodations and support. Further questions focused on the effectiveness of the current processes or the lack of processes in place for leading IEP Teams in their support of SWD.

Table 3.5 Interview Questions

1.	<p>Briefly describe how your school or organization approaches supplemental online programs.</p> <p>1a. Is there a separate process for enrolling students with disabilities? 1b. Do you use supplemental online programs for credit recovery? 1c. What types of courses are taken through supplemental online programs at your school or organization? 1d. Do you see any different enrollment pattern with students with disabilities?</p>
<hr/>	
2.	<p>Do you think there needs to be more than normal attention to course placement, performance, or outcomes in a supplemental online program by the IEP team of students with disabilities than for other types of class placements?</p> <p>2a. Have you tracked or noticed any different outcomes for students with disabilities in supplementals than for the general school population? 2b. Do you track performance or outcomes of your students in supplemental online courses? 2c. Do you track performance or outcomes of your students with disabilities in supplemental online courses?</p>
<hr/>	
3.	<p>Do you have an organized approach to “training” or “prepping” of IEP Teams in your school or organization?</p> <p>3a. Any separate “training” or “prepping” for placing students with disabilities in supplemental online programs? 3b. Does your school or organization have any guidelines, either published or procedural, to guide IEP Teams in student placement in supplemental online programs? 3c. Do you think there is a need for a separate approach for IEP Teams when they place students with disabilities in SOP? 3d. Do you see each decision by the IEP Teams as under their own purview?</p>
<hr/>	
4.	<p>Do you have any staff members who are “go to” people for placing students in supplemental online programs in terms of their knowledge or experience?</p> <p>4a. Please describe any staffing structure or process that is related to student placement in supplementals. 4b. Please describe any staffing structure or process that is related to the placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs? 4c. What are some work traits of a staff member who is a “go to” person for placing students in supplemental online programs?</p>
<hr/>	
5.	<p>Can you describe the general attitude of your organization or school toward the placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs?</p> <p>5a. Can you describe the general attitude of your special education staff towards the placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs?</p>
<hr/>	
6.	<p>As online education and supplemental online programs continue to grow, what processes do you see as important for IEP Teams and organizations or schools</p>

to follow for inclusion of students with disabilities to be effective in meeting the needs of that population of students?

6a. How can IEP Team specifically work to improve effective placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs?

7. Do you see your current process for placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs as effective?

7a. How might it be improved?

8. When a student with a disability is enrolled in a supplemental online program how are the specific requirements of their IEP communicated to the supplemental online provider?

Most interview questions were asked exactly as they were written. In some cases, the researcher followed up with additional, incidental questions to drill down for deeper meaning and richer understanding of the respondent's experiences. The individual answers to the interview questions in some cases led to specific lines of questioning regarding important topics that arose out of the conversations. These additional questions were not consistently the same among the participants, but a common topic was how the current Covid-19 pandemic had affected current practice and how its impact might lead to significant changes in supporting SWD in online education (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The following are representative samples of the additional questions:

Do you see putting students with disabilities into supplemental online programs is really just an extension of good special education services and good IEP teamwork?

(Researcher)

Here's where I ask my extra question, are those programs seeing big changes right now or does that still remains to be seen? If those programs are going to bounce up due to the virus? (Researcher)

It was made clear to each participant that they could skip or decide not to answer any question they felt uncomfortable answering or believed to be redundant based on their previous responses. The recorded interview file was labeled with a number to protect participant privacy. The list of numbers and corresponding names was kept in a Google document within the Boise State Google Suite.

During the interview process some preliminary memos were noted including the prevalence of the role of case manager in the texts, and of the natural alignment of the research question topics to the interview data (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). After the transcription process was complete, the transcriptions were checked by the researcher for accuracy through a careful reading and review. The text was coded by reducing it into segments, and then grouping the segments by themes (Figure 3, Creswell, 2013).

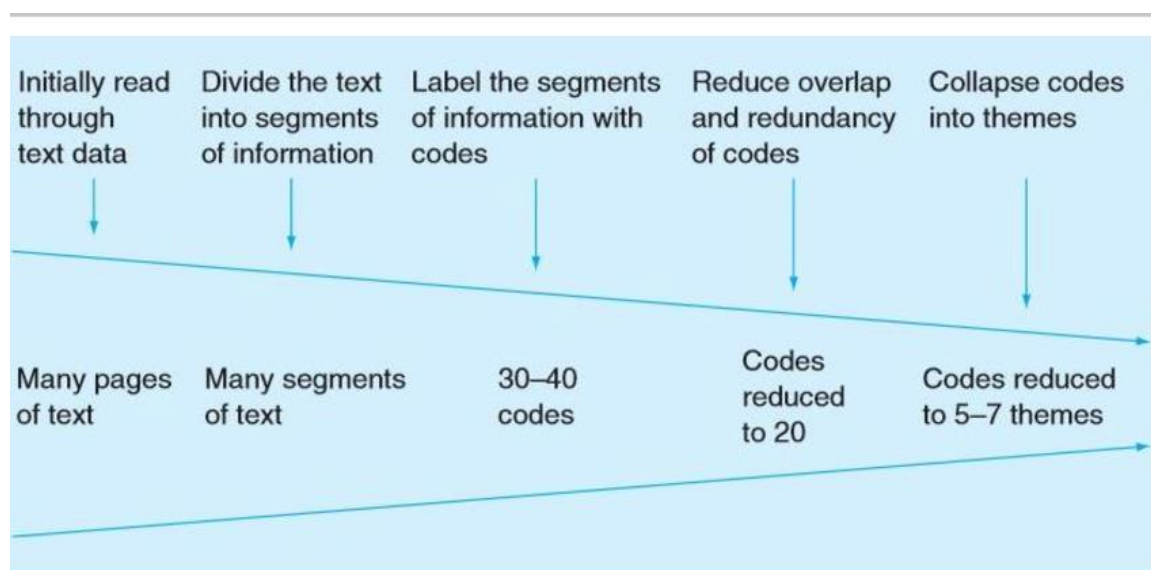


Figure 3.3 A visual model of the coding process in qualitative research. (Creswell, 2013, p.244).

The researcher began the coding process with three codes that were directly correlated to the three research questions: “needs,” “processes,” and “process meets and supports,” and with the additional code of “case manager.” Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods study offered a broad view of the research and using both quantitative and qualitative research methods increased the validity of the research. The interviews further clarified the needs of SWD in SOP and further described whether or not those needs were being met effectively through the processes IEP Teams used to support SWD.

Limitations

All research studies have limitations. Limitations are weaknesses in the study that potentially impact the results (Creswell, 2013). The researcher identified the following limitations in this study:

Generalizability

The generalizability of this study is limited due to the small sample size and an inability to reach saturation in all identified qualitative themes. The researcher sought to increase the usefulness of this study to a broader group of educators seeking to increase the effectiveness of their work with SWD through the inclusion of significant quantities of raw data and the use of thorough analysis to highlight information that was relevant to the study sample. Through the use of “thick description” (Polit & Beck, 2010, p. 1455), the researcher presented a conceptual framework that allows readers to make their own informed decisions on the transferability of the findings to their own practice. The use of mixed methods research in and of itself is a strategy to increase generalizability but is

reliant on effective blending of the data types (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit and Beck, 2010).

Researcher Bias

The researcher is an online special education teacher with extensive work experience at the predominant state virtual school (SVS) in the state in the northeastern United States. This could lead to bias in the data collection and analysis process. This role was shared with the participants in an effort to bracket out her personal experiences in order to increase objectivity, and she maintained an ongoing awareness of her own experience in the fields of special education and online education. The researcher made a conscious effort to be transparent through a clear explanation of the research method. These included cross-checking and mixing of the data, protocols for the semi-structured interviews and bracketing of the researcher's professional roles during the interviews. No participants in the interview process were known to the researcher or were part of local educational agencies (LEA) familiar to the researcher.

Covid-19 Pandemic

A final potential limitation was the fact that the data collection for this research study occurred at the end of the 2019-20 school year at a time when face-to-face schooling in the state in the northeastern United States was shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This unprecedented situation may have impacted the potential target population of SED by increasing their attentiveness and interest in online support for SWD. There is also the potential that the pandemic increased their workload to a degree that additional tasks, such as participating in a research study, would be far less likely.

Chapter Summary

This research study included a survey of special education directors (SED) as they bear the responsibility for leading and managing Individual Education Program Teams (IEP Teams) who support students with disabilities (SWD) in supplemental online programs (SOP). The data from the survey and the semi-structured interviews was used to describe the needs of SWD when enrolled in SOP, the current of processes used to support SWD, and explored whether or not the current processes used by IEP Teams are effective in their support of SWD.

Responsibility for a SWD's educational placement and progress lies with the IEP Team. Moving towards a connected, collaborative IEP Team approach that transcends organizational and geographic boundaries will foster data collection which can be used to support diverse students with a range of disabilities and abilities. The use of the existing context of the IEP team in supporting SWD online allows all stakeholders to use a familiar structure and process to support students with personalized accommodations and services for their learning experiences within a SOP.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Findings

The purposes of this study were to identify the needs of students with disabilities (SWD) in supplemental online programs (SOP), to identify the processes used by Individual Education Program Teams (IEP Teams) to support SWD in SOP, and to determine if those processes meet the needs and support SWD in SOP. SWD are reliant on their IEP Team to do the requisite work to determine goals, accommodations, and services that will allow the student to reach their individual academic potential. Through this study the researcher sought to identify the functional characteristics of IEP Teams that are successfully proactive and reactive in meeting the academic needs of SWD participating in SOP and to delineate the processes that these teams use.

Overview of Research Method

The researcher embraced the need for quantitative data collection in this study to determine the needs of SWD in SOP, the current state of IEP Team functioning, and how the processes the IEP Teams use meet the needs of and support SWD. The survey respondents and the interview participants were purposefully sampled from the larger population of special education directors (SED) whose role included the supervision and direction of the members of IEP Teams of SWD in SOP. The qualitative data collected from the in-depth conversations of semi-structured interviews was used to more fully describe those needs and processes as they are currently used to support students. The

following research questions guided the design of the research study, the review of literature and the collection and analysis of the data:

Research Question Number One (RQ1): What are the needs of SWD enrolled in supplemental online programs?

Research Question Number Two (RQ2): What are the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in supplemental online programs?

Research Question Number Three (RQ3): Do the processes IEP Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How?

The online survey was sent out starting on June 17, 2021 in four weekly batches. Of the 621 specific emails sent to SED within a state in the northeastern United States, 110 (17.7 %) of those invited started the survey. One hundred and five of those respondents made some progress into the survey, but there was significant survey fatigue leading to only 57 respondents replying to SQ25 (9.1%) and only 44 respondents (7%) replying to the final Likert survey question (SQ50). Survey respondents who answered affirmatively to at least one of two questions that identified having a process for enrolling or supporting SWD in SOP met the criteria for the interview group. Thirty-one survey respondents met that criteria. These 31 respondents were sent an emailed request for an interview (Appendix D). Of the 31, ten eventually participated in an interview (32%). The first interview was conducted on July 8, 2020, and the final interview on July 28, 2020. Data analysis and summarizing of outcomes was completed between August and December of 2020.

This research study followed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design which includes the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The results of the study are presented in parts, one corresponding with each of the three research questions.

In this chapter both the findings and the results of the collection of data will be reported to answer the identified research questions listed above.

Demographic Summary

The majority of the respondents in the study were female (84.5%) with males at 15.5%, and the respondents reported their ethnicity as white at 88.57% and African American at 11.43%. They were a significantly experienced group with 69.01% having spent 20 years or more in special education. Half (50.71%) of the SED had been in a special education leadership position for at least ten years. These demographic questions allowed the researcher to gather background information on the respondents and provided context for the survey data. This information increases the ability to accurately describe the sample and analyze the data. It is important to know the time spent in special education and in special education leadership as these participant characteristics may influence the processes and methods used to support SWD.

Table 4.1 Survey Respondent Demographic Information

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	11	15.49%
Female	60	84.51%
Ethnicity		
Black or African American	62	88.57%
White	8	11.43%
Years in Special Education		
20 years or more	49	69.01%
15-20 years	16	22.54%
10-15 years	4	5.63%
5-10 years	2	2.82%
Years in Special Education Leadership		
20 years or more	11	15.5%
15-20 years	6	8.45%
10-15 years	19	26.76%
5-10 years	3	23.94%
Less than 5 years	1	25.35%

General Questions on IEP Team Management or Leadership

The respondents were asked additional questions about their role in leading IEP Teams generally within their school or organization. These questions were intended to help further provide a picture of practical functioning of IEP Teams in their support of SWD. When asked to describe their role (Q7) as a leader of IEP Teams, half (50.70%) of the respondents identified that “The management and support needed by IEP Teams from me varies greatly by student and team.” An additional 24%, described their role as either significant or as having very specific processes for IEP Teams to follow as they develop IEPs.

Time in Special Education Leadership and Process to Enroll or Support

A cross tabulation was created to identify any relationship between the length of time the SED had spent in special education leadership and the reporting by the SED that they had a specific process for enrolling SWD in SOP (SQ14) (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Cross Tabulation Time in Leadership with Having a Process to Enroll SWD

Enrollment Process	Length of Time in Special Education Leadership				
	20 years or more	15-20 years	10-15 years	5-10 years	Less than 5 years
Yes	6 (54.5%)	3 (50%)	9 (47.4%)	8 (47.1%)	7 (38.9%)
No	4 (36.4%)	3 (50%)	10 (52.6%)	6 (35.3%)	9 (50%)
Unknown	1 (9.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5.6%)
Overall Stat Test of Percentages	.9				

The Overall Stats Test of Percentages acts as a chi-squared test within Qualtrics. A chi-squared statistic tests whether there is a relationship between two variables. This test produces a p-value to determine if there is a significant relationship between the two

variables. The resulting p-value of .9 means that there is no statistically significant relationship between time in special education leadership and having a process to enroll SWD in SOP.

A cross tabulation was created to identify any relationship between the length of time the SED had spent in special education leadership and the reporting by the SED that they had a process to guide IEP Teams when they enroll SWD in SOP (SQ26) (Table 4.3). The resulting p-value of .9 means that there is no statistically significant relationship between time in special education leadership and having a process to guide IEP Teams when they enroll SWD in SOP. Increased time in special education leadership did not increase the likelihood that there was a process in place to enroll SWD in SOP or to guide IEP Teams when they enroll SWD in SOP.

Table 4.3 Cross Tabulation Time in Leadership with Having a Process to Guide IEP Teams

IEP Guidance	Length of Time in Special Education Leadership				
	20 years or more	15-20 years	10-15 years	5-10 years	Less than 5 years
Yes	4 (36.4%)	2 (33.3%)	4 (21.1%)	5 (29.4%)	3 (16.7%)
No	5 (45.5%)	4 (66.7%)	11 (57.9%)	6 (35.3%)	11 (61.1%)
Unknown	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (5.3%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (5.6%)
Overall Stat Test of Percentages		.9			

Survey Data Applied to Research Question Number One

The response data for selective survey items will be described for each of the three research questions to more fully explore and answer them. As previously stated, the survey questions were aligned to each of the three research questions (Appendix B).

Research Question Number One (RQ1): What are the needs of SWD enrolled in

supplemental online programs?

Through multiple survey questions the respondents shared their perceptions of the needs of SWD in SOP. The survey instrument was not designed to gather an exhaustive list of needs, but to identify categorical needs that might be adapted to multiple structures.

Seventy-five percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the needs of SWD in SOP are different than their non-disabled peers (SQ21), but only 35% reported that their school or organization had specifically identified the specific needs of these students in this type of placement (SQ23). Again, 75% of the respondents reported their IEP Teams as being “aware of and are deliberate in their efforts” to meet the needs of SWD. This question also received a strong neutral response of 21% (SQ25). The respondents were not confident in the support SWD received through the design of the online courses offered to them with 65% of them reporting either a neutral or negative response (SQ32). An even higher percentage (73%) were not confident in the appropriateness of the reading, writing, or math requirements of the online courses for individual SWD (SQ36). When reflecting on the broad development of programs for SWD that meet their needs, there was a strong affirmative response of 84% (SQ49).

Table 4.4 Selected Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Number One: What are the needs of SWD enrolled in supplemental online programs? with Response Percentages

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Based on your current understanding and your experience, are the needs of students with disabilities different than their non-disabled peers when enrolled in supplemental online programs. (SQ21)	31.03	55.17	8.62	5.17	0
Within your school or organization, the needs of students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online programs have been identified and addressed as a specific student population? (SQ23)	1.72	34.48	37.93	22.41	3.45
The IEP Teams that I manage or lead within my school or organization are aware of, and are deliberate in their efforts, to meet the needs of students with disabilities when enrolled in supplemental online programs. (SQ25)	15.79	59.65	21.05	1.75	1.75
The design of the online courses where students with disabilities are enrolled reflects a clear understanding of varied student needs. (SQ32)	2.04	32.65	42.86	16.33	6.12
The readability levels, written language assignments and mathematical requirements are appropriate for students with disabilities enrolled in the online course. (SQ36)	0	27.08	45.83	18.75	8.33

	Definitely Yes	Probably Yes	Might or Might Not	Probably No	Definitely No
Programs are developed to meet the needs of individual students. (SQ49)	75	9.09	11.36	4.55	0

As the survey explored RQ1, there was evidence of confidence on the part of the respondents when discussing broad organization and IEP Team level awareness and operational work within the special education system. There was a lack of confidence in the ability to meet the needs of SWD when questions dealt with those needs at the level of the individual online course.

Survey Data Applied to Research Question Number Two

Research Question Number Two: What are the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in supplemental online programs?

Through multiple survey questions the respondents shared their perceptions of the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in SOP. The survey instrument was not designed to gather any one school or organization's complete, specific process, but to collect and describe specific characteristics of the current processes used by the respondent SED's school or organization.

Survey question 14 (SQ14) asked if the SED had a process for enrolling SWD in SOP. Out of the 67 respondents who answered this question, they were split evenly at 33 each with one unknown. When later asked if they had "a process to guide IEP Teams when they enroll SWD in SOP", the response was 37 "no" (63.79%) and 18 "yes" (31.03%) with 3 responding with "unknown" (SQ26). Affirmative answers to either or both survey questions 14 and 26 were used to identify survey respondents who qualified

for the phase two interviews. The majority of the SED described themselves as giving “significant guidance” to their IEP Teams (83%) (SQ15), and an even higher majority (90.16%) described themselves as allowing their IEP Teams to “function independently” (SQ16).

More than half (65.91%) of the SED surveyed provide “high quality professional learning in facilitating instruction and specialized support” to their IEP Teams (SQ41). They report (77%) using data-based decision-making practices that are “apparent to all stakeholders” (SQ45), and that data is collected from multiple sources when used to develop IEPs (91%) (SQ46). Ninety-three percent affirmed the input by multiple stakeholders (student, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school staff) “into how IEPs will ensure that students receive support” (SQ47).

Table 4.5 Selected Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Number Two: What are the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in supplemental online programs? with Response Percentages

Survey Question	Unknown	No	Yes		
Does your school or organization have a specific process for enrolling students with disabilities in supplemental online programs that is separate from the independent functioning of IEP Teams? (SQ14)	2.99	47.76	49.25		
Do you, or your school or organization, have a process to guide IEP Teams when they enroll students with disabilities in supplemental online programs? (SQ26)	5.17	63.79	31.03		
Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a leader of IEP Teams, I give significant guidance to the functioning of the IEP Teams. (SQ15)	21.31	62.29	8.2	8.2	0
As a leader of IEP Teams, I allow IEP Teams to function independently. (SQ16)	22.95	67.21	3.28	6.56	0
	Definitely Yes	Probably Yes	Might or Might Not	Probably No	Definitely No
High quality professional learning in facilitating instruction and specialized support is provided to staff members participating in IEP Teams in my school or organization. (SQ41)	34.09	31.82	20.45	6.82	6.82
Evidence of data-based decision-making is apparent to all stakeholders and is reflected in IEP meeting documents and notes. (SQ45)	52.27	25	15.91	4.55	2.27

Data come from multiple sources and is used to support development of and changes to student IEPs. (SQ46)	70.45	20.45	9.09	0	0
Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school staff all have input into how IEPs will ensure that students receive support. (SQ47)	79.55	13.64	6.82	0	0

As the survey addressed RQ2, there was evidence that while not all the schools or organizations represented had specific processes in place for enrollment and support of SWD in SOP, there is a balance between authoritative guidance and independent function among the IEP Teams. The processes used are based on the collected data and the input of multiple stakeholders.

Survey Data Applied to Research Question Number Three

Research Question Number Three (RQ3): Do the processes IEP Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How?

Through multiple survey questions the respondents shared their perceptions of the effectiveness of the current processes used by their IEP teams in meeting the needs of and supporting SWD in SOPs. The survey instrument was designed to collect data on various critical aspects of the process that would include follow-up on the student's performance and experience in the SOP or determination of the quality of outcomes for individual students.

SOP are accepted at least somewhat (67%) as an option for SWD within the schools represented by the SED surveyed, and a further 13% hold a neither positive or

negative position (SQ13). Fifty-nine percent report that online courses are “understood to be an effective supplement” for SWD (SQ17).

The processes used include stakeholder feedback and data collection leading to the “educational needs of SWD being met effectively” for 42.1% of the respondents with a strong neutral response of 42.11% while 15.79% disagree (SQ24). While 43.75% of respondents believe instructors and other staff can adapt online learning activities to student needs, 56.25% either are neutral or disagree with this ability to adapt online learning activities by the staff (SQ35). A large percentage (30%) reported that they neither agreed or disagreed that the interaction between IEP Teams of SWD and the providers of SOP has a positive impact on the academic performance of SWD. Forty-eight percent of respondents at least somewhat agreed that there is indeed a positive impact resulting from this interaction (SQ20).

While some (46%) respondents had significant confidence that the courses where SWD are enrolled provided “opportunities for appropriate instructor-student interaction” there was a strong neutral response of 44% (SQ37). Ninety-one percent replied that multi-sourced data is used to develop and, if necessary, change a student’s IEP to meet their needs (SQ46).

Table 4.6 Selected Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Number Three: Do the processes IEP Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How? with Response Percentages

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Within your organization or school, supplemental online programs are accepted as an educational option for students with disabilities. (SQ13)	4.48	64.18	13.43	13.44	4.48
Within your school or organization, online courses are commonly understood to be an effective supplement to a traditional education program for all students including those with disabilities. (SQ17)	4.92	54.1	11.48	22.95	6.56
Through stakeholder feedback or direct data collection, students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online programs within your school or organization are having their educational needs met effectively. (SQ24)	1.75	40.35	42.11	10.53	5.26
The online courses where students with disabilities are enrolled provide instructors and other staff with opportunities to adapt learning activities to student needs. (SQ35)	0	43.75	35.42	18.75	2.08
The IEP Teams of students with disabilities interact with the specific provider(s) of supplemental online programs for our school or organization to positively impact the academic performance of	3.39	47.45	23.73	16.94	8.47

	Definitely Yes	Probably Yes	Might or Might Not	Probably No	Definitely No
students with disabilities. (SQ20)					
The design of the courses where students with disabilities are enrolled provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student interaction, including opportunities for timely and frequent feedback about student progress. (SQ37)	4.17	41.67	43.75	8.33	2.08
Data come from multiple sources and is used to support development of and changes to student IEPs. (SQ46)	70.45	20.45	9.09	0	0
Participating in online courses through supplemental online programs gives students with disabilities access to rigorous curriculum, with full continuum of services, in a general education setting. (SQ42)	13.95	27.91	37.21	11.63	9.3

Survey question 42 (SQ42) asked the respondents a broad question regarding the use of SOP to give “SWD access to rigorous curriculum, with a full continuum of services, in a general education setting.” The responses to SQ42 are shown in Figure. The figure displays the broad range of responses showing that the SED have varied levels of confidence in the use of SOP to meet the needs of and support SWD.

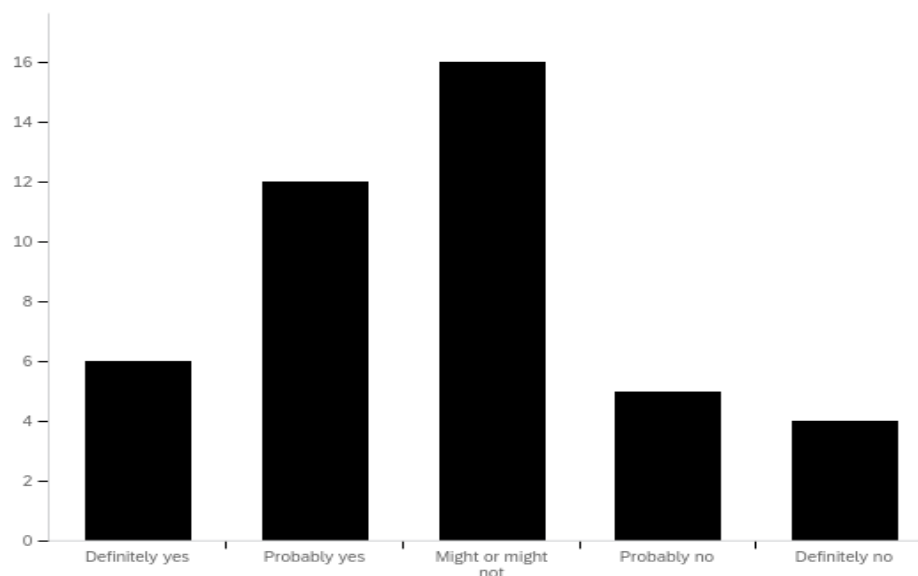


Figure 4.1 Survey Question 42 Reponses “Participating in online courses through supplemental online programs gives students with disabilities access to rigorous curriculum, with full continuum of services, in a general education setting.”

Phase Two Qualitative Data Analysis

The phase two qualitative portion of the mixed methods study began with the identification of potential interview participants through their responses to SQ14 and SQ26. This process identified 31 respondents who were sent an emailed request for an interview (Appendix D). Of the 31, ten eventually participated in an interview (32%)

Table 4.7 Survey Questions Used to Identify Potential Interview Participants with Responses

Survey Question	Yes	No	Unknown
SQ14. Does your school or organization have a specific process for enrolling students with disabilities in supplemental online programs that is separate from the independent functioning of IEP Teams?	33 (49.25%)	32 (47.76%)	2 (2.99%)
SQ26. Do you, or your school or organization, have a process to guide IEP Teams when they enroll students with disabilities in supplemental online programs?	18 (31.03%)	37 (63.79%)	3 (5.17%)

Nine of the ten interview participants were female, and nine were white. One male participated, and one participant was African American. All of the interview participants had been working in special education for at least 15 years. Sixty percent of them had been in special education leadership positions for at least ten years (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Interview Participant Demographic Information

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	1	10%
Female	9	90%
Ethnicity		
Black or African American	1	10%
White	9	90%
Years in Special Education		
20 years or more	5	50%
15-20 years	5	50%
Years in Special Education Leadership		
20 years or more	3	30%
15-20 years	0	0%
10-15	3	30%
5-10	3	30%
Less than 5 years	1	10%

The interview participants held a variety of leadership roles. One was a state level official. One led a portion of schools within a single county in a state in the northeastern United States including a charter school, an alternative high school and a school district. The rest can be accurately described as district level administrators. The size and structural organization of the districts including the organizational distance between the SED and the IEP Teams under their leadership varied significantly, and structural description was dependent on the SED's perception of norms for IEP Team management. One SED noted her personal presence at IEP Team meetings, others presented themselves as communicating policy and procedure outside of the IEP Team meeting

itself. The daily engagement level with IEP Teams and SWD was unclear and was not clarified through either the survey or interview process. The interview participants were able to respond to the questions effectively within their given roles.

Increasing Validity and Addressing Bias

Throughout the qualitative data collection and analysis, bracketing was used by the researcher to reduce bias and increase the credibility of the study. Researchers must bracket their own knowledge and experience in order to not have those elements impact either the collection or analysis of the data. The researcher restrained her own experiences of the practices of supplemental online programs (SOP), IEP Teams, and of what SWD need within those placements. Her own assumptions were bracketed in order to allow the participant experiences to be independently presented. Using bracketing in this way allowed the researcher to participate in the interview process as an observer rather than a member of that population (Creswell, 2013).

Initial Coding

As the interviews progressed, the researcher recognized the emergent theme in the data of the role of special education “case manager.” The researcher recognized that since she herself works in that specific special education role, there was a potential for inordinate attention to that role within the collected transcripts due to personal bias. With this recognition, when the transcribed interviews were uploaded into NVivo for deductive coding the researcher pre-selected the code “case manager.” Then further selected codes were derived from the three research questions: “needs,” “processes,” and “process meets and supports.”

The “case manager” code was applied to any instance where the term “case manager” was used, or where the transcript very specifically described that specific role. The “needs” code was used to find instances where the respondents identified needs of SWD who are enrolled in SOP. The “processes” code was used to find instances where the participants identified elements of or steps in the processes used within their school or organization to enroll or support SWD who are enrolled in SOP. The “process meets and supports” code was used to identify when reference was made to a process being implemented with corresponding results of the implementation. The results of the process could either be positive or negative regarding their impact on SWD in SOP, and still receive this code.

Outcomes of Deductive Coding

Deductive coding occurs when sections of the transcripts are categorized with a specific structure in mind to set the stage for further analysis within the initial established structures. This allows the data to be chunked for analysis. The structure applied to this data set was the three research questions and the emergent code “case manager” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The initial cycle of coding yielded very few sections of transcript coded with either the “case manager” or “process meets and supports” code. The interview transcripts were once again reviewed with a focus on identifying areas that matched these particular codes as references to “case managers” often were implied and process parts may not have been recognized during the initial cycle. The resulting codes and references of the first cycle of coding are displayed in Figure 4.2.

Name	Files	References	Created on	Created by	Modified on	Modified by
Case Manager	10	41	11/3/2020 4:25 PM	SLS	11/11/2020 5:17 PM	SLS
Needs	10	67	11/4/2020 5:03 PM	SLS	11/11/2020 5:14 PM	SLS
Process	10	85	11/4/2020 5:03 PM	SLS	11/11/2020 5:10 PM	SLS
Process Meets and Supports	5	15	11/4/2020 5:04 PM	SLS	11/11/2020 5:00 PM	SLS

Figure 4.2 NVivo Codebook

Outcomes of Pattern Coding

The first cycle of deductive coding led to a second cycle of pattern coding. Pattern codes are sub-codes that are inferential and further explain the text data. They emerge from the initial cycle's set of codes. They increase meaning, and are definable (Miles et al., 2014). Sub-codes were identified within the four original codes based on patterns and themes that emerged as the data was reviewed and analyzed. Further analysis of each of these sub-codes will be explored within this section and supported with quotes directly from the transcripts.

Process Needs and Supports

When reviewing the outcomes of the initial coding, it was clear that the code associated with Research Question #3, “process needs and supports”, was only referenced by half of the participants, and then only for a total of 15 times. In order to apply this code, there needed to be either a positive or a negative association in the transcript between the processes used by IEP Teams to support SWD in SOP and student outcomes. This was a high standard and resulted in a limited number of references within this code.

Within the 15 references that were cited, a sub-code was identified through emergent coding. This sub-code was “reflection.” Three of the participants referenced looking back at what had been previously done that was successful when supporting students.

Table 4.8 Process Needs and Supports Sub-Code Theme Description

Theme and Corresponding Description

Reflection - Educators reviewing past experiences to identify supports and processes that can be documented as having led to successful student outcomes.

Well, I think now we have to look at the data that we have from our spring. So how engaged were the students? Did they make progress in their IEP objectives? Was it a format that works for them? I think we would have to go back and look at that piece of information, even though it's minimal, but be able to look at that moving forward if we were to suggest an online program for our students.

(A)

This “reflection” code was applied specifically to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the closure of face-to-face schooling for most students in the state in the northeastern United States in March of 2020.

I think looking at the data and being able to have a lot of baseline data on how students do in class, so being able to take a period of time in virtual classrooms, if you will, and see how the students are doing and comparing and then moving forward with a placement decision for families long term. (A)

Another one of the participants who was coded for “reflection” shared

Honestly, at this point, I think the thing we can do to improve it is really paying attention to what did we learn from spring and what did we learn from it.

(A)

While the “reflection” sub-code revealed an important element of the data, the minimal numbers of references within the “process meets and supports” code did not result in substantial data to elucidate Research Question Three. There were very few specific references as to how the processes used by schools or organizations to support or enroll SWD in SOP had direct impact on outcomes for these students.

Needs

The “needs” code was used to find instances where the respondents identified or described the needs of SWD who are enrolled in supplemental online programs (SOP). The researcher returned to the transcript and used emergent coding to identify sub-codes within the coded transcript. The sub-codes that resulted from this cycle of coding included: “credit recovery,” “flexibility,” “generic reference to student needs,” “graduation push,” “role of parents,” “support staff,” and “teacher-student relationships.” Descriptions of the “needs” sub-code themes are displayed in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Needs Sub-Code Theme Descriptions

Theme and Corresponding Description
Credit Recovery - Students needing to retake courses that they have failed in their first attempt within the traditional high school schedule.
Flexibility - Students can work on their courses at a time and location that fits their schedule or preference.
Generic Reference to Student Needs - General or collective reference to the needs of SWD
Graduation Push - The urgency or desire for students to complete graduation requirements successfully in order to culminate in being awarded a high school diploma.
Role of Parents - The participation or presence of parents in the enrollment or support of SWD in SOP.
Support Staff - Identification of staff other than special education case managers who support, monitor or coach SWD.
Teacher - Student Relationships - The connections between teacher and student that work towards the successful completion of academic tasks and the attainment of required credits.

Name	Files	References	Created on	Created by	Modified on	Modified by
Case Manager	10	41	11/3/2020 4:25	SLS	11/11/2020 5:17 PM	SLS
Needs	10	67	11/4/2020 5:03	SLS	11/11/2020 5:14 PM	SLS
Credit Recovery	7	11	11/12/2020 9:13	SLS	11/13/2020 6:47 PM	SLS
Generic Reference to Stud	7	10	11/10/2020 4:59	SLS	11/13/2020 7:22 PM	SLS
Support Staff	3	4	11/12/2020 9:15	SLS	11/13/2020 7:20 PM	SLS
Flexibility	4	7	11/10/2020 5:02	SLS	11/13/2020 6:46 PM	SLS
Graduation Push	4	7	11/13/2020 5:28	SLS	11/13/2020 6:46 PM	SLS
Teacher - Student Relatio	3	4	11/13/2020 5:33	SLS	11/13/2020 7:19 PM	SLS
Role of Parents	2	2	11/13/2020 5:36	SLS	11/13/2020 6:40 PM	SLS
Process	10	85	11/4/2020 5:03	SLS	11/11/2020 5:10 PM	SLS
Process Meets and Supports	5	15	11/4/2020 5:04	SLS	11/11/2020 5:00 PM	SLS

Figure 4.3 NVivo Code Book Displaying Needs Subcodes with Total References

Credit Recovery

Seventy percent of the interview participants referenced “credit recovery”. Credit recovery is the process by which students who have lost credit make that credit up outside of their traditional school day. Credit recovery through SOP is a significant use of this placement at the schools represented by the interview participants. The participants mentioned credit recovery as an off-handed, even assumed use of SOP for both general and special education students.

We have students that need to make up coursework that have failed classes, so they take virtual classes in order to make up credits. (A)

The use of online courses for credit recovery purposes was reflected in the responses of 7 participants for a total of 11 references. This establishes it as a common practice among these schools, and an option for most students who need it. This use of SOP appears to have a relatively long history as compared to the use of online coursework more generally.

We've always used supplemental online programs for credit recovery for some of our students. We've used the programs for online learning for kids who either could not attend because of special needs. So we've always had some form of online learning available, at least as long as I've been here. (A)

One participant who is a county level special education director over a variety of types of schools described the use of SOP.

If it is a traditional in-seat program, traditional K-12, then it's going to be more credit recovery. If it is your non-traditional charter, that's a whole separate program. They have a three tier program; they have their primary, secondary, and then they have their virtual program. So it's not necessarily credit recovery. It's these children and their families have opted for this different delivery system. (C)

The use of SOP for credit recovery is a significant way that students use these programs and courses. It is a means by which the likelihood of graduating high school with a diploma is enhanced and is therefore commonly used. SWD have at least a similar need for credit recovery as do general education students, so it accounts for a significant reason these students participate in SOP.

Flexibility

The sub-code “flexibility” related to the ways SOP and online courses more generally allow students to work on or participate in their courses at a time and location that fits their schedule or preference.

I think most of the online classes are pretty flexible, whether they have IEPs or not. Because they're already flexible. There's this like theory in my head

about online classes, except for when the deadline is the deadline. That's the end.

You know, the whole point of online classes is flexibility. (B)

“Flexibility” as it related to student schedules and personal activities or priorities was mentioned by at least two participants.

They have schedules such that it does not allow them to take six classes, or if they have band, for example, that takes up significant hours in their school day. So they use virtual classes to be able to take additional classes outside of the typical school day. We also have exceptional athletes that sometimes are not able to go to brick-and-mortar school because of their athletic schedule. (A)

Students with special needs benefitting from the flexibility of SOP were noted by two participants.

We've used the programs for online learning for kids who could not attend because of special needs. (A)

Doing what we've been doing. But with a different area, a different topic, a different delivery system. If a kid can't sit in a class and listen to a teacher deliver, maybe he can, you know, maybe he can do it in snapshots of time. And again, that's something I'd like to see our district look at as part of the overall offerings rather than when we have a behavior problem or discipline issue or a medically fragile child. (A)

The seven references to the theme of “flexibility” represented different types of flexibility both of online education in general and of the flexibility required for uncommon special needs within the sphere of special education.

Generic Reference to Needs

There were 10 references among 70% of the participants to the needs of SWD in a general or a collective manner.

We just need to meet the needs of students. (B)

Technology needs or student technology deficits were included as part of the collective needs.

What does that kid need to be successful for virtual? Like some of the students really submitting, even really high functioning students submitting stuff digitally--It was just too many steps, like to complete the task and find the portal it had to go in and find all the steps in the portal to attach it. They just couldn't do it. They were just emailing stuff to the teacher where that's fine, but do we need to write that in specifically, so that they can just go to that or can they just submit videos? (B)

There was evidence of the SED balancing the individualized needs of specific students with shared, frequently occurring needs. The following quote shows evidence of proactive envisioning of student needs as replicated in online learning environments.

A lot of it has been, again, the case-by-case scenarios that make you think about those things. For instance, "Well, we don't need to worry about the kid who doesn't come to class prepared." I'm like, "Whoa, wait a minute. Yes, you do. Think about it. What are they going to need to have in front of them in order to even get started?" "Well, we don't need to really worry about extended timelines for a student for assignments, because it's untimed." Wait a minute. Yes you do. You need to be thinking about if they're going to get through X amount of

curriculum within the year, is the student going to need some type of a calendar to help them pace out when they should be on each lesson and in those types of things. And helping them understand that those are all things that you might need to put in the supplementary aids and services part of the IEP, because otherwise the kid is going to be up to two nights or two weeks in a row all night long, trying to get it all done by the end of the card marking. (B)

As a result of the Covid-19 shut down and the resultant increase in online learning, some participants grouped the needs of SWD coming out of this experience collectively.

I think what we learned this time around is some of them need more like adaptive technology, like some of the chromebooks really weren't working. They needed the iPad, but some of the stuff the teachers were loading didn't work as well on the iPad. Did they need more follow up in person or follow up Zoom conversation to talk through a lesson. Did they maybe need to be able to retake a lesson or have a preview of the lessons so that they could see it a couple of times because it wasn't quite sticking as well as in-person instruction. (A)

Delineating specific versus general needs of SWD in SOP is a nuanced process. The participants consistently stated a recognition that students have individual needs, but also that many needs are common to a large population of special education students.

I think our special educators were especially careful to make sure in those continuity of learning plans that they were paying attention to what those needs were of their special needs students or what their anticipated needs are going to

be. Actually, I think special ed kids are getting more than what they would normally get. It's not in person, but it's face-to-face in a lot of cases. (S)

Graduation Push

Four of the participants mentioned the urgency and importance of using SOP as part of the important, earnest efforts to get students to leave high school with a diploma. The following quote shares the emotion and the desire to support students as they complete required courses for graduation.

You got to get them through, yeah. Get them through. Yep, get them to the next stage for sure. (B)

With the increased use of online education that came with the shutdown of face-to-face schooling due to Covid-19, some participants discussed their current ability to service students with SOP including examining and increasing their catalog of courses available to all their students.

We've been having some conversation about that because not everything the student needs to graduate is offered through the suite of classes we purchased. (A)

There was a total of seven references to the code “graduation push.” The transcripts show a willingness across several participant schools to do whatever it takes to get SWD through their required courses successfully.

What we feel happens in our end is that they hand deliver those students to the graduation line. It's a lot of customized learning. (B)

Role of Parents

Parents were mentioned very rarely in the transcripts. During the coding the researcher looked for evidence of the participation or presence of parents in the support of the SWD or any mention of parental participation in the process of enrollment in SOP. The interviews focused on school staff, and how they are led or directed by SED. While not the focus of the research or the interview questions, the scarcity of mention of parents is an important element of the data to be considered.

Parents are wanting to move to all online. (A)

Four participants mentioned parents in a significant way. The inclusion of parents as a theme was very limited. Two responses are included here to give a broad picture of perceptions of the SED regarding the role of parents.

Parents think that they should not help, but they have to at least be the motivator. (B)

These two mentions of parents are very different. One is broad, about online education in general, and the other reflects the importance of their support role when students are participating in learning activities at home while online.

Support Staff

The code “support staff” was used to identify references to school staff other than special education case managers who support, monitor or coach SWD. Three participants mentioned different types of “support staff” other than case manager a total of four times.

Like the motivational aspect or skill deficits... the success rate is going to be a little bit better for the students with disabilities with more individualized help. (S)

There were descriptions of support provided by school staff that fell under the description of monitoring, coaching, or helping.

They can take them after school. or do them at home. But we also offer a time where they can actually take a class in school. So it's like one of their hours. And if there is, there's a monitor there and he's there to help out with things. (B)

Even with intensive support by school staff, student outcomes are not always successful.

Anecdotally we don't have a lot of success. If we do, we have heavy coaching. (B)

Teacher-Student Relationships

Three participants referred to “teacher-student relationships” a total of four times. This theme represented the connections between teacher and student that work towards the successful completion of academic tasks and the attainment of required credits. The case manager code was not excluded from this theme, but the case manager code itself was applied with or without the relational elements that were coded “teacher-student relationship.”

It's easier when I have you sitting next to me, and I can provide you with the instruction. But if I never get to physically be in the same room with you, it may look a little bit different. (A)

After the Covid-19 shutdown of schools, questions remained about how to support students, and how to maintain effective teacher-student relationships.

How much time do you need to be spending with a student online? Email. phone calls to support that student? How do you document services for a student

who's online? So we have provided that professional development to our staff after March 13. (A)

One participant identified that students have a hard time asking for help, and that this difficulty was exacerbated by the shutdown.

...reaching out is the problem. (B)

Process

All ten interview participants were coded for at least one reference to the “process” of supporting SWD in supplemental online programs (SOP) with a total of 85 references. The “process” code was used to find instances where the participants identified elements of or steps in the processes used within their school or organization to enroll SWD in SOP or support SWD who are enrolled in SOP. After the initial cycle of coding, the researcher returned to the transcripts to identify emergent sub-codes. The resulting themes from this cycle of coding included: “training,” communication,” “document sharing,” and “reference to IEP process.” Descriptions of the “process” sub-code themes are displayed in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 Process Sub-Code Theme Descriptions

Theme and Corresponding Description

Training - Preparation and instruction in special education practices.

Communication - Sharing and transfer of information through varied methods including face-to-face conversation, email, phone calls, texting, and messages within learning management systems.

Document Sharing - Methods of collaboration through documents and materials that can be referenced by special educators and providers of supplemental online programs (SOP).

Reference to IEP Process - Any portion of the IEP process or IEP Team meeting as a whole.

Training

Five participants discussed preparation and instruction in special education practices as it related to the processes used to enroll and support SWD in SOP. Five of the six references related to cyclical or regularly occurring sessions of “training.”

We have three meetings throughout the year where I present or highlight best practices, or have other people highlight best practices and share resources.....I send monthly newsletters out that just kind of are reminders for some compliance stuff. But I also say, look, this is on the legal horizon or look at this best practice. (A)

Two of the participants expressed significant confidence in the training and preparation of their special educators.

I really believe that our special ed teachers are very prepared, very well-trained. Our district is very fortunate in that when they want to request training, we want to get them to training. We certainly don't want to be caught behind the eight ball with special education law, because that'll get you in trouble big time. So we offer them the training. I think they are very, very prepared. (B)

I will tell you that I believe our special ed department is very trained at meeting the specific needs of each student. (B)

Communication

Eight of the participants cited varied forms of “communication” including sharing and transfer of information through varied methods including face-to-face conversation, email, phone calls, texting, and messages within learning management systems.

The people on both sides are communicating more and more effectively, but that's not always the case. And if that's not the case, then we need to guide our special ed people or our online people about what collaboration looks like. We almost need courses in collaboration to say it's important that both sides know exactly what's going on. (S)

Of the 13 references, nine either use the term “direct” to describe the “communication” or describe a communication exchange between at least two stakeholders involved in the process of supporting SWD in SOP.

So that person can directly communicate with the case manager because they're the one that's going to help the kid get through the class. (B)

“Communication” was referenced throughout different times and elements of the process.

So they do a lot of that prep work of talking to people about where the kid currently is, what does the kid need, and now what is the expectation of the program going to be and what is the kid going to be expected to be able to do? And then that way they can pair that up with the student's strengths and weaknesses to help us figure out the goals and objectives. Do they still make sense or do we need to adjust those in any way? (B)

Document Sharing

Within the “process” code, six references to the theme “document sharing” were noted.

We have a shared Google drive that has our processes, procedures and resources all in it. So people have access to those materials...So, you know, we do

a lot of support for our staff and a lot of sharing resources and information and giving them the tools they need to do the job. (A)

One of the SED acknowledged some uncertainty about the “process” for sharing information among school staff, but made an assumption based on processes that she knew were in place.

I'm guessing what should be happening is the coordinator should be letting them know that, OK, because his name is on that hour. So my case managers give an accommodation sheet at the beginning of every semester to the instructor. (B)

Google documents and forms were mentioned two times within the “document sharing” theme. Shared documents were the basis of a tracking and accountability system for one of the SED.

We use Google Docs as a form that I created, because I was like, "Look, I need accountability." Because I mean, because virtual is one of those animals that can kind of get away from you. I was like, "I need to have available that if I ask to see what's going on, we need to be able to provide that." (C)

Reference to IEP Process

The “reference to IEP process” code was applied liberally to areas of transcript that referred to the IEP process as a whole. In response to the question, “Is there a separate process for enrolling students with disabilities?” one SED replied:

Well, the separate process would be the IEP process. So if we're changing their placement, then that becomes an IEP team decision. It has to involve the IEP process. (A)

Eight of the participants cited the IEP process 21 times. One reference identified the accountability the IEP Team has to the parent.

In my world, it's all about documentation. So how are you going to document your service time? How do you document progress and IEP goals and objectives? How do you document the use and accessibility of supplementary aids and services? So really it's about how I, as the case provider, am going to ensure the parent that I'm actually providing what is written into an IEP. (A)

One of the SED mentioned the special education concept of a free and appropriate education (FAPE). Appropriateness requires that schools provide services, accommodations, and modifications that strive to move the student toward grade-level proficiency, and that the provision of services, accommodations, and modifications is instructionally beneficial to the student (Fuchs et al., 2010; Gregson & Chavez, 2015). They identified concerns that online courses may not be an appropriate offer of FAPE for some students, and that those students might need additional support or alternative placements.

The IEP team really does have to consider if that's an offer of FAPE or not. If we don't think they can access those classes, then technically we need to provide more. I mean, it's honestly a little bit of a sticky situation. (B)

Another emphasized the individualized attention and focus that should be inherent in the IEP that is produced for each student.

Honestly, I think if we had more, we would get more automaticity with it. our teacher consultant, myself, the principal, we sit down and we really just ... I mean, every kid's different. So we really try to honor that in the IEP. There's no

rubber stamp to make online learning successful. Every kid has different challenges. (B)

One participant did an extensive description of their own vision of the IEP process and described their role and supervision of the process. This included the team element with evidence of direct oversight.

We work as teams...first, you have to gather the data. The IEP process kind of flows. How do we gather the right data for the plan? How are we identifying gaps in learning? And then how are we writing goals to remediate those gaps? I review that every year and then if we get new information. This year I really focused on progress reports. I don't want to see like, "Have a nice summer." And then I'm like, "There's no data in there." I have a process where, and I'm not sure if this is what you mean, but they have to write the IEP by Friday and then I read it and give feedback and then they adjust it, because there are certain things that we want to make sure ... we want to write high quality IEPs. (B)

The placement determination may come before the IEP Team meeting, and therefore shape the process.

I feel like if a family or a school has made the determination that a student should be in a program, then we run the IEP knowing that the student is going to an online program. And we determine what those supplementary aids and services might look like. Pretty much the goals and objectives are the same, unless of course it's about school success, about coming to class prepared, we might not be having goals of that

nature. But everything else is pretty specific to the environment and the learning program they're going to be in. (B)

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that IEP meetings are not taking place in person due to school closures and other restrictions. The positive, and potentially long-term, impact of this phenomena was mentioned by one participant.

Another thing we learned is meetings don't have to be done in person. That Zoom is working fine or whatever platform you're finding. And that parent participation has skyrocketed with IEPs and other things that they're more willing to attend. And it's going better than sitting around the table. It's less contentious. There's not as much threatening and whatever. So that's nice. (S)

Case Manager

All ten interview participants were coded for at least one reference to the initial code “case manager” with a total of 41 references overall. In response to a follow up question asking about the centrality of the role of the “case manager,” a state level SED answered,

Mm-hmm. I think that that's how they see themselves. They are the primary person responsible because ultimately they have to grade them. They have to pass them. (S)

The “case manager” coded references were reviewed twice to identify emergent sub-code themes. This code had been attached to a wide variety of topics, so determining sub-codes was not done as quickly as with the other initial deductive codes. The identification of the sub-codes for the other three initial codes made the researcher aware and attentive to those identified sub-codes, and those sub-codes seemed in evidence

within the “case manager” code. “Communication” and “document sharing” themes were represented, but with a different tone and orientation. These previously identified themes were melded and expanded into the case manager sub-code of “stakeholder interaction.” This sub-code included various types of interactions among stakeholders within special education including, but not limited to case managers, students, teacher consultants, SED, parents, supplemental online program (SOP) providers, administrators, and online course instructors or providers. The other emergent sub-code identified by the researcher was “dedication.” This sub-code reflected the desire and commitment on the part of special educators to see their students succeed including a willingness to self-sacrifice on behalf of their students (Table 4.11).

Table 4.11 Case Manager Sub-Code Theme Descriptions

Theme and Corresponding Description
<p>Stakeholder Interaction - Varied types of interactions among stakeholders within special education including, but not limited to: case managers, students, teacher consultants, SED, parents, SOP providers, and administrators.</p> <p>Dedication - The desire and commitment on the part of special educators to see their students succeed including a willingness to self-sacrifice on the part of their students.</p>

Stakeholder Interaction

Seven participants were coded for “stakeholder interaction” with a total of 14 references. The time and effort case managers spend with students was evident. Interactions with students include those centered in academic content, tutoring or coaching.

We have to talk about what type of outreach will our case manager provide that student. Right? So we need to know how that's going to look is that

email is that phone is that zoom or Google meetings? What does that look like in order to support that student's needs? (A)

Parents were mentioned by two of the participants as stakeholders in relation to case managers, but not with the same sense of necessity or relevance in terms of outcomes for students that were applied to other stakeholders in the process of supporting SWD.

In my world, it's all about documentation. So how are you going to document your service time? How do you document progress and IEP goals and objectives? How do you document the use and accessibility of supplementary aids and services? So really it's about how am I as the case provider am going to ensure the parent that I'm actually providing what is written into an IEP. (A)

At least one of the participants described the mediator role of the case manager between parents and other school staff involved in the process of enrolling or supporting SWD in SOP.

The case manager usually discusses the options with the parents, and then follows up with the administrator for the summer school program as to what's going to be best in what they've decided together. But I will say it's driven by the case manager, who is a special education teacher, and the lead on the IEP team. (S)

The case manager is seen to be the central figure engaging other school staff members who are part of the enrollment or support system for the student. One participant described the efforts of multiple staff members to make the placement successful for students.

We always work with the counselor, because we want to make sure, obviously, that if they're doing this that it's going to count for their credits. I have one teacher who's a teacher consultant. She typically will work with those kids. It's the counselor or the case manager, sometimes the general education teacher just trying to figure it out. (B)

One SED described the confidence they have in a specific case manager to support the SWD on their individual caseloads.

She would come to me and say, "This is what's best for the student, sign off on it", and I would truly trust her decision. She's a great person, and has been in the district for a long time. I know she would certainly meet the needs of the student. So, if they came to me and recommended to do an online course, I'd sign off on it in a heartbeat. (B)

The “case manager” was identified as the person with the responsibility to connect with the online course instructor or provider. Case managers are charged with communicating the students' IEP mandated accommodations. While there is an established process in the opinion of the SED, there was still some ambivalence on whether this sharing of accommodations was actually happening.

My case managers give an accommodation sheet at the beginning of every semester to the instructor. He would be considered the instructor, so he should be getting those. (B)

The effective implementation of the student’s accommodations necessitates an understanding of what is available through the learning management system itself. Between the case manager and the online instructor or provider there must be an effective

working knowledge of what can be done within the course to align with the requirements of the IEP.

Also, working with the online teacher in regard to what supplementary aids and services that student may require online. Some of them are inherent in online programming, but others are not. So being able to have those discussions with “state virtual school”, or whatever our virtual program, is important as well. (A)

Effective communication of the students' IEP contents and specific needs may require more than an exchange of documents as explained by one SED and may require consistent monitoring by the case manager.

In a case of an outside provider, it would be just the transmission of the IEP in a phone call. Some conversation between the teacher of record and the case manager explaining what the student's specific needs are is needed. Sometimes those aren't really communicated clearly via paper on the IEP. So the case manager checks in with them if not daily, I would say again, at least weekly to see what the progress is and how it's going and what needs to be adjusted. (A)

One participant recognized that direct interaction between the case manager and the instructor of the online class would be beneficial, and that the lack of it is frustrating.

I wish there was a way for the case manager to actually connect with the online instructor. So we didn't always have that go-between of the online coordinator. There's always a middle man. To me, if I was the teacher, that would drive me crazy. (B)

Another SED expressed surprise and interest that a conversation could be had between the school staff and a state virtual school or other online provider.

I think it would definitely fall on the case person, but we've not had literally almost zero experience with that at all. And any experience that we had, I think, would be very, very limited. So the communication with us and "state virtual school" as far as needing accommodations, let's just say it's non-existent. I've never had a contact with the "state virtual school" saying, "Hey listen, I got a student here who has a disability. How can you help them out?" We've never had that conversation. (B)

Dedication

Six of the participants referenced the theme "dedication" a total of 12 times. This theme reflected the desire and commitment on the part of special educators to see their students succeed, and to have them move steadily toward their high school graduation through the earning of required credits. This included behaviors that would be over and above the basic job requirements of a special education teacher and can be described as a wholehearted commitment to doing whatever they deem necessary to support their assigned caseload of students. The view of this SED of the centrality of the case manager role is clear in their statement.

They're the one that's going to help the kid get through the class. (B)

The quantity and difficulty of the work involved in preparing and in implementing support for these students was directly stated by the participants. Their uncertainty and frustration are clear as their phrases tumble out.

I think sometimes it is overwhelming as a credit recovery when we know someone's on the fence about being ... I've had some teachers really coach people. I don't think we're scared of it. Sometimes it's hard because we have to watch that ... you can't know every subject. So it's like, okay, they're going to do an online physics. I mean, sometimes you have to watch the video too, so it can be kind of intense. (B)

Between learning the course delivery system, as well as being familiar with the content, the case managers are often seen as carrying much of the load in personalization of the student's learning within their courses.

What we feel happens on our end is that they hand deliver those students to the graduation line. It's a lot of customized learning. (B)

The theme of "dedication" was not only applied to the workload efforts but was also attached to the emotion and connectedness that exists between case manager and caseload students.

They tend to become very possessive of their caseload students and want to make sure that they're not just giving them over to somebody else. They kind of want to exhaust all avenues, but they still view it as ok if everybody decides that that's what's right for the kid. (A)

The state level SED acknowledged that the individual case manager's personal opinion on the broad appropriateness of online education for SWD may limit the options these students have to participate in these educational options.

If you have a teacher that's, you know, a little bit more protective and wants them, you know, not to be out in gen ed as much versus being more in

special education classes--it depends so much on our special education teacher's philosophy, and so I've been working out that. (S)

The resistance to online courses is perceived to be in the lack of oversight or control that the case manager has over the content or delivery of the course.

I feel special education teachers have such big hearts for their kids that they want a little bit more protection for them. They feel like they're going to get that by not doing online. (S)

This “dedication” was recognized throughout the first few months of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the accompanying shut down of face-to-face learning in the state in the northeastern United States in the Spring of 2020.

What I found were my special ed teachers were contacting me saying, "I can't let my kid go for three weeks or four weeks. I have to be working with my kid. Do you have any suggestions?" A lot of them started making phone calls and took it upon themselves. So only two days into the shutdown they were already meeting with their students on a regular basis. (S)

While navigating this very different educational reality, the SED saw their case managers going deeper, being creative, and continuing to work hard to service their students. There was a recognition of the vitality of what was being done by some special educators.

The teachers are working really hard to do whatever they can. I think the IEPs are more dynamic because the IEPs aren't being looked at right now as being a year from now. It's more often our teachers that are finding the information that we need to do because they care about their students. (S)

Mixing the Results

The final phase of this study addresses all three research questions. Mixed methods research takes the quantitative and qualitative data and mixes it to further explore the data set. As previously noted, the survey questions were aligned to each of the research questions. After the qualitative coding and identification of codes and sub-codes was completed, the researcher returned to the survey question alignment chart, and noted specific questions and themes of interest due to the deeper explanations that emerged from the combination of the two data streams. What follows is a section for each of the three research questions. Within each of those sections are descriptions of selected areas where mixtures of the two phases of data collection was recognized as leading to deeper meaning and exploration of the research questions.

Research Question Number One (RQ1): What are the needs of SWD enrolled in supplemental online programs?

Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question One and Theme of Generic Reference to Student Needs

The survey data shows that the special education directors (SED) have a fairly strong perception that students with disabilities (SWD) in supplemental online programs (SOP) have needs that are specific to that educational placement as reflected in the ratings for SQ21 with 86.2% at either agree or strongly agree. The recognition that there is an organization- or school-wide ability to adapt to meet the needs of SWD when they are discretely identified was seen in the ratings of SQ49. Seventy-five percent rated SQ49 as “definitely yes” when asked if programs are developed that meet the needs of individual students. Most of the SED interviewed assumed that an Individual Education

Program Team (IEP Team) would meet to review the needs of each student with the understanding that either the overall appropriateness of the enrollment in an SOP would be determined or the individual student's specific needs, services, and accommodations would be reviewed and adjusted to fit this setting.

There is kind of a referral process that the parents go through with this administrator. We really look at what does the kid need...kind of case by case. (A)

Research Question Number Two (RQ2): What are the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in supplemental online programs?

Two identified qualitative themes, "document sharing" and "reference to IEP process" prompted the most connections by the researcher to specific aligned survey questions.

Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Two and Theme of Document Sharing

The survey data strongly demonstrated the SED's perception that in order to have IEPs that ensure student support there needs to be input from multiple stakeholders. Ninety-three percent of respondents rated SQ47 with "probably or definitely yes" which referenced this broadly sourced input. This necessitates organization of data in a meaningfully accessible way. Less than a third of the survey respondents (31.03%) stated they had a process for guiding IEP Teams of SWD in supplemental online programs (SOP) (SQ26). The SED affirmed (91%) that the data-based decision-making of their IEP Teams is reflected in the IEP meeting documents and notes, and that multi-sourced data is used in the development of and changes to IEPs (SQ46). This often includes a process to communicate with supplemental online providers. While no survey questions addressed any specific method of document sharing the above-mentioned questions

highlighted the respondents' perceptions of effective processes for sharing data among stakeholders in the student's IEP.

Similarly, there were no interview questions that directly addressed methodology for document sharing, but the need for creating and maintaining documents that are readily available for sharing and use was referenced by several participants to varied degrees.

As opposed to reinventing the wheel every time. So no, nothing's published yet, but we're working on getting stuff written up, so that we just have that available to us. (C)

The need for electronic document sharing and usage arose during the interviews.

We made it electronic for all of our staff because it was easier for our general education staff because we have 14000 students, you know, almost two thousand students with IEPs. So keeping track of whether or not you provided an accommodation was daunting. So what? It's the law. (A)

Two participants identified the use of Google drive documents, and others described the online options they were using to share documents.

So there's a virtual meeting sharing of documentation of their supplementary aids and services. So sometimes what might look different? (A)

The Covid-19 pandemic seemed to escalate the process of electronic document sharing.

Well, we created this year, who would have thought we ever would have needed it, but a virtual IEP meeting document. So just for staff, knowing how to write the IEP when you don't have people in front of you. (B)

Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Two and Theme of Reference to IEP Process

Only 18 of the 58 (31%) survey respondents reported having “a process to guide IEP Teams when they enroll SWD in supplemental online programs (SOP)”. The SED perceive themselves as giving guidance while allowing IEP teams a degree of independence. The IEP Team process represents to the SED the input of multiple stakeholders ensuring the SWD receives effective support. Seven of the respondents expanded their thoughts on the IEP Team process to clearly state that before a student with an IEP was enrolled in a SOP a meeting of the IEP Team is required. The remaining three described the role of the case manager or counselor over that of the team as the lead in enrolling the students in SOP with the decision driven by the need to make up required credits for graduation. One interview participant was direct when asked “if there was a separate process for enrolling students with disabilities?”

Well, the separate process would be the IEP process. So if we're changing their placement, then that becomes an IEP team decision. (A)

Research Question Number Three (RQ3): Do the processes IEP Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How?

Survey Questions Aligned to Research Question Three and Theme of Reflection

The survey data showed that the SED perceived a generally favorable attitude within their school or organization toward SWD participating in SOP (56.72%) with 31.34% neither positive nor negative. This suggests some evidence that there have been some successful experiences when SWD have been enrolled in these courses. This

corresponds to the emergent theme of “reflection” in that school staff are sensing a need to look at what has worked for students and build accommodations and processes around those successful experiences.

Analysis of Responses Based on Interview Participant Classification

For each of the eight base interview questions, four sample responses were selected. One from each of the four identified classifications of SED represented in the sample.

Table 4.12 Selected Responses to Each of the Eight Base Interview Questions

1. Briefly describe how your school or organization approaches supplemental online programs.	
State Level (S)	<i>There's a whole variety of ways that people are doing it...They felt like they were really reactive. And they're still very troubled with that that they reacted because they didn't know a whole lot about online learning</i>
County Level (C)	<i>When students are being considered for virtual programming, we review the IEP.</i>
Class A (A)	<i>We've always used supplemental online programs for credit recovery for some of our students. We've used the programs for online learning for kids who either could not attend because of special needs, they had reasons where they needed to pick up extra classes.</i>
Class B (B)	<i>We use them for credit recovery, for the most part. That's for a general education and our special education students. Although with all this COVID stuff, we could be using it more. Then we have an alternative program where that's the main curriculum.</i>
2. Do you think there needs to be more than normal attention to course placement, performance or outcomes in a supplemental online program by the IEP team of students with disabilities than for other types of class placements?	
State Level (S)	<i>I am seeing an influx of IEPs and things that are just way more dynamic, way more creative than what I've ever seen before. I think in some ways our special ed population is benefiting from this.</i>
County Level (C)	<i>So any placement, whether it is online or whether it's traditional in-seat, needs to be a consideration of the IEP team to make sure that we have the appropriate supports in place for students for their success.</i>
Class A (A)	<i>We have to talk about what type of outreach will our case manager provide that student. Right? So we need to know how that's going to look. Is that email? Is that phone? Is that Zoom or Google meetings? What does that look like in order to support that student's needs?</i>
Class B (B)	<i>If a family or a school has, with the family, made the determination that a student should be in a program, then we run the IEP knowing that the student is going to an</i>

online program. Pretty much the goals and objectives are the same, but everything else is pretty specific to the environment and the learning program they're going to be in.

3. As online education and supplemental online programs continue to grow, what processes do you see as important for IEP Teams and organizations or schools to follow for inclusion of students with disabilities to be effective in meeting the needs of that population of students?

State Level (S)

So the new teachers really do get inundated with these forms. These are our forms and here's how you do it, A-B-C. I think that's one area that our state is far better than around the country. Everybody borrows from everybody else and changes that a little bit. But I think our IEP teams, the teachers are really well-trained if they're even in the smaller ISDs.

County Level (C)

We work together under a County Director, and because of that, we're able to kind of figure out where the holes are in understanding both for our general ed and special ed population. Where are we missing pieces? And we make sure that we employ trainings as appropriate.? We make sure that, okay, does everybody have the information they have with regard to IEP completion? So what we do is, it's not ... I wouldn't say that it's organized, but it's a very strategic way, in that when we identify a hole, we make sure the trainings are there, and they're mandatory.

Class A (A)

You know, one of the things about special education, I feel like a lot of the recommendations are kind of based on the case manager's perception. And so, you know, we're in special ed. Where we're just trying to get him through. So those processes aren't always there when we're just trying to get him to the finish line.

Class B (B)

We work very closely with our ISD. We have an ISD that has probably seven schools in it, and I really believe that our special ed teachers are very prepared, very well-trained. Our district is very fortunate in that when they want to request training, we want to get them to training.

4. Do you have any staff members who are “go to” people for placing students in supplemental online programs in terms of their knowledge or experience?

State Level (S)

Actually, I think special ed kids are getting more than what they would normally get. It's not in person, but it's

face-to-face in a lot of cases.

- County Level (C) *When I first dealt with online, I was still a teacher. I remember proctoring one of my student's courses, which again, he was a perfect example of why if you have ADHD, this is a bad idea. But, you know, seeing where we came from, it was okay, we just proctor it and okay, we make sure they have the accommodations. As opposed to our understanding, recognizing that that service has to look entirely different, has very much evolved.*
- Class A (A) *They have a drive to see their student succeed. So they have that drive to understand what's in that coursework and how to best align it to the student's needs: what the student can and cannot do independently dependability, compassion, and understanding of the online offerings.*
- Class B (B) *It's just an option for everybody and we consider it as a team.*

5. Can you describe the general attitude of your organization or school toward the placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs?

- State Level (S) *It's a mixed bag. I think there are some people that think, "Yeah. If this is the best we can do for our kids right now, we're going to do it." I think there are others that won't ever believe that's the best we can do for our kids. So, I think everybody has tried that I've spoken to. Everybody's tried some kind of a supplemental program. Everybody's tried an online program. Whether or not they've stuck with it just depends on their preferences.*
- County Level (C) *Whatever makes sense for the kid.*
- Class A (A) *I think the majority of our teachers now have been exposed to teaching students with special needs online. And I think if I did every single one of them in this room, everyone would say it's not the best option for students with IEPs.*
- Class B (B) *We want them to graduate and that, and so if they are able to do that and, you know, over the summer or finish a class and a parent helps you or, you know, just sort of keeps rolling.*

6. As online education and supplemental online programs continue to grow, what processes do you see as important for IEP Teams and organizations or schools

to follow for inclusion of students with disabilities to be effective in meeting the needs of that population of students?

State Level (S)	<i>They need to know the programs. That's first and foremost. I think that we're still spending too much time wondering what's out there and is what they're doing over in this county better than what I'm doing in my county, or this school better than that school.</i>
County Level (C)	<i>I think you have to have a checklist, and that's basically what the process is. Having a checks and balance of review the IEP, review the areas of eligibility, reviewing the level of support that's necessary, and using that information to drive whether or not it's an appropriate fit. Making sure that it's not something that happens in isolation, so that you have the team reviewing it whenever possible.</i>
Class A (A)	<i>So I think what we've learned from the covid situation is that it's really important to flush out the supplemental aids and services piece or really what just the student needs to access online learning.</i>
Class B (B)	<i>They're meeting with school counselors or the general education teachers to determine where the kids are at within those different content areas, whether, especially at the high school level, just trying to pick the courses that the students are still going to be needing. They meet with the teachers that are assigned to students that are in supplemental learning programs to find out what are the expectations, how often are you expecting to see them face-to-face or virtually?</i>

7. Do you see your current process for placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs as effective?

State Level (S)	<i>Yes and no. It depends on the teacher. It depends on their experience with technology. It depends on how much they've been willing to reach outside of that brick and mortar mobile that they've always been in. So I would say it's split about 50/50 from the people I've talked to. They either have embraced it and done really well or they've had a bad experience and so not doing that anymore. And there's, not a whole lot in between.</i>
County Level (C)	<i>It depends on the kid. I mean, I think the process works. But I think their success entirely depends on the kid.</i>

Class A (A)	<i>I think looking at the data and being able to have a lot of baseline data on how students do in class, so being able to take a period of time in virtual classrooms, if you will, and see how the students are doing and comparing and then moving forward with a placement decision for families long term.</i>
Class B (B)	<i>I don't think we do enough. I think we could do a better job at it, at least providing the opportunity and the awareness of it. We could do better. We always can do better. I'm the guy who thinks you're never there.</i>

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8. When a student with a disability is enrolled in a supplemental online program how are the specific requirements of their IEP communicated to the supplemental online provider?
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State Level (S)	<i>I know for my schools, what they're doing is they're actually sending copies of the IEP and saying, "This is what I'm responsible for." One of the glitches that they have found is that the people that are delivering the course aren't always corresponding back with them like they would like, because they want to have tighter reigns on what's happening.</i>
County Level (C)	<i>They talk. So what often happens, and the alternative, those teachers talk to the resource teacher, because it's one teacher. And so I know that she takes care of that. And so they talk and make sure.</i>
Class A (A)	<i>We kind of do like the summary accommodation sheet. The high school teachers do it on every student. And so that is that has been shared well with the online teacher.</i>
Class B (B)	<i>That's the case manager's responsibility.</i>

The responses of the state level SED do reflect some breadth of topic reflecting statewide oversight and awareness, but it is nuanced. Only when multiple educational units are mentioned is there distinct clarity that the reference is not representative of a single local school district. In one of their responses the county level SED refers to a person in a superior role within the county. Other than that mention, the county level SED's responses may be applied to a single local school district. When examining the

sample responses of the Class A and Class B districts, the quotes are consistent in their applicability to a single school district with no differentiation possible based on the selected responses.

Chapter Summary

This study followed an explanatory sequential mixed method design, and this chapter reviewed the results of the quantitative first phase which consisted of an online survey using Qualtrics Survey Software and the qualitative second phase which consisted of semi-structured interviews. Data analysis of the survey data included descriptive statistics and crosstabulations comparing two variables. Data analysis for the qualitative phase included deductive and emergent coding processes aligned to the research questions. Areas where the survey data and emergent themes were cohesive were mixed further bringing the two data sets together. Classifications of the interview participants were identified to give context to the interview data. In the next chapter, the discussion of the conclusions and implications of the research will be presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

Students with disabilities (SWD) are participating in online education for the same, practical reasons as their general education peers (Burdette et al., 2013). This reality is accompanied by a shared responsibility for servicing SWD when their educational program is supplemented with online courses (Jones et al., 2015). While online education offers potential for educational individualization and personalized learning to increase academic achievement, SWD are not finding the same levels of success as their non-disabled peers (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014).

The purposes of this study were to identify the needs of SWD in supplemental online programs (SOP), to identify the processes used by Individual Education Program Teams (IEP Teams) to support SWD in SOP, and to determine if those processes meet the needs and support SWD in SOP. Without appropriate processes in place to communicate the needs of the students between the IEP Team and supplemental online course providers and other stakeholders and implement ongoing effective support of the student, there is a risk of decreased student achievement and potential failure of the course. These processes and their efficacy are the responsibility of the IEP Team members and the special education director (SED) that is charged with their oversight (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013).

In this chapter, the results of this study are discussed in further detail. The results are connected to the literature review of Chapter Two, and the implications of the use of

effective processes used by IEP Teams in meeting the needs and supporting SWD in SOP will be explored. Limitations to the study and recommendations for further research in this area are also included.

Discussion of Findings

The findings are summarized in the following table. The findings are then presented as they address each of the three research questions.

Table 5.1 Summary of Findings

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confidence in established special education system and IEP Team process to meet specific needs of SWD in all educational placements. 2. Lack of confidence in the ability of special education staff to adapt online learning settings or courses to meet the needs of SWD or to implement accommodations online. 3. Perception that special education staff are well-trained and prepared to identify and meet the needs of SWD. 4. Perception that the needs of SWD in online educational settings are different than those in traditional face-to-face settings. 5. Contradictory perception that the SED give significant guidance to IEP Teams while allowing independent functioning of those teams. 6. Perception that special education staff are dedicated and work extremely hard to meet the specific needs of their students. 7. Perception that it is critical to use the Covid-19 related school shut down as an opportunity to reflect on and learn how to better serve SWD online.

Research Question Number One: What are the needs of SWD enrolled in supplemental online programs? (RQ1)

The data collected through this study showed a clear acknowledgement that the needs of SWD in SOP are different from their non-disabled peers, but those needs are not collectively identified or organized. The survey instrument was not designed to gather an exhaustive list of needs, but to identify categorical needs that might be adapted to

multiple structures.

There is confidence in the ability of IEP Teams to both identify and meet the needs of their target students. This confidence extends to the broad level of the organization or school and includes IEP Team awareness and operational work done to identify individual needs of students. The confidence decreases when it is applied to the student's needs at the level of the individual online course. This is a reinforcement of the review of literature that confirmed a lack of research concerning how best to support SWD in online education as being an area of significant concern (Basham et al., 2016; Burgstahler, 2015; Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014; Vasquez & Straub, 2012).

Seven qualitative themes related to RQ1 were identified: "credit recovery," "flexibility," "generic reference to student needs," "graduation push," "role of parents," "support staff," and "teacher-student relationships." These themes, while they can and should be globalized to the larger student population of students in SOP, were primarily spoken and directed to the intimate level of the single student. One of Archambault's (2015) three themes for student success in online education refers to the stakeholder relationships that allow for identification of individual student needs. It is clear from this study that the place and time for the collaboration and input of the stakeholders in the identification of individual student needs is the IEP Team meeting. This existent and mandated system can be used to address the challenges of preparedness and organization as support systems for students with disabilities move online (Burdette et al., 2013).

Research Question Number Two: What are the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in supplemental online programs? (RQ2)

Half of the survey respondents (SQ14, 49.25%) reported having a process for enrolling SWD in SOP while even fewer had a process to guide IEP teams in their support of these students while enrolled in the SOP (SQ26, 31.03%). Training, preparation and instruction in special education practices, was one of four themes that emerged from the interview. Training and guidance are provided by and through the schools or organizations represented by the SED population of this research study. This training includes the use of data from multiple stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of the implementation of student support systems.

Preparing staff to follow new legal requirements to ensure proper due process for SWD is sometimes done through direct instruction by the SED or can be shared through local intermediate school districts. The interview data reflected a strong training emphasis on the IEP process itself. When asked specifically about the IEP Team processes for SWD in SOP, most of the SED returned to the topic of preparing their staff for legally and practically effective IEP writing. Greer et al. (2015) interviewed 16 state directors of special education and reported that the majority of them did not believe the average IEP Team had the knowledge of online education to make appropriate decisions about a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for SWD in online settings. When reflecting on this reality, the emphasis on preparing staff is warranted, but the training must, of necessity, attend to the individual student needs as they are when the student is involved in this type of educational placement. Contradictory findings were related to the perception of oversight the SED provide to their IEP Teams. The SED believe themselves to be providing significant guidance while allowing independent functioning of the IEP Teams.

One of the interview participants honestly shared,

We're building the ship as we go...But, you know, seeing where we came from...We make sure they have the accommodations as opposed to our understanding. Recognizing that that service has to look entirely different---has very much evolved. (C)

The themes of “communication” and “document sharing” are a part of, as well as being supports to, effective work of the IEP Team. Muller (2010) affirmed that IEP Teams are not receiving clear policy support as they work to support students online. “Communication” and “document sharing” are the means by which the stakeholders not only share data, but how they provide effective daily support and eventually measure outcomes. Rice and Carter (2016) conducted a case study of online special education teachers that confirmed the necessity of intensive communication to sustain work completion by students, and the fact that special education teachers often provide emotional support to their students.

We work as teams...first, you have to gather the data. The IEP process kind of flows. How do we gather the right data for the plan? How are we identifying gaps in learning? And then how are we writing goals to remediate those gaps? (B)

The theme of “reference to the IEP process” reflected a common thread through the interviews where the SED would consistently refer to the IEP process as a familiar framework that new data, accommodations, and technological awareness could be added to achieve the overarching goal of meeting individual student needs.

I believe our special ed department is very trained at meeting the specific needs of each student. (B)

Rice, East, and Mellard (2015) reported that administrators of SWD in online

education admitted that in their organizations it is special education teachers who are selecting the accommodations, strategies and tools used to support SWD. While not always wielding the authority or personal power as an administrator or of a parent, the case manager leads and directs the IEP Team meeting. It is the case manager who most often has been directly assigned the SWD. This 1:1 relationship forms the basis for the work of the IEP Team.

A clear finding of this study is the firm perception on the part of the SED that special educators are extremely dedicated to their students and work over and above basic job requirements to meet their students' needs to the best of their ability. This was evident in the identified theme of "dedication."

Research Question Number Three: Do the processes IEP Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How? (RQ3)

RQ3 requires looking at outcomes and various aspects of the IEP process that would include follow-up on the student's performance and experience in the SOP to determine the quality of outcomes for individual students. The performance outcomes of online education are difficult to disaggregate due to varied state requirements for data collection and reporting, and varied state and online provider structural differences with outcomes for special education only rarely disaggregated. A large number of students are reported to be unsuccessful in their online classes (Freidhoff, 2018; Molnar et al., 2019). Outcomes for all students using SOP have not been tracked in methods that allow for big picture analysis or comparison again due to the inclusion of these grades on transcripts along with the student's traditional load of classes.

None of the interview participants reported that their school or organization did any sort of tracking as to how SWD do when they take online classes as a SOP. One used the term “anecdotally” to share the feeling in the district that SWD are generally not successful when taking online classes.

No, we haven't tracked it. Anecdotally we don't have a lot of success. If we do, we have heavy coaching. (B)

SOP were recognized by the staff of the schools or organizations represented by the majority of both the survey respondents and interview participants as an acceptable option for SWD, but there remains a significant group that does not see SOP, or even online classes more generally, as an appropriate educational placement for SWD. This means that the SED perceive a significant portion of their school staff believe that the outcomes for SWD require intensive engagement by their special education teacher, and that is not feasible within most online educational settings including SOP.

If you have a teacher that's, you know, a little bit more protective and wants them, you know, like a student and not be out in gen ed as much versus being more in special education classes. (A)

This perception aligns with the literature that affirms the potential for educational individualization and personalized learning that online education affords to increase academic achievement but reports that SWD are not finding the same levels of success as their non-disabled peers (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014).

There was not much evidence that instructors or staff can truly adapt online learning activities effectively for individual students (Carter & Rice, 2016). Confidence was even lower when asked about the ability of staff to work within the structures of the

online course itself. This aligns with the research that identified the challenges facing school staff including a lack of preparedness and organization for moving the support system for students with disabilities into online environments including meeting student needs and for delivering accommodated content. The ability to provide effective monitoring or accountability for reporting data or outcomes to educational agencies is also in question (Burdette et al., 2013).

The SED of this research study placed the most extensive confidence in, and repeatedly referenced, the dedicated use of the IEP Team process to collect and use data and in special education staff to do the requisite work to find ways to meet individual student needs. They see positive outcomes as the result of the work of the case manager as the point person providing support and implementing accommodations within the IEP Team and through its processes. The Covid-19 related school shut down is recognized as a massive, forced experiment in servicing students online. There was a distinct recognition that, while it may have been imperfect and difficult, the past year's experiences should be used to increase effectiveness and increase the options for accommodating individual student needs online.

Online learning environments have the potential to be used to both produce and collect data that serves to inform teachers and service providers as they evaluate the effectiveness of accommodations and placements for SWD. This data can be fused with IEP goals and documentation as part of an enhanced communication network serving the student in all their learning activities. There remains a need for further research to inform the experience of SWD online and to improve achievement for these students through informed decision-making by IEP Teams as well as instructional designers with emphasis

on meeting student needs and honoring the integrity of the IEP in place (Stahl & Karger, 2016; Vasquez et al., 2015).

Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the research streams for online education for students with disabilities (SWD) and for effective Individual Education Program Team (IEP Team) processes. The growth of online education has created a new set of placements for which the degree of restrictiveness is often difficult to assess. An appropriate application of least restrictive environment (LRE) requires a vision and description of online students that is an accurate representation of the experience of general education students in online education to effectively accommodate and implement an Individual Education Program (IEP) for a SWD (Bernstein, 2013; Maag, Kauffman, & Simpson, 2018; Means et al., 2010; Rice, 2012; Rozalski et al., 2010). The IEP Team is designed to incorporate testing data, student performance, parental concern, and expert, consultant perspectives together in a plan for the student's maximized achievement. Technology should be optimized, but with the acknowledgement of the need for an extended network of interactions between student, home, school, and any online education provider (Carter & Rice, 2016; DeVore et al., 2011).

This research study addressed the need for increased attention and preparedness by the IEP Team when SWD are enrolled in supplemental online programs (SOP). These SWD enrolled in SOP must receive their accommodations in ways that lead to their maximum academic achievement. The enrollment of a SWD in an online course must lead to a meaningful benefit to the student (Moore, 2019).

The major implications of this research are two pronged: improving implementation of student IEP accommodations and services when enrolled in a SOP and improving the ability of special education staff to efficiently do their job of supporting students while they are enrolled in an SOP. Both find a critically important place in this moment when we can learn from the past few months of dramatic increases in online learning for SWD due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Effective student support online begins with an IEP that is written with either fully online or supplemental online placement in mind. This precludes trying to fit an IEP written with a vision of a brick and mortar, physical presence implementation guiding the IEP Team. This appropriate vision allows the IEP Team, and the case manager in particular, to incorporate services, assistive technology tools, outside service providers and goals into a plan that will be actionable within a SOP.

A student's IEP Team must consider whether an online course, with its specific content and technological skill requirements, is an appropriate place in which to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) to the SWD. The enrollment process should include a determination if current IEP accommodations can be delivered within the online learning environment (Virtual SC, 2019). If the current IEP cannot be effectively implemented, then the IEP Team must write a new plan with the online placement in mind or eliminate the option for participation in an SOP.

This has serious implications for the school shutdowns related to Covid-19. There are unique and difficult decisions to be made by IEP Teams of students for whom online learning environments cannot allow them to be supported effectively, but for whom, at least temporarily there is not a face-to-face option. This research study suggests those IEP

Teams return to the IEP Team meeting and to the familiar process through which to do the requisite work to support SWD in online educational settings. Academic success is impacted more significantly by quality instruction than by special education placement. Effective instruction for SWD requires individualized design based on intimate knowledge of the student and their needs (Burgstahler, 2015; Calhoon & Scanlon, 2019; Hocutt, 1996; Marteney & Bernadowski, 2016; Repetto, Cavanaugh, Wayer, & Liu, 2010).

Improving the ability of special education staff to efficiently do their job of supporting students while they are enrolled in an SOP will require training and resources. Due to the multitude of providers with various learning management systems (LMS) and programs, the typical special education case manager cannot be expected to know how to use or facilitate even a fraction of them to basic proficiency. The study affirmed the lack of confidence the SED had in their IEP Teams to adapt online courses or specific online accommodations to meet the needs of SWD (Carter & Rice, 2016; Collins et al., 2015; Rose, Blomyer, & iNACOL, 2007). This then returns the decision of placement of SWD in SOP to the IEP Team who should ensure that there are staff members who have the familiarity with the specific program before enrolling a student. This may mean new ways of assigning students and sharing service duties per student, and it will still necessitate that special educators become “quick studies” to learn new programs when an unfamiliar program seems like the best option for the student. This new process would increase the likelihood that both student and special educator can work more quickly and efficiently through the required content.

Creating systems to make available and share what was developed or learned from the shift online due to the Covid-19 pandemic is critically important. This should include model IEPs, online support structures and functional accommodations. This system would allow teachers to access materials at their level and those that would also align with the IEP goals and service needs of the student as determined by the IEP Team.

Increasing the efficiency of special education staff includes allowing them access to the shared resources, so that they themselves can select what works both for their target student and what they themselves can use and actually implement. Of course, special education staff, and case managers, in particular, need training in how to use the learning management systems, online programs and accommodations that are part of a much broader reality of online education as it stands today (Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Catagnus & Hantula, 2011; Rice & Carter, 2015). A clearinghouse system would allow for teachers and school staff to contribute to the collective bank of resources. This could include training videos or modules to prepare teachers in ways that are rapid and effective. By using accessible, shareable documents to support processes, the IEP Teams can ensure they are addressing student needs and freeing up teacher time through identification of critical tasks and reduction of redundancies.

I think you have to have a checklist, and that's basically what the process is. Having a checks and balance of review of the IEP...and within that reviewing the areas of eligibility, reviewing the level of support that's necessary, and using that information to drive whether or not it's an appropriate fit. Making sure that it's not something that happens in isolation, so that you have the team reviewing it whenever possible. If it's not

possible for the team, make sure that you have a couple of eyes on it, so that nothing is missed.

There is a certitude that comes from this study's reinforcement that what SWD need is the effective workings of an existent, required system. The newness of online learning, albeit into its third decade, and the crushing immediacy of the massive exodus from face-to-face learning to online learning due to the pandemic have made it clear that while the IEP Process is the functioning system there needs to be attention to how that process works regarding enrollment in SOP. This attention should also be extended to online education for SWD more generally. This attentiveness must include deliberate measures to address the long-standing deficiencies in the special education system and a lack of effective accommodation in online education (Basham et al., 2016; Carter & Rice, 2016; Greer et al., 2015).

Recommendations for Future Research

In the course of this research study, many potential avenues for future research were identified. It is easy to overgeneralize when addressing a topic like support for students with disabilities (SWD), but certainly the methods to mitigate gaps in learning or ability can always be improved through the application of research. Research is needed in how to best motivate teachers to participate in training to be better providers of special education service in online learning environments. Making this training meaningful and timely are critical factors in encouraging teachers to take part. Researching how to collect and disseminate resources such as model Individual Education Programs (IEP), goal banks, and service models would be an important support post-pandemic. Aligning accommodations and methods that are effective and appropriate online, and then

overlaying that with specific student needs would generate a list of ready-made supports that teachers could easily access.

More specific to the present research study would be future research that included case studies of students with IEPs who were educated fully online or who took part in a supplemental online program (SOP) to identify specific needs and support systems. Comparing the performance of SWD who of necessity had to receive their special education services via the internet or through other distance measures due to the pandemic with their previous performance in the face-to-face setting may yield identification of specific areas where the online system works better for many students and can be replicated. Comparing the performance of SWD by disability category might also potentially identify students for whom online education might draw them ever deeper into the general education curriculum.

Conclusion

The findings of this research study have returned attention to the need for emphatic attention to the Individual Education Program Team (IEP Team) process when students with disabilities (SWD) are enrolled in supplemental online programs (SOP). This attention is necessary to ensure that the students are effectively accommodated with the requirements of their written Individual Education Program (IEP) and that teachers are supported as they do the necessary work to support the students before, during, and after enrollment in SOP.

There is no doubt that the deep and dramatic educational shift online in 2020 has made dramatic changes to the delivery of special education services to SWD in online education. This shift will influence how students are supported well beyond the end of

the Covid-19 pandemic. The past year (2020-21) should be recognized as a trial by fire for educators who sought to continue to meet the needs of their students without being in their familiar school buildings. The experience and data that comes from this unique time should be used to leap forward in the ability to service students effectively using the range of options available online.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Question Alignment Chart

Research Question/Survey Item Alignment Chart	
Research Question Number One: What are the needs of SWD enrolled in supplemental online programs?	12,13,21,22,23,24,25,29,32,36,49
Research Question Number Two: What are the processes IEP teams use to support SWD in supplemental online programs?	14,15,16,18,20,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,33,34,41,45,46,47,1b,14a,26a,27a
Research Question Number Three: Do the processes IEP Teams use in supplemental online programs meet the needs of and support students with disabilities? If so, How?	11,12,13,15,16,17,19,20,23,24,25,31,35,36,37,38,39,40,42,45,46,49
General Supporting Info & Demographics	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,
Case Manager Related Items	25,35

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Email

Hello

My name is Susan Sharp, and I am a teacher and special educator. I am also a doctoral student in Educational Technology at Boise State. My dissertation research study will explore how IEP Teams function as they support students in online education. This email is a request for you to take about 15 minutes to complete a survey for this research project. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be kept private.

If you are interested, please click on the link for the survey and additional information: **[SURVEY](#)**

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (susansharp@u.boisestate.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Kerry Rice (krice@boisestate.edu). Research at Boise State University is conducted under the oversight of the BSU Institutional Review Board. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Boise State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday, by calling (208) 426-5401 or by writing: Institutional Review Board, Office of Research Compliance, Boise State University, 1910 University Dr., Boise, ID 83725-1138. You may also email the BSU IRB office via email at humansubjects@boisestate.edu. Please reference IRB # _____.

Thank you for your time.

Susan Sharp
Doctoral Candidate
Boise State University

APPENDIX C

Consent Letter

Hello

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my survey. My dissertation focuses on the support of special education students in Supplemental Online Programs.

Supplemental Online Programs come in many forms in the state. A state virtual school is one major source within our state, but many other providers and programs are used to serve our students.

At any time you can choose not to participate without any consequence, and you have the right to withdraw your consent. There are no known risks to completing this survey, nor are there any direct benefits or compensation to participants. However, by participating in this study, you have the indirect benefit of helping to improve the support of students with disabilities as they learn online.

The results of this survey will be compiled so that no one is individually identifiable. The results may be published in scholarly journals, or presented at professional conferences. By continuing into this survey by clicking the BEGIN SURVEY link, you are acknowledging you understand what this study is for and are agreeing to participate. For this research project, the researcher is requesting demographic information. Due to the makeup of the state's population, the combined answers to these questions may make an individual person identifiable. The researcher will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

Sincerely,

Susan L. Sharp

APPENDIX D

Interview Recruitment Email

Within the last month you were gracious enough to participate in my doctoral dissertation survey. Those results indicate that you are one of the minority of leaders of special education who have a process for supporting students with disabilities when they are enrolled in supplemental online classes.

The next phase of my research study is an interview to have a conversation about what it is that your school or organization does in that process. My research goal is to outline a process that can be shared and discussed to better support our students.

If you would be willing to participate in an interview, please reply to this email. The interviews would likely last approximately 15 minutes. We can speak on the phone or use Zoom. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out by email or call me at 810-955-4820.

Sincerely,
Susan L. Sharp
Boise State University

APPENDIX E

Table E1 Survey Questions Aligned to Literature

Survey Questions	Literature Reference Alignment
1. In your organization or school, are there students with disabilities who are enrolled in supplemental online programs or courses such as those offered by a state virtual school or other providers of part-time online courses?	Demographic
2. What best represents your gender?	Demographic
3. What best represents your ethnicity?	Demographic
4. How long have you been working in the field of education?	Demographic
5. How long have you been working in the area of Special Education?	Demographic
6. How long have you had a role as a leader in the area of Special Education?	Demographic
7. How would you best describe your role as a manager or leader of IEP Teams within your school or organization as the teams develop IEPs?	Demographic
8. How many special education students are enrolled in supplemental online programs through your school or organization?	Demographic
9. Regarding the special education staff members who participate in IEPs and manage students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online courses through your organization or school	Demographic
10. As a leader of special education, I understand the role that supplemental online programs play in current educational programming.	Demographic
Section Two: Enrollment in Supplemental Online Programs	

11. Within your school or organization, describe the general perception of all students taking supplemental online courses as a viable placement option.	Digital Learning Collaborative, 2020
12. Within your school or organization, describe the general perception of students with disabilities taking supplemental online courses as a viable placement option.	Bernstein, 2013; Maag, Kauffman, & Simpson, 2018; Means et al., 2010; Rice, 2012; Rozalski et al., 2010
13. Within your organization or school, supplemental online programs are accepted as an educational option for students with disabilities.	Bernstein, 2013; Maag, Kauffman, & Simpson, 2018; Means et al., 2010; Rice, 2012; Rozalski et al., 2010
14. Does your school or organization have a specific process for enrolling students with disabilities in supplemental online programs that is separate from the independent functioning of IEP Teams?	Basham et al., 2016; Rhim & Kowal, 2008
15. As a leader of IEP Teams, I give significant guidance to the functioning of the IEP Teams.	Boscardin, 2007; Bays & Crocket, 2007; CEC, 1997; Crocket, 2007
16. As a leader of IEP Teams, I allow IEP Teams to function independently.	Boscardin, 2007; Bays & Crocket, 2007; CEC, 1997; Crocket, 2007
17. Within your school or organization, online courses are commonly understood to be an effective supplement to a traditional education program for all students including those with disabilities.	Bernstein, 2013; Maag, Kauffman, & Simpson, 2018; Means et al., 2010; Rice, 2012; Rozalski et al., 2010
18. The specific provider(s) of supplemental online programs for our school or organization are partners with us in supporting our students with disabilities.	Burdette et al., 2013; Carter & Rice, 2016; Deschaine, 2018; Rice et al., 2015
19. The specific provider(s) of supplemental online programs for our school or organization make an effort to implement student IEPs within their courses.	Burdette et al., 2013; Carter & Rice, 2016; Deschaine, 2018; Rice et al., 2015
20. The IEP Teams of students with disabilities interact with the specific provider(s) of supplemental online programs for our school or organization to positively impact the academic performance of students with disabilities.	Burdette et al., 2013; Carter & Rice, 2016; Deschaine, 2018; Rice et al., 2015

Section Three: Needs of Students with Disabilities in Supplemental Online Programs

21. Based on your current understanding and your experience, are the needs of students with disabilities different than their non-disabled peers when enrolled in supplemental online programs.	Basham et al., 2016; Burgstahler, 2015; Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014; Vasquez & Straub, 2012
22. I believe the needs of students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online programs are significantly different than those of their non-disabled peers.	Basham et al., 2016; Burgstahler, 2015; Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014; Vasquez & Straub, 2012
23. Within your school or organization, the needs of students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online programs have been identified and addressed as a specific student population?	Basham et al., 2016; Burgstahler, 2015; Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014; Vasquez & Straub, 2012
24. Through stakeholder feedback or direct data collection, students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online programs within your school or organization are having their educational needs met effectively.	Basham et al., 2016; Burgstahler, 2015; Carnahan & Fulton, 2013; Greer et al., 2014; Vasquez & Straub, 2012
25. The IEP Teams that I manage or lead within my school or organization are aware of, and are deliberate in their efforts, to meet the needs of students with disabilities when enrolled in supplemental online programs.	Carter & Rice, 2016; Greer et al., 2015; Muller, 2009
Section Four: IEP Team Processes to Support Students in Supplemental Online Programs	
26. Do you, or your school or organization, have a process to guide IEP Teams when they enroll students with disabilities in supplemental online programs?	Carter & Rice, 2016; Greer et al., 2015; Muller, 2009
27. Do you, or your school or organization, have a process to communicate the contents of an IEP to supplemental online providers?	Carter & Rice, 2016; Greer et al., 2015; Muller, 2009
28. Do the IEP Teams within your school or organization review supplemental online programs or courses before enrolling students with disabilities?	Carter & Rice, 2016; Greer et al., 2015; Muller, 2009
29. Within online learning environments, courses can be proactively set up to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Select the option that best describes the	Rice, 2014; VanSciver & Conover, 2009

current functioning of the IEP teams of your school or organization.

30. As members of the IEP Team, do the parents of students with disabilities enrolled in supplemental online programs have an understanding of the characteristics, requirements or rigor of supplemental online program through their participation in the IEP Team meetings and other forms of communication.

Burdette et al., 2013; Carter & Rice, 2016; Deschaine, 2018; Rice et al., 2015

Section Five: Questions Adopted from National Standards for Online Quality Online Courses: Third Edition (2019)

31. Multiple methods of communication between student and instructor or other support personnel within the supplemental online program are clearly available and effective within the courses where students with disabilities are enrolled.

NSQOL, 2019

32. The design of the online courses where students with disabilities are enrolled reflects a clear understanding of varied student needs.

NSQOL, 2019

33. The design of the online courses where students with disabilities are enrolled allows for multiple methods to demonstrate competency of the curriculum.

NSQOL, 2019

34. The online courses where students with disabilities are enrolled provide multiple learning paths to maintain engagement of all students.

NSQOL, 2019

35. The online courses where students with disabilities are enrolled provide instructors and other staff with opportunities to adapt learning activities to student needs.

NSQOL, 2019

36. The readability levels, written language assignments and mathematical requirements are appropriate for students with disabilities enrolled in the online course.

NSQOL, 2019

37. The design of the courses where students with disabilities are enrolled provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student interaction, including opportunities for timely and frequent feedback about student progress.

NSQOL, 2019

38. The design of the online courses where students with disabilities are enrolled provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student and student-student interaction to foster mastery and application of the material.

NSQOL, 2019

39. The design of the online courses where students with disabilities are enrolled includes adequate and appropriate methods and procedures to assess students' mastery of content.

NSQOL, 2019

40. Course materials and activities within the online course where students with disabilities are enrolled has been designed to provide appropriate access to all students.

NSQOL, 2019

Section Six: Questions Adopted from Assessing and Improving Special Education

41. High quality professional learning in facilitating instruction and specialized support is provided to staff members participating in IEP Teams in my school or organization.

Grabill & Rhim, 2017

42. Participating in online courses through supplemental online programs gives students with disabilities access to rigorous curriculum, with full continuum of services, in a general education setting.

Grabill & Rhim, 2017

43. In your school or organization, a high percentage of families of students with disabilities are active in the parent-teacher organization or IEP Teams.

Grabill & Rhim, 2017

44. In your school or organization, parent input and needs are collected through a variety of data-collection tools.

Grabill & Rhim, 2017

45. Evidence of data-based decision-making is apparent to all stakeholders and is reflected in IEP meeting documents and notes.

Grabill & Rhim, 2017

46. Data come from multiple sources and is used to support development of and changes to student IEPs.

Grabill & Rhim, 2017

47. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school staff all have input into how IEPs will ensure that students receive support. Grabil & Rhim, 2017

48. Families and students are respected as essential team members. Grabil & Rhim, 2017

49. Programs are developed to meet the needs of individual students. Grabil & Rhim, 2017

50. Students receive academic and non-academic support in the least intrusive ways, and special education services are integrated into general learning activities. Grabil & Rhim, 2017

APPENDIX F

Sample Transcript Produced from Rev.Com

So any time you want me to slow down, you just let me know.

Okay.

So before we begin I will read the following consent script, and ask if you fully understand your involvement in this phase of my research study. My name is Susan Sharp. I am a doctoral student at Boise State University working under the supervision of Dr. Kerry Rice.

You are being asked to participate in my dissertation research that is examining the processes used by IEP teams to support students with disabilities when they participate in supplemental online programs. The interview will be conducted through ----- . As you are participating in this phase of your research study, you do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. At any time you can choose not to participate without any consequence, and you have the right to withdraw your consent.

There are no known risks to completing this interview, nor are there any direct benefits or compensation to participants. However, by participating in this study, you have the indirect benefit of helping to improve the support of students with disabilities as they learn online.

Your responses will be analyzed and reported anonymously to protect your privacy. The results of this interview will be analyzed so that you are not individually identifiable. The results may be published in scholarly journals, or presented at professional conferences.

By continuing into this interview, you are acknowledging you understand what the study is for and are agreeing to participate. If you have any questions or comments about this research study, please contact me at susansharp@boisestate.edu or by phone at ----- . You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Kerry Rice at krice@boisestate.edu.

Research at Boise State University is conducted under the oversight of the BSU institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Boise State University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of participants in research studies. You may reach the board office between 8:00 and 5:00 Monday through Friday by calling (208) 426-5401, or by writing the Institutional Review Board. You may also email BSU IRB office via email at humansubjects@boisestate.edu. Do you fully understand what I have just read?

Yes.

Do you have any questions?

No.

Do you give consent to continue?

Yes.

Okay. So that's over with. And then I basically have eight questions.

Okay.

And I have follow-ups based on your responses. So you might see me kind of skipping around, because a lot of times I'm finding people are covering it. If you feel like you have already covered what you would say, you can say that, "Covered it, or, "Skip that one." That's perfectly fine.

So we'll go ahead and dive in. So number one is to briefly describe how your school or organization approaches supplemental online programs. And I usually say like those provided by ----- although there's certainly lots of other providers out there.

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So in my role, I'm a Special Education Supervisor. And so for my assignment for this, for the last three years, I've had ----- and I've had ----- . So one is a charter, one is a traditional; ----- being the traditional. And both offer virtual.

And what we do in both cases is when students are being considered for virtual programming, we review the IEP. I'm always alerted. My TC, because we have Teacher Consultants, that's the way our structure works. Our Teacher Consultants are our building level compliance officers for lack of a better term. And so my Teacher Consultants are consulted. They alert me, review the IEP to make sure that this makes sense.

Factors that are considered when we're looking at online programming, are students' area of certification or eligibility, and the degree to which they require service. So for example, if a student qualifies as having mild or moderate cognitive impairment, it's a rule out for online. It is not an option for them, because the readability for the online platforms is at minimum fourth/fifth grade. Typically our students in mild or moderate programming cannot access that. So it's an automatic rule out.

The next piece we look at is, so again, looking at their certification areas or areas of eligibility, we consider they could be an LD student, but to what degree do they require support? So your LDs, your OHIs, your ASDs, what ... so the broad spectrum of 13 areas that you can qualify, what degree, what level of support do they need?

If it is significant, then that's another rule out. It's not an option, because we're setting them up for failure. So we really look to see what the level of support is needed for the student first. And then once we've established if online is even a viable, reasonable option for their success, we then look at what that programming needs to look like.

Most oftentimes it very much mirrors what they would get in a traditional setting. In some cases, in the majority of the kids, that it makes the most sense for an online platform, those kids they're pretty much almost TC level, almost raise it to transition off. And so we really look conscientiously at what that program hours need to be, if we still need to provide social work, if they need speech, all of those things. If it makes sense as a regular review, and then we look at what those times should be to support that student.

And so all of that is considered when looking at their programming. And then we're very conscious of having a service log for any services that are delivered to them. Which is interesting, because in traditional, we don't necessarily keep a service log.

Okay.

And which is hit or miss, depending on where you're at in the state, as to the level of service logs in general. But typically in -----, they don't do service logs unless it's an online component. And then we're doing that just as a means of making sure that we have those checks and balances in place. Those students are also reviewed regularly, because we have team meetings every month to look at the overall caseload, to troubleshoot any problems that may arise.

Okay. I'm kind of off script here, but is the service log electronic?

Yes.

Okay.

Yes.

Okay very good.

It is electronic service log. It is. We use Google Docs as a form that I created, because I was like, "Look, I need accountability." Because I mean, because virtual is one of those animals that can kind of get away from you because I was like, "I need to have available that if I ask to see what's going on, we need to be able to provide that."

Okay.

Because it's not the same as at least if they're in seat, then they're attending class.

Right.

So I can say they were here on such and such day, they attended this particular class. I can't say that for virtual without having that tracking. And so we track both the date and time, as well as the duration of the services provided.

Okay well-

And the modality.

My other question is how are you notified? At enrollment or by the case manager?

Oh, I'm notified when they try to enroll.

Got you. Okay.

So a schedule is not created until after we have looked at it. Because again, some kids it's just not a viable option for them.

Okay. Okay.

And in those cases where, especially our mild and moderately impaired students, I have a personal conversation with those parents, and talk them through it. Because I don't want them to feel that someone's discriminating against their child. We're not. But that's just not a modality that's going to be accessible for their children. So we need to err on the side of what makes ... what's the best offer of faith.

Okay. Well, you've done a fabulous job. You've bounced around in my interview. Awesome. So you're going to see me, I'm going to be skipping a little bit. And some of these things you've already touched on. So this is basically my 1a. So, and I think this is a yeah. So is there a separate process for enrolling students with disabilities? So that notification that comes to you, do you know how different that is from the general ed system? I mean, is it just like Counselor, if it fits and the kid wants it? Do you know how [crosstalk 00:09:14].

It's a little different because I don't need to be involved in it for an in-seat student.

Okay.

Or generally, in general, I'm not going to need to know. But an in-seat students that receive special education services, I don't need to be notified unless it is one of those, "We have a problem. Houston, we have a problem."

Okay.

Because generally speaking, all of those enrollments are handled by my Teacher Consultants and Case Managers. They only pull me in on those, if there's a problem. They're like, "Hey, this is a little wonky. We're concerned about what this looks like. How do we facilitate it?"

For example, in transitioning between traditional in-seat secondary for ----- to our alternative program, if it looks wonky, they're going to call me on it and say, "You know what? We have some concerns about whether or not this is an appropriate shift for this student." And

so then I weigh in on, okay, here's where we're at compliance wise. Here's what we need to really consider. But in general, no.

Okay. Okay. And so do you use supplemental online programs for credit recovery?

Yes.

Okay. Now, would you say that's a large proportion of ... So if you have a special education student, is it more likely they're in an online class for credit recovery or for some of the reasons that anybody takes them? A class that's not available, it doesn't fit their schedule.

It depends on the setting.

Okay.

If it is a traditional in-seat program, traditional K-12, which is like -----, then it's going to be more credit recovery, is more often when that's offered. If it is your non traditional charter, that's a whole separate program. They have a three tier program; they have their primary, secondary, and then they have their virtual program. So it's not necessarily credit recovery, it's these children and their families have opted for this different delivery system.

Okay. Well, this is question number two. Do you think there needs to be more than normal attention to course placement, performance, outcomes by the IEP team, when students with disabilities are enrolled in supplemental online programs? So more than normal attention to that placement process.

I guess I struggle with the, "More than normal," from the standpoint of special education is specially designed instruction. And so any placement, whether it is online or whether it's traditional in-seat, needs to be a consideration of the IEP team to make sure that we have the appropriate supports in place for students for their success.

So I don't know, there'll be more than normal, because the norm for special ed has got to be, we have a different threshold than gen ed placements.

Right. And I see, that's kind of a, I don't know if I want to call it a theme that's coming out, is at what point is it just good IEP team work to get the job done? Or is it something that unique that's happening?

So next question. Have you tracked or noticed any different outcomes for students with disabilities? Seeing anything

There's a pattern as to who's going to be successful with it and who's not.

Okay.

There's definitely a pattern. And it tends to fall in line with those students who have the aptitude, but the traditional NC is just too stressful for them.

And so those students who have that discipline, but just can't handle all of the distractions that occur within the traditional setting, seem to exhibit the greatest amount of success. So typically it's going to be really surprisingly, it's going to be more of your like EI students. They really do well with it. But not the extreme that would need to be in a self contained program, but the students who just that self-regulation, that they fall more on the mild side, those tend to be more successful. Not so much with your students that qualify in OHI with regard to ADHD; it's a horrible fit for them.

But your medical kids, absolutely. But traditionally, what I have seen across the board, is if you are LD across the board, in all the areas, it's a bad idea. So I just, I discourage families from that.

And if you have ADHD is a horrible idea, because unless you have someone that is actually sitting there with them, walking them through it, it is too easy to kind of get lost in the muck.

Okay. Very good. This is number three. So do you ... And this is more generally, do you have an organized approach to training or prepping IEP teams in your school or organization?

Do we have an organized approach? It's kind of funny, because since we're a supervisory team, so -----, well, ----- is a centralized administration model for special ed. So you have 13 supervisors that are responsible for being the directors for every district. And we work together.

And so we work together under a County Director. And so what is need is because of that, we're able to kind of figure out where the holes are in understanding both for our general ed, you know, general ed pop, as well as our especial ed pop. Where are we missing pieces? And we make sure that we employ trainings as appropriate.

So like there seem to have been a gap a couple years ago with just having a clear understanding between special ed in general and about 504s, especially this automatic works. We need to know this. That's just a part of it, right?

There was a gap. So we brought in legal training to make sure everybody got that. We make sure that, okay, does everybody have the information they have with regard to IEP completion? So what we do is, it's not ... I wouldn't say that it's organized, but it's a very strategic way, in that when we identify a hole, we make sure the trainings are there, so that ... and they're mandatory.

Okay. Well, and so then the next question is any part of that training or any separate piece of that related to any supplemental online programs? Has that come up in any training modules? Or has there been an identified need to talk about placing online kids?

Well you know, I think it really depends on ... And we're building the ship as we go. Because when I started off, when I first dealt with online, I was still a teacher. And I remember proctoring one of my student's courses, which again, he was a perfect example of why if you have ADHD, this is a bad idea. But, you know, seeing where we came from, it was okay, we just proctor it and okay, we make sure they have the accommodations. As opposed to our understanding, recognizing that that service has to look entirely different, has very much evolved.

So I want to say that it's something that it depends on where you're at. Like the service logs that we have for -----, and then I started putting together in ----- were because I was there and going, "This is going to be something that we're going to get hung out to dry on." Because there's not a clear tracking, and my mantra is what doesn't get documented didn't happen.

Right.

So, you know, so I think that's something that, as we all dive into this further, we're going to see more stuff develop, and we just have to fix it as we go.

Right.

I.E. the closure that just happened, and the fact they will probably all be flipped all school year.

Right, yes. And so now there's going to be a quick learning curve for, you know, all ... some folks. Okay. So, and I think you've already covered this one too, so basically the next

question is just asking, are any of the guidelines for online classes like published or procedural? Or is it ... I guess what I'm kind of hearing you describing is more again, a part of the process you've got for you being notified, and getting to those IEP teams?

Yeah, currently-

What was the question?

Yes, let me kind of put it back together. Well, I guess I'm still just talking about, is there something special that happens? And again, it just seems like the way you've described it, you get a notification that that IEP team process is working on that case by case basis.

Mm-hmm (affirmative). There's nothing published. It is ... and we're working towards that, because one of the things I tell my team is that ... And this is morbid and I apologize for it, but if I die tomorrow, if any one of the team members dies tomorrow, someone's going to take your spot.

Right.

But will that knowledge die with you? And so we need to make sure that stuff is written down, so that the next person that walks into the door, "Oh, this is what I do." As opposed to reinventing the wheel every time. So no, nothing's published yet, but we're working on getting stuff written up, so that we just have that available to us.

Right. Well, this is number four. Do you have any staff members who are go-to people for placing students in supplemental online programs? It could be more of an IT person, or it can be a special education person. Anybody who's kind of that go-to understanding the courses or the process.

So in both cases for -----, it is ... there's a Director of the virtual program. And so she and I, and the TC collaborate, because she's going to be the one that places them and gets them situated. But it's after we've all discussed it.

With ----- it's more so one issue; it's the alternative or it's credit recovery. And that is if it is a student who, especially a student in traditional high school, it's going to be the TC that sets that up, in collaboration with the Counselor. For the alternative is going to be the Case Manager and the TC that set it up.

Okay. Very good. And again, my next question is in there, we're talking about the staffing structure and you did it perfect to describe that.

So this is number five. Can you describe the general attitude of your organization or school toward the placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs? So what's kind of the general feel for that,

Whatever makes sense for the kid.

Okay.6

What is the best fit, is the overall just feel culture of how we're going about the business, is what makes ... what's the best fit for the child?

And would you say ... so the next question, the followup is, just putting special education staff in there. So instead of the broad organization, what's the general attitude of your special education staff? Would you say it's the same?

Still the same. What makes the most sense? In fact, I have to giggle because one of my providers, "Oh, well, we can make it work." I'm like, "No." I understand. And he's happy to figure

it. I'm like, "Sometimes we have to make the big girl decisions and say no, this is not a good fit. We need to change the offer."

Okay. So this is number six. And so as online education and supplemental online programs continue to grow, what processes do you see as important for IEP teams to use? I like your process. And so what ... you know, if you just want to reiterate what you think is best about yours. Maybe even thinking about what you might improve, how would you describe that process?

I think you have to have a checklist, and that's basically what the process is. Having a checks and balance of review the IEP, review the ... and within that reviewing the areas of eligibility, reviewing the level of support that's necessary, and using that information to drive whether or not it's an appropriate fit. Making sure that it's not something that happens in isolation, so that you have the team reviewing it whenever possible. If it's not possible for the team, make sure that you have a couple of eyes on it, so that nothing is missed. Because if you leave it just a one, you're going to miss something.

Do you feel like you've been able to get enough information about the course itself?

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Okay. Okay. Good. The qualities of the course, the level of rigor? Okay, good.

What like, is that in both districts, you have people that know the courses enough, that when I ask the questions, they can say, "Okay, well this happens in this course. We can modify this course this way. We can't modify ..." So you have a team of folks that are familiar enough with the offerings that we can do what makes sense.

Okay. That's good. All right. That's very interesting actually.

Yeah. I'm the one that knows the least about the overall courses.

Okay.

Yeah, my TCs have it down to a science, and the Director of Virtual will have it down to a science. And so I ask them questions about, you know, can we reduce this? Where can we you know, what level of reduction can we do? Can we modify the grading? So, but all of those conversations happen most likely in either an IEP meeting or they come in a data review. Which is we have our monthly SPED team meetings and we stack data reviews within that.

Okay. Very good. This is number seven. Do you see your current process for placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs as effective?

It depends on the kid.

Okay.

I mean, I think the process works. But I think their success entirely depends on the kid.

Okay. And I know I've brought this up already. Do you see any ... where would you see it needing to be improved? Where ... or maybe have there been some holes that you've identified?

I would actually like to just make sure it's in writing, so that when they're enrolled, it actually lays out, check this, check this, check this, check this. So it is a formal checklist, as opposed to a common understanding of this is what has to happen.

Okay. So number eight is the last question. And it says, "When a student with a disability is enrolled in a supplemental online program, how are their specific requirements of their IEP communicated to the supplemental online provider?"

They talk. They talk. So what often happens, and the alternative, those teachers talk to the resource teacher, because it's one teacher respond. And so I know that she takes care of that. And so they talk and make sure.

And then likewise with the alternative ... with the charter program, those two ... because there's two or three, I can't remember, I think it's three or four, maybe three or four gen ed teachers that work that program, the resource room teacher that's assigned to that program, works with them. And they make sure that they shoot back and forth and get the information. Then the directors serve as a nice pivot. That program is bigger than the program at ----- . I'm transitioning into ----- .

Okay.

This is going to be interesting, because ----- has about 200 kids online. Versus ----- , where we have maybe 30 to 40. And versus ----- that has ... they tutor around 80 to 90. So this should be interesting to see how this works. Because it's supposed to work like that. It's been working like that in these two programs. This other one, I know the resource teachers meet with the kids. I don't know how fluid that conversation is between gen ed and special ed. But in these existing programs it's very fluid.

Okay. Well, that brings me to the end of the questions that I had.

Okay.

I had another interview this morning, and both of you today were so, you know, if I'd met you before I did this research, I wouldn't have done this research. But it's just good to know that people have that ... you guys have a process. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but there's a process. It's just, like I said, today's interviews were very, very interesting. There's-

Now, are you a special ed teacher?

I currently am an online special ed teacher

It's you know, fascinating how things work out. I was ... I had a special ed degree, but I never used it. And then after I retired, I absolutely love it. I absolutely love it.

So just those things, like, again, we say all the time, "If it doesn't get logged, it didn't happen." That's our-

Right.

... our mantra too.

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

So it was just interesting that now I'm in this role after I'd already gotten this research started. I taught for ----- for about 13 years.

Okay.

And so what I was seeing was, you know, a week or so before the end of the semester, then I'd find out the kid had an IEP, you know?

Oh. Yikes.

Like, what can I do now? You know?

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

So that kind of got my wheels turning. But again, today I had two people who said, "This is what we do." And it sounds good to me.

So again, I just want to reiterate my thankfulness. People have been so gracious. It's been great getting to know people. And I wish you well, as all that you've got to do this summer to sort things out. So thank you, and take care.

You're welcome. Definitely. Have a great day.

APPENDIX G

Sample Transcript Produced from NVivo Transcription

Susan 00:00 You're being asked to participate in my dissertation research that is examining the processes used by IEP teams to support students with disabilities when they participate in supplemental online programs. The interview will be conducted via----- Is your party's sitting in this phase of my research study? You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer in the time. You can choose not to participate without any consequence, and you have the right to withdraw your consent. There are no known risks to completing this interview, nor are there any direct benefits or compensation to participants. However, by participating in the study of the indirect benefit helping to improve the support of students with disabilities as they learn in line, your responses will be analyzed and reported anonymously to protect your privacy. The results of this interview will be analyzed so they are not individually identifiable. The results may be published in scholar, in journals or presented at professional conferences. By continuing into this interview, you are acknowledging that you understand what the is for in agreeing to participate. Do you have any questions or comments about this research study? Please contact me. Susan Sharp it you at Boise State debt to you or by phone at ------- . You may also contact my faculty supervisor, Dr Kerry Rice. Research at Boise State is conducted under the oversight of the BSA BSU Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Boise State IAB, which is concerned with the protection of participants and research studies. You may call the board office between 8 and 5 Monday through Friday or contact them in writing. You may also email them at human subjects at Boise State.

Susan 01:39 Do you do you fully understand what I've just read?
----- 01:43 Yes.
Susan 01:44 Do you have any questions? No. Do you give consent to continue? Yes. Okay, great. All right. So basically, I have eight questions. And under those eight questions, there are follow up, you know, based on your responses. So if one seems redundant or you feel like you're gonna give the same answer, please feel free to go on because they're kind of nested, I guess would be a good way to say it. I will sometimes say a in a letter like I might say 3 B, so you can completely ignore that because I've already recognized that you've addressed some of the other ones. So. So here we go. So number one is briefly describe how your school or your district approaches supplemental online programs.

----- 02:31 say that to me one more time.
Susan 02:33 So how does your district approach may be in general using classes from ----- or these outside online providers, and that

- can be for both the general population and the special education population.
- 02:48 So for our general population, you know, sometimes they have schedules such that it does not allow them to take six classes or if they have band, for example, that takes up significant hours in their school day. So they use virtual classes to be able to take additional classes outside of the typical school day. We also have exceptional athletes that sometimes are not able to go to brick and mortar school because of their athletic schedule. So they take virtual classes as well. We have students that need to make up coursework that have failed classes, so they take virtual classes in order to make up credits. And then we also have students who have been expelled or suspended long term. And so we use virtual classes for that as well.
- Susan 03:45 OK.
- Susan 03:47 This is one A. Is there a separate process for enrolling students with disabilities?
- 03:54 Well, the separate process would be the IEP process.
- Susan 03:57 OK,
- 03:57 so if we're changing their placement, then that becomes an IEP team decision.
- Susan 04:03 OK. So without going through an IEP team meeting or at least part of that team having a discussion, they would not be enrolled.
- 04:12 Right. Yes. OK. It has to involve the IEP process. OK.
- Susan 04:19 And again, you've covered some of these.
- Susan 04:21 Do you see any different enrollment pattern with students with disabilities
- 04:27 compared to general students enrolling?
- 04:33 I'm gonna say overall, no.
- 04:36 We typically have probably a larger number of general education students registered for online classes just because of the nature of the independence that those online classes require.
- Susan 04:49 This is number two. Do you think there needs to be more than normal attention to course placement performance or outcomes in a supplemental supplemental online program by the IEP team
- Susan 05:02 And you've already you've already said that. So maybe if you could just describe a little bit maybe what that looks like at an IEP team meeting
- 05:14 So when we enroll a student into a virtual class that also has an IEP? We have to talk about what type of outreach will our case manager provide that student. Right. So we need to know how that's going to look is that email is that phone is that zoom or Google meetings? What does that look like in order to support that student's needs? Also working with the online teacher in regard to what supplementary AIDS and services that student may require

online. Some of them are inherent in online programming, but others are not. So being able to have those discussions with -----
 -- or whatever our virtual program is as well

Susan 05:57 Very good. This is to a have you tracked or noticed any different outcomes for students with disabilities than for the general population

----- 06:09 We have not tracked that.

Susan 06:15 This is number three. Do you have any organized approach to training or prepping IEP teams in your district? So that's more generally. So what's your process for training? OK, is that is it would you say that's ongoing, something that's strong at the beginning of the year? Both

----- 06:38 That would be both. We almost always have a beginning of the year prior to the start of the school year with all of our student services staff reminding them about the IEP process. Any changes that have been made to the paper work policies or procedures throughout the school year at minimum. monthly department meetings with each individual department about ongoing compliance issues or concerns

Susan 07:05 So this is three A and I have it as any separate training or prepping. But I think what I really mean for based on your response, do supplemental online programs ever come up in that training?

Susan 07:18 So here's what we're gonna do when this comes to the team

----- 07:25 So obviously now more than ever. Yes, we do provide training in particular what's written into the IEP again

----- 07:35 How much time you need to be spending with a student online? Email phone calls to support that student. How do you document services for a student who's online? So we have provided that professional development to our staff after March 13.

----- 07:49 OK. This is a off off script. Are your services looking different? Are you listing a service that specific to the online courses

----- 08:02 Our services don't look different, but our time methodology with which we provide that service will look a lot different. It's easier when I have you sitting next to me and I can provide you with the instruction, but if I never get to physically be in the same room with you, it may look a little bit different. And if our IEP hours, let's say a typical secondary student would be one to five hours a week of resource support. But what does that look like when you don't you can't come to me for that hour. That means do I need to meet with you? An hour over the week. How much support do you actually need? You need more. Do you need less? So a lot of that discussion goes on

Susan 08:41 I was curious if you were labeling it differently yet. So it's still the support time

Susan 08:46 OK. Let me see. And again, I'm just kind of scanning because I think you've covered some of them

Susan 08:57 This is 3D and it really is talking about so how independent the IEP teams are to make that decision on the placement. Would you say that the team itself is, as with many decisions, they are empowered to make those decisions on their own

----- 09:16 Typically, for a student with an IEP pre pandemic, right? If they were going online, one hundred percent, they were going online because it was a disciplinary change of placement.

Susan 09:27 OK

----- 09:28 So that required a lot more support from the director level than an individual team decision

----- 09:38 But if it's something as simple as an extra online class for U.S. history because they failed at the previous year, that's something that they have full independence with

Susan 09:49 OK, very good. This is number four.

Susan 09:52 Do you have any staff members who are go to people for placing students in supplemental online programs based on their knowledge or expertise?

----- 10:03 Yes.

Susan 10:04 Now, would you say those are special ed people? Or are they general ed people or both

----- 10:08 Both

Susan 10:09 OK. Awesome. And again, you've already kind of discussed that, too

----- 10:18 All right. So this is \$C. What are some of the traits of those people that are those go to people and get that kind of goes back to are they the techie people or are they special education people

Susan 10:32 I know you said both, but what what makes them that person

----- 10:38 my special education person is a teacher consultant, has been working with virtual classes for a very long period of time. So it's really her expertise, her knowledge, her years of working with a very unique population, not only special education, but also those expelled students. So she has had great relationships with families. Great communication skills on the pure Gen ed side. He's a counselor. So he has the understanding of how many credits does a kid need? What are they missing? All of that kind of information, seat time, waiver policies and procedures, 21 F policies and procedures. So it's really we have two people who I would direct depending on what the situation is. And they've been doing it for a long period of time

Susan 11:34 we'll go to number five. Can you describe the general attitude of your district toward the placement of students with disabilities in supplement supplemental online programs

----- 11:49 Are you talking pre pandemic or post?

Susan 11:52 Well, you can speak to both if you want.

----- 11:55 I would say a pre pandemic. It's again, mostly it was due to disciplinary issues

----- 12:02 Same with our general ed students who were expelled or long term suspensions.

Susan 12:09 And nobody is going gonna be opposed to credit recovery, right?

----- 12:12 Nobody gives. No

----- 12:14 It's it's not an issue. I think moving forward, I think the majority of our teachers now have been exposed to teaching students with special needs online. And I think if I did every single one of them in this room, everyone would say it's not the best option for students with IEPs

Susan 12:32 Okay. All right. Very good.

Susan 12:35 So number 6 is online education continues to grow and supplemental online programs. What processes do you see as important for IEP teams to follow for including these students with disabilities in these new classes

----- 12:53 In my world, it's all about documentation. So how are you going to document your service time? How do you document progress and IEP goals and objectives? How do you document the use and accessibility of supplementary AIDS and services? So really it's about how am I as the case provider going to ensure the parent that I'm actually providing what is written into an IEP.

Susan 13:21 Very good.

----- 13:23 This is you might have already covered that. I'm going to say I just in case you have something else to add to this one. This is 6 A. So how can an IEP team specifically work to improve effective placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs? So how can an IEP team, what can they do to improve good placement for those students

----- 13:46 Well, I think now we have to look at the data that we have from our spring. So how engaged were the students? Did they make progress in their IEP objectives? Was it a format that works for them? I think we would have to go back and look at that piece of information, even though it's minimal, but be able to look at that moving forward. If we were to suggest an online program for our students.

Susan 14:13 This has been a wonderful experiment in a lot of ways, a forced experiment, but we might as well get as much data out of it as possible

----- 14:21 I also think it depends on the special education eligibility area of a student as well. So we work with students with severe autism and severe cognitive impairments. It's not working for them. What about a student with an emotional impairment? Well, if we're teaching them social emotional skills, that's pretty difficult to do online. We want them in school around other kids learning appropriate social behavior. So.

Susan 14:49 OK.

Susan 14:51 So number seven, do you see your current process for placement of students with disabilities in supplemental online programs as effective

----- 15:01 Yes

Susan 15:02 And so how might it be improved if you could think of a way

----- 15:09 I think looking at the data and being able to have we have a lot of baseline data on how students do in class, so being able to take a period of time in virtual classrooms, if you will, and see how the students are doing and comparing and then moving forward with a placement decision for families long term.

Susan 15:33 And this is number eight

Susan 15:36 When a student with a disability is enrolled in a supplemental online program, how are the specific requirements of their IEP communicated to the Supplemental. Online provider

----- 15:49 Yes. So there's a virtual meeting sharing of documentation of their supplementary aids and services. So sometimes what might look different? We have a personal curriculum plan in ----- as well, where we can modify some of the requirements. So making sure that we share that information and then it's constant communication with that online person, but also us looking at what's our attendance, what's their engagement level?

Susan 16:21 And most of that is on the case manager

----- 16:24 Correct.

Susan 16:24 Okay. All right. Great

----- 16:27 Well, that brings me to the end. First of all, let me say and I don't know how much discussing I'm supposed to do, but I mean, I'm. You have been the most organized to describe what's actually happening. So my compliments to you. So that's good. So very, very helpful. I appreciate it. So how much longer do you have? Well, you know, I'm going to I think I'm going to be done with my data collection at the end of this month. People have been, but I don't know, shockingly gracious. So I don't know if some people had a lot more time on their hands and then some were very busy and still willing to slide me in. But it's been great. I even I think there's something there to talk about what special educators are willing to do, their level of devotion and concern about improving practice. I don't know if that's part of it, too, but it's gone great.

----- 18:36 Yeah. We made it electronic for all of our staff because it was easier for our general education staff because we have 14000 students you know, almost two thousand students with IEP. So keeping track of whether or not you provided an accommodation was daunting. So what? It's the law. The law. You

Susan 18:56 Right. And yeah, once the electronic settle to the general, let teachers know. Once once the electronic system is there, you know, it just has to become what we do every day. And I wish I would have had it, you know, instead of my checklist, sir, that kind of thing. So, again, thank you, -----.

----- 19:13 Good luck to you.

Susan 19:14 And same to you. Mm hmm. Bye bye now. Take care. All right