Benefits, Barriers, and Facilitative Factors in Implementing a Response to Instruction Program

by

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Abstract

The study investigated a school district's implementation of a Response to Instruction (RtI) Program, mandated by the state to address early intervention of academically struggling students. This study examined benefits of program implementation and the factors that facilitated and hindered program success from the perspective of the Tier III teachers, the group of teachers most closely involved in program implementation.

Previous research suggests that using the RtI model has resulted in a decrease in special education placement. Although there is much research of the organizational change due to RtI, little research, especially qualitative, has studied the implementation program from the perspective of teachers. In addition, this study provided significant information to national, state, and local education leaders who are struggling with the proper implementation of RtI.

Findings indicated that the implementation of RtI was successfully facilitated by collaboration, communication, data analysis, motivation, and relevant professional development. Ineffective or limited professional development, lack of resources and scheduling issues were barriers that hindered successful implementation. Benefits of implementing the RtI program were found to be interrelated with what teachers considered being the facilitating factors that promoted program success. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are presented.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Since the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), school leaders have made attempts to increase school accountability for student progress and to close achievement gaps among student groups. The passage of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004*, which sought to ensure that children with disabilities received appropriate services, has helped schools become more aware of what their students need in order to be successful in the classroom (Turnbull, 2005). These instructional reform efforts have addressed not only teacher quality, but also the quality of instruction in the general education classroom and the academic support students should receive outside of their classrooms (Turnbull, 2005).

In the 1990s, researchers began writing about the problems inherent in both the general and special education systems which included the following: (a) sharp contrasts between general and special education service delivery; (b) lack of emphasis on prevention and early intervention; (c) limited weight given to the importance of research-based instruction and intervention; and (d) poor relationships between the identification of Specific Learning Disabilities and eligibility procedures and the interventions offered in special education (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2008). One of the proposed solutions to address these concerns is to increase emphasis on prevention by incorporating early intervention programs. There is adequate research to indicate that early intervention will enhance student learning, reduce the need for special education placement (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005) and, through the collaborative processes involved, address the previously cited problems identified by NASDSE.

Such efforts stress that schools should not solely rely on the special education teachers to "fix" struggling students. They should focus instead upon having general education teachers be engaged in identifying and responding to student learning approaches and problems before they become serious. This preventative approach can minimize the number of students who are placed in special education and help foster their success (Burns et al., 2005). In order to successfully accomplish this feat, a well-structured program must be in place that fosters collaboration and data-based decision making among administrators, general and special education teachers, counselors, and academic coaches.

To initiate such a program, the Alabama State Department of Education decided to implement Response to Instruction (RtI) into all of the public school districts. RtI is a framework that enhances the practice of quality instruction and intervention based on student needs (Batsche et al., 2005). The RtI model has three hierarchal tiers of instruction. Instructional practices differ in these tiers, based on the needs of the learners. Tier I involves increasing the quality of research-based instruction within the regular classroom (Marston, 2005). Tier II includes using research-based instruction in the classroom along with targeted intervention and frequent progress monitoring for those students labeled as Tier II (Ardoin, Witt, Connell, & Koenig, 2005). Tier III, the last tier, differs from the other tiers because instruction is delivered outside of the classroom. Students in this tier have not been successful in Tier 1 or Tier II thus instruction tends to be very intense (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2010).

Purpose Statement

In this study, the researcher sought to examine a school district's attempt to implement RtI to address the issue of prevention and early intervention of academically struggling students. The researcher examined the benefits that resulted from its implementation and the factors that

facilitated and hindered the success of the program, from the perspective of Tier III teachers, the group of teachers most closely involved in implementation. The study occurred during the 2011–2012 school year, which was the district's first year of implementation.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are the benefits of incorporating RtI into a school district's program as perceived by the Tier III teachers?

2. What factors are facilitating RtI program implementation as perceived by Tier III teachers?

3. What factors are hindering RtI program implementation as perceived by Tier III teachers?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is the collaborative inquiry approach, which Love (2009) stated can enable teachers to utilize the increasing amount of school data available to improve student learning. Love also described it as a process where "teachers construct their understanding of student learning problems and embrace and test out solutions together through rigorous use of data and reflective dialogue" (p. x). Zuman (2006) found that establishing a culture of discussing student data has made schools more accountable for the results and more cognizant that teachers are in a position to influence gains in student outcomes. In order to establish a collaborative inquiry culture, Zuman noted that district and school leaders must: 1) distribute leadership and capacity; 2) build collaborative teams; 3) use data frequently and in-depth; 4) focus on instructional improvement; and 5) nurture a collaborative culture based on commitment to equity and trust throughout the process.

These elements are of vital importance in the successful implementation of the components of RtI because teachers and administrators must collaborate with one another, review data, and discuss what is going well and what is not going well in order to effectively meet student needs. The proper execution of the collaborative inquiry approach can ensure that all of the components will facilitate success. These elements and this conceptual framework are discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

Background

The sections that follow provide background information about the creation of the RtI program from a federal, state, and school district perspective. Also detailed are the problem statement and methods used in this study.

Federal Response

In 2004, Congress re-authorized the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), which included major changes in the referral process for identifying special education students. It changed the process from a discrepancy model to a responsiveness through intervention model (Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, & Saenz, 2008). The law enables the local education agency (LEA) to use a process that determines whether or not a student responds to intervention that is scientific and research-based (Turnbull, 2005). It is not until after that intervention occurs that the LEA will be allowed to recommend the need for a special education referral. This requirement has led many school districts and state education departments to implement the Response to Instruction (RtI) program.

Response to Instruction (RtI) Program

Response to Instruction (RtI) is an instructional framework that connects all educational services (general, gifted, and special education) with high-quality instruction, standards-based

instruction, and intervention to match students' individual needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In addition, through an adjoining process, RtI also identifies and provides early intervention for students exhibiting behavior challenges through various interventions. Gersten et al. (2009) stated that RtI has been explicitly recognized as a diagnostic process for evaluating, identifying, and assisting students with specific learning disabilities.

The RtI framework was initially developed from an investigation in the 1970s by the National Research Council (NRC). The NRC wanted to evaluate the validity of the classification process when determining students' placement into special education programs (Gresham, 2005). They used three criteria throughout their research: a) quality of instruction in the general education program, b) value of the special education program in producing important student outcomes, and c) accuracy and meaningfulness of the assessment process in the identification of a disability (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982). The student's placement is only considered valid when all three criteria are met.

The NRC recommended that before determining special education placement, schools should repeatedly assess the students' progress in the general education curriculum using a curriculum-based measurement as opposed to the old process of using one-time IQ test (Gresham, 2005). Fuchs, Fuchs, and Speece (2002) noted that the results of the IQ achievement assessment has resulted in the overrepresentation of males and minority students in special education and does not provide any information about the areas in which the students need to improve. Rather than relying on this single IQ score, the RtI process involves a multi-tiered approach providing intervention in three levels (Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III) and individualization based on what the student needs in order to achieve positive gains. Vaughn and Fuchs (2003) recognized four advantages of RtI: early identification of learning problems, recognizing

learning problems as a risk model rather than a deficit model, reducing identification biases, and focusing on student outcomes.

State Responses

With the implementation of RtI becoming a national trend throughout the United States, Sawyer, Holland, and Detgen (2008) found that over one-third of the states indicated that they planned to use the program as a replacement or supplement to the learning disability discrepancy model. Most states also indicated that they were using, or plan to use, a combined problem-solving, standard treatment protocol model for making multi-tiered RTI decisions (Sawyer et al., 2008). In the southern region of the United States, where this study occurred, state education departments have varied from planning phases in Alabama and South Carolina, to piloting initiatives in Florida and North Carolina, to statewide rollouts in Georgia and Mississippi (Sawyer et al., 2008). The states also varied in the leadership of the RtI program. In some states, the special education departments took the initiative to implement the program. However, in states such as Alabama, general education departments led the way. This also guided Alabama's decision to name the program Response to Instruction as oppose to Response to Intervention.

Since many states, such as Illinois, required their school districts to implement RtI in order to identify students with specific learning disabilities (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010), programs and resources for all three levels of implementation have become important. Organizations such as NASDSE and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) have supported researchers and practitioners in their efforts to "provide a framework around which implementation can be built" (NASDSE, 2008, p. 3) at the state, district and school levels. Universities such as the University of Texas at Austin developed "Building Capacity for Response to Intervention" through their Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risks

(Meadows Center, 2012). The goal in developing this project was to provide a venue for Texas educators to acquire resources needed to successfully implement RtI in their districts and schools.

Alabama Context

In response to the law change at the national level, the Alabama Legislature (the state in which this study occurred) revised the Child Identification section under the Alabama Code. The law now requires that there be data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement and periodic, reflective formal assessment of student progress during instruction. In addition, all public school districts must alter their special education pre-referral process and provide periodic progress monitoring and benchmark assessments for students.

This law, which follows the federal law, was designed to facilitate a reduction in the number of special education students and to proactively provide intervention to students who are at risk of not mastering academic content. It required that all students be involved in a universal screening process to identify their achievement levels, with the results being used to determine whether there is a need for any type of academic intervention. If there is a need identified, more data must be used to examine the individual student's areas of weakness. Unlike previous processes, before there is any type of special education referral, the students must proceed through intervention within the general education curriculum. In order to disseminate the new program to Alabama educators, the state's education leaders provided professional development sessions through webinars, informational workshops, consultants, and literature distributed to district and school leaders.

As far as the multi-tiered approach taken by the state, Alabama used the model that provides a continuum of services organized by three tiers. Tier I refers to implementing the core

general education classroom curricula. Through high-quality instruction in the general education classroom, student mastery should be achieved by approximately 80 percent of the student population. Tier II consists of approximately 15 percent of a school's student population. Students placed in this tier do not respond to class-wide intervention. Therefore, they are exposed to targeted small or large group supplemental instruction (Ardoin et al., 2005). Tier III intervention is considered to be the most intensive and is focused on individual students. This population accounts for only five percent of the students in the school. In addition to the three-tier model, the state also required each district to create a Problem Solving Team (PST) in their schools to monitor and lead each school in the RtI process. PSTs replaced Building Based Student Support Teams (BBSST), which were previously used in order to meet the current federal and state requirements (D. Gibbs, personal communication, June 7, 2011). Gibbs (personal communication, June 7, 2011) also stated that the main difference between the two is that the PST structure recommends interventions and addresses the needs of students who are low and high level, while the BBSST recommends accommodations only to students who are failing or at risk of failing their core classes. PST is also geared to ensuring that students receive interventions matched to their identified needs, and that appropriate progress monitoring tools are used to provide evidence of students' response to intervention, and that progress monitoring data are used to determine students' needs in order for them to make positive gains.

Districts' Challenges

The RtI approach emphasizes using intensive instruction that is created to fill small gaps in student achievement before they become bigger ones (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Research indicates that teachers and administrators are facing many challenges in learning how to implement RtI in a school environment where time is already an issue and teaching philosophies

are challenged. Murawski and Hughes (2009) found that some of these challenges included incorporating differentiated instruction, data analysis and application, and small grouping for intensive instruction. Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle (2007) stated that using high-quality instruction, communication, and gathering of data are key aspects of an effective RtI program. The teachers must evaluate how they can incorporate new teaching strategies to address students' individual needs. In addition, the administration has to assess and determine what can be done to aid in the teachers' struggles in implementing RtI.

Context of the Research

This section presents an overview of context within which the research occurred. It begins with a program description. This is followed by a brief description of Winfred City Schools (WCS) (pseudonym), the district in which it occurred. Both will be presented in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Program Description

In response to the change in the Alabama State Board of Education's policy, WCS created a plan that would meet the needs of their students. The district combined core instruction, assessment, and intervention within a multi-tiered system to increase student achievement. In its first year of full implementation, WCS focused on Tier I, II, and III of the academic component of the RtI framework. School leaders would implement the behavior component of the framework in Year 2.

Winfred City Schools District

WCS consists of 10 schools: one senior high, one junior high, one middle school, six elementary schools, and one kindergarten. The six elementary schools (ranging from grades 1st–5th) house an average of approximately 470 students with an average of 40 teachers and support

staff. Sixty-three percent of the student population is White, 24 percent is Black, 9 percent is Asian, 4 percent consists of other ethnicities which include Hispanic, American Indian, and Multi-Race.

All of the elementary schools transition into the district's only middle school which houses WCS's 6th and 7th graders. Currently, its student population is 1,150. Sixty-two percent of the students are White, 25 percent Black, and 13 percent Other which includes Asian and Hispanic populations.

The middle school students transition to the junior high school whose enrollment is 1,075 eighth and ninth graders. Sixty percent of the students are White, 30 percent are Black, and 10 percent consist of other ethnicities including Asian, American Indian, Multi-Race, and Hispanic.

The high school's population totals 1,390 tenth through twelfth graders. Similar to the junior high school, the high school's ethnicity breakdown is 60 percent White, 28 percent Black, and 12 percent Other consisting of American Indian, Asian, Multi-Race, Hispanic.

Structural Processes

As previously noted, research has indicated that RtI is maximized through a collaborative problem-solving approach to identify student needs and implement targeted interventions. Thus, the school district sought to incorporate the components of the Collaborative Inquiry Approach into the school system's implementation process.

To successfully implement RtI, WCS utilized the 3-tier approach. The various school levels operated the process differently to identify and address their student needs. At the elementary level, Title I, English Language Learner (ELL), and Reading coaches were responsible for providing Tier III instruction for their students. The Data, Support, and Instruction teams (DSI) were also organized by grade levels. Each of the grade level teachers

had planning periods together, therefore they were able to meet with the DSI team in order to discuss their struggling students. However, at the middle school, grade level math and language arts teachers were selected to deliver Tier III instruction for the year. The teachers, including the Tier III teachers, met during DSI team meetings along with their academic team members. Although the junior high and high school organized monthly DSI team meetings, they developed a different system that included a team of representatives from each grade level. In addition, their version of Tier III instruction included students participating in the Credit Recovery program provided by the district. Teachers were assigned as a Credit Recovery teacher for this program.

Teachers in the district were quite comfortable with the BBSST process they had been using prior to the implementation of RtI. Since the BBSST referral process focused on student failure due to grades, teachers had to re-learn how to become more proactive in identifying students who were struggling academically through using data from various types of assessments to determine their students' needs. They also had to become more adept at engaging in the collaborative inquiry process and in working with one another to assure student and program success.

School district personnel were aware of the changes that needed to be made and sought to provide support to teachers and administrators to help assure success. District and school-level professional development activities were conducted. In an effort to provide much needed professional development, the school district encouraged teachers and administrators to participate in a year-long program that focused on the research-based instructional strategies that have positive effects on student learning. School-based leaders also provided opportunities to their secondary-level staff members, which included a 2-day workshop with trainers from the

Alabama Reading Initiative. Their goal was to provide strategies to differentiate instruction to address the need of secondary teachers' lack of knowledge in the area of differentiated instruction.

The level of success of RtI in this district and in general depends upon multiple elements. Though some research has been conducted on this subject, much remains to be done. This researcher sought to examine the program implementation from the perspective of the teachers most closely involved with RtI in order to provide this school district with information to assist them in this endeavor and to provide meaningful insights to other school districts involved in similar processes.

Methods

This study used a qualitative approach to conduct an in-depth exploration of WCS's journey in implementing RtI from the perspective of educators who are serving as Tier III instructors, at all school and grade levels in the district. A purposeful sample of classroom educators was interviewed to gain data for the study. The methods are described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

After approval from the Institutional Review Board and Winfred City School District, data were collected using two techniques: document review and face-to-face interviews. Merriam (2009) notes that one of the benefits of document review is that it allows the researcher to find new meanings, create understanding, and reveal ideas significant to the research.

The researcher began the process of trying to expand his understanding of the implementation of the RtI process, by reviewing documents provided by the school district's Director of Instructional Support and Intervention. The documents consisted of survey responses

from each of the school's principals and assistant principal(s) assessing the effectiveness of RtI. These were collected by the Director through small group information sessions.

After reviewing the documents, the researcher combined this information with the elements contained in the conceptual framework to develop an interview protocol addressing the research questions of this study. Next, data were collected using person-to-person interviews. Patton (2002) states, "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot observe…feelings thoughts, and intentions" (p. 109). The purpose of the interviews was to examine the Tier III teachers' perceptions of the program's implementation.

Data Analysis

Since qualitative research comes in the form of words rather than numbers, the researcher is challenged with transforming those words to data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher used the "bottom-up" approach to develop themes and establish categories. This process involved developing a general sense of the data, and then coding description and themes about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). One significant feature of qualitative data analysis is that it is iterative, which means that the researcher cycles back and forth between data collection and analysis. Creswell (2005) wrote, "In qualitative research, you might collect stories from individuals, and, as your analysis of their stories proceeds, you may return for more information to fill in gaps in their stories" (p. 232). Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that data analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: reducing the data, displaying the data through charts, maps, graphs, etc., and drawing conclusions. These activities were applied to the data analysis as appropriate.

Significance of the Study

Although there is a national interest in RtI, there is not a large body of research about the process from the perspective of teachers and educational leaders (Sawyer et al., 2008). However, in a meta-analytic review of RtI research, Burns et al. (2005) examined four field-based and research-implemented models. Burns et al. found that the unbiased estimates of effects of field-based RtI models were twice as large in the areas of student outcome and systemic outcomes than those implemented by university-staff for research. Through their study, Burns et al. did not report finding any qualitative studies. However, the researcher of this study provided an in-depth qualitative study examining how teachers implemented and facilitated the RtI program process. Since the research on this topic is so scant, this study of a school district that is at the initial stages of implementation could provide vital information to similar districts that are in the beginning stages of implementation by providing insights into actions and strategies to use in order to enhance and improve the RTI process. It may also create a greater understanding of challenges to changing educators' mindset about providing diverse instruction and engaging in collaborative processes. Finally, the study will build on the literature on organizational change and the factors that facilitate and hinder the process.

Definition of Terms

Case Study: a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or a particular event (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data-based: relying on observation or experimental results that supported the hypothesis.

Differentiated Instruction: ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning (Tomlinson, 2004).

(**The) IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model**: assesses whether there is a significant difference between a student's scores on a test of general intelligence (e.g., an IQ test such as the *WISC-IV*) and scores obtained on an achievement test (e.g., the *Woodcock Johnson Achievement Test*). The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is the approach traditionally used to identify children with learning disabilities (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002).

Public School: an elementary or secondary school in the United States supported by public funds and providing free education of a community or district.

Response to Instruction (RtI): an instructional framework that connects all educational services (general, gifted, and special education) with high-quality instruction, standards-based instruction and intervention to match students' individual needs.

Specified Learning Disability (SLD): disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations.

State-mandated: any state-initiated constitutional, statutory or executive action that requires a local government to establish, expand, or modify its activities.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an introduction to the study, its purpose, research questions, and significance. The next chapter provides a review of the literature examining the current trends related to Collaborative Inquiry Approach and the RtI framework. Chapter 3 presents the design of the study, description of participants, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and a plan for data analysis. The final chapters present the findings, discussion, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the literature related to the research topic. It begins by providing an historical account of special education and its evolution from isolation to inclusion. The chapter then describes the Response to Instruction framework (RtI) and the Collaborative Inquiry Approach. This is followed with a thorough discussion of the key elements of the Collaborative Inquiry Approach and value and importance of this approach to the proper implementation of RtI. The chapter concludes with an overview of the research findings on the factors that serve as barriers to success of this approach and those that facilitate its implementation.

A Historical Perspective on Special Education

Special education is defined as "specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of an individual recognized as exceptional" (Gargiulo, 2010). Since its origin in Europe over 300 years ago, special education has reformed numerous times to expand and identify the many needs of children.

In the long dark ages, Winzer (2009) found that people with disabilities were treated cruelly and dismissed by society. Before the 18th century, no matter the type or degree of disability people had, they were placed in the category of "idiot". At the end of the 18th century, people who were labeled as mentally retarded and mentally ill were admitted to one of the many insane asylums throughout Europe and Great Britain. Doerner (1969) noted that these

institutions included individuals who were “truly insane, mentally retarded individuals, aged derelicts, albinos, epileptics, dissenters, and others who caused disruption to the social or religious order” (p. 45). As knowledge became abundant in the medical field, asylums became hospitals that provided “moral treatment for these individuals” (Doerner, 1969, p. 84).

Later, the Enlightenment Era brought the ideals of equality for all and the responsibility of all humans to take care of others. These ideals encouraged many European countries to begin some form of special education; however, France is credited with providing a generous desire for the proper treatment of individuals with exceptionalities (Winzer, 2009). Initially, new educational opportunities for the disabled focused on people who were deaf, blind, and/or intellectually disabled (Winzer, 2009). The term, intellectual disability, has since evolved to include a wide spectrum of disabilities. As the core ideals of the Enlightenment era began to carry over into European colonies in North America, the influences of Europe’s views on disability which incorporated the concept of benevolent intervention became integrated into the North American perspective. Institutions and organizations began to form various disability groups such as Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet’s Connecticut Asylum for Education and the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons (Valentine, 1993).

Once such institutions began to gain popularity, they began to request financial assistance from the private sector, as well as from the state and local government. For example, Mason Cogswell, doctor and philanthropist, secured an act of incorporation from the Connecticut legislature that allowed 63 Hartford residential facilities to form into a corporation under the name “Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons” (Winzer, 1993). Lane (1976) wrote that the legislature provided funding of $5, 000, and

Congress donated 23, 000 acres to build institutional settings for the "security of the public and the proper treatment of patients" (p. 99).

In a like manner, Horace Mann led Massachusetts in the "Common School Movement" in an effort to provide an equal educational opportunity for all students. Mann sought to create a tuition-free school that all children attended and a common political and social ideology was taught (Spring, 1994). However, the idea of an education for all students began to change as teachers and administrators began to notice the challenges of the students whom they noted "violated social mores, failed to conform to the expectations of teachers and mounted threats to the placidity of general classrooms" (Winzer, 2009, p. 23). Most of these students were boys and were labeled as morally and intellectually weak (Osgood, 1997).

The creation of special classes emerged to handle students who Wallin (1914) referred to as feeble-minded. Also known as ungraded classes, these classrooms focused on restoration and remediation. Farrell (1908) described the first special class in New York City as a space for those students to exist with other students in the regular school. She describes such students as "over-aged, so called naughty…, and the dull and stupid children" (p. 91).

Although the concept of special education was not as successful as had been expected during the early 1900s, considerable interest in the first two decades of the new century arose from new findings in psychology and child study as well as new direction in medicine and public health, which began to be applied within these programs (Winzer, 2009). Special education expanded as states began requiring appropriate educational placement in public schools. For example, in 1911, Massachusetts was the first to pass a law making it mandatory to educate intellectually disabled children; New Jersey also passed the first compulsory special class law for the deaf, blind, and intellectually disabled that same year (Winzer, 2009).

The 1960s saw an expansion of special education and a movement to truly meet the needs of students with disabilities. This period was "a beacon of change, an optimistic period of American history, a time when both the desire and the finances existed to promote social and educational changes" (Winzer, 2009, p.105). In the midst of historical events such as the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, which was focused on the needs of people, the special education movement significantly benefitted from the major issues that surrounded it. In addition, with the passing of the *National Defense Education Act of 1958*, the federal government provided financial and research support in special education services to train higher education instructors who would, in turn, train special education teachers. The *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 also prohibited discrimination in education, social services, and other federally sponsored activities.

As discussion and interest in special education was sparked, other specialized laws were passed that were more specific to the needs of those individuals with disabilities. The passage of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* of 1975 "guaranteed the availability of free special education to children who needed it; assured that decisions about special education would be fair and appropriate in the least restrictive environment; required clear management procedures for special education at all levels; and provided federal funds to supplement the costs of state and local governments' special education programs" (Winzer, 2009, p.119).

Later, the 1980s ignited further discussion about what should be considered as "the least restrictive environment" and a fundamental movement of inclusion in the general education classroom setting began. Winzer (2009) wrote:

> As a proxy for school restricting, inclusion was not merely minor tinkering done to improve basic educational structures; it was a major reform that was designed to

> transform and alter permanently the structure and organization of schooling…reform needed to change general education fundamentally in terms of its teaching and learning processes to fashion school programs that would be responsive to the needs of all learners. (p. 203)

The concept of inclusion gained popularity throughout the country, and became a part of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* of 1997 which required schools to incorporate students in the general classroom and align the outcome measures on their Individual Education Plan to the general education curriculum goals and objectives (Winzer, 2009).

In the midst of the debate about inclusion, another concern arose about the throughout disproportionality of males and minorities who were being place in special education programs (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Although special education legislation sought to recognize the value of all human beings and many students were assisted by it, the over-representation of minority groups and the overuse of tests as the primary source of evidence used to determine special education classes became identified as serious problems within the special education system. Sullivan and Bal (2013) discussed early research which found that factors facilitating the over-representation of minority groups involved assessment bias, teacher ratings of performance, and referral patterns in schools.

One initiative to help address this concern and to close the achievement gap between whites and minority groups was the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* (NCLB), approved by Congress and signed by President George W. Bush. This new law required states to conduct assessments linked to the state's standards and to identify schools which failed to show adequate yearly progress in math and reading. A purpose of this law was to help assure that all students would be proficient in math and reading by the year 2013–2014 (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

Consequently, in public educational institutions throughout the country a concurrent movement focused on assuring all children would succeed in becoming college and career-ready adults. As part of the need to deal with these issues, President Obama's administration revised NCLB and passed the 2010 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act which focused on four areas (United States Department of Education, 2010) :

(1) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader;
(2) Providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, and to educators to help them improve their students' learning;
(3) Implementing college and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards; and
(4) Improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions (p. 3)

The latter priority is one that is not only important in the low-performing schools, but throughout all schools in the nation, in meeting the needs of every child. These legislative actions have aided in creating mental shifts in the education of students and provided an outline of the federal government's expectations of schools throughout the nation.

This focus on meeting individual student needs led local and state education legislators and leaders to create mandates to ensure that student learning and achievement is increased. To support this effort, they have identified and adopted strategies and programs geared to providing intensive support and effective interventions to assist student learning before referring students for special education services. This focus on intervening to foster student success has an additional goal of reducing the overpopulation of students in special education through

redesigning the pre-referral process for special education. One approach to this effort has been Response to Instruction (RtI) programs. Presently, over 70 percent of state departments and local school districts in the country have begun the implementation of RtI in order to support struggling learners (Gersten et al., 2009).

Response to Instruction (RtI)

RtI is defined as "the practice of providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions" (Batsche et al., 2005, p. 1). RtI requires schools to analyze the quality of instruction as opposed to solely using standardized tests to label students' learning deficiencies (Ardoin et al., 2005).

Mack, Smith, and Straight (2010) defined RtI as a single, well-integrated, multi-tiered system that connects general, remedial, and special education through scientifically-based research instructional practices. It is a comprehensive and coordinated framework for monitoring students' mastery of skills and for responding to the lack of progress with appropriate levels of intervention. RtI has appeared to achieve its goals, and studies found that it has produced positive outcomes that indicate decreases in children who were considered for special education services and greater accuracy in providing differentiated instruction who are low achieving or who have not been provided with previous adequate instruction (Ardoin et al., 2005).

Hoover and Love (2011) noted that 70 percent of school districts nationally have implemented RtI in their schools. The majority of these districts use the RtI model that consists of three hierarchal tiers of intervention/instruction which increases based on the needs of the struggling learner: Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III (see Figure 1).

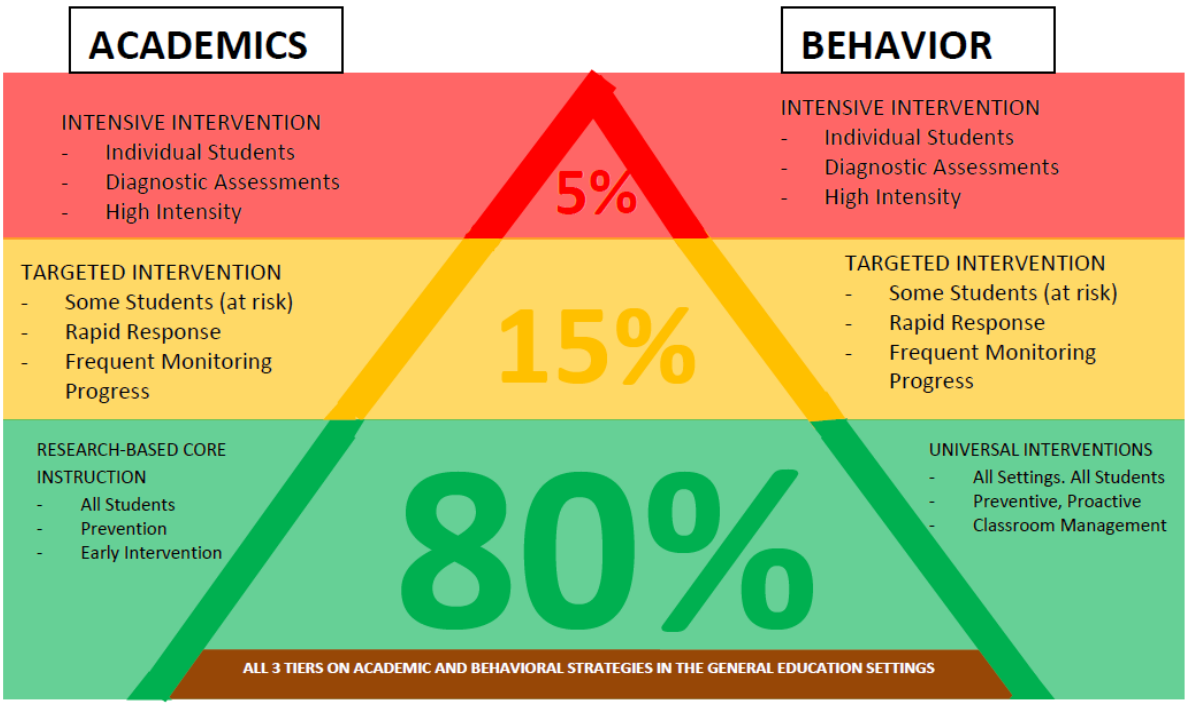

Figure 1. Three-Tier RtI Model (Alabama State Board of Education, 2009)

Tier I refers to implementing the core general education classroom curricula. This involves teachers in the regular education classroom providing quality instruction based on the state curriculum standards. Marston (2005) noted that Tier I is critical because it is the first tier that has to be implemented in the hierarchal process, and monitoring student performance is also important at this level. In Tier I, all students are monitored and involved in appropriate classroom-based instruction. To assess the students' performance, schools use universal screening for early intervention. Universal screening consists of assessing students and reviewing multiple measures such as test scores, recent grades, and teacher input that will help in identifying those who need a higher intervention for mastery (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008). Stecker, Fuchs, and Fuchs (2008) described screening measures as

> a tool to target students at the beginning of the school year to see how they would do as far as achieving the standards for the academic year. Also, the use of a screening measure could be extended throughout the year to implement a benchmark system. (p. 11)

Wixson and Valencia (2011) indicated that the purpose of the benchmark process is to gather data at predetermined times of the year to assess the overall performance of a student in relation to their age or grade level.

The next tier, Tier II, consists of approximately 15 percent of a school's student population. Students placed in this tier do not respond to class-wide intervention. Therefore, they are exposed to small or large group supplemental instruction within the classroom (Ardoin et al., 2005). Tier II refers to supplemental instruction to support specific needs that surface within Tier I instruction. There is an increase of collaboration of general and special education staff at Tier II (Marston, 2005). Although there is a combination of both general and special education intervention in Tier II, the second tier is more intensive than general education, but less intensive than Tier III (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Vaughn and Roberts (2007) found that Tier II can be intensified by decreasing the group size, so that fewer students are assigned to teachers and increase the amount of intervention. When implementing an intense secondary intervention, schools must consider: "a) amount of time per day, b) number of days per week, c) number of weeks of instruction, and d) when the intervention will occur" (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007, p. 44).

While schools prefer highly trained educators to provide secondary intervention, that is not always possible. However, research suggests that using well-trained tutors and paraprofessionals can sometimes be appropriate and has been associated with improved

outcomes. The key factor in this positive outcome involves "extensive and ongoing professional development, support, coaching, and clear guidance on instructional practice" (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007, p. 42).

In addition to monitoring at the Tier I level, Tier II continues to provide frequent progress monitoring for those students who need Tier II instruction. It is imperative to understand that when developing or selecting Tier II interventions, the goal is to make sure the students catch-up with their peers (Stecker et al., 2008). Therefore, during the daily sessions, the interventions must be "highly focused and keenly aligned with the instructional needs of the student" (Stecker et al., 2008, p. 13).

The last level of intervention, Tier III, is considered to be the most intensive and is focused on individual students. This population accounts for only five percent of the students in the school. These students have demonstrated poor performance and academic unresponsiveness to high quality instruction. This is indicated by poor patterns of growth in both general education classrooms and during more focused supplemental instruction (Stecker et al., 2008). Wanzek and Vaughn (2010) identified three distinct differences in Tier III from the other levels of intervention: 1) Tier III students may have more severe difficulties (sometimes even life-long); 2) more intensive interventions are provided; and 3) very high expertise and knowledge is expected for Tier III instructors. If a Tier III student does not respond to intense intervention, the staff will consider referring him or her for services in special education.

Research has shown that there has been a decrease in special education placement due to implementing the three tiers of intervention (Torgesen, 2000; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000). These studies have also found that between two and seven percent of the student population does not respond to any of the three tiers.

Attributes of RtI

Some of the positive attributes of the RtI model is that it allows for educators to improve many of the issues that are associated with the "wait-to-fail" model (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Before RtI, many districts based their special education placements decisions on the IQ-Achievement discrepancy, which relies on the students having to fail a course in order to receive services (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). The RtI process is also effective because it uses teacher input in a problem-solving approach, and provides a record of instructional interventions to track student progress.

Another attribute of RtI is the reduction of over-identification of special education students (Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012). Since it is a multi-tiered process, students who could possibly master a particular area with minimum intervention could still receive the help they need without having to be referred to special education. Their needs could be met quicker and more efficiently.

RtI also focuses on providing interventions rather than accommodations which are used in other pre-referral processes. Accommodations do not meet the scientific, research-based intervention requirements included in current federal and state laws and regulations. In RtI, the problem-solving team recommends interventions and not accommodations. Gibbs (personal communication, June 8, 2011) notes that this type of intervention will result in students achieving academic proficiency especially when there is explicit and systemic instruction, smaller intervention group sizes, increased instructional time, and more individual skill practice.

Barriers to RtI

Although research has shown significant success in implementing RtI, there are some issues that serve as barriers to the success of the RtI process (Stecker et al., 2008). In a RTI

Pilot Project in Montana, Mahdavi and Beebe-Frankenberger (2009) found teachers viewed the biggest barrier to RTI's was the time it took to implement the process. They viewed it as being time, energy, and resource intensive and indicated that the organizational structures of the school made it extremely difficult to find the time or the energy to implement the process effectively.

One of the reasons that RtI involves so much time, energy, and resources is that there must be verification that research-based instructional practices are in place in Tier I and Tier II. Therefore, high-quality instruction must occur at all of these levels. This is critical because many students who are referred to special education demonstrate low performance due to the ineffective instruction in the classroom (Stecker et al., 2008). Another time and resource factor is the use of progress monitoring, which must be technically sound to capture overall student mastery. RtI requires that research evidence guides the use of these data for decision making.

A third limiting element is that student movement in and out of the three tiers of intervention must be considered and monitored. This requires schools to develop and implement protocols when students progress out of a tier or regress into a lower tier.

Johnson and Smith (2008) found several additional barriers to RtI, especially in the middle grades. These barriers include the lack of differentiated instruction, limited number of evidence-based instructional strategies, and the lack of a system that uses progress monitoring to make important decisions.

One way to overcome the barriers to success and implement effective RtI strategies is through the utilization of a collaborative inquiry approach. This requires quality leadership; the development and implementation of collaborative cultures; integrative data analysis, use, and decision-making; and professional development focused on instructional improvement (Love, 2009). These elements are described more fully in the following sections.

Collaborative Inquiry Approach

Collaborative inquiry is a structured process for problem understanding and solution generation, with defined roles and pacing for questions and solution suggestions (Byrne-Jiménez & Orr, 2007). While facilitators and participants have positional roles in the process they also have shared roles as inquirers and learners, creating a sense of trust and capacity building. Byrne-Jiménez and Orr (2007) centered collective inquiry on the following key ideas:

1) Collaborative inquiry is framed by an overarching question, within which problems of practice are explored and problem-solving approaches identified.
2) There are four aspects to problem-solving: problem identification, problem exploration, solution generation, and solution development.
3) Complex problems require multiple frames of reference that can unpack their elements and generate novel solutions.
4) Educational leaders rely on one or two frames of reference for problem-solving and can benefit from other participants' frames of reference to provide new insights and solutions.
5) Structured reflection with colleagues can facilitate better problem understanding and solutions; it is a skill that can be developed through practice. (p. 20)

The Collaborative Inquiry Approach can best be illustrated as a bridge (Figure 2) that enables schools to connect the increasing amount of school data available to improve student learning (Love, 2009). Schools must cross the metaphorical bridge by integrating the following components: leadership and capacity, collaboration, data use, and instructional improvement. Love (2009) contended that "these stepping blocks are embedded due to school culture, equity, and trust" (p. 2). It is then that learning results will be improved.

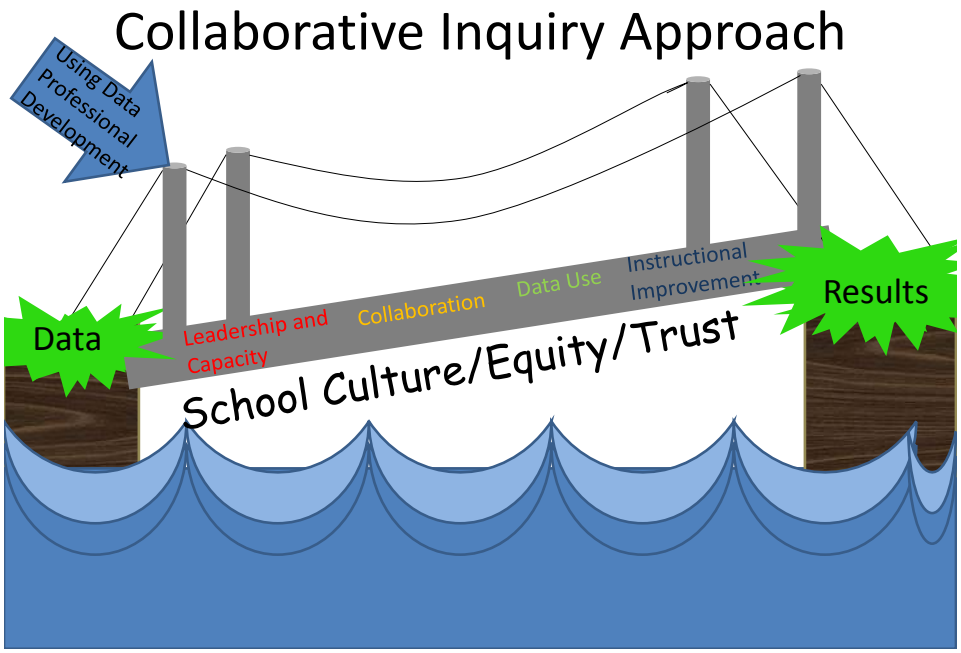

Figure 2. Redesigned based on Conceptual Framework from Collaborative Inquiry Approach (Love, 2009)

One distinction of collaborative inquiry is that it allows for data to be used efficiently and prevents school leaders from distributing test scores to teachers and simply asking them what they plan to do to improve the scores. This approach involves teachers constructing their understanding of student learning problems and embracing and testing out solutions together through rigorous use of data and reflective dialogue. Collaborative inquiry, also found to continuously improve teaching and learning, is based on more than data, and requires wholesale cultural exchange (Love, 2009).

Continuously improving teaching and learning in the classroom is a key factor in student success. In collaborative inquiry, educators discuss student comprehension and performance on a periodic basis. For example, they may use a data pyramid to monitor various practices and data at different times throughout the year. As the teachers monitor progress at the various time

periods, they also discuss as a team what the data results show. Love (2009) illustrated a suggested timeline to evaluate student progress throughout the school year (see Figure 3). Using a timetable such as this, teachers are given immediate feedback on their practices from the information provided. For example, in a math course, teachers may provide daily formative assessments through homework assignments and quizzes, but they may provide only a few end-of-unit common assessments throughout the grading period. If the data pyramid is used properly, teachers monitor student progress throughout the time they are providing instruction. In addition, the teachers are able to adjust their instruction based on the feedback they receive from periodic assessments.

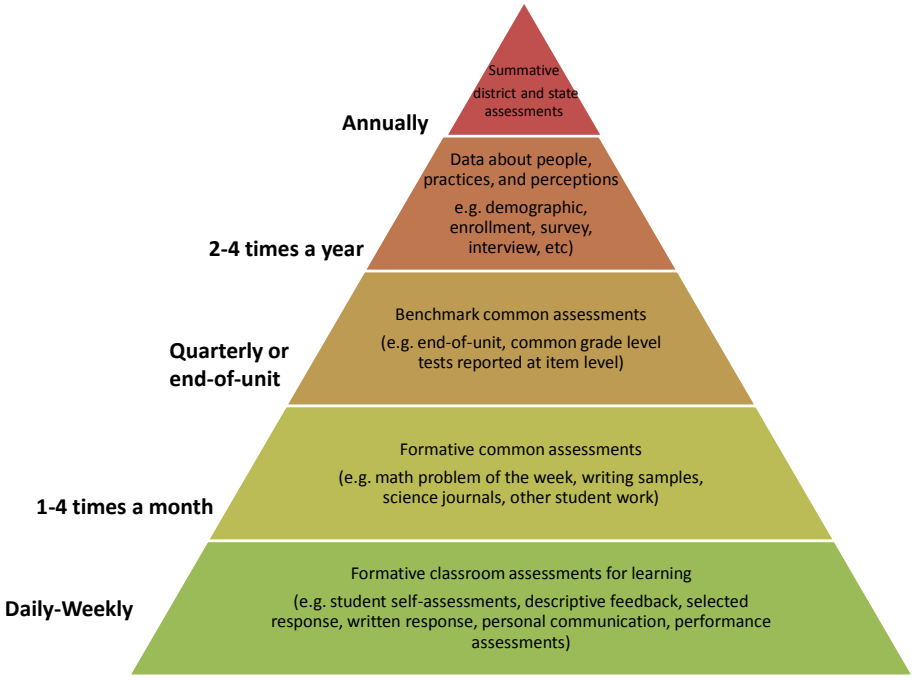

Figure 3. Data Pyramid. Suggested timeline benchmarks to evaluate student progress throughout the school year. (Adapted from Love, 2009)

The pyramid also acknowledges the effective use of data pertaining to the characteristics of the student population, which provides just as much pertinent information as the assessment data (Love, 2009). Reviewing data about the school's student population and their perceptions and using benchmark assessments can also determine various practices and whether or not they will be effective in the classroom. So, before students even get to the summative district and state assessment, teachers should already know their students' deficiencies. This practice connects well with the component of RtI that suggests periodic benchmark assessments throughout the school year to assess mastery.

The collaborative inquiry process helps school districts and schools to determine their progress and also aids teachers in learning how to inquire of their students' progress on their own (Huffman & Kalnin, 2003). The process also helps "break the cycle of isolation…, breakdown the barriers faced by teachers…, teachers critically inquire about teaching…, and focus on evidence-based decisions" (Huffman & Kalnin, 2003, p. 578).

An example of a program grounded in the collaborative inquiry approach is the Using Data Project (UDP) (Love, Stiles, Mundry, & DiRanna, 2008). The purpose of UDP was to "build the capacity of school and district-based teacher leaders and administrators to lead a process of collaborative inquiry to influence the culture of schools so that data are used continually, collaboratively, and effectively to improve teaching and learning" (p.1). UDP consisted of teachers and administrators who became data facilitators for their respective schools. The project provided comprehensive professional development for the educational leaders so they could return to their schools as data facilitators. The data facilitators were trained in the following competencies in order to become experts in their schools/districts: collaborative inquiry and data literacy skills; cultural responsiveness; content and pedagogical content

knowledge; and leadership and facilitation skills. With these skills sharpened, schools have been found to be associated with high capacity data use, which has lead to instructional improvement and achievement gains. The Intercultural Research in Education group (INCRE) reported UDP participants had greater engagement in data driven decision-making, greater and more meaningful use of data, and increased collaborative inquiry in the participating schools (Zuman, 2006).

In addition to the increase in data use in schools, the UDP schools have experienced increases in student mastery and performance. In Canton City, Ohio school district, they doubled the percentage of students passing in the three of four of their middle schools in the state tests and the common grade level assessments. In 2005, three of four middle schools maintained or exceeded achievement gains made in 2004. In Johnson County, Tennessee, grades 3, 5, and 8 who earned proficient and above went from 36 percent to 73 percent after participating in UDP.

Leadership and Capacity

As the bridge diagram illustrates, in order for any type of change to occur in a learning organization, there must be leadership in the forefront to provide the necessary support and guidance. There are numerous definitions of leadership.Bass and Stogdill (1990) stated that,

> Leadership has been conceived as the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviors, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interactions, as a differentiated role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions. (p. 8)

Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (1993) created a list of definitions of leadership after studying the various interpretation of the role and learned how complex the definition could be.

They stated that a leader directs and coordinates the work of group members; acts as an interpersonal relation in which others comply because they want to, not because they have to; transforms followers, creates visions of the goals that may be attained, and articulates for the followers the ways to attain those goals; influences an organized group toward accomplishing its goals; and focuses resources on actions that create desirable opportunities.

McFarland, Senn, and Childress (1993) discussed leadership with 100 top leaders about the most important changes they see in leadership in the 21st century. Through the conversations, the researchers found emerging themes that would help future leaders possess the proper characteristics which included: 1) leadership is no longer a position for only the person "at the top", it is for all who are involved; 2) leaders must facilitate excellence in others; and 3) recognizing the difference between leadership and management; The three themes are described in detail below.

Distributed Leadership

As change is being implemented, leadership must be exhibited not only on only at the administrative level, but must also involve other staff members throughout the school. It is essential that administrative leaders delegate and allow others within the school to participate in the change process. Reeves (2005) described this style as distributed leadership which is based on trust, as well as certain knowledge and skills that no single leader possesses, and talent to lead an organization. Reeves compared leadership in schools to the architect who built the Temple of Concord. Even though the lead architect receives all of the credit, he could not have built a temple that lasted over 2,500 years alone. "Whether it is the Temple of the Concord or the Temple of student achievement, the temple of educational excellence or the temple of

educational equity, even the most skilled and hard-working architect cannot build the temple alone" (p. 28).

To determine if distributed leadership is the proper vehicle for an inquiry process for school improvement, Copland (2003) analyzed a collection of mixed methods data. He studied the concept in two phases: surveys and random observational data. Participants included school leaders and a sample of teachers in the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) Leadership School.

Principals recognized that participating in the BASRC School was positive. Ninety-one percent of the principals agreed or strongly agreed that their school's BASRC involvement was instrumental in changing teacher leadership (Copland, 2003). Copland (2003) also found that the program helped school principals promote leadership activity among other stakeholders in the school community. Overall, Copland discovered "the use of the inquiry-based approach builds a common vocabulary, enables articulation of the one or two key issues that the school aim to address, and is a key vehicle for building distributed leadership for improving teaching and learning" (p. 387).

Because of the new leadership philosophy, participating schools created new structures to support the efforts of distributed leadership. One of the new structures included the role of teacher leaders. School leaders broaden the role of teachers to include leadership responsibilities such as teacher leader, master teacher, mentor teacher, and team leader (Smylie, 1997). Subsequently, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2007) wrote, "Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change" (p. 2). Teacher leadership has been an integral part of the decision-making process since there has been an emphasis for a need to professionalize teaching. Advocates claimed the career structure for

teachers was flat, there was no room for growth, and school leaders did not capitalize on teachers' expertise for school improvement (Stoelinga & Mangin, 2010). In their research, Stoelinga and Mangin (2010) found that school leaders incorporated teachers into the conversations of school improvement. This also makes sense because of the teachers' close proximity and knowledge of their students' needs and how to meet those needs. It must be clear that the teacher leader's primary focus should be on teaching and learning. However, teaching and learning is affected when teachers develop leadership capacity and take on school-wide responsibilities (Murphy, 2005). Stoelinga and Mangin noticed that many of these school-based positions are used as to conduct managerial and administrative tasks. They stress that teacher leader roles should include all activities that would help improve instructional practice. These activities include conducting workshops, facilitating study groups, co-planning and modeling lessons, observing teaching and providing feedback. It is also suggested that teacher leaders can be a driving force to help collect and analyze data in the schools. This information can help administrators make decisions that will not only help the students, but also the teachers (Stoelinga & Mangin, 2010).

Crowther (2009) conducted a 5-year study on teacher leadership, in which he noted that school success has been achieved because teacher leaders: 1) convey convictions about a better world, 2) facilitate communities of learning, 3) strive for pedagogical excellence, 4) confront barriers in the school's culture and structures, 5) translate their ideas into sustainable systems of action, and 6) nurture a culture of success. Crowther also identified seven challenges school leaders face in to allow teacher leaders to effectively take on a decision-making role. These challenges were a collective list he developed from interviews with school principals who incorporated teacher leadership in their schools. Crowther then identified the strategies school

leaders should implement when fostering teacher leader development to overcome the identified challenges. These strategies include:

1. School leaders must communicate strategic intent.
2. School leaders must incorporate the aspirations and views of others.
3. School leaders must be able to pose difficult to answer questions.
4. School leaders must make space for individual innovation.
5. School leaders must know when to step back.
6. School leaders should create opportunities from perceived difficulties.
7. School leaders should build on achievements to create a culture of success. (Crowther, 2009)

Leaders Create Strong, Collaborative Relationships

In addition to creating a culture of distributed leadership, leaders must create a relational environment that allows for progress to happen and fosters group morale. Reeves (2006) discovered that relational leaders listen to their colleagues without interrupting or prejudging, respect confidentiality, and have genuine empathy achieved through deliberate inquiry. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) found relational leaders have three times as much of an impact on organizational performance as analytical leaders do. In contrast, those who lack relationship skills have negative influences on the organization no matter how competent they are otherwise (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005).

Relational skills also connects with the key elements needed for collaborative leadership, which includes shared decision making and a willingness to concede one's own agenda. Conversely, leadership that is not collaborative is demonstrated by asserting a vision, accomplishing a mission, and where necessary and appropriate, exerting authority and making

unilateral decisions. Hallinger and Heck (2010) found in a four-year study of leadership, that collaborative leadership was a driver for change in school improvement capacity and indirectly impacted growth in student learning. They noted,

> Collaborative leaders are distinguished by the bridges they build…that individuals willingly cross, connecting 1) their personal needs and motives with a shared public purpose and 2) the work that they do with others whose collaborative alliance can help them do it better, faster, more easily, more enduring, more efficiently with broader ownership or with higher meaning. (p. 14)

Lastly, collaborative leadership involves communicative leadership. This type of leadership involves the skill of communicating with group members in various forms. This is not only the traditional written and oral communication skill that all group members should possess, but also includes the ability to communicate with other group members through the structure of things such as an agenda, emails, phone calls, webcasts (Reeves, 2006).

Management and Leadership: Two Edges of the Same Sword

Kotter (2008) noted that leadership and management should be seen as two different entities. He stated that management is about coping within a complex organization that tends to be chaotic and could threaten the organization's very existence. Good management brings order and consistency. On the other hand, leadership is considered to be coping with change. Kotter (2008) stated, "Major changes are more and more necessary to survive and compete effectively in this new environment. More change always demands more leadership" (p. 114).

Collaboration

As mentioned in the previous section, a leader must be collaborative and possess the ability to create a collaborative culture throughout the school's environment. To work well, the

RtI process requires a high level of collaboration among general and special education teachers, administrators, and specialists (Mahdavi & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2009). Collaboration among these groups in schools contributes to the achievement of a common goal. Murawski and Hughes (2009) defined collaboration as "the interaction between professionals who offer different areas of expertise, yet share responsibilities and goals" (p. 269). Rubin (2009) also defined collaboration is a strategically-planned and purposeful relationship in order to accomplish a shared outcome. Collaboration is complex and context specific and so its implementation processes may vary, but it has some specific characteristics (Rubin, 2009).

Characteristics of Collaboration

Cook and Friend (1991) noted that collaboration has many characteristics that will help define it. One characteristic of collaboration is that it must be done on a voluntary basis. Therefore, school leaders should not mandate that staff members participate in a professional activity. Cook and Friend emphasized that coercing people into working together in joint activities may get them to the table, but this type of endeavor is not collaboration.

Collaboration must also involve having participants share a common goal. Although all participants may have the common goal to do what is best for students, Cook and Friend found that each participant comes with his/her own set of expectations which makes it more difficult, initially, to narrow and specify goals that can be operational and evaluated. Thus, there must be opportunities for people to develop these goals together.

Parity among participants is another characteristic that must be in place in order to properly implement collaboration. No matter what role participants serve in the school (special education teacher, general education teacher, speech therapist, counselor, administrator, etc), everyone in the group must believe that he/she is a valuable participant; without each person's

input and expertise, the collaboration would not be effective. Parity will create the basis for the required shared responsibility for decisions; will help minimize miscommunication when decisions are agreed upon when decided as a group and not divided up and decided in smaller groups; and in turn, help with shared accountability for outcomes (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Collaborative School Cultures

Gruenert (2005) conducted a study to investigate the salience of collaborative culture in relation to student achievement. Based on a state-wide survey and an analysis of the participating schools' achievement scores, the participating schools not only exhibited higher achievement, but also were engaged in a collegial work climate (Gruenert, 2005). However, it is important to understand the difference between a collegial climate and just a friendly environment in a school. "Professional relationships in American schools seem to be friendly, but not yet collegial" (Lortie, 2002).

If collaboration is to succeed, this concept must be built into the culture of the school. Lam, Yim, and Lam (2002) found in their study that "If the emphasis is placed on the fulfillment of the *format* of collegiality without regard for the development of the culture, any attempt to initiate collaboration will only result in administratively imposed collegiality whose effects will be subverted" (p. 193). They also found that although the development of this culture is effective, it is quite slow and will provide genuine collaboration as opposed to mandated collaboration forced by administration (Lam et al., 2002). Higgins-D'Alessandro and Sadh (1998) defined school culture as a consistent pattern of traditions, beliefs, and values formed over a period of time within a school climate. School leaders must lead the way and model the collaboration that they expect to see from their teachers (Piercey, 2010). In a comparative analysis of cultural ethos, Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex (2010) found that collaboration is an

explicit purpose and process for teachers and administrators and opportunities for outside collaboration are available and supported. In a school that has embedded a collaborative culture, teachers can tinker, transfer knowledge, work together to solve problems, dialogue with colleagues, and engage with middle managers in facilitating their collaboration (Hargreaves, 1999; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994).

In a three-year study examining the dynamics of school culture in three elementary schools that have beaten the odds of low achievement, Strahan (2003) found that a collaborative culture was a major factor in the schools' increase in low-income and minority achievement. Over time, the schools

> developed a cultural stance that communicated expectations and values to new teachers.… Conversations about learning and teaching routinely featured formal and informal assessments.… Teachers knew what students needed to succeed, and when unsure, could count on their colleagues for suggestions and support. This set the stage for continuous improvement. (p. 142)

Strahan also found that a collaborative school culture included practical, daily routines such as collaborating planning sessions, modeling and practicing instructional strategies, and review of data of sources to guide decisions.

Data Use and the Data-Based Decision Making Process

The fourth component of collaborative inquiry is the efficient and proper use of data. Data-driven decision making has been an untapped resource in determining student needs. Over the years, schools have possessed a wealth of data in storage closets and basements (Wayman, 2005). Although schools have been "data-rich," they have been also "information-poor" because these stored treasures have been inaccessible to teachers and often have been difficult to

comprehend. Since the inception of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), there has been a push to open those closets, and basements so data may be used to identify the needs of students by way of making improvements (Wayman, 2005; Wayman & Stringfield, 2006).

Schools cannot review only one method of assessment to help identify needs. There needs to be a variety of data measures to aid in the process. Ackley (2001) states in education, data are significant sources of information that aids in making effective decisions concerning instruction, curriculum content, and how student achievement will be impacted. He also notes that if educators rely solely on data from a summative assessment, they are more likely to ignore the immediate needs of individual students (Ackley, 2001). Thus, in order to determine what data are important, it is essential to understand that "learning is cumulative" (Bernhardt, 2004).

Data Analysis in Schools

In order to begin to analyze data, schools must determine what data should be analyzed to help improve student achievement. Bernhardt (2003) states that schools already have an abundance of powerful data they can use. She adds that school leaders can answer any question to evaluate the effectiveness of their school by gathering, intersecting, and analyzing four types of data: 1) Demographics, 2) Student Learning, 3) Perceptions, and 4) School Processes. Figure 4 explains, in detail, the interrelations of the categories of data measures.

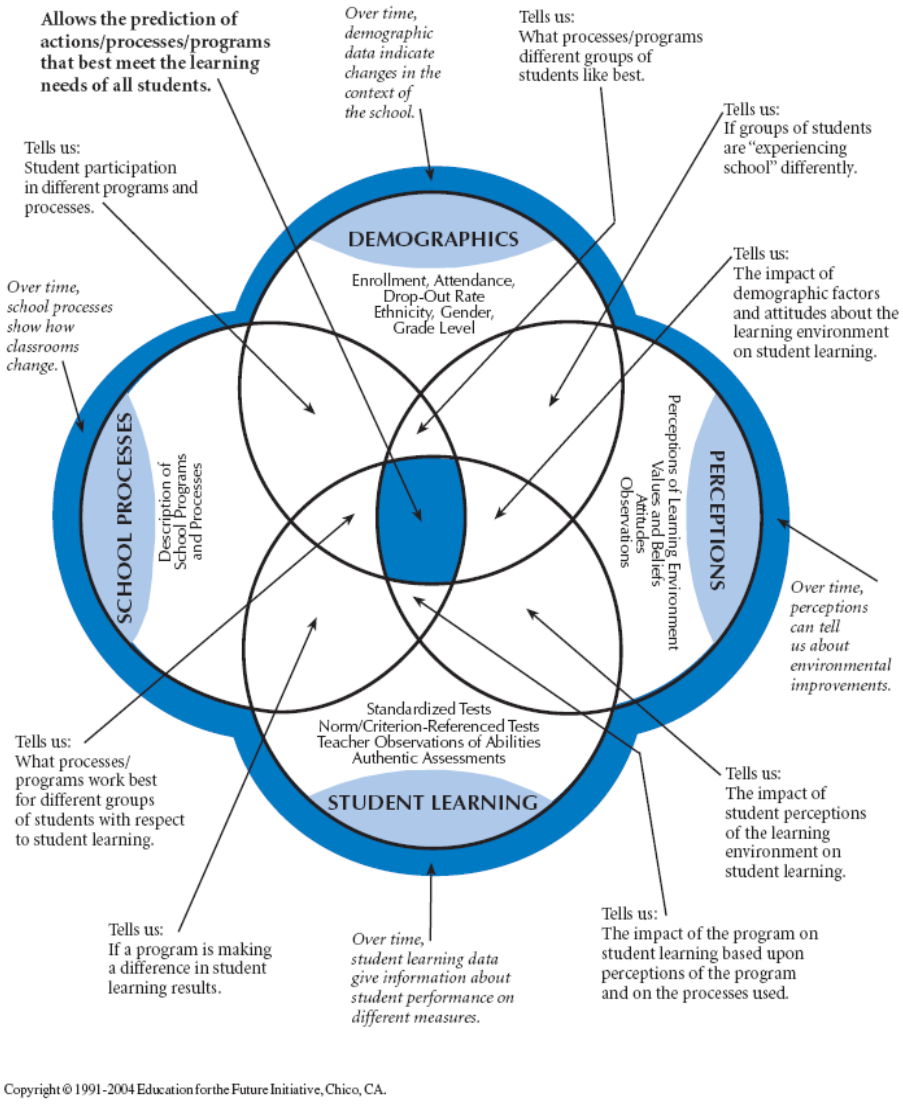

Figure 4. Measures of Data (Bernhardt, 2004)

Before delving into data, Depka (2006) recommends that group members ask one another what sources will be used, levels of data to consider, how information can be organized for efficiency, who will participate, and how much time is needed. It is also important in analyzing data that everyone carefully examines data results and fosters questions about what is seen and what is needed.

When analyzing data, the demographics of a particular district are important because they can reveal trends which will assist in developing a plan based on the student population (Bernhardt, 2004). Demographic data helps provide information such as enrollment, attendance level, grade level, ethnicity, gender, native language, teacher data, experience, and socioeconomic status. Gathering perceptions of those involved, such as students, parents, and staff helps them to reflect upon what they think about their learning environment, about the schools, and the community, and can be a useful data source in determining needs that might not be addressed by hard data such as numerical demographic or assessment data (Bernhardt, 2004). Perceptions can be gathered through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations. This information is relevant to the data analysis process so leaders can understand the perceptions of all stakeholders to improve their school culture.

Once the demographics and perceptions are examined, leaders must explore the elements of student learning, which expose the academic outlook of the school (Bernhardt, 2004). Raw data such as standardized test results, grade point averages, standards assessments, and authentic assessments can be used to determine the school's overall status on student achievement. An essential element in the success or failure of student learning is the process schools are incorporating and the resources they are using in order to get students to achieve mastery. Processes include things such as curricular programs (such as Alabama Reading Initiative); groupings such as special education and English as a Second Language; instructional strategies; and other classroom practices should all be considered part of the data about the school and should be examined and considered when considering areas of success, failure, and needed change.

Efficiency of Data Use

Many studies have found various factors in fostering data efficiently (Kerr, Marsh, Ikemoto, Darilek, & Barney, 2006; Lachat & Smith, 2005; Wayman & Stringfield, 2006). In the Wayman and Stringfield (2006) study, they found that the facilitating factors in successfully using data included user-friendly systems, timely data, and longitudinal data. Receiving timely feedback was an essential component of applying data information in schools. Participants noted that having student data at the start of the school year was beneficial because they were able to learn more about incoming students (Wayman & Stringfield, 2006). Wayman and Stringfield also found that using longitudinal data frequently provided teachers a student's academic achievement history, which was useful in understanding and supporting students.

An area of concern that impacted data use buy-in from the faculty in the Wayman and Stringfield (2006) study was the validity and accuracy of various assessments. The validity concerns consisted of content quality of the tests administered and student- or classroom-level item analysis. Another concern was that teachers complained that data were not timely (Wayman & Stringfield, 2006). In one district, principals and teachers criticized the district administrator's emphasis on using state test results in their school improvement plan because by the time they received it, it was out of date. Ackley (2001) examined how a district might use new technology to provide teachers with current student performance data to aid in receiving out-of-date data. He suggested that teachers receive formative, detailed item-by-item local assessment results for students as well as whole-class reports to help with remediation and to help them identify programs that might address a specific need.

In addition to the concerns in the previous paragraphs, there has been an issue with teachers' capacity to effectively use data in schools (Kerr, et al., 2006). Researchers addressing

this issue found that only 19% of the teachers and administrators in the schools they examined felt that they had sufficient skills to manipulate the data in a manner that would allow them to address the issues they were examining (Kerr et al., 2006). To help increase the efficacy of reading and applying data, various professional development programs focus on inquiry and formulating research questions, data-based dialogue strategies, and applying real school data to address issues and challenges (Kerr et al., 2006). Lachat and Smith (2005) found that improving data access by restructuring school processes helped enhance understanding of the data. One example was the creation of a Data Access Plan. The Plan enabled school personnel to gain a better understanding of why the data were needed, and when to expect to receive them. After this strategy was implemented, the schools created teams and they were given data as early as possible to analyze student literacy and target instructional needs more effectively for their school.

Data disaggregation also was studied in this case (Lachat & Smith, 2005). Teams received data quarterly to determine student progress in student attendance and academic success. This type of data allowed administration and faculty to depend less on annual state assessments. It also allowed the teachers to make more meaningful instructional decisions (Lachat & Smith, 2005).

Similar to Lachat and Smith's (2005) study, Stiggins (2002) noted that in order for administration and staff to fully delve into data, an effort to increase assessment literacy nationwide is needed. He suggested establishing a comprehensive program nationally, statewide, and locally to foster literacy in classroom assessment use for state, district, and building-based administrators. Another action Stiggins feels is needed is the review of licensing requirements for educators to include an expectation of competence in analyzing assessment data.

Technology is another barrier to data use/access in schools (Chen, Heritage, & Lee, 2005; Lachat & Smith, 2005; Wayman, Midgley, & Stringfield, 2006). Chen et al. (2005) suggested that successful data use to meet student needs depends on the school's and district's capacity. Heritage and Yeagley (2005) found most schools use an electronic information system that assists in management of student records. However, there needs to be a separate system for assessment data. There are data tools that will significantly enhance data use and analysis in schools and districts rather than using warehouses, Excel spreadsheets, and loose paper (Heritage & Yeagley, 2005).

In an effort to address issues with technology, Halverson (2010) comprised the Data-driven Instructional System (DDIS) which helps in translating summative achievement test data into formative data that aids teachers in improving student learning. The DDIS model consists of data acquisition, data reflection, program alignment, program design, formative feedback, and test preparation (Halverson, 2010). Data acquisition processes refer to searching, collecting, and preparing information to guide teaching and learning. As a result, Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, and Thomas (2005) found the schools studied acquired data via data collecting, data storage, and data reporting. One school reported that they found data results provided for administration insufficient for their local change process (Halverson et al., 2005). Therefore, they developed an internal system that helped guide instructional improvement such as student achievement data, student attendance, and student discipline. Data storage practices were found to also be a school-based effort, as opposed to total warehousing at the district-level (due to the relevance of the individual school program) (Halverson et al., 2005). They also noticed that low- and high technology solutions were used. However, all schools relied primarily on printouts and notebooks to keep update results relevant to the program (p. 21). Data reporting varied by each

of the schools consisting of approaches such as: 1) regular meetings with principal and lead teachers to report on student learning collected through regular testing and anecdotal information (Halverson et al., 2005); 2) the development of a weekly data report called the Critical Index, which was used to initiate staff conversations about the current state of the school's instructional system; and 3) the creation of an indicator system to identify individual students and their program level problems .

Once this is done, those involved must engage in data reflection. The purpose of data reflection is to make sense of student data in a structured, collaborative environment in order to improve teaching and learning. When data reflection is implemented successfully, it will include problem-framing and concludes with determining goals and a plan of action (Halverson et al., 2005). Halverson et al. (2005) found that data reflection was evident in two levels in their participating schools. As a result, data-led retreats allowed for the district to "develop a shared understanding for the district's overall instructional goals." Local data reflection was found to be worthwhile for two of the schools. Pearson School used professional development time for "implementation days" where faculty members discussed student achievement and student behavior reports. Special education teachers were also included to bridge communication between regular education faculty and special education faculty. Malcolm School's administration team met weekly to review data on student discipline which was later reported to teachers who developed strategies to reduce behavior and increase academic achievement. Halverson et al. stated that the value of local data reflection meetings did not lie in statistical analysis, but in the open, honest discussion of practice. They also found that the majority of the discussion was based on how to help struggling students improve rather than how to help students progress from proficient to advanced levels. Teachers were found to be more engaged

in the discussion when it focused on individual students and not on a grade or subject level (Halverson et al., 2005).

Another element of the DDIS Model is program alignment. This involves aligning the school's relevant content and performance standards with the content teachers are actually incorporating to improve learning and meet student needs (Halverson et al., 2005). Program alignment in the four schools in the study was found to be either a problem-finding purpose to identify whether or not a particular program was ineffective and not addressing student needs; or as an aid for the schools to understand how all of their current programs align with and address relevant content and curricular standards (Halverson et al., 2005). For example, the Direct Instruction (DI) program allowed the Harrison School principal not to use it as a "one-stop solution for student learning issues" (p. 24) but as a supplemental program to provide consistency within the school. The staff also used the program as an avenue to identify gaps in their current programs. In addition, Halverson et al. (2005) found that DDIS helped teachers and leaders align standards with student services, community outreach, and other programs.

After aligning the standards and instructional strategies, program design is enacted to meet instructional needs by creating curricula, pedagogies, student service programs, and instructional strategies to improve student learning. Program design showed how the four schools used either faculty-based programs to develop capacity for instructional practice; curriculum-based programs to instruct students in conventional classroom settings; and student-based programs to create individualized instructional plans for students (Halverson et al., 2005).

Formative feedback follows in the system to produce "learner-focused iterative evaluation cycles designed to create ongoing timely flows of information to improve both student learning and instructional program quality across the school" (Halverson et al., 2005,

p. 9). Lastly, test preparation involves activities designed to motivate students and develop strategies for improving their performance on state and district assessments. Of the six elements of the DDIS model, formative assessment is considered to be the most difficult to implement. This is probably why the researchers found that none of the schools exhibited the capacity to provide systematic feedback on student learning across instructional programs. However, all of the schools had feedback structures for individual programs. Programs such as Title I/Literacy were used to gather feedback to immediately adjust instruction in the classroom (Halverson, 2010).

Instructional Improvement

The last element that must be considered in the collaborative inquiry approach, and in reality, a final outcome, is improving instruction. One of the most effective methods for fostering instructional improvement and maintaining and increasing student achievement is the development of a school improvement plan (Bifulco, Duncombe, & Yinger, 2005). Doud (1995) wrote that "developing a school improvement plan is an integral part of every successful ongoing individual school improvement effort" (p.177). Fernandez (2011) stated that at any given moment, any school district will encumber variety of reforms or pedagogical activities to choose from to improve the quality of education.

All schools are mandated to have an improvement plan in order to ensure higher student achievement. Although these are mandates, the effectiveness of an improvement plan depends on whether there is ownership by stakeholders (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003). One major mandate was established through No Child Left Behind when the United States Department of Education designated schools that were in need of improvement as part of the School Improvement Programs (SIP). However, before this mandate was enacted, many states

required their local school districts to create improvement plans. For example, the Commonwealth of Kentucky aligned mandated reform and school-based renewal efforts through their Standards and Indicators for School Improvement (SISI). Browne-Ferrigno, Allen, and Hurt (2008) stated that the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) uses SISI in order to evaluate schools' performance progress toward goal achievement in the accountability system.

Professional Development

Before instruction is improved, teachers must participate in various forms of professional development. Professional development is considered to be essential to deepen teacher content knowledge and develop teaching practice (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Desimone (2009) found that professional development is also essential to reforms in teaching and learning and schools must apply best practices to measure it effects.

Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) found three structural features that significantly affect teacher learning: a) form of the activity; b) duration of the activity; and c) the emphasis on collective participation. The last structure, collective participation refers to professional development designed for groups of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level (Garet et al., 2001). Some of the advantages of collective participation are having the potential to discuss concepts, skills, and problems related to the school's culture, and share curriculum and assessment materials. Such activities foster opportunities for teachers to share students' needs and success strategies across grade levels and classes. They also allow teachers to share effective practices and reinforce their commitment to the goals of their school (Garet et al., 2001; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996).

Garet et al. (2001) also found that collective participation of teachers from similar schools, grades, and subjects is related to both coherence and active learning. The features

correlate to improvements in teacher knowledge and skill and changes in classroom practice. First, coherence learning in professional development opportunities allows for teachers to build upon what they already learned, emphasizes content and pedagogy that is aligned with national, state, and local standards, and assessments; and it supports teachers in developing sustained, professional communication with other teachers who are changing their teaching styles in similar ways (Garet et al., 2001).

Active learning, in conjunction with collective participation, is also significant because it provides the opportunity: to observe expert teachers and to be observed teaching; to plan how new curriculum materials and new teaching methods will be used in the classroom; to review student work in the topic areas being covered; and to lead discussions and engage in written work (Carey & Frechtling, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lierberman, 1996).

Similarly, Desimone et al. (2002) conducted a three-year study on the features of professional development and its effect on changing teaching practices for math and science. They found that the effect on teacher's instruction increased due to active learning opportunities teachers experienced.

Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, and Gallagher (2007) reported in a study the evidence of effective professional development conditions and practices from participants taking part in professional development preparing them to implement materials from a new curriculum. They found that support after the initial professional development had been meaningful, ongoing, and coherent; the additional professional development had a significant impact on teacher knowledge and change (Penuel et al., 2007). Porter, Garet, Desimone, Yoon, and Birman (2000) also found the effect of professional development has on teaching practice. They found that professional development is more effective when: 1) it is a reform type (i.e., study group) as opposed to

traditional type (i.e., workshop or conference); 2) it increases the use of strategies when they are focused, higher order; and 3) it provides opportunities for active learning. Even though the findings discussed were found to be high quality, they noticed from their national data that teachers did not experience high quality professional development.

Therefore, as school leaders develop high-quality professional development content must be a key factor. Porter, Garet, Desimone, and Birman (2003) found in their Eisenhower Study that teachers' main goal in professional development included focusing on improving their content knowledge and acquiring more pedagogical strategies. To help improve student achievement and address teachers' needs, the latter must be included.

Instructional Strategies to Improve Achievement

Another way to successfully ensure instructional improvement is incorporating research-based strategies in the classroom. A study of effective research-based strategies for increasing student achievement resulted in the identification of nine strategies that were most effective and produced the most percentile gains for students for each strategy (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Figure 5 shows each of the strategies' increased effect size and percentile gain for student achievement. For example, identifying similarities and differences has an effect size of 1.61 and yields a 45 percentile gain. Of the 31 studies conducted these were the average. Also, the importance of summarizing and note taking is noted (see Figure 5); of 179 studies conducted the average effect size is 1.00 and the percentile gain yields at 34 percent.

Category	Ave. Effect Size (ES)	Percentile Gain	No. of ESs	Standard Deviation (SD)
Identifying similarities and differences	1.61	45	31	.31
Summarizing and note taking	1.00	34	179	.50
Reinforcing effort and providing recognition	.80	29	21	.35
Homework and practice	.77	28	134	.36
Nonlinguistic representations	.75	27	246	.40
Cooperative learning	.73	27	122	.40
Setting objectives and providing feedback	.61	23	408	.28
Generating and testing hypothesis	.61	23	63	.79
Questions, cues, and advance organizers	.59	22	1,251	.26

Figure 5. Nine high-yield strategies that impact student achievement

These strategies can be implemented in all content areas. Therefore, it is important that teachers incorporate differentiated instruction in their classrooms. Tomlinson et al. (2003) proposed that effective differentiated instruction is proactive rather than reactive which means that teachers must plan lessons that will, from the outset, address learner variance rather than plan a lesson and wait until they see the lesson is not comprehensible. Effective differentiation encompasses the use of small teaching-learning groups in the classroom. Lou et al. (1996) developed a meta-analysis of 165 effect sizes from studies of effects of within-class grouping on student achievement and other outcomes. In their analysis, they found that students in small within-classroom learning groups achieved significantly more than students not learning in small groups; these students also had more positive attitudes about learning and stronger self-concept measures than those in ungrouped classes (Lou et al., 1996). As far as ability grouping, the meta-analysis reports that low-ability students tended to learn better in heterogeneous groups,

medium ability students in homogenous groups, and high ability learners fared equally in either setting (Lou et al., 1996). Effective differentiation also varies the materials used by individuals and small groups of students in the classroom. Kulik and Kulik (1991) mentioned that students' gains are greatest when instructional materials are varied for differing instructional groups, rather than using one material for all students.

Along with increasing student achievement, the research-based instructional strategies discussed also maximized student motivation. McCombs and Miller (2007) discussed in the study of the Learner-Centered Principles that children are inherently motivated learners, but motivation is decreased when students begin having negative thoughts about their abilities and even their learning environment.

Researchers have also found that when students have set goals to achieve, they also exhibit increased motivation and efficiency (Marzano, 1992). In addition, students can be intrinsically motivated when they show knowledge gain because people are typically encouraged when they see they have increased their understanding and skill (Covington, 1992). In a review of motivational dynamics of school achievement, Covington (2000) states that the

> quality of student learning as well as the will to continue learning depends closely on interaction between the kinds of social and academic goals students bring to the classroom, the motivating properties of these goals and prevailing classroom reward structures. (p. 171)

Conclusion

In order to achieve successful implementation of a program that will affect teacher pedagogy and student achievement, school leaders must put elements of collaborative inquiry into place. To begin at data and end at results, leaders must be able to incorporate elements of

leadership and capacity, collaboration, data use, and instructional improvement. These are closely related with the proper implementation of RtI program. Since many states and school districts are beginning to incorporate RtI, school leaders must begin to consider use the collaborative inquiry approach. History has shown us that schools must begin to consider this path due to the push for stricter special education referral and the need to become more proactive than reactive when it comes to choosing the proper intervention. Chapter Three presents the methodology used to conduct this research.

CHAPTER III. METHODS

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methods employed in this study. The chapter consists of the purpose and significance of the study, research questions, methodology and rationale, data collection and analysis, and issues related to validity and reliability.

Purpose

Since the 2004 re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), state and district-level leaders have progressively moved from a discrepancy model toward the RtI model when identifying students who appear to have some type of learning difficulty (Hoover et al., 2008). One of the important differences between the two models is that while the discrepancy model delays intervention until the student shows deficiency in achievement, Response to Instruction allows for early identification and action to help prevent learning deficiencies and problems. The Alabama State Department of Education followed this national trend by recently creating a state-wide mandate for Alabama school districts to implement the Response to Instruction (RtI) framework in all schools. One of the purposes of this mandate was to assure that schools would provide services and interventions to students that would help foster their success and minimize the number of students identified as requiring special education services.

Prior to the passage of this mandate, most Alabama school districts based their special education placement decisions on an IQ-Achievement discrepancy model which is based on the

students having to fail a course in order to receive services (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). RtI requires that educators be proactive in their interventions and instruction before referring students for special education services. It involves the use of extensive data analysis, collaborative inquiry, and the implementation of diverse instructional strategies focusing on individual student learning needs. For many teachers, this paradigm shift involves the adoption of new teaching models, practices, and a deeper understanding of student learning. Senge et al. (1999) describes this as organizational change in which he states, "It is not enough to change strategies, structure, and systems, unless the thinking that produced those strategies, structures, and system also changes" (p.187). The RtI model challenges many educators' personal teaching philosophy and makes it difficult for teachers to alter their pedagogy. However, Fullan (2007) noted that, in general, teachers are willing to adopt change when the innovation is practical, there is support from the administration, collaboration amongst teachers is available, and outside expert resources are provided. Changes in teaching methods and in school culture are generally not easy to implement (Fullan, 2007). Although research on organizational change is readily available in the literature, and there is national interest in RtI, it is a fairly new approach to teaching and learning; little research studying the program from the perspective of teachers and educational leaders and how they plan and implement the program has been conducted (Sawyer et al., 2008). VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson (2007) found that "the research conducted to date with few exceptions…has focused primarily on the efficacy of the components individually but not on the efficacy of the RtI process as an integrated whole" (p. 226). Thus, little has been written about the factors facilitating and hindering its successes. Likewise, there is scant research about the degree to which implementing this change serves to benefit the students,

teachers, or schools. No research on this topic has been conducted in Alabama, the state in which this study occurred.

This researcher sought to examine how one school district implemented a state-mandated RtI intervention program using collaborative inquiry in order to understand how the district can improve and enhance the program implementation. The researcher examined the benefits of program implementation for the schools, the systems and those involved in the process. He also examined the factors that facilitated and hindered the process in the school district examined. The study occurred during the first year of the program's full implementation.

The research questions explored in this study include:

1. What are the benefits of incorporating RtI into a school district's program as perceived by the Tier III teachers?

2. What factors are facilitating RtI program implementation as perceived by Tier III teachers?

3. What factors are hindering RtI program implementation as perceived by Tier III teachers?

Research Methods

Since the researcher sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the context, the program, and the changes occurring from the perspective of those involved, qualitative methods were considered the most appropriate approach. Qualitative research relies on the participants' views; asks broad, general questions; collects data that consists mainly of words; and describes and analyzes these words for themes (Creswell, 2005). Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002) stated that "Qualitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the holistic picture and creates a depth of understanding rather than a numeric analysis of data" (p. 426).

One characteristic of qualitative inquiry is the use of descriptive data. The data are collected in the form of words, which represent the subjects' experiences and perspectives, and the researcher's goal is to discover and report a rich description of people, objects, events, places, and conversations. Another characteristic of qualitative inquiry is that it is used in a naturalistic setting based on the idea that the phenomenon being studied can be best understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Ary et al. (2002) also stress that qualitative research is studied best when it is seen in its real world behavior as it occurs naturally in a particular organization's surroundings. Qualitative research is also concerned with the process as opposed to the outcome or results of the study. Qualitative researchers tend to inductively analyze data which Patton (2002) describes as "discovering patterns themes, and categories in one's data" (p. 453) instead of previously stipulating categories beforehand based on an existing framework.

Although there are many different types of qualitative research approaches, the most commonly used include: ethnography, case studies, document analysis, naturalistic observation, focused interviews, phenomenological studies, grounded theory, and historical studies. This research involved a case study within a particular school district. Creswell (2005) defines case study as "a variation of ethnography in that the researcher provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g. an activity, an event, a process, or an individual) based on extensive data collection" (p. 439). The researcher's goal when using a case study approach is to provide a detailed description and understanding of the entity (Ary et al., 2002). Case studies use multiple methods such as interviews, observation and archives to gather data. Merriam (1988) explained that case studies are particularistic, descriptive, holistic, and inductive; they are also concerned with understanding and describing process more than behavioral outcomes. Bromley (1986)

stated case studies "get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can by means of direct observation in natural settings, by their access to subjective factors" (p. 23).

Context

This section begins with background information and a description of the school system in which the study occurred. This is followed by information about how the RtI process was developed and how it is structured. The last section describes the study population and sample.

Community and School District

The study occurred in a school setting in a small Southern city with a population of 56,908 residents (2012 United States Census). The school system examined was Winfred City Schools (WCS) (pseudonym). The city of Winfred, nestled in the east central part of the state, has been recognized and ranked by numerous businesses and publications such as *Forbes Magazine* (#17 Best Small Place for Business and Careers in the U.S.), *U.S. News and World Report* and The Today Show (Top 10 Best Places to Live in the U.S.), and U.S. Census Bureau (#14 Fastest Growing City in the U.S.). Winfred is also known for its local university with a student population of over 25, 000 students. The demographics of the city's population includes 75 percent White, 17.3 percent Black or African-American, 5.8 percent Asian, 3.0 percent Hispanic or Latino, and 1.8 percent Other (which includes American Indian, Asian Pacific and residents characterized as Bi-Racial).

Similar to the city of Winfred, WCS has also been recognized as one of the nation's premier school districts. WCS was established in 1961 after citizens favored becoming a separate entity from the county school district. Although the district has shown growth over the past years, it continues to receive recognition nationally such as: *U.S. News and World Report* and *Newsweek's* Best High Schools, Blue Ribbon U.S. School of Excellence, George Lucas

Educational Foundation, SMART Showcase Schools, Intel Technology Schools of Distinction, and CLAS Banner School. WCS is also ranked as the state's 6th fastest growing school district.

WCS consists of 10 schools: one senior high, one junior high, one middle, six elementary, and one kindergarten. The six elementary schools house an average of approximately 470 students with an average staff of 40 teachers and support staff. Sixty-three percent of the student population is White, 24 percent is Black, 9 percent is Asian, and 4 percent consists of other ethnicities which include Hispanic, American Indian, and Multi-Race. Each school houses 1st through 5th grades.

All of the elementary schools transition into the only middle school which houses the WCS's 6th and 7th graders. Currently, its student population is 1, 150. Sixty-two percent of those are White students, 25 percent Black, and 13 percent Other which includes Asian and Hispanic and other smaller population groups.

The middle school students transition to the junior high school whose current enrollment is 1,075 8th and 9th graders. Sixty percent of the students are White, 30 percent are Black, and 10 percent consist of other ethnicities including such groups as Asian, American Indian, Multi-Race, and Hispanic.

The high school's population totals 1,390 10th through 12th graders. Similar to the junior high school, the high school's ethnicity breakdown is 60 percent White, 28 percent Black, and 12 percent other as described above. Table 1 details each school's demographic data.

Table 1

WCS School Demographics 2011–2012

	American Indian	Asian	Black	Multi-Race	Pacific Islander	White	Hispanic	Total
Wallace High	4	134	394	5	0	829	24	1390
Pearlman Jr. High	4	77	324	7	0	646	17	1075
Staton Middle	3	105	284	4	1	697	21	1115
Griffin Elementary	1	44	97	2	0	282	13	439
Hardin Elementary	0	32	64	7	0	313	15	431
Seals Elementary	0	38	101	1	0	351	16	507
Red Oak Elementary	2	40	126	5	0	252	10	435
Huntley Elementary	0	18	127	7	0	290	5	447
Dewey Elementary	0	72	169	2	0	283	19	545

The district states that its mission is to ensure each student embraces and achieves his or her unique intellectual gifts and personal aspirations while advancing the community, through a system distinguished by:

1. Compassion for others
2. Symbiotic relationships with an engaged community
3. The creation and sharing of knowledge
4. Inspired learners with a global perspective
5. The courage to determine our future

Implementation Process

The school district took action in developing a RtI planning committee during Fall of the 2010–2011 academic year. The collaboration process began with a core group of educators representing the district's ten schools. The group consisted of administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, speech and language clinicians, reading coaches, and counselors. The Department of Special Education from a local university was also represented. This committee focused on the major components and how they could be implemented by forming subcommittees which were the process team, measurement team, curriculum intervention team, and training team.

Based upon a directive from the state department of education, the district used the 3-tier model in order to identify and address the needs of the district's student population. Tier I focuses on schools acquiring mastery of at least 80 percent of the student population. Tier II provides more supplemental instruction within the general education classroom in order to aid in students acquiring mastery. Approximately 15 percent of students participate in Tier II. Lastly, Tier III intervention provides intensive instruction in order to help students achieve mastery at their respective grade level. If students are not successful in Tier III instruction after a given period of time, they will be referred for special education services. However, if the student progresses in Tier II or Tier III, he/she will move up to the previous tier. To continue monitoring academic performance, benchmark assessments are administered at least three times per year. For those students who are labeled as Tier II and Tier III, benchmark assessments are given at least twice a month to monitor progress.

In 2010–2011, the planning year before implementation, WCS focused on developing core instruction by coordinating efforts to ensure that the Alabama Quality Teaching Standards

(AQTS) were incorporated in the classrooms throughout the school district. For example, one standard that teachers are evaluated on is the use of formative assessment. In alignment with RtI, this will help assess if teachers are using well thought-out analysis of student comprehension and they are providing quality feedback directly to those students. Another example is the standard of diversity that focuses on differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students' different learning styles, rates, and modalities.

That same year, the following activities and elements were set to be fully implemented for the 2011–2012 school year: capacity, universal screeners, referral for Tier II and III interventions, length of time in Tier II and III, progress monitoring tools and frequency, problem-solving approach; intervention delivery system (Personnel and locations); and intervention programs. The 2011–2012 school year is also the year that the researcher collected data. To prepare for implementation, the district provided professional development for all instructional staff members and administrators. Professional development opportunities relate to Marzano's High Impact Strategies, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and other research-based instructional strategies. The district partnered with state organizations such as the East Alabama Regional Inservice Center (EARIC), Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), and the Alabama Math, Science, Technology Initiative (AMSTI) to develop plans and provide professional development for teachers and leaders. District leaders also visited each of the ten schools to provide an orientation for all instructional staff members addressing the purposes and core concepts of RtI and the district's plan for full implementation.

Implementation Structures and Population

To be in accordance with the state's requirement for schools to form Problem Solving Teams (PSTs), WCS organized Data, Support, and Instruction (DSI) teams at each school. Their

structures of these teams differed based on the manner in which schools and teachers were already organized. These DSI team structures are described below. During the 2011–2012 academic year, each school formed a DSI team and began implementing items after a group of school and teacher leaders worked together during the previous summer.

The structure of the DSI teams for grades K–7 was based on existing grade level/team structures. Winfred Kindergarten School is organized into "pods" which are comprised of a team of academic teachers. The six elementary schools are organized into grade levels; therefore the DSI team make-up consisted of teachers of that particular grade. Similar to Winfred Kindergarten School, the students and teachers at Staton Middle School are arranged into interdisciplinary teams each consisting of four academic teachers. These teams function as a decision-making unit for students who are assigned to the teams. The DSI team composition for K–7 grades were a natural fit because they already meet frequently to review student data, plan instruction, and discuss student learning.

For grades 8–12, the structure had to be organized differently. Pearlman Jr. High School's DSI team had been comprised of a core group of staff members representing each of the interdisciplinary teams for each grade level. The team consisted of five members, four of whom are school-wide members that serve each team. The fifth member was an academic teacher from each of the teams who served as a liaison between the team and school-wide participants.

Wallace High School was organized into three DSI teams based on student grade level with one team serving 10^{th} grade, one serving 11^{th} grade, and one serving 12^{th} grade. In addition, the teams consisted of one administrator, one counselor, and one teacher from each core area.

Each school's DSI group met once a month in order to discuss and review students' data and the progression or regression that they may have made since the last meeting. All core

teachers in the schools were involved in the implementation of this program. Core teachers included teachers who taught Math, Social Studies, Language Arts, and Science. In addition to teaching their regular curriculum, they were responsible for intervention services to the students who were receiving Tier II and Tier III-level support. A selected number of these individuals, including members of each constituency, comprised the population for this study.

Participants

A purposive sampling was used to identify the population and sample. Purposive sampling is the qualitative research process in which the researcher selects individuals or sites with an intentional purpose (Creswell, 2005). The researcher selected individuals based on their experience and competence (Chein, 1981); and based on the quality of information they could provide to the study (Patton, 2002). The criteria for selection included teachers and academic coaches who were providing Tier III instruction on a daily basis.

In purposive sampling, researchers use the process to maximize their insight and understanding of their topic, and they use their experience and knowledge to select a sample they believe can provide relevant information regarding the topic and setting (Ary et al., 2002). However, the researcher planned to include all teachers and coaches who have been involved in the administration of Tier III instruction and who helped to determine the referral of students who do not respond to intensive intervention. This population included 23 people who could have participated in the program. Table 2 shows the number of potential participants and their assigned schools.

Table 2

Potential Participants and Their Assigned Schools

School	# of Potential Participants
Wallace High School	4
Pearlman Jr. High School	4
Staton Middle School	3
Griffin Elementary School	3
Hardin Elementary School	2
Seals Elementary School	2
Red Oak Elementary School	2
Huntley Elementary School	1
Dewey Elementary School	3
Hunter Station School	2

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (Appendix 1), and the school district (Appendix 2), the researcher prepared a letter of invitation to teachers who were listed as potential participants and sent it via email (Appendix 3). The researcher explained the purposes of the study and assured the participants that their participation was strictly confidential and voluntary. Only those educators who volunteered to participate were selected and included in the data collection phase of this study.

The first year of implementation begin during the 2011–2012 school year, and data were collected in the spring and summer of 2012 in order to get a clear picture of the program's full

year implementation. Two data collection processes were used: document review and individual interviews. Ary et al. (2002) explained document analysis as analyzing and interpreting recorded material within its own context. Materials may be public records, letters, tapes, and reports. One of the benefits of reviewing documents is that it represents a good source for text data. It also provides stability, unlike observations and interviews. Merriam (2009) mentioned that document review allows the researcher's presence not to alter what is being studied. Documents relevant to the creation, implementation, and evaluation of the program were reviewed. Among these documents were all materials that contained information about the program that had been prepared by the district, information about professional development activities, and a report of an evaluation conducted by district leaders and completed by school-based leaders assessing the district's 2011–2012 RtI program implementation (Appendix 4). The process for collecting these data used by the school system included creating a handbook at the district level for school-based leaders and distributing surveys to leaders. At the request of the researcher, the Director of Instructional Support and Intervention provided the materials discussed.

The researcher used the evaluation report and information gleaned from the literature review to develop an interview protocol based on addressing the research questions. Once the researcher completed the protocol, he received feedback from his major professor to determine its significance to the research. After receiving feedback, revisions were made, and the researcher's final interview protocol consisted of 28 open-ended questions in addition to one question asking for any information that the participants did not get a chance to share in the interview. The purpose of the interviews was to examine the Tier III teachers' perceptions of the program's implementation. The interviews were conducted privately in the teachers' classrooms or in the researcher's work office. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes. They

were all tape-recorded. After the researcher completed each interview, they were transcribed. Transcriptions were given to the interviewees to allow them to conduct a member check and clarify any responses believed necessary.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the "bottom-up" approach to analyze the data collected. Creswell (2005) acknowledges that this process involves developing a general sense of the data, and then coding description and themes about the central phenomenon. One significant feature of qualitative data analysis is that it is iterative which means that the researcher cycles back and forth between data collection and analysis. Creswell stated that through collected, qualitative research stories, researchers may return to information that will help fill in the gap after careful analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that data analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: reducing the data; displaying the data through charts, maps, graphs; and drawing conclusions. In this study, open coding and constant comparative methods helped in the first phase of data analysis.

Open Coding

During the analysis and interpretation of data the researcher created a coding system to organize data into categories. This process consisted of searching through collected data for regularities and patterns and topics the data covers. The coding system also involved the researcher writing down words and phrases to represent the topics and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The researcher used open coding to develop conceptual categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). All collected documents and interviews were used to code data during the initial analysis

process. After interviews were transcribed, the transcripts were thoroughly read in order to identify recurring patterns and continue the coding process.

Constant Comparative

In addition to coding, the constant comparative method was used to analyze and conceptualize the data for this study. Strauss and Corbin (1994) noted that this method is for multi-data sources, which is similar to the analytic induction because it also conducts formal analysis early in the study and is almost complete toward to the end of data collection. One of the characteristics of the constant comparative method is the process of continuous refinement. Goetz and LeCompte (1984)mention that the initial categories may be changed, merged, or omitted; new categories may be generated; and new relationships can be discovered. The researcher used this method of categorizing data until saturation occurred.

Validity and Reliability

"Qualitative inquirers use a variety of procedures to confirm their developing insights or hypotheses and to ensure the trustworthiness of the data being gathered" (Ary et al., 2002, p. 435). One of those procedures includes the use of multiple methods of data collection, also referred to as triangulation. Silverman (2009) writes, when a researcher has accumulated data from different contexts, they will be able to triangulate "the true state of affairs by examining where the different data intersect" (p. 124). Therefore, triangulation may improve the reliability of a method. The researcher achieved triangulation by employing document review and individual interviews. Another procedure used in this study to confirm validity previously mentioned was member checking. Member checking enhances validity by sharing with the participants their interpretation of the data collected. It also helps eliminate miscommunication, identify inaccuracies, and assists in obtaining additional useful data (Ary et al., 2002). This

procedure involved the solicitation of feedback from the participants about the study's findings during the interview process and after the study to ensure authenticity and originality, the researcher restated questions to confirm accuracy during individual interviews. Once the study was completed, the researcher shared all of the findings with the participants involved in the interviews.

Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The participants responded to the interview questions truthfully.
2. The participants were asked the same questions.
3. All responses reflect the professional opinion of the participants.
4. District administration consented to the researcher's request to interview participants within the district.

Limitations

There are some limitations in this study. First, since this is a single case study, findings may not be generalizable to other sites. However, it should provide insights for others who are seeking to implement similar programs. Nevertheless, schools may examine the information in order to determine if it is suitable for their schools.

One limitation in this study is the position role of the researcher and his role in the system and the study. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument. In this study, the researcher is an employee of the school system in which the study occurred, having served there for nine years. The researcher's role in this study was to identify steps that may be taken to improve and enhance the program's implementation and student outcomes in WCS's schools. During the time of the interviews, the researcher held the role of assistant principal at one of the

participating schools in the study. One of his administrative responsibilities includes the supervision of the RtI process as a member of the DSI team. This study provided the researcher with the opportunity to listen to teachers' celebrations and concerns of the RtI process. Also, he was able to understand the significant role and influence of his school in the success of the program when it came to the district-wide implementation.

While this gave the researcher access, a limitation was the danger of bias and a concern that the teachers at his school might not feel comfortable about openly sharing their opinions. Also, there was a concern with the number of participants and the risk of information being lost. The researcher addressed these issues in a number of ways. One strategy was the use of field notes during the research process. The notes recorded helped to identify what did/did not work in gaining and maintain access, entry, ethics, and gathering data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher examined these notes to look for evidence of bias and keep these as the analysis proceeded. To assure that the participants felt comfortable during the data collection process, the researcher scheduled interview sessions at the convenience of the participants in an environment conducive to private conversations between the interviewer and interviewee. The participants were also made aware of the expected amount of time that it will take to complete the interviews. The researcher also provided a copy of the interview protocol during the interview session so participants would be able to clearly comprehend questions asked by the researcher.

Other strategies used to overcome this limitation were implemented. First, the researcher used thick descriptions when combining the interview data. Secondly, the researcher engaged in triangulation by using multiple data sources including document review and data from interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Triangulation is expected to help overcome the concern for information being lost due to the number of participants. Finally, participants were asked to

review their interview data to provide clarity and to assure that the researcher was not viewing what was said in a biased manner.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the research methods used to collect and analyze data that answered the research questions for this study. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the analyses that were described in this chapter. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings as well as presenting recommendation for future research.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate an Alabama school district's first-year attempt to implement the state's mandated Response to Instruction (RtI) program to address the issue low achieving students. The researcher explored the benefits of the RtI program for a school district and the factors that facilitated and hindered the program's success and the benefits that resulted from its implementation. This chapter presents the findings of the study.

Context

RtI is the practice of (1) providing high quality instruction/intervention based on students' learning needs, and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions (Batsche et al., 2005). Although the program varies in levels of intervention, Alabama chose to utilize the three-tier model of intervention. Tier I consists of 80 percent of the student population. These students respond to high quality instruction in all of their core general education classes (language, math, social studies, and science curricula). Students who need additional academic support are placed in Tier II instruction which consist of 15 percent of the student population. Tier II provides in-class supplemental instruction to students via purposeful small group instruction. Students who are not successful in Tier II are placed in the Tier III intervention which is the most intense of the three tiers. In addition to the Tier I and II services, Tier III students are provided individualized instruction based on their

particular needs and deficiencies. It is not until students are unsuccessful in Tier III intervention that they are referred for special education services.

This study used qualitative methods to explore WCS's journey during its first year of implementation of the RtI program. The researcher is an assistant principal in the district. Therefore, many relationships have already been established due to his current and past positions. As an English teacher in the district for five years, the researcher knew some of the participants as colleagues through vertical teams and other district-level collaborations. Other relationships were established due to his current role as administrator where he participated on the school's DSI committee and was primarily responsible for one of the school's grade level matters as a whole. The story was examined from the perspective of Tier III teachers who are considered the RtI experts in the school.

The district consists of over 470 teachers who all have acquired "Highly Qualified" status based on the standards determined by No Child Left Behind of 2001. Of the 470 teachers in the district, 23 teachers in grades K–9 were identified by school administrators as active participants in the initial RtI implementation process. This includes members of the Data, Support, and Instruction (DSI) teams or Tier III instructors for the respective schools. These individuals are considered to be the most versed in the RtI process. The sample resulted in eleven respondents deciding to participate. The high school in this district was not represented in the selection process due to the unique structure of RtI during this first year of implementation. For the purpose of this study, pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity of the participants.

The primary data source used in this study was interviews. Before the interview began, the researcher provided each participant with "Audio Release" and "Informed Consent" forms.

During the interview, each participant also received a copy of the questions so they would be able to clearly understand questions asked by the researcher.

The interview process consisted of 28 guiding questions which focused on the following: personal career information, leadership, data use, instructional improvement, and program implementation. The guiding questions were developed based on the researcher's review of responses from a survey created by the district administration to acquire feedback on the overall success of RtI implementation for the school year and a literature review. These survey responses were completed by each school's administrator(s) in the spring of 2012. The researcher collected these responses from WCS's Director of Instructional Support and Intervention. At the end of each interview, the researcher gave the participant an opportunity to add any comments that they felt were pertinent to the research that were not addressed in any of the guiding questions. In order to concentrate on the questions and to "preserve the interview analysis" (Merriam, 2009), each interview was audio recorded. After each interview, the researcher transcribed each participant's responses and reviewed the transcript to determine whether or not there was a need for follow-up questions. The researcher found that this was not necessary. The next few pages discuss the findings organized according to the research questions discussed earlier in the chapter.

The research questions addressed were:

1. What are the benefits of incorporating RtI into a school district's program as perceived by the Tier III teachers?

2. What factors are facilitating RtI program implementation as perceived by Tier III teachers?

3. What factors are hindering RtI program implementation as perceived by Tier III teachers?

The findings are presented in four sections. The first section, describes demographics and educational background of the 11 participants involved. The next section explores the participants' perceptions of the benefits of incorporating RtI into the school district's program. The third section identifies the factors that the participants perceive as facilitating implementation. The last section focuses on the factors perceived as hindering proper implementation of the program.

Educational Background and Demographic Data

The educational degree levels of the participants at the elementary and middle school levels are displayed in Table 3. Most teachers hold a masters degree, with one teacher having only a bachelors and one holding a doctorate.

Table 3

Degree Types Held by Participants

Participants	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate	Total
Elementary K–5	1	4	0	5
Secondary 6–9	0	5	1	6

Table 4 displays the participants' current academic position. At the elementary level, participants held the positions of reading coach (2), Title I teacher (2), and RtI instructor (1). The six participants who taught at the secondary level were general education teachers in the

content areas math, language arts, and social studies. They were not only DSI team members, but they were also responsible for Tier III instruction for all students at their school.

Table 4

Current Positions of Participants

Participants	Reading Coach	Title I Teacher	RtI Teacher	General Education	Total
Elementary K–5	2	2	1	0	5
Secondary 6–9	0	0	0	6	6

Participants' total years of teaching experience are presented in Table 5. The majority of the teachers in the study had at least 19 years of experience. This level of experience is particularly prominent at the elementary level where only one teacher had taught for less than 7 years, while the other four taught for at least 19. Experience levels were more varied at the middle and junior high school levels.

Table 5

Participants' Years of Teaching Experience

Participants	0–3	4–6	7–9	10–12	13–15	16–18	19–25	26+	Total
Elementary K–5	0	1	0	0	0	0	4		5
Secondary 6–9	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	6

Findings

Teacher Perceptions of the Benefits of RtI

The program appeared to be valuable in enhancing teachers' abilities to meet student needs and thus improved the environment for both students and teachers. Although the benefits are thus of value to the school and district as a whole, based on the interviews and analysis, the primary emphasis from the respondents' perspective deal with students and teachers. Perceived student benefits were: 1) early identification, intervention, and support; 2) high quality instruction; and 3) improved participation and success. Teacher benefits reported were: 1) increased acquisition and application of data; 2) increased collaboration and communication. Each of these will be described in detail in the section that follows.

Student Benefits

Early identification, intervention, and support. One of the most significant benefits of the RtI program appears to be that it helps to prevent student failure. A number of the participants mentioned the helpfulness of screening all students to identify those who are struggling. Participants shared that each student was screened to determine his/her level of mastery in the areas of math and reading. Teachers and staff are provided with a detailed report for each student discussing their specific areas of weakness in those two subject areas. The report also discusses the child's current grade level performance. For example, a 7th grade student could be performing on a 5th grade level which means that the teacher's goal would be to support the student in his/her attempt to reach mastery up to grade level. Students who were considered "Below grade level" as a result of the screening were considered to be a "caution" for their teachers. Mrs. Donahue stated,

> I do like how we screened all students to see where they were as far as mastering standards on grade level. We learned that we had to do a double take on many of our 'average students' because the ones who we thought were okay, were not okay.

After careful consideration of the students who needed to participate in the Tier III classes, the teachers discussed what would be taught and the importance of that instruction being specific to what the students needed. She continued,

> As a team we discussed each student and their areas of weakness. We made suggestions as to whether their weakness warranted Tier II and Tier III status. We noticed that some of the students' weaknesses could have been resolved with good classroom instruction.

Mrs. Donahue stated that those students who were assigned Tier III came during the school's Boost Time in order to receive additional instruction in their areas of weakness.

> I had one student this year who struggled with word problems. So, during Boost Time that is what we worked on with her. I noticed there was some improvement during my time with her based on her increasing benchmark scores.

Mrs. Mortenson also noted that although there were some challenges in getting some quality time with the students, doing so resulted in an increase in mastery amongst her Tier III students. "Once we got organized, I began to form relationships with the students and we got to work. Once all of that was established, I noticed that the interventions were effective and bringing about mastery with these students."

As a result of the effective use of screeners, which provided a broad view of the general needs of the student body, the participants felt that they were able to provide effective support for the students. Once the screeners were sorted into areas of caution, teachers and administrators explored the struggling students' deficiencies and decided upon what strategies

could help meet their individual needs in all of their classes. The teachers seem to agree with the importance of student support in both the general classroom and in the Tier III classes. Mrs. Heald stated:

> Once I knew who my struggling learners were in my class, I took that information to see what I could do to provide additional support in my class that would complement whatever Tier III instruction he/she received on a daily basis.

Mrs. Mims also mentioned the benefit of being aware of this vital information.

> If a student struggles in nonfiction reading material, I make sure I paired them with another person that had similar deficiencies so that I am able work with both students or one-on-one. I also tried to mix them up with higher level students who would be able to help as well, but that was not as common.

High quality instruction. The participants also felt the quality of their instructional delivery improved as a result of the RtI program, resulting in higher levels of learning for their students. Many teachers noted the drastic change in instruction when they began to receive up-to-date data for each of their students. For example, Mrs. Mims felt that her instruction became more beneficial to the students because "there was more of an awareness of who these students were, and thinking about maybe doing more differentiated instruction to help those students."

More specifically, one strategy used in order to increase the quality of instruction that many participants discussed was the one-on-one interaction in the general education classroom. This was especially true for the secondary teachers in the general education class who used it for both Tier II and III students. Mrs. Devereaux stated that she began taking advantage of the student data received from screening and purposely addressing those students' needs in her lesson plans.

> Since I knew who my students were, I tried to incorporate in my lessons strategies that help in increasing mastery for those students. This allowed me to include time for one-on-one interactions with those students to ensure they comprehend the lesson. I have found that it helped me assess their mastery much better than in the past. I found that many students were not comprehending because mainly they had no clue what to do. It was a lot of work on my part, but I noticed progress in not just the Tier III students, but also the other students in the class.

Mrs. Wilson also learned this lesson by increasing her one-on-one time with the Tier III students whom she taught in the general education classroom.

> A simple thing as including in my lesson plans my Tier II and III students and their weaknesses helped me in making sure that their needs were addressed. So, during lessons, I would go by their desks and monitor their understanding. If I saw that they were having problems with the lesson for the day, I would do one of two things: Either walk them through at their desk or work one on the board similar to one that they do not understand.

Another strategy the participants discussed that was effective in their instruction was the concept of grouping. Mrs. Mims stated that even though one-on-one instruction also worked well, some lessons did not allow time for it. "I group all of my low-ability students so that I may create somewhat of a 'one-stop shop' to address all of their needs in one space. That has helped provide quality feedback to those students in addition to them helping one another."

Not only was the strategy beneficial in the general classroom, participants discussed that it also helped in the Tier III classes as well. Mrs. Oliver stated that she had an opportunity to divide the students into groups.

> We did not always have time to provide individual instruction so we created small groups and worked with them on a similar intervention. This was only when they had similar weaknesses. I think it was not just a time saver, but it was helpful for the students to be able to help one another.

In order for any of the strategies to be effective, the participants noted the importance of providing the students with continuous feedback to show their progression in the current instruction. Mrs. Donahue stated, "Students have to receive immediate feedback for whatever work they produce, it defeats the purpose if they see it on their progress report one or two weeks later." Mrs. Mortenson agreed,

> I learned quickly that when I would provide feedback to my students immediately, they would quickly see where they made mistakes and that was part of the learning process. I think my students' gains came from the mistakes that were made. They learned where their mistakes were and learned how to correct them. That could not happen if I would have shown them to them two weeks later.

Improved participation and success. Once early identification and intervention and an increase in high quality instruction was in place, the participants noted that students became more participatory which resulted in greater participation and academic success and improved student behavior. Mrs. Heald stated many students had not succeeded academically because they just lacked some strategy or had not received appropriate mastery of a skill. Things began to change when RtI was implemented. For example, Mrs. Mortenson reported on one student's progress when she said, "His teacher told me he actually is doing his work and doing well in my class. He also began raising his hand in class and participating." Mrs. Donahue also noted that one of her students began to see his progress in one area, and it extended over to the general

classroom. "Once they see that little dot on the line of data move up, they see that they can do it and their grades begin to increase as well."

Participants also acknowledged student increase in behaviors related to motivation and engagement extended from the Tier III classes to general education classes as well. Mr. Rooney commented, "In the Tier III instruction, some students seem to improve significantly on the programs where they were able to go on their own pace due to individualization of the programs. This seems to also provide engagement and motivation for the students." Ms. Poe stated "When the students saw how much they improved in the skills assessed in Tier III, they became much more motivated than they did before they started the program. This also carried over to some of their classroom success as well."

Lastly, participants discussed the environment contributing to student motivation and success. Mrs. Tarrant mentioned "For the most part, the students who are really struggling like being in a smaller group setting because they can be more successful." In addition, Mrs. Donahue commented that those students succeeded more in her class because they felt more comfortable making mistakes in Tier III classes than they did in their general classes because they were not intimidated and were willing to take risks.

Teacher Benefits

Increased acquisition and application of data. Another key group of stakeholders that RtI seem to benefit were the teachers. The findings revealed that implementation of RtI allowed teachers to gain additional knowledge of their students, and they viewed this as benefitting them as well as their students. Teachers acknowledged that before they began using the RtI process, the knowledge they had about students would not have been as plentiful and timely as what RtI provides. Mr. Rooney stated, "Although the state assessments were very helpful, it was good to

have more recent data, especially for the new students who, sometimes, we have no information for."

Participants noted that one of the benefits is that the data acquired provides teachers with a guide on how they can approach their whole class instruction. Ms. Tarrant noticed that "many students this year needed a lot of reviewing on fractions and decimals before we can begin grade level instructions. So, the math department spent some time reviewing these standards, and it seemed to help."

Mrs. Mortenson also experienced this benefit in her language class. She said, "Once we saw that data, we had to somewhat go back to the drawing board and make sure that we were incorporating some of the elements where students struggled."

Increase in collaboration and communication. A final benefit for teachers was the collaboration they engaged in. The RtI program relies on the involvement of all staff support in the building. This is not something that can be done by a few people. Teachers seem to feel that collaboration helped, and they appeared to enjoy the opportunity to work with colleagues. Mrs. Donahue stated, "I love the idea that all are involved in the success of the students. I have also enjoyed the idea that all content areas work together to develop lessons plans more which has helped us devise strategies to incorporate differentiated instruction in our lessons." Mrs. Devereaux noted that "it has been beneficial that we utilized all of our strengths to come up with a strong curriculum for the year. In addition, the staff worked with Tier III teachers to discuss what was being taught in the classroom and how can we incorporate that into our Tier III lessons."

Collaboration has also helped lessen the burden of standards being addressed only in language and math. Mrs. Mortenson stated, "The other core classes have been helpful in meeting

the needs of the struggling learners. The social studies and science teachers constantly discuss how they can help incorporate some of the needs in their lessons as well."

Mrs. Mims added, "During our DSI meetings, I mention that there is an increased need for students to comprehend the structure of non-fiction reading materials. Other core classes look at their lesson plans, and we discuss how they can incorporate those needs to their upcoming class activities. It makes my job a little easier to know that we can spread the wealth among other disciplines."

Finally, collaboration also became an integral part of data-based decisions about students and teachers found this of benefit to them. All of the students' teachers meet together to determine movement throughout the tiers or whether they should be referred for special education due to lack of progression in their mastering of skills. Teachers felt that the collaboration became beneficial due to dialogue amongst the teachers who would impact the students' success. The dialogue regarding the student's data-based performances helped the staff to clearly understand the rationale and feel comfortable about their decision about changing a student's tier level or referring for special education services. Ms. Donahue stated:

> Believe me. We referred two students this year, and it was not a decision taken lightly. After careful consideration and discussion as a team, we were sure that these particular students needed to be referred. When we met with his mom, we were able to explain to her his overall experience in Tier III intervention. We showed her all of the data that led to the decisions. Thanks to continued contact with mom and our monthly meetings as a DSI team, we knew what had to be done for him to be successful.

Mrs. Oliver added:

Before a student moved due to progression or regression out of a tier, the DSI team met to review the data that we have acquired and discuss information from all of their teachers. Making these decisions was never accomplished by one person. It was a group effort to make sure that we were doing what was best for the students.

Factors that Facilitated Successful RtI Implementation

In order to receive the benefits of RtI, there must be some key factors that facilitate proper implementation of the RtI process. Based on the participants' interview responses, the teachers indicated that the following factors facilitated successful implementation: 1) Effective Professional Development; 2) Communication; 3) Teacher Dedication to Student Success; and 4) Motivation through Success. Each of the factors is described in detail in the following sections.

Effective Professional Development

One of the most important facilitative factors teachers perceived as aiding them in implementing RtI was the professional development experiences that were offered by the school district. Teachers indicated that these experiences impacted their ability to implement RtI in three ways: increased awareness, knowledge and competence of the key components of the program; enabling them to integrate the use of data into their instructional endeavors; and fostering their use of more diverse strategies to meet student needs.

Increase awareness, knowledge, and competence. A majority (8) of the participants indicated that the professional development opportunities they personally engaged in promoted awareness, knowledge, and the ability to implement key features of the RtI intervention process. Mrs. Poe stated, "Anytime I can leave a workshop with a toolbox of tricks for my classroom, I feel as if a workshop is worth my time. Some of the RtI workshops have been just that. I feel much more confident when that happens."

Mr. Rooney commented on how an instructional-based workshop experience helped him understand the significance of changing his delivery of instruction to meet the needs of all students. He shared:

> After participating in the Marzano study group, it makes me think more. You can look at your bad ones [lessons plans] and see what you need to change. It definitely makes me think about what I am doing right and how to change to meet the needs of the students.

Another teacher concurred with Rooney. Mrs. Heald stated the effectiveness of the same workshop for those teachers who participated in it. She said, "I think many teachers have proven the strategies (they) learned (have been) ....effective." Mrs. Donahue added to this concept that the professional development provided was beneficial for those involved. She remarked:

> We did a lot of research in our school through individual book studies and listened to presentations by teachers that have done other book studies. I have also attended the Mega Conference and had different schooling on RtI with Dr. Gibbs.

Mrs. Tarrant commented on how the professional development activities impacted her competency levels when she stated:

> I think the professional development opportunities have given us some different ways of getting different subject matters across the board. It's presenting in a different way and I think that has made a difference in student comprehension.

Mrs. Dandridge noted that she gained more from a workshop where the teachers applied real data to their activities. She said:

> That workshop was key to me fully understanding what I am supposed to do in regards to RtI. They started out with the introduction and rationale behind the program. By mid-morning, I was still confused and in the dark about my role. However, the facilitators

> asked us to bring in real data from our school for the afternoon session. Using that real-life information gave me a head start and helped me use what I already know about our students and apply it to what I am supposed to know about RtI.

Mrs. Wilson attended a different professional development activity and agreed that applying her most recent student data helped her increase her level of competency and knowledge as to what she was supposed to do as a classroom teacher and a Tier III teacher.

Integration of data analysis into instructional processes. All of the participants also discussed how engaging in professional development activities fostered their use of data analysis to determine student progress and aided them in meeting the needs of their struggling students. This increase in engagement and practice stemmed from professional development opportunities at the school level where teachers were presented with multiple sources of data used to determine whether a student was progressing or regressing as a result of the assigned intervention. The teachers participated in activities that required them to use data such as Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) scores in which they had previous experience, but also new data sources such as Software Technology, Inc (STI) assessment data, which they possessed little knowledge of. For example, Mrs. Oliver commented:

> So the tools that we were using were able to show me specific deficiencies and it is easier to show me that this class has a specific deficiency as a whole so that I know where I need to focus my time. It forced me to look more closely at individual ARMT scores and the different reading levels and abilities embedded in the data.

Mrs. Heald agreed and stated how she and her colleagues' instruction have been guided by the data as well:

> I think it [data analysis] has also forced all of us in a good way. It has forced us to look at it because we have many more assessments and much more data to use to go back and revamp and re-teach and to see where our students are.

Not only has learning how to analyze and use data from their professional development activities helped teachers to question their students' performance, but it has also made the teachers more inquisitive and reflective about their own instructional practices. Through continuous professional development, Mr. Rooney questioned his instruction after learning how to regularly analyze classroom data. He stated:

> It has opened my eyes a little bit to see if I need to do a better job during this unit. This unit is not getting across the way it should be. For example, they struggled with one particular unit. I think that has shown teachers their weak areas, but you have to get away from the idea of 'well I taught that well… they just did not grab it'. You know if 70 percent of the kids do not understand the concept, I am not doing something right.

Implementation of diverse instructional strategies. A pivotal part of the RtI process is the implementation of diverse instructional strategies at all tiers of the process. One of the outcomes of having increased competency was that teachers began to implement more diverse instructional processes into their teaching. Each of the teachers participated in a regional professional development activity in order to return to their schools and present effective Tier II strategies. All participants mentioned that they felt one of the most effective parts of RtI was the Tier II instruction delivered by regular classroom teachers and the Tier III instruction by the teachers in small group settings outside of the regular classroom. Mrs. Dandridge stated that she was reminded of the one of effective strategies in a book study group the district hosted in order to help meet student needs. "The teachers use a lot of games to effectively meet the needs of our

Tier II and Tier III students. Since these students require more one-on-one small group instruction, these games allows us to address those needs and to keep their attention."

Mrs. Tarrant noted the importance of integrating diverse instruction and its significance when she shared:

> In the past, one of the things that we did to meet the needs of our strugglers is simply giving them an extra dose. Well, if you keep weighing a cow and don't do anything to change its weight, you are going to get the same weight. If you are not doing anything different, you are not really going to see results.

Four middle school participants mentioned that effective strategies learned in a summer workshop helped to supplement their classroom instruction to aid students at all levels of intervention. Mrs. Wilson described her professional development experience as helping her to increase the use of a variety of instructional strategies beneficial for her students by saying:

> This was especially difficult for me and some other colleagues because we were not as experienced with using differentiated instruction strategies at the secondary level like our friends at the elementary level. I think this [differentiated instruction] definitely made it easier to increase the use of Tier II instruction in our classrooms.

Mrs. Mortenson also stated that the increase in her knowledge base changed her choices of instruction and the tools she uses:

> I am more aware of the differences and it has helped me differentiate my instruction. As far as Tier II instruction goes, just trying to use more graphics, small groups, and tier my instruction and model more.

Communication

Communication is another factor that seems to have served as a facilitating factor in the implementation of RtI. This communication existed between and among the following constituents: teachers, administrative leaders, and parents. It occurred within the schools, between teachers and administrators, and between school personnel and parents.

Collegial communication within the schools. Teachers believe that communication amongst building-level colleagues had a significant impact on the successful implementation of RtI. Nine of the participants expressed that there must be opportunities for them to discuss student progress with one another and reflect on what deficiencies students are having that may affect their learning. Mrs. Mims stated, "I was provided great data by other Tier III teachers of the students that were in my general education classes. I had access to all of my students' scores and their progress." Also, Mrs. Tarrant recalled communication as being something that has been most effective. She explained that collaborating monthly was not solely due to assigning Tier I, II, and III, but the teachers

> work together to group children and to meet their needs and…our teachers were meeting sometimes daily, usually at least weekly and they make decisions about the groupings and then the DSI teams met monthly to discuss what kind of interventions were going to be delivered.

One of the primary arenas of communication for the teachers to discuss student progress in regular classes and in Tier III intervention was in Data, Support, and Instruction (DSI) meetings held at each school. As noted previously, the structures of the teams differed, depending upon the grade configuration of the school.

However, each school's group met once a month in order to discuss and review students' data and the progression — or regression — that they may have made since the last meeting. Meetings provided an avenue for communication to occur. Ten of the teachers indicated that this type of communication was essential due to the lack of opportunities that Tier III and general education teachers had to professionally communicate with one another during the school day. Mrs. Oliver commented on how purposeful and valuable the constant communication became between her and the general education teachers. She found it helped her to share with the teachers how they could help once she examined the child's data in the Tier III group. She commented:

> In DSI meetings, I met with the teachers of each of my students and was afforded the opportunity to share with them some of their students' deficiencies. I remember with one student, I mentioned to the teachers that Joe was not on reading level. I told them that he was about four grades behind. The student's science teacher said, 'That explains a lot. That is why he is not doing well on his articles or on tests. He does well in class discussions and lab experiences, but anything he has to read independently he fails.' This led to discussions on various strategies that the teacher could use.

In addition, eight teachers shared that they were able to communicate with the DSI team members concerning the suggested strategies discussed in previous meetings for individual students. Mrs. Devereaux stated,

> I felt quite comfortable meeting with my colleagues and sharing what did not work plus offer suggestions on what could work for specific students. This allowed them to share with other teachers during their meetings throughout the day. The teams also

communicated to us what was working in other areas of the school as well so that we may try it on our team.

This type of communication for RtI implementation carried over to the specific content areas as well to creating lessons together to meet the needs of Tier II and III students. Six teachers responded that this became beneficial because all students were receiving the same instruction at the same time. Several teachers and administrators stated that this helped in differentiated instruction for students in all tier levels. As an example, Mr. Rooney stated, "We sit down together and plan lessons and units together. So it's four heads instead of mine alone. As the year goes on, we're bouncing ideas off of each other: 'Did you try this?', 'Did it work?', 'No, don't do it'".

Communication between teachers and administrators. When asked about communication with administration, all of the teachers discussed the frequent feedback requests for their opinions about the RtI process from the district and school leaders. For example, throughout the first semester of implementation, district level administrators met not only with the building-level administrators at their respective schools, but also included Tier III teachers to discuss any concerns with such things as materials, testing administration, the delivery of Tier III instruction. Mrs. Devereaux noted, "I think I saw certain district administrators in my school more often than before during this time because I think they knew that this was going to be a challenge, and they needed that feedback from us in order for this to be worth our time." The feedback requested allowed leaders to discuss issues as a team and reflect upon what could be done in order for the process to continue successfully. Mrs. Mortenson summed up when she stated:

> The feedback to administrators was so crucial because I feel there is sometimes a disconnect in what they think is going to happen and what is actually happening. It has been refreshing for the leaders to listen to what were the ups and downs of the process, how can we change, how can we tweak it, what can we continue to use, and what should we bring that is new.

Several participants also mentioned that it has been beneficial for building-level administrators to participate on the DSI teams to ensure that they are also aware of the pulse of the school's viewpoint of the implementation process and some of the concerns and needs of the teachers and staff. Mrs. Dandridge noted, "Our administrators are actively involved in the RtI process. They act as facilitators during our meetings. They ensure that the proper documentation has been gathered and submitted for students being referred for RtI."

Mrs. Donahue expressed the thoughts of most of the teachers who viewed their administrators as facilitators and cheerleaders for the process. She said,

> Our principal and assistant principal have been important in implementing this and getting it going.... If our leaders did not portray this type of positive attitude, it could definitely not be as manageable and successful as it has been.

Parent communication. Since RtI is a new concept to parents, eleven teachers mentioned that parent communication was a crucial factor in the success of this program. Mrs. Tarrant described part of her role as "to monitor what is going on with students and informing parents of what is going on with the students' progress that is being made as far as the student is concerned."

Seven teachers indicated that many parents were confused about the new program, so it was important to communicate with them so they could understand the process and their role in

monitoring and encouraging their child's progress. In dealing with this issue, Mrs. Poe remarked, "Many parents ask us what they can help them with at home, or what resources could they use to get them up to grade level." Mrs. Mortenson explained a similar experience with a parent. "I remember a parent wanted the data to be explained. They were not really satisfied with what was going on until I clearly showed her the data that related to her son's gaps and how he has progressed since that time." Mrs. Dandridge also commented, "Once we clearly understood the effectiveness of progress monitoring graphs they were great resources to help parents understand their child's deficiencies and what we plan to do help them overcome those deficiencies."

Participants also reported that face-to-face communication with parents was not the only source of communication that helped facilitate the program. With an acknowledgement that all parents are not always able to meet, schools also provided student reports that were periodically sent home. Six participants mentioned that the student reports were overall very helpful. Mr. Rooney noted how reader-friendly reports allowed the schools to maintain constant communication with parents in order to provide the needed interventions for students, "Giving the students and parents a monthly report regarding progress and intervention opportunities through the DSI teams allowed parents to see the team as a guide or support rather than a negative group of teachers who are out to get them and their students."

Teacher Dedication toward Student Success

Another facilitating factor revealed through the data was the impact of teacher dedication and passion for the profession and for the assigned RtI role. For example, Mr. Rooney stated, "My job is to help come up with ideas that make these kids successful. That is my number one goal of this. I mean how can I help them get there? I think as a teacher and a member of the DSI

committee, that is my job." Five participants commented about teachers' dedication to the students' success no matter how burdensome RtI could be. Mrs. Heald commented that she feels "everyone's primary goal is students' success in general." Mrs. Tarrant believes that:

> Everybody is investing in it hard to meet the needs at my school to meet the needs of the students. I feel like it has set a fire under everybody, there is no longer a time to you know… I mean this is where the rubber meets the road and we got to make sure that we are making use of every minute. There is no downtime, there is no time to waste and so I feel like our students will benefit from that.

Mrs. Mims also indicated a similar trait in colleagues at her school:

> Even without a clear understanding of the commitment to what it was that we were using, most of our teachers have the mindset of 'I am going to work as hard as I can to do what I can for these students'.

Mrs. Oliver also viewed this as facilitating implementation when she mentioned:

> The teamwork and dedication of faculty members has helped a lot through this process… We have teachers and administrators that want kids to be successful. If you have that then hopefully what happens is that you have the drive to do it.

Motivation through Success

Although there were discouraging moments throughout implementation, there were definitely cycles of success which prompted motivation in the teachers and students and led to more engagement and the desire to see how much more they could progress.

Teacher motivation through success. Seven teachers discussed how observing students making positive and significant changes in Tier III and in their general education classes motivated them. Mrs. Oliver illustrates this process:

> It is really realistic when you bring a kid to the table in November, then by February you are talking about that same kid and we get to rejoice when we see improvement and we do see that because of some of the teachers who are working hard to make that change.

Mrs. Mortenson added, "I was able to get really excited for specific students about how much they had improved." Mr. Rooney acknowledged how student success defined his role as a teacher:

> The major benefit to me is trying to get these kids that have never been successful in school before and getting to feel success. We were able to get many of the students on track this year where they felt as if even though they were not an 'A' student, they still could be successful in school and graduate.

Similarly, when asked "What is your greatest future sense of satisfaction about the program?", Mrs. Heald stated:

> Watching these kids and seeing how we make the upcoming 9th graders successful through credit recovery and then watch them graduate and go back and think I remember when this kid was struggling like crazy, but look at him now. That is where you get satisfaction out of it.

Student motivation through success. Since the need to focus on students is a key component of RtI, student success and motivation was something that the participants discussed when asked about the Tier II and Tier III students. Eight participants noticed that some of the strategies provided allowed students to see small successes that led to big ones later in the process. Although the students may not have started in Tier III as motivated students, many became more engaged in the learning process in both Tier III classes and in their core classes. Regardless of the grade level, participants discussed how the feedback that students received

made a difference in their levels of engagement and motivation. Not only did it help the students, but it also helped the teachers monitor student progress more accurately than before. This was because students were actually putting forth effort as opposed to just completing assignments with no effort at all. Mrs. Heald noticed how student success and motivation increased for those who participated in the Credit Recovery program:

> I see with Credit Recovery how much better they feel about themselves and knowing that they are on track when they get to the high school. I just know with Tier III, if you go in and help them learn, they will come out believing, 'you know I can comprehend this, I can do this math, I can do that.'

In the middle grades, an increase in self-efficacy was evident as well. Four middle grades participants shared that when the students were able to see some success, they gained the confidence needed to want to try to do more and better. Mrs. Mortenson stated:

> I think it built a sense of self-confidence for a few of them. For a few weeks, I saw a spark of 'I know I can improve because I did.' They had tangible numbers to look at. Like a student went from a 300 to a 500. So they did really good. I think it gave them a sense of self-confidence and made them want to do better.

Mrs. Mortenson revealed how affirmation helped in motivating the students to put forth effort in their work through this process:

> Affirmation with my Tier III group worked well in order to motivate them. This has to be done because they are constantly being hammered through this program. They have to work on this; they have to work on that. Just praising some of them motivated them to want to do more.

As a result of the Tier III teachers' immediate feedback, seven respondents commented on how motivation and success carried over into the Tier III students' regular education classes. Mrs. Oliver explained:

> There was a lot of excitement when students saw their improvement and you know that may have only lasted for two weeks, but it was two weeks where they were excited about getting better. I even saw that excitement carry over into their regular classes as well. One student who really did not put forth his best effort in class or in Tier III, once he saw how much he improved on the graph, suddenly his grades got better in my class and in his science class. His science teacher mentioned to me, 'He is actually doing his homework, participating, and raising his hands.'

At the elementary level, Mrs. Donahue saw similar improvements in the students that she served. "I think when they can see that they can do it, and they see their little dot on the line of data move up, I think it is rewarding for them and for me too."

Factors that Hindered Successful RtI Implementation

Although there were many factors that facilitated the success of RtI, there were also elements that hindered its proper implementation. These elements were: 1) Time, 2) Ineffective Training, 3) Resource Issues, and 4) Mindset. These are described in detail below.

Time

One of the most often discussed problems noted by all participants was the issue of time constraints. This problem related to the scheduling of intervention time within the school day and the limited planning time teachers had within a school day to complete all the tasks required of them.

Scheduling of intervention. One example of the scheduling and time problem that exists dealt with the state requirement that Tier III students must receive at least one hour of Tier III intervention daily. All of the respondents shared there was no time in the daily school schedule to incorporate Tier III intervention for the recommended amount of intensive instruction. This was especially true for the secondary teachers. Mr. Rooney discussed the difficulty of "pulling" students during the regular school day. He stated, "We had a problem pulling out kids in the little 15–20 minutes that show us valid data…that never got rolling for us this year which was frustrating." Mrs. Devereaux, another secondary teacher, also expressed frustration due to the lack of "true instructional time" spent with the students:

> Even though the schedule says that we have 25 minutes for intervention, that time is reduced to about 18–19 minutes when you consider the students coming from different teams, then getting them settled to begin instruction. On many days, we were doing great to have 15 minutes of quality instructional time.

Although the schools found ways to incorporate some intervention time in the day, nine of the participants also questioned whether or not that was the most effective time. This was especially true for secondary schools since their intervention teachers were also general classroom teachers. Mr. Rooney commented:

> We are not an elementary school where there is a teacher that is kinda what they do. When do you do it during the schedule? Do you want to pull them out during Math? Well, they are struggling in Math. Do we want them to miss more instruction? Do you want to pull them out during PE? Opt Time might not be long enough. I know for us that is one of the big problems.

Ms. Mims also suggested that "[Tier III intervention] needs to be their elective. Reading improvement needs to be incorporated somehow as an elective. They need more time. There just isn't enough time to really implement the program as fully as it needed to be implemented."

Although the participants at the secondary level felt the elementary schools had an advantage of having an individual in their schools that focused on RtI and Tier III instruction, the elementary-level participants also discussed concerns about their scheduling and time constraint issues. Four of the participants, including Mrs. Wilson, shared that "scheduling Tier III students without taking them from subject areas they needed to have such as science, math, etc. became a concern for the Tier III and general education teachers." Mrs. Tarrant also acknowledged that it was not easy to schedule Intervention/ Enrichment (I/E) time for the school. She noted that not including an intervention time in the master schedule for each grade level was one of the least effective parts of RtI during the school year.

Teacher preparation and planning time. The RtI process involves assessing all students three times per year, conducting Tier III intervention, and implementing frequent progress monitoring of those Tier II and Tier III students. This must be done on top of an already busy teaching schedule and the teachers noted that their daily preparation and planning times are very limited. Nine of the respondents saw this as a barrier to success. Mrs. Donahue stated:

> My typical day prior to this year was very different than the typical day last year. Last year, much of my time was spent on RtI implementation…and record keeping, bookkeeping for RtI because that became part of my job at the school. I did not feel as if I had as much time to spend on my duties as reading coach because so much of my time was taken with RtI.

Mrs. Tarrant also recalled the amount of time spent on RtI as opposed to focusing on her main job as reading coach:

> I tried to spend my morning…going into observing classrooms working on more RTI things whether it's answering e-mails from teachers, coming up with materials for teachers to use for interventions, cataloguing and doing inventory of new interventions. Tier III students had to be progress monitored weekly so the afternoons were spent either helping progress monitor, collecting data or entering data getting it all into the computer or getting assessments ready for the following week. So much, much time was spent on RTI implementation instead of being a reading coach.

Not only has adding additional curriculum into the daily school calendar been a hindrance, but seven of the teacher participants shared that the interruption of quality preparation and planning time has also been a problem. The teachers criticized the lack of time allotted for RtI preparation during their planning periods because of how much time it consumed. Mrs. Mims mentioned:

> I have about 1 hour for planning time which is taken up by parent meetings, team meetings, technology training, etc. On top of that, trying to plan for the next day and/or gathering materials for the next class periods. Now that RtI is implemented, I must find time to prep for the Tier III intervention class and update the folders for my Tier III students.

According to Mrs. Heald, sometimes the hectic schedule made anything concerning DSI and RtI somewhat of a last priority because of other pressing matters. "With trying to manage my classes, grading papers, etc., when I felt like I had enough time to get to the DSI paperwork, I did."

Mrs. Tarrant's experience is representative of types of problems many of the reading coaches and teachers had when trying to implement the program. RtI process were added to their daily responsibilities, but nothing was taken away to relieve the stress of an already hectic schedule. With six respondents mentioning this, it seems to have also been a common thread in the hindrances of RtI.

Ineffective or Limited Training

Although teachers identified professional development as a facilitative element in program success, this area was also identified as a limiting factor as they did not think that enough information had been disseminated to enough people. The importance of possessing an ideal knowledge base of the structure, purpose, and goals of RtI was evident in the participants' interview responses. All of the 11 participant's response to the question: *What do you think is the district/ school administrations' role(s) in the RtI process* included the need to train all teachers and leaders in function-specific components of RtI. Five participants felt that leadership needed to provide more professional development in order to increase all stakeholders' knowledge in what was expected of them. Mrs. Mims described the leadership's role as to:

> It is their job to let the schools know this is what the mandate is from the state. And the school leaders will then…dispense that information to the teachers…and provide whatever is necessary: materials, training

The participants mentioned the lack of prior knowledge and their own limited knowledge base and that of other teachers throughout their individual schools. Mrs. Donahue mentioned:

> There was somewhat of a disconnect between what the district expected from us and what was the plan to get there. For about a year, we kept hearing about how RtI was coming soon. Then we started attending trainings on incorporating various classroom

strategies. However, many of us did not really grasp the correlation until it was time to begin implementation. Even then, we did not really know how much was expected until maybe later in the first semester.

Ineffective training and its affect on data use and instruction. Ineffective training was also a concern as it related to technology use and assessment for the Tier III teachers which led to issues concerning proper use of data and instruction. Due to time constraints, some teachers felt that they did not really get a chance to be thoroughly trained to use the technology provided. Mrs. Donahue noted:

> We used a web-based online math solution program, but it was a learning year so our teachers did not really know how to use the different components and we were learning as we were going. A lot of teachers did not know that you could go in and have the kids work on certain modules, but we learned as we went. We were all over the board last year with progress monitoring.

Mrs. Mortenson also mentioned similar problems at the secondary level with the improper use of technology due to ineffective training:

> It was toward the end of the year once we figured out the online program. We figured out where the data was as far as in the program and there was a point where we actually accidentally deleted some data and we figured out that we got to print it or else it will get deleted.

Although all participants agreed that there was an adequate amount of data provided, they felt that there needed to be more training for all teachers on how to analyze the type of data distributed to the teachers. Mrs. Heald stated, “I think this is an area where we can improve, not only for the DSI committees, but also for our school as a whole”.

Since data use is also crucial in understanding the needs of Tier II students, 7 of the respondents also felt that they, along with their colleagues, needed more training on Tier II instruction and how it should work effectively in the classroom. Mrs. Heald's remarks are noted that this was an area where more workshops are needed. "But I do think that some teachers do implement Tier II instruction, and I do think it has helped the students." Mrs. Devereaux shared:

> We need training for our staff in delivering Tier II intervention and what that looks like in the content area classrooms. Particularly in the area of differentiated instruction on the secondary level. Our teachers are very tentative as this is not how many of us are taught.

Resource issues. In conjunction with training and time, another hindering factor that emerged from the data were the issues of teacher resources and the lack of professional staffing in the secondary schools to assist in properly serving Tier III students. Eight of the participants felt that these were hindrances.

One of the initial problems was that Tier III instruction began later than expected due to teacher and student resources arriving later in the first semester of the school year. Schools had to wait until the new fiscal year (October) in order to purchase the needed materials. Several participants discussed how they felt effective intervention was hindered due to the program's late start. Mrs. Poe stated that the extended time created a rush in the start time of the process. "Because it was all new to us, we had a slow start and our slow start caused some missteps later in the year that we had to go back and correct."

Mrs. Poe mentioned, "It was an overwhelming start of the school year to learn so many new programs, once school was already in session." Mrs. Mims concurred with similar concerns:

> We desired to be ready to move with placing students in intervention classes when school began. Based on our schedule, the delay in having a plan in place is frustrating to our staff when changes are constant in the fall. We needed a clear plan, clear forms and protocol, and be ready to make it work in August.

Mrs. Mortenson felt that this issue was very important for the leadership to consider and to make sure that they were "providing resources in a timely manner to preview and get familiar with before they [the teachers] are asked to implement or use the resources."

Another resource factor was the availability of a trained professional who could aid in the serving Tier II and III students. All secondary teachers mentioned the elementary levels having reading coaches who are also considered RtI specialists in all of the district's K–5 schools. At the secondary level, general education teachers were selected to provide Tier III instruction to students during I/E time. Every secondary-level participant mentioned the need for a reading and/ or math specialist to relieve them of this responsibility. Mrs. Heald remarked about numerous times in her interview. A typical statement was:

> We need a reading coach or reading teacher that will be able to go in and help those when they are brought before the DSI team. That way, they can have about 45 minutes of reading intervention. To me, that is the biggest element that we are missing.

Mr. Rooney agreed, "If we could have just one faculty member that could devote all of their time to helping struggling kids… Gosh! That would make everything go smoother." Ms. Mims also saw a benefit to a reading specialist as to "work with those students to build a rapport with them, to become an advocate for those students so the students know that that is what is going on."

Mrs. Mortenson felt that building a rapport was important, but found it challenging with the number of students in her Tier III class. That was another reason why she desired a trained professional for her school.

> If there were fewer students per teacher, it would have helped. There were students who were more willing to work in smaller groups but were less willing to speak up in a large group format. If my group was a bit smaller, I could have made more headway.

Mindset

With anything new, there will be some type of resistance from some individuals. Although teacher dedication and teacher and student motivation were identified as elements that helped the program succeed, there was also some resistance among these groups that served as barriers to success. This type of resistance can negatively affect proper implementation of a program. In addition, data indicated that beliefs about role identification on the part of the teachers also hindered the program's goals from being successfully accomplished.

Teacher mindset. Although an attitude of resistance did not come from the majority of the participants, it is important that this resistance is acknowledged. Four of the participants mentioned that resistance may be due to a variety of factors, some of which may be the barriers they face, such as lack of competence or time. For example, Ms. Mims mentioned sometimes when people get overwhelmed with a new paradigm shift like RtI, they are not really doing what they say they are doing. She stated:

> I feel like teachers are one of the best professions at faining, doing what it is that they are being asked to do…we gotta do this, so we can kind of tweak this here and tweak this there and make it look like we are actually implementing this, but we are not actually implementing this.

Four of the participants felt this attitude may be linked to the teachers' fear that this will be just another short-lived program. Mrs. Mortenson stated that her greatest future concern for the program is "we are going to drop it and it is going to be a fad like everybody is afraid of. We are going to spend time investing in this and money invested because it is so expensive." Mr. Rooney also noted his concern of the program's longevity. "Educators are famous for jumping on the bandwagon for just a few years and then jumping right back off."

Resistance may also be connected to a lack of confidence and a personal loss of pride in what one knows and has previously done. Mrs. Mortensen discussed this when she said,

> I think this program has revealed a weakness in our teaching. Like "Oh God! I don't know how to teach people how to read so I am going to resist it so no one knows that I am deficient in that area." We don't want to admit that is a weakness of area as teachers so we try to push it aside.

Clear identification of teachers' roles. Resistance also appears to be a result of some individuals feeling like RtI is not their responsibility and the roles have already been established for those individuals who are responsible because of their expertise in certain areas. In order for the implementation to be effective, all teachers must be invested and buy-in to the RtI program. Some teachers felt that there were burdens of responsibility placed on only a few people and others did not see RtI as their responsibility. Ironically, that burden differed at each of the levels. At the elementary level, Mrs. Donahue, a reading specialist, mentioned:

> I feel like some teachers…because I am the guru, but not really…I am supposed to get the students and fix them. I think the responsibility must also be on the teachers…I feel like we are all in this as a team and we should all have ownership. It is not just Mrs. John's kids, it is all of our kids.

Mrs. Tarrant also discussed the true purpose of her role as opposed to what teachers perceived it to be.

> I really don't think that the RtI person…should have the entire burden of the whole process on them. Maybe a coordinator that makes sure that the meetings are setup to go around and make sure that teachers are doing their part, but I really think the responsibility needs to be…distributed evenly with your teachers and I also think they have more buy in…it is not me telling them what to do.

At the secondary level, there seems to be a burden placed on the language arts and math teachers. Mrs. Mortenson noted, "I think that some of the teachers have the attitude of, 'He has a reading problem, so I will just let the language arts teacher deal with that', or 'he has a math problem so that is the math teacher's problem.'" She also mentioned the assumption that some teachers have that the language teachers are experts in teaching reading:

> I think a lot fell on the language arts teachers because there is an assumption that the language arts teachers know how to teach students how to read. That assumption should not be made because I don't get taught how to teach reading in secondary education as much as anybody else does.

Student mindset. One unexpected topic that emerged from the data was student mindset and their level of motivation and attitude in the Tier III classes. Many participants mentioned this issue when asked, *How has working with Tier III students been as far as their behaviors, their attitudes, etc.* Mrs. Mortenson stated:

> It was a large challenge because these students (Tier III) knew there is something that made them not the best. We recognize we are not good at something. You don't want to think you are not good at a particular skill so it is difficult and challenging because they

> are resistant to learn. I think in their minds they really believe 'I am not a good reader and I will never be a good reader.' I think if they have a different attitude instead of thinking that they are in the dumb kid class that would change their attitude.

Mrs. Wilson also noted her experience as:

> The biggest challenge that I have faced in a super long time. We had the lowest students with the worst behaviors and the least cooperation. It was very disheartening. The discipline problems were so overwhelming, the lack of motivation on the students' part. There was no ownership as far as the students go.

In addition, Mrs. Donahue mentioned that students at the elementary level also felt burned out.

> I think our students are so tired and frustrated if they are struggling readers who are not improving that they become discipline issues. Even at that early age. Some of our students spend approximately 2 hours a day in intensive reading intervention. I have noticed the frustration in some of the students when they see some of their classmates being successful and they are not. They try to give up quickly.

Conclusion

It is important that we examine the effectiveness of any new program, the benefits it provides and the elements that foster and hinder success from the perspective of those involved in the process. This is the only way that leaders will understand how to encourage the successes and evade the failures. Chapter IV provided a detailed description of the findings related to the effectiveness of the RtI program in its first year of implementation. The next chapter discusses the findings as they relate to the research questions and delve into the implications of the study, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This researcher sought to examine a school district's attempt to implement the Response to Instruction (RtI) Program from the perspective of the Tier III teachers involved in the process. The Tier III teachers utilize all available disaggregated data to plan and provide individualized tiered instruction for students functioning at two or more grade levels below their same age peers. This initiative was mandated by the state to address the issue of prevention and early intervention of academically struggling students. The study examined the factors that facilitated and hindered the success of executing the program from the perspective of a group of teachers most closely involved in implementation. The study also investigated the benefits of incorporating RtI into school districts. This chapter discusses the key findings from the study in addition to the implications of those findings and recommendations for future research. The following questions provided the framework for this study:

1. What are the benefits of incorporating RtI into a school district's program as perceived by the Tier III teachers?

2. What factors are facilitating RtI program implementation as perceived by Tier III teachers?

3. What factors are hindering RtI program implementation as perceived by Tier III teachers?

Implication of Key Findings

The findings for each of the research questions are briefly described in this section along with implications for practice. The final section of the chapter presents recommendations for future research, based upon the findings. It is important to note that although the findings are presented separately for each question, the issues discussed are interconnected and create a domino effect upon one another and must be considered in relationship to one another.

Benefits of RtI

This study shows that the overall benefits of implementing the RtI program are interrelated with the facilitating factors that promoted the success of RtI implementation. As a result of professional development, the teachers experienced an increase in the application of data which resulted in teachers identifying students earlier for effective intervention before failure. In effect, these items also created improved teacher quality and collaboration which helped to increase motivation and communication.

Since these benefits are a result of proper implementation, it appears that will only occur if these facilitative elements are in place. Therefore, it will be important for school leaders to be aware of these facilitative factors and to all that is necessary to foster them. Likewise, they must be cautious of the potential hindrances in order to avoid and/or overcome them. One suggestion for being able to create this awareness would be to constantly conduct a similar interview process as the research exhibited in order to assess the degree of effectiveness of the program and the degree to which it is being properly implemented. Another is to have continuous opportunities for teachers to engage in evaluative discussions and provide feedback on their learning needs, the resources required, problems that are surfacing and areas of success.

Torgesen (2007) found that applying RtI in the form of 1) ensuring high quality instruction, 2) modifying academic interventions based on progress monitoring data, and 3) providing increasingly powerful "tiers" of intervention based on student need decreased the number of underachieving students. This should be the ultimate goal for all teachers and school leaders. All of the participants shared that the program overall was beneficial to the students' success. The participants discussed how the students benefitted from the program because the processes implemented led to the early identification of all of the students' needs and then allowed teachers to provide proper intervention and support through high quality instruction in the classroom and in Tier III classes. In addition, the teachers noted that there was an increase in student participation and success due to student motivation. Thus, it appears that the program purposes of ensuring student successes are being met.

Other strategies for assuring this success by fostering those factors that helped teachers to implement the program and steps that could be taken to minimize barriers to this success are presented in the sections that follow.

Facilitative Factors

There were four areas that facilitated the RtI process to be implemented successfully. They include 1) collaboration and communication, 2) increased data usage and application, 3) motivation, and 4) relevant professional development. These factors are interrelated with each other and with the other two research questions, but they are being discussed separately.

Collaboration and communication. The findings indicate that collegial collaboration and communication within schools is essential for the successful implementation of RtI. Ehren, Laster, and Watts-Taffe (2009) described collaboration process when educators join forces, pool their resources, share their expertise in order to meet shared goals for instruction and assessment.

This finding is similar to reports from other research. For example, Murawski and Hughes (2009) also found that these elements were important in their study of the important components of collaboration as it relates to RtI. They found that educators using RTI are keenly aware of the need to work with others to obtain the best results. The items that facilitated this area were scheduled meetings and consistent collaboration among peer teachers, administration, and parents.

Face-to-face discussions concerning student progress and instructional improvement was a key factor amongst the participants when it came to effective decision making for student placement. Wayman et al. (2006) found that effective collaborative teams should engage educators at various levels. However, compliance should not be the focus because it hinders deep, reflective thought since team members are more engaged than following the rules than reflection and inquiry (p. 10). These findings suggest that schools should provide opportunities for teachers to share quality, uninterrupted planning and discussion time with others who share the same students or the same content.

One method for providing such opportunities is to structure productive and organized Data, Support, and Instruction (DSI) meetings where teachers can discuss concerns for students struggling academically based on recent data. This process should allow everyone to be aware of any changes that have been made and what needs to be done in order to make sure that child's needs are met. Since DSI team members are mostly fluid due to the groups being organized by grade levels or academic teams, there must an individual (s) who will present at all DSI meetings. This should include individuals who have a broader interest in all of the students' success. This could include counselors, Tier III instructors, and school administrators. When

issues are discussed, the static members of the team will be able to inform others of what is working and what is not working that another group would like to try.

According to the findings, one of the static members of the DSI teams must be a school administrator. Other research also points to the importance of such involvement when trying to change and improve schools. Hallinger and Heck (2010) found that collaborative leadership was a driver of change in school improvement capacity and indirectly impacted growth in student learning. Being part of the team will give leaders an understanding of what is occurring and permit them to act as a facilitator in the meetings and to help remove barriers to success that might be operating within the school setting. It will also allow the teachers to express their concerns and inform the leadership about what is needed. This may include elements such as resources and materials, extra staff help, support with students in their classes, and parent communication. In programs like this, there must be immediate feedback on what is not working because it is the students who are being affected in the long run. Therefore, school leaders must determine a plan of action as to how to close the gap and ensure success for the teachers and students. Crowther (2002) noted the importance of such leader involvement stating that it helps leaders draw on the ideas and energy of colleagues throughout the organization, so that they not only gain more creative solutions, but can also build trust and commitment.

In this study, monthly DSI meetings have been successful. However, within the findings on hindrances, teachers noted that finding time to meet otherwise was a problem. Since collaboration seems to be a vital element in RtI success, school leaders should examine ways to expand time for faculty to collaborate and/or methods to foster collaboration using technology formats. For example, if team members were provided duty-free lunch times, they could have a full hour to discuss student data and instructional plans to address student needs as they arise.

Likewise setting up Skype meetings or fostering online chats or dialogues might be a meaningful way to share information and collaborate. Of course, issues of confidentiality and protection of data would be a primary factor to consider when using such strategies. The issue of time will be discussed in more detail in the section on barriers to success.

Another benefit of collaboration perceived by the participants was that they felt the responsibility for student success was being shared more equally, thus lessening this burden on specific staff members of the school. RtI thus helped to make the concept that student success is the responsibility of everyone in the school, as a more visible and accepted belief. This appears to be very important for RtI to succeed. Murawski and Hughes (2009) noted "For RTI to be successful, a wide array of stakeholders need to collaborate. These include administrators, parents, students, staff, the community, and all types of educators" (p. 269). It seems apparent therefore, that teachers of all content areas should be aware of all students' academic needs to help improve mastery. One way to foster this awareness and cross-responsibility for student learning, as well as enhancing collaboration (the first benefit identified) is to form interdisciplinary teams. Working in such teams, teachers can jointly determine the needs of their students based on data, and identify how varying courses can aid in ensuring that students master their particular learning needs. For example, if data show that mastery in the area of math problem-solving is needed teachers could discuss how this could be incorporated not only into mathematics, but in other core and elective subject areas such as science, social studies, language arts, music, and physical education. This is also true for mastery of reading standards. For example, if there is a need to improve comprehension in nonfiction literature, team members could discuss how they could incorporate comprehension into all subject areas. In this way,

everyone could take ownership for the success of student mastery in these areas, and the burden of responsibility would be lessened.

Parental communication and collaboration with the school was another vital element in the program's success. Longitudinal research has also found positive and direct links between academic achievement and parental involvement (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004). In addition, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) cited Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of the parental involvement process which suggests that "parental involvement is motivated by two belief systems: role construction for involvement and sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school" (p.107). Therefore, schools should consider providing opportunities for parents to learn more about RtI and in explaining how it could impact their child, how it would change the environment of the teachers' classrooms, and what steps are used when placing students in the three levels of intervention. They might hold informational sessions through PTO/PTA meetings; sessions during the school day and in the evenings to accommodate parents' schedules; and individual parent conferences. Individual conferences should also be made available to parents whose children are considered for placement in Tiers II and III. Materials should also be sent home to parents using mailings, take home materials, or online communication resources. Schools should also consider establishing links on their websites discussing the RtI process and brief descriptions of each tier and what parent expectations from the school. Such activities will provide parents with the needed background, when students come home discussing their tier placement.

Increased data use. The second major benefit of RtI, which was related to facilitative factors, was the increased use of data, which helped to foster teacher knowledge and student success. Participants also discussed the benefit of an increase in the use, analysis and application

of student data amongst teachers throughout the school. The participants discussed their satisfaction with the benchmark assessment portion of progress monitoring. A significant presence of this component was evident in the culture and language of the schools. The participants discussed how effective administration and the DSI team's consistent use of data helped teachers incorporate into their professional practice of data-based reflection of their instruction. Therefore, it appears vital schools must consistently include data use and analysis in their common language and professional discussions. Administration must also model this by including it into their professional practice. Any discussions and decisions with teachers should be data-based. These discussions should be analyzed at all instructional levels (whole class or individual students) and by all teams (grade level, curriculum, school-wide, etc.) in the school. Leaders should be able to attend any of these meetings and hear professional, data-driven discussions to make decisions. Anderson, Leithwood, and Strauss (2010) found that schools are more influenced to use data that is accessible and timely. Thus, it is important that the data are updated on a regular basis and that they are easy to access and use.

Another important finding was that it is vital that teachers understand how to review both individual and school-level data to determine where students demonstrate strengths and weaknesses in the state standards. Therefore, it seems essential that school leaders model the practice of data use and analysis throughout the school year. Teachers should expect that all decisions concerning student mastery are related to data. In addition, curriculum-based teams should also use data to reflect upon the effectiveness of their instruction throughout the year. This practice should extend to the district level. It would seem particularly helpful if systems fostered having teachers and leaders from feeder schools communicate with one another,

examine the data, and use these types of processes to enhance RtI implementation. This type of data sharing was not mentioned in the interview data.

Motivation. The data show that teachers play a significant role in fostering student success and each other's success. Teacher motivation and student motivation were also found to enhance RtI success.

This begins with recruiting and hiring quality teachers for the school. The participants noted qualities it will take for a teacher to be successful in a school implementing the RtI program. Thornton (2006) stated that "the discourse on teacher quality has centered on issues of teacher knowledge and teacher skill, yet a third element that is central to all professional standards is teacher dispositions. The third element encompasses characteristics such as work ethic, commitment, and self-reflection" (p. 55). Schools must not only take into consideration teacher candidates' skills and knowledge of their content, but also take into consideration characteristics that will make them an effective teacher and colleague which will carry into the school being successful. Leaders must also reflect upon the school culture and assess whether the school's disposition follows suit. It would be irrelevant to search for teachers who possess these qualifications if the school is not made up of it, or making an effort to do so.

Teachers should expect school leaders to create a culture of school support that is conducive to Ryan and Deci (2000) self-determination theory which includes competence support, autonomy support, and collegial support to help teachers maintain motivation throughout the school year. Lam, Cheng, and Choy (2010) state:

> The need for competence refers to the need to engage in optimal challenges and experience mastery in one endeavors; the need for autonomy refers to the need to experience oneself as the indicator of action and to self-regulate one's own behavior; and

> the need for relatedness refers to the need to seek attachments and experience feelings of security, belongingness, and intimacy with others. With these three dimensions in place, the teachers know that they are expected to challenge themselves and the students while receiving support from all of their colleagues. (p. 488)

To promote school support and teacher motivation, districts should find creative ways to enhance motivation. One way is to highlight some of the successful practices. The school districts should honor those teams who are exhibiting best practices in and out of the classroom. It could be recognized in the district's newsletter, at their institute day, or on their websites. Another suggestion would be to encourage teachers and school leaders who are experiencing success with RtI to present their success at various professional conferences and conventions nationally. The district could financially aid in sending these teachers to applicable conventions. In addition, since this is a state-wide initiative, the State Department of Education could also conduct similar practices.

Within teacher training sessions and discussions, it is important that teachers become aware of this what will motivate students to be successful. Marzano et al. (2001) stated that high motivation can be seen in students when they see information as personally relevant. However, when they do see purpose in instruction, student motivation is decreased. One strategy to motivate Tier III students is to encourage teachers to provide student feedback to show progression. One example is for the DSI teams to create data walls or portfolios that are comprehensible to teachers, parents, and students. This would be a one stop shop so a student may be able to visually see his/her progress. Also Tier III teachers and/or school leaders could have mini-conferences with the students to discuss their progress in the program. These one-on-one meetings could consist of discussing how they are succeeding and what areas they need a

little more help with. It also would provide an opportunity for the adult and the student to create short-term and long-term goals for the year. Frequent meetings of this type will show the students where they are and where they are going. These opportunities will add a celebratory component to RtI and also give the students something to look forward to other than an official letter sent home that they need to get signed by their parents.

Relevant professional development. The findings in this study indicated that the professional development Tier III teachers received was an important factor in comprehending the components of RtI and implementing RtI. The way in which professional development was structured presents important implications for practice. It appears that professional development activities should be provided at both the school district and school levels, should be conducted on a continuous basis, and should be embedded into the work of the teachers and the schools. This is in keeping with other research on high quality professional development processes (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Not only should districts provide professional development opportunities in this RtI and the elements associated with it, but school leaders should also implement school-wide activities that would be part of their year-long professional development plan (PLP). For example, if one of the school's goals is to increase data-based decisions in the classroom, school leaders should provide a variety of professional development opportunities for the teachers to learn how to achieve this goal in their classrooms. Another suggestion would be to create a school-wide study on the topic of instructional best practices. Teachers could be divided into groups and focus on implementing at least one practice per month and reflect on the pros and cons of the attempted strategies practiced.

Table 6

Recommendations to Foster Facilitating Factors

Facilitating Factors
Collaboration and Communication
1. Create and structure organized meeting opportunities for general classroom and Tier III teachers to discuss concerns about academically struggling students.
2. Provide opportunities for the leadership to listen to any concerns from the staff and provide the appropriate feedback in response to those concerns.
3. Expand time for faculty collaboration through various face-to-face and technological formats to enhance instructional plans and apply recent student data.
4. Incorporate interdisciplinary teams throughout the school to foster cross-curricular partnerships.
5. Provide RtI awareness sessions for parents (individual and groups).
Increased Data Usage and Application
1. Create a benchmark assessment system to gauge student mastery on various levels (individual, whole-class, and school-wide)
2. Assure that leaders model and develop a data-rich culture throughout the school
3. Implement systems and structures to assure that decisions concerning student placement in tiers are data-based.
Motivation
1. Recruit and employ quality teachers based not only on content knowledge, but also on teacher dispositions and their ability to collaborate and motivate student success.
2. Provide appropriate support to the faculty in their endeavors to motivate quality instruction.
3. Highlight best practices of RtI implementation throughout the school district.
Relevant Professional Development
1. Provide appropriate professional development opportunities in the needed areas expressed by the teachers and staff.
2. Continue ongoing and relevant professional development that is embedded into the work of the teachers and school (ex. Professional development plan and professional learning communities).

The Conceptual Framework

Before moving to the section on barriers to success, it is important to note that is quite clear that the facilitative factors and the benefits identified in this research tie into the essential elements of this collaborative inquiry conceptual framework which was used to frame this study. More specifically, data showed the significance of the leadership element with the efforts of not only district and school-based leaders, but also developing teacher leaders who helped in leading the RtI process. The data also showed evidence of how collaboration facilitated the success of implementation through the district's practice of consistent and structured means of communication amongst teachers, school leaders, and parents. In addition, evidence supported how the element of data use and analysis helped create a culture where decisions were made based on student data. Last, the data showed how instructional improvement facilitated professional development which helped Tier III teachers improved the quality of instruction and, in turn, improve student achievement. These findings make it clear, that this conceptual framework provides a useful planning tool to those who wish to implement an RtI program. Those involved should assure that all elements in this framework are attended to in the planning and implementation process. It might be helpful to use it in discussions about the program and how to ensure its success and as a visible reminder of what is necessary within the cultural context to help ensure program success.

With the aforementioned factors implemented, RtI could be successful for both teachers and students. However, it is important that the hindrances in the data are also addressed due to the significance it has in the success and failure of proper implementation.

Barriers to RtI Success

There were three significant barriers identified in the research. These barriers included: 1) ineffective professional development, 2) lack of appropriate resources and materials, and 3) timing and scheduling issues.

Ineffective professional development. Although the participants believe their training and professional development (PD) opportunities as Tier III instructors were up to par, they did not feel the same way about the PD that was given to the staff members at their respective schools. This was of special concern in the areas of increasing teachers' knowledge in function-specific components of RtI. The respondents believed that this lack of training affected the teachers' use of data and their understanding of the importance the data they received in terms of helping them to improve and enhance student learning in their classrooms.

They stated that school district leadership should provide more professional development opportunities that include research-based instructional strategies teachers can incorporate into their class instruction. Participants also discussed the valuable experience of professional development in the area of differentiated instruction in the classroom which could be accomplished by having a group of competent elementary level professionals lead workshops. This team could also consist of school administration or veteran teachers.

Another way to provide meaningful, school-level professional development would be to provide an outside expert to facilitate professional development in the area of needs determined by teachers in the schools. A single activity will not be enough and PD should include continuous professional development feedback and support by the expert or designated teacher leaders.

A powerful method to foster continuous development and teacher growth is for school leaders to create learning communities to promote knowledge of the various instructional strategies mentioned above. School leaders could encourage skilled teachers to lead these opportunities when expert trainers are not available on a continuous basis, Newmann et al. (1996) found that "Making use of internal as well as external expertise, staff development activities took advantage of local skills and sharing of effective practice. Including internal experts as staff developers reinforced teachers' sense of commitment to their school's goals" (p. 305). One way to foster such a community is to create a school-wide book study so teachers may interact with one another and begin professional conversations on topics of their greatest needs. School districts should also establish professional development workshops during vertical team meetings so that teachers at various grade levels, but similar contents, may learn from one another skills and strategies that are working in their classroom to improve reading and math mastery. Similar to the above suggestion, teachers could discuss areas of need for improvement for their particular vertical team.

Resources and materials. The findings indicated that the resources and materials available and the resources and materials needed did not match. The needed resources included a teacher in each school whose sole responsibility is to provide Tier III instruction and RtI administration. Another need included availability of the proper materials to provide quality RtI instruction to Tier III students.

All of the participants, especially those at the secondary level, stated that there was a need for an individual in their school whose primary responsibility is to provide instruction and progress monitoring to students identified as Tier III. Therefore, schools should provide a Tier III intervention teacher/ RtI specialist to their faculty roster. In addition, this individual could

also become an on-campus resource for RtI and help provide professional development to all teachers so they are incorporating the proper instruction in their classroom to help meet the needs of those Tier II and III students. Since this individual will only instruct five percent of the student population at one time, they could also be responsible for the coordination of benchmark assessments, Tier II and III progress monitoring, and participate as a static member of the DSI team mentioned in the facilitation section. DSI membership could be a significant role so they could report individual student progress to their teachers and parents. Based on the data from the secondary level participants, this will relieve much of the burden from the teachers who are not only providing Tier III instruction, but also teaching core classes as well. However, with this new addition, it must be a clear expectation that all general education teachers are still responsible for quality Tier II instruction for Tier II and III students. Teachers will also maintain responsibility for knowledge of their students' data. This is still crucial to the success of the DSI team meeting component of the program.

In addition to human resources, other resource allocations came up as a concern as well. One example the participants mentioned was the lack of available textbooks and intervention programs for Tier III instruction. It seems essential that schools and systems examine this issue carefully and assure that teachers have the resources they need to accomplish what is being asked of them.

Kulik and Kulik (1991) stated that "student gains are greatest when instructional materials are varied for differing instructional groups rather than using materials for all students." School and district leaders should examine what supplementary resources are available for Tier III instruction. Materials for this group must be individualized and differentiated in order to be effective. To ensure proper selection of materials for Tier III

instruction, schools and systems must include Tier III teachers who have experience in textbook selection and what to look for in a quality product. As they decide on products and materials, it is important that this purchase includes an ongoing, quality training and support program for the teachers and administrators who will use them. This would benefit the teachers as the year progresses when they may need help using various components of the program. Based on the data, these teachers felt that they needed more support with the materials that came with new technological assessments teachers struggle with at the beginning of implementation. If support would have been provided with their purchase, they probably would not have lost important data and time.

Another factor to consider when selecting materials is the level of student engagement these materials include. As one participant stated, the students are already disengaged due to the fact that they do not want to be in the Tier III. Therefore, it is crucial the materials are resources that appeal to their age group as they attempt to achieve mastery in the areas in which they are struggling. This will also help teachers get an accurate response to the intervention that is provided.

Time issues and scheduling. Another barrier of the RtI program discussed by all participants involved the amount of time the program consumes which is aggravated by the lack of planning and meeting time and the inflexibility of school schedule. Mahdavi and Beebe-Frankenberger (2009) also mentioned that teachers in their study stated one of the biggest barriers is RTI's challenge to the school's organization, planning, and energy level. "Their [teachers] estimation of the cost in time increased as RtI implementation proceeded across two years; developing and teaching small intervention groups were seen as particularly time- and resource-sensitive" (p. 67).

Many participants mentioned the lack of quality time for Tier III instruction, benchmark assessments, and progress monitoring. While teachers appeared to work diligently to achieve RtI goals, it seems imperative that administrators recognize the importance of giving teachers time to learn new teaching strategies and how to use new resources, have time to collaborate and share, and have opportunities to talk with students and parents about student needs and progress. Not dealing with this issue may create serious implementation problems.

To this end, schools should consider re-structuring their schools' daily schedules to ensure that Tier III instruction is provided. For example, they could add Tier III Intervention as an elective course designed for students who are identified for Tier III instruction. This would eliminate the issue that most teachers mentioned dealing with pulling students during random times of the day and feeling rushed to get it done in the little time provided. This type of schedule change would also help in encouraging students to take the intervention more seriously. Since RtI is a fluid program, students may exit the class after they have shown sufficient progress and be assigned to another elective or exploratory course.

In addition to RtI courses, schools could create before or after school programs that would help with intervention for those Tier III students. The staff could be a combination of teachers and community volunteers. In order to ensure students who need intervention are being served, transportation should also be provided for those whose parents may not be able to drop them off or pick them up. Such programs should be engaging and interactive so the students will not only want to attend, but they are also motivated to master the standards.

As noted by participants, teachers have very little time to do anything extra at school. Thus, school leaders need to develop strategies and structures that will provide teachers time to meet and learn together. Some meetings may occur during planning periods, faculty meetings,

curriculum meetings, or professional days. For example, district level leadership should consider incorporating student half-days throughout the school year to promote engaging professional half-days for teachers to work as professional learning communities and meet as teams or curriculums in order to learn how to analyze their students' data, incorporating differentiated instruction, and how to use technology associated with RtI. This would call for students to come to school for the first half of the day, then leave around noon.

Another consideration would be to share substitutes between curriculum areas so they could meet to plan and develop lessons that are appropriate for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. For example, if the Math teachers met in the morning, once they returned to their class, the substitutes would move to the language arts teachers' classrooms and cover for them so they may be able to meet the rest of the day and work on curriculum and lesson plans. Instead substitutes, school leaders could also partner with local colleges and university administrators to develop a plan where college students could come over and work with students to cover classes so teachers could work together.

Another example would be to provide planning days throughout the school year and summer to allow content areas to share ideas in a professional setting. This is especially beneficial since the RtI program mandates that teachers must meet the needs of all Tier students in all classrooms. Teachers are able to plan within their curriculum teams, therefore brainstorm effective, instructional strategies to help them in all of their lesson plans. This would also be an opportunity for the teams to demonstrate lessons that some individuals may have trouble teaching. This could be done by the administrators hosting two-day planning sessions in the summer, half-day planning sessions twice in the school year, and providing meeting times on teacher planning days and monthly curriculum meeting days as well.

Lastly, school leaders could incorporate semester activities such as a "Great Break" where students participate in club-type activities for a half day. Students would be allowed to choose activities for the half hour event. Students could choose from a range of activities such as cooking, sports, music, jewelry making, planting, etc. This event could be spearheaded by elective teachers, counselors, parent volunteers, and administration staff. During this time, core subject teachers could use this time to meet and discuss the needs of the students on their team or in their grade level.

When it comes to scheduling and protection of teachers' time, school leaders must learn to become creative and think outside of the norm and what has been done before. They must also be able to go beyond their staff to ensure that these ideas are successful. School leaders should take advantage of local resources including parent volunteers, sororities and fraternities, and service organizations that are looking for opportunities throughout the school year. The ideas discussed above will relieve some of the time and schedule issues that the participants discussed. Based on the data, it seems that if the following barriers were addressed before implementation, it would help in ensuring teachers are properly trained, provided resources in a timely manner, and given adequate preparation time.

Table 7

Recommendations to Minimize Barriers to Success

Barriers to Success
Ineffective Professional Development 1. Increase purposeful professional development opportunities regarding research-based instructional strategies to incorporate differentiated instruction. 2. Include outside expertise to facilitate professional development in needed areas determined by teacher input. 3. Engage teachers in professional learning communities to foster continuous professional development and reflection (ex. book study). Teacher leaders will be recruited to lead these opportunities.
Resources and Materials 1. Assess and evaluate the need for an Tier III intervention teacher/RtI specialist in each school 2. Collaborate with Tier III teachers to review and evaluate the appropriateness of Tier III textbooks and intervention programs materials.
Time Issues and Scheduling 1. Re-structure the school's daily schedule to incorporate a Tier III instruction course. 2. Create interactive before- or after-school programs that aid in Tier III intervention support. 3. Organize intermittent meeting times throughout the year for teachers to meet and learn together (ex. faculty meetings, professional days, and half-days). 4. Use local community stakeholders as resources in order to provide time for teacher planning.

Recommendations for Future Research

Participants mentioned that one benefit of RtI was the sharing of responsibility for having students achieve mastery in reading and math. This responsibility should not be placed solely on those teachers who teach reading and math, it should be addressed in all classes. However, one of the barriers discussed is the issue of teachers at the secondary level who are teaching core

classes in addition to Tier III instruction without extra planning time. One recommendation is to conduct a study on the relationship between teacher retention/burnout and the lack of support for those teachers who are designated as Tier III intervention teachers for the school.

Another recommendation that addresses one of the hindrances to successful implementation is to conduct a comparative study on the various research-based programs specifically designed for Tier III instruction. There are many programs to choose from, but many are tedious and lack validity and reliability. The study should examine the top RtI programs. Some of the factors that could be explored are: the benchmark assessment, data analysis, the link between state standards and individual student's mastery level for that standard, and suggested lesson plans to help aid students in Tier I and Tier II. This type of study could assist leaders in making decisions on which product to purchase for the teachers and students.

One issue that was not examined in this study was student progress. Future research could include student success gains in one year for those students who participated in Tier III instruction. A longitudinal study following a class of students from elementary to high school identifying their progression or regression and what were the factors that caused their success or failure in the program might also be of value. Such a study could research factors such as why students resist this type of support and what would motivate them to participate. Such studies could examine the outcomes of this study related to motivation and student engagement from the perspective of students, teachers, leaders, and/or parents perspectives.

Since this study was conducted in one school district, it would be beneficial to replicate it in other districts with a different configuration. It might also be valuable to design an instrument to survey schools about the degree to which each of the elements identified served as barriers or facilitators to success. Another meaningful study would be to identify schools and systems that

are being very successful in implementing RtI and identifying best practices in adapting school schedules, organizing teacher time and tasks, professional development, and engaging students implement RtI. Such a study could be used to explore how schools/school districts have integrated this program into their regular school schedule and achieved positive gains in student mastery in their areas of need. A study of this caliber would help school leaders decide how to best structure student and teacher schedules.

In addition, conducting an in-depth examination of RtI collaboration would also significantly contribute to the body of research. It would be beneficial to study what factors foster collaboration within RtI implementation. Also, it would be beneficial to examine some best practices that foster successful collaboration.

Lastly, this study only included the perspective of the Tier III teachers. There was no research found that discussed the implementation process from the perspective of other teachers, school leaders, students, and parents. Since the RtI process affects all those involved, future research should be considered involving the perspective of the school leaders, students, and parents actively involved in the Tier III intervention phase of RtI. This type of research could provide insight on what encourages and discourages them to become invested in their learning intervention.

Conclusion

This study has identified the overall benefits, facilitating factors, and the hindrances of successfully implementing an RtI program in its first year of implementation from the perspective of Tier III teachers involved. It is hoped that the information gleaned with aid those in this school system and in others to enhance their program structure and processes. The program fosters the idea that each child is a unique learner and schools must attempt to adapt

teaching processes to assure that each one will succeed. Thus, it is vital that information about how to foster the successful implementation of this program be gathered and disseminated. This study is one step in the process. It is hoped that it will stimulate additional research about this important topic.

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APPENDIX 1

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

REQUEST for PROTOCOL RENEWAL

For Information or help completing this form, contact: **THE OFFICE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH**, 115 Ramsay Hall
Phone: 334-844-5966 **e-mail:** hsubjec@auburn.edu **Web Address:** http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm

Complete this form using Adobe Acrobat Writer (versions 5.0 and greater). Hand written forms will not be accepted.

1. **Protocol Number:** 12-186EP1205

2. **Original IRB Approval Dates:** From: 5/14/12 To: 5/13/13

3. **Requested ONE YEAR MAXIMUM Renewal Period:** From: 5/14/13 To: 5/13/14

4. **PROJECT TITLE:** A public school system's journey in implementing a Reponse to Instruction program to meet students' learning needs

5.

Duriel Barlow	Graduate Student	EFLT	334-703-1507	barlodt@auburn.edu
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	TITLE	DEPT	PHONE	AU E-MAIL
PI SIGNATURE	2010 Stephanie Court; Auburn, AL 36830 MAILING ADDRESS			dtbarlow1906@hotmail.co ALTERNATE E-MAIL
Frances Kochan	[signature]	EFLT	334-844-5038	kochafr@auburn.edu
FACULTY ADVISOR	SIGNATURE	DEPT	PHONE	AU E-MAIL

Name of Current Department Head: Sheri Downer AU E-MAIL: sheri@auburn.ed

6. **Current External Funding Agency:** N/A

7. **List any contractors, sub-contractors, or other entities or IRBs associated with this project:**

N/A

8. **Briefly list** *(numbered or bulleted)* **the activities that occurred over the past year, particularly those that involved participants.**

1. Identified participants
2. Sent a scripted email to all participants
3. Scheduled interviews with participants
4. Prepared an interview protocol for all interviews.
5. Met with each partcipant during interviews.
6. Sighed all consent forms.
7. Secured the audio and transcripts in private office to ensure confidentiality.
8. Allowed the participants to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy.

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 5/13/13 to 5/13/14 Protocol # 12-186 EP 1205

9. **Explain why you are requesting additional time to complete this research project.**

I am in the process in completing my dissertation, and needed to renew my protocol. Although, I am not conducting anymore interviews and have completed my data collection, I still needed to make sure I am still complying with all of the IRB's requirements.

Received MAY 13 2013 Research Compliance

10. **Do you plan to make any changes in your protocol if the renewal request is approved?**
(e.g., research design, methodology, participant characteristics, authorized number of participants, etc.)

☑ NO ☐ YES (If "yes", please complete and attach the "REQUEST for PROTOCOL MODIFICATION" form. The IRB will review both requests at the same time.)

11. **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION**

a. **How many individuals have actually participated in this research?** 13
If retrospective, how many files or records were accessed? 9

b. **Were there any adverse events, unexpected difficulties or unexpected benefits with the approved procedures?**

☑ NO ☐ YES (if YES, please explain)

d. **How many participants have withdrawn from the study?** _____ ☑ None or Not Applicable.
NOTE: If any participants withdrew from the study, please explain.

e. **How many new participants do you plan to recruit during the renewal period?** _____ ☑ None / NA

f. **During the renewal period, will you re-contact any individual that has already participated in your research project?** ☐ None / NA

☑ NO ☐ YES If "YES", please explain reasons for re-contacting participants.
(If "YES" and the procedure to re-contact has not been previously approved, please complete and attach a "REQUEST for PROTOCOL MODIFICATION" form. The IRB will review both requests at the same time.)

12. PROTECTION OF DATA

a. Is the data being collected, stored and protected as previously approved by the IRB?

☐ NO (If "NO", explain) ☑ YES

b. Are there any changes in the "key research personnel" that have access to participants or data?
Attach CITI proof of completion for all new key personnel.

☑ NO ☐ YES (If "YES", identify each individual and explain the reason(s) for each change.)

c. What is the latest date (month and year) you now expect all identifiable data to be destroyed?
(Identifiable data includes videotapes, photographs, code lists, etc.)

DATE: May, 2014

☐ Not Applicable – no identifiable data has been or will be colleted.

11. Attach a copy of all "stamped" IRB-approved documents used during the previous year.
(Information letters, Informed Consents, Parental Permissions, etc.).

12. If you plan to recruit participants, or collect human subject data during the renewal period, attach a new copy of the consent document or information letter you will use during the extension.

(Be sure to review the OHSR website for current consent document guidelines and updated contact information: http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/sample.htm .)

PLEASE NOTE: If you do not plan to collect additional data and/or you do not have access to any identifiable data (including code lists, etc.) you may be able to file a "FINAL REPORT" for this project.
Contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for more information.

When complete, submit hard copy with signatures to the Office of Human Subjects Research,
115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849

APPENDIX 2

SITE AUTHORIZATION LETTER

[redacted]

April 9, 2012

Institutional Review Board
c/o Office of Human Subjects Research
307 Samford Hall
Auburn University, AL 36849

Dear IRB Members,

After reviewing the proposed study, "A Public School System's Journey in Implementing a Response to Instruction Program to Meet Students' Learning Needs", presented by Mr. Duriel Barlow, a graduate student at Auburn University, I have granted permission for the study to be conducted at the following [redacted]

The purpose of the study is to examine the system's successes and hindrances through this instructional change in its schools. Also, the study will examine how administration and teachers collaborate to ensure that this program is effective. The primary activity will be to conduct interviews with teachers and the school's administrators. Only teachers and administrators directly involved in the implementation process will be asked to participate.

I understand that Mr. Barlow will receive informed consent for all participants and will have confirmed that he has the cooperation of the teachers and administrators. Mr. Barlow has agreed to provide to my office a copy of all Auburn University IRB-approved, stamped consent documents before he recruits participants on campus. Any data collected by Mr. Barlow will be kept confidential and will be stored *in a locked filing cabinet at 2010 Stephanie Court, Auburn, AL 36830.* Mr. Barlow has also agreed to provide to us a copy of the aggregate results from his study.

If the IRB has any concerns about the permission being granted by this letter, please contact me at the phone number listed below.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

APPENDIX 3

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMED CONSENT

for a Research Study entitled

"A Public School System's Journey in Implementing a Response to Instruction Program to Meet Students' Learning Needs"

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine the system's successes and hindrances through this instructional change in its schools. Also, the study will examine how administration and teachers collaborate to ensure that this program is effective. The study is being conducted by Duriel Barlow, a graduate student, under the direction of Dr. Frances Kochan in the Auburn University Department of EFLT. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an educator who is involved in the RTI implementation process and are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, I will ask to individually interview you about your perceptions of the RtI implementation process at your school. Your total time commitment will be approximately 45 minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risk associated with participating in this study is a breach in confidentiality. To minimize this risk, all interview transcripts will be anonymous.

Will you receive compensation for participating? There will be no compensation for participation.

Participants Initials _____ Page 1 of 2

4036 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 36849-5221; Telephone: 334-844-4460; Fax: 334-844-3072

www.auburn.edu

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, published in a professional journal and/or presented at a professional meeting.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Duriel Barlow at (334) 703-1507 or Dr. Frances Kochan at (334) 844-4446. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature Date	Investigator obtaining consent Date
Printed Name	Printed Name
	Co-Investigator Date
	Printed Name

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 5/14/12 to 5/13/13
Protocol # 12-186 EP 1205

Participants Initials _____

APPENDIX 4

2011–2012 RESPONSE TO INSTRUCTION (RtI) IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

Response to Instruction
Implementation Survey, 2011–2012

1. **Briefly list and describe the part of the RtI framework that you feel was most effective or worked best during the 2011-12 school year.**

2. **Briefly list and describe the part of the RtI framework that you feel was least effective or did not work well during the 2011-12 school year.**

3. **In regard to iSteep, DIBELS and the screening/progress monitoring process, what worked well and what needs to be changed or re-evaluated?**

4. **Of the math interventions that were available, a) which one did you use most, b)which one did you use least, c)which one did you find most effective, and d)which one did you find least effective?**

5. **Of the reading interventions that were available, a) which one did you use most, b)which one did you use least, c)which one did you find most effective, and d)which one did you find least effective?**

6. **Based on your experience with our menu of available interventions during the 2011-12 school year, make your recommendations for 2012-13 by writing keep (k), expand (e), discontinue (d) or need more information (n) in the blank provided.**

    a. Voyager Passport _____
    b. Voyager Journeys ____
    c. SPIRE _____
    d. My Sidewalks ____
    e. Read Naturally _____
    f. Ticket to Read _____
    g. V-Math _____
    h. V-Math Live _____
    i. Otter Creek Facts ____

7. **List other interventions that you have used or would like for us to consider including in the menu of options available to schools.**

8. **In terms of the process elements of the RtI framework (screening, progress monitoring, problem solving team planning and meeting, data collection, data analysis, etc.), what areas need to be changed and what would be a more effective way of completing that part of the framework?**

9. **We need to add a behavior component to the plan for 2012-13. What suggestions do you have for the behavioral component?**

10. **What other suggestions for the RtI framework do you have?**