Examining Educator Perceptions of a Response to Intervention Initiative: Facilitating Factors, Barriers and Benefits

by

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Abstract

This study investigated a school district's implementation of a state mandated, Tier III, Response to Instruction (RtI) Program during its fifth year of implementation. This study examined administrators' and teachers' perspectives of the facilitating factors and barriers that influenced the success of the program and benefits which resulted from its implementation.

A qualitative research approach was implemented as the method of inquiry for this study. Purposeful sampling was used to provide an in depth knowledge of the Tier III intervention process and program. Data sources included a review of documents and interviews of Tier III participants.

Findings included six elements as facilitating factors to the overall success of the Tier III intervention program. These factors include a) teacher and administrator understanding and implementation of their role, b) implementation of a Problem Solving Team, c) collaboration, d) data analysis, e) professional development, and f) resources.

Time constraints, scheduling, limited personnel and resource materials were identified as barriers to the success of Tier III interventions. Benefits for teachers and students were identified as being interrelated to each other. Benefits for teachers included collaboration and enhanced instructional strategies. Improved opportunities for learning, attitudes toward learning and early identification were included as benefits for students. Building relationships was identified as a benefit for both teachers and students.

Previous research suggested that the RtI tiered model of intervention promotes student achievement for struggling students. However there is little research that focuses on the implementation process and the changes that occur over time as perceived by the administrators and teachers who are most closely involved in the intervention process. This study filled a gap in the literature and presents new information that should be of value to practitioners and researchers interested in strategies and processes focused upon fostering school change to enhance student learning, fostering teacher collaboration, and implementing RtI.

Acknowledgments

As this educational accomplishment comes later in life for me than most, it provides me with an opportunity for self-reflection beginning with the many blessings that God has bestowed upon me over the many years of my life. This educational achievement would not have been possible without his careful placement of significant people along my path to offer love, support and guidance to me in all that I have strived to achieve. And it is to these special people that I would like to express my heartfelt thankfulness.

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make this dream a reality. It is to you that I dedicate this accomplishment.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER I. NATURE OF STUDY

Introduction

Schools within the United States were created to develop an educated society

(Dewey, 2007). Schools and systems are becoming more complex and the diversity of the

population within them is increasing.

> The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined well-educated,
>
> and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international
>
> standings and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our
>
> laboratories and neighborhood workshops. (National Commission of Excellence in
>
> Education, 1983 p. 3)

This complexity in our global reality, coupled with the growing diversity within American

society, validates the importance of education across the nation. Along with education

being showcased as the foundation of our society comes public pressure for all children to

be successful in school. This means that,

> All, regardless of class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the
>
> tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This
>
> promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided,
>
> can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful
>
> employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own

interests but also the progress of society itself. (National Commission of Excellence

in Education, 1983, p. 1)

Statement of the Problem

"Expectations of what politicians, parents and employers of what schools should

accomplish in terms of student achievement have been rising for many years" (Hargreaves,

1999, p. 122). These prospects of what education should provide has led to an increase in

laws and policies, which focus on school accountability at the federal and state levels. The

most recent of these federal laws was the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2010*

(www2.ed.gov…/107-110). Public Law 107-110, commonly referred to as NCLB, clearly

outlines the basis for the need for intervention programs in schools throughout the United

States. The NCLB law was created to assure that all children have a significant opportunity

to obtain a free, equal and high quality education and reach proficiency levels on state

assessment, which are both- challenging and purposeful.

Another federal policy change, the reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities*

Education Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004,Sec 614.B.6.B.) mandated the need for scientifically-

based instructional interventions to be utilized when making the determination of whether

or not a student may or may not have a learning disability (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005;

Glover & DiPerna, 2007). Shinn (2007) pointed out that the language of the law indicates

that student response data from scientifically-based instructional interventions should be

considered when making the determination of a learning disability. The rewording of the

language in the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) modified the previous

"discrepancy model" which required educators to use grade level differences and actual

student performances to identify students with specific learning disabilities. The revisions

2

within the (IDEA) law created the response to intervention process as an alternative method for identifying struggling students for special education services. Because of this law, when determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a Local Educational Agency (LEA) can use a process that determines if the child responds to a scientific, based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures (IDEA, 2004, Sec 614.B.6.B). This additional provision allows LEAS to utilize the intervention process before making a referral for special education services.

These pieces of important legislation were the driving forces behind a national movement, which allowed school systems to create intervention programs that were designed to meet the needs of each individual student and foster academic success. As a result of this, the Response to Intervention (RtI) Program became a central focus for many school districts and policy makers. Mellard, Stern and Woods (2011) provide a clear definition of RtI. "Response to Intervention (RtI) is widely used as a framework for providing high quality instruction and intervention that are matched to student needs" (p. 1). Erickson, Noonan, and Jenson (2012) note that many RtI instructional models provide multi-tiered instructional support in the areas of academics and behavior. RtI models provide school systems with the ability to create and implement intervention programs, which are designed to meet individual student needs.

Research conducted by Hoover, Baca, Love and Sanenz (2008) established that on a national level, the Response to Intervention (RtI) model was still in a transition period three years after RtI was introduced into the IDEA language of the law. However, findings of their study point out that although implementation of RtI is an eventual inevitability in the United States, the process differs from state to state. The progression, according to

Berley, Bender, Peaster and Saunders (2009), indicates that at least 47 of 50 states within

the United States are participating in the implementation of RtI at some level in their school

systems.

Although the design of intervention models may vary across school districts (Fuchs

& Fuchs, 2006; Vaughn, 2003), there are key identifiers that provide the foundation for

meeting the needs of all learners. Most intervention models are comprised of three tiers of

instruction that increase in duration and intensity and are based on individual learner

needs and differentiated instruction provided within the tiers. This approach appears to be

critical to the success of the overall RtI model. Hoover and Love (2011) provided an

explanation of the three tier instructional model. Tier I instruction is the core instruction

provided to students within the general education classroom. Tier II is supplemental

instruction generally provided within a small group setting to provide students with

support in being successful with the Tier I instruction. Tier III consists of instruction that is

intensive in content and is conducted in a small group, which may include special education

students. Tier I and Tier II is expected to meet the needs of 90% to 95% of all learners.

The Alabama Model

In Alabama, the state in which this research study occurred, prior to 2009, the

Alabama State Department of Education implemented the Building-Based Student Support

Team (BBSST) model, which provided accommodations for students struggling with

academics or behavior. After changes to the Alabama Administrative Code (AAC) were

made in 2009, the state moved to an RtI model identified as Positive Behavior

Interventions and Support (PBS). The goal of PBS is to enhance the ability of schools to

educate all students, especially those with challenging behaviors by establishing an

effective range of PBS systems, which includes data and a three- tiered model of RtI

support for students (http: www.alsde.edu/general.RESPONSE_TO_INSTRUCTION.pdf).

The passage of *Alabama's Accountability Act of 2013* (AAA 2013) reiterated the

importance of improving student achievement within all public school systems across the

state of Alabama. The AAA 2013 allows local school districts to develop a flexibility

contract with the State Board of Education. This flexibility permits local school systems to

flex out particular laws, policies and regulations. The law also creates tax credits for

families with students in public schools that are consistently failing to attend a nonpublic

or a non-failing school. Taxpayers may also donate a nonprofit scholarship to non-profit

organizations for students to attend a non-public failing school or a nonpublic school.

The state ranks all schools in the state using a combination of examination scores of

students on reading and math test across all grade levels. The AAA 2013 also required that

the Alabama State Department of Education release a list of failing schools according to the

accountability guidelines. The list included 76 out of 1,496 total Alabama schools at the

end of the 2013 school year. Thus, students are able to transfer out of approximately five

percent of schools in Alabama. The transferring process allows students to attend other

schools within the system with the system bearing the expense of transportation.   Students

from the five percent of failing schools were also provided the opportunity to transfer to a

non-public school and receive the tax credit to attend a private school. The law identifies

as "failing" any neighborhood school that ranks in the bottom six percent at least three

times in six years (http: www.alabamapolicy.org/wp …/2013-Alabama-Accountability-Act-

Gt1.p…).

The adoption of *Plan 2020* by the Alabama State Board of Education in 2012 added a new dimension to school requirements and student learning. It placed the RtI program at the forefront in its contribution to meeting the overall goals of the plan which includes closing the achievement gap, increasing the graduation rate, improving student achievement and preparing students who are college and career ready to be successful in society (web.alsde.edu/Home/General/Plan_2020.aspx).

Plan 2020 is outlined by the Alabama State Department of Education as being an eight year strategic plan for public education for grades K–12 in the state. It clearly describes a high school graduate as being a student who is college and career ready when leaving high school. The four key focus areas include Learners, Support Systems, Professionals, and Schools and Systems. Each of these areas of support includes objectives and research strategies, which seek to ensure that projected goals for each student are obtained (http://www.alsde.edu/sec/acct/Pages/home.aspx)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher and administrator perceptions of their school district's implementation of an RtI program. It focused on Tier III in the areas of reading and math. The study examined teacher and administrators perceptions of the elements that promoted and hindered success, and the benefits of implementation. This study was conducted during the fifth year of the school system's implementation of the response to intervention program.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided the study.

1.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that fostered the success of Tier III in RtI?

2.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that serve as barriers to the success of Tier III RtI instruction?

3.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the primary benefits of Tier III RtI instruction?

4.   To what extent do perceptions of these issues differ between teachers and administrators?

Program Description and Context

This section presents an overview of the RtI program and is followed by a brief description of the Hillcrest Public School District (pseudonym), the school district where the research occurred.

Program Description

The Hillcrest School District (HSD) is presently in its fifth year of RtI implementation. This means that the initiative would be in the institutional stage of what Fullan (2007) titles as stages of the change process. The HSD developed guidelines utilizing the states' RtI three tier instructional model. Tier I is instruction provided by the general education teacher and is provided to all students. Tier II is used with students who are not progressing adequately in the Tier I instruction. Tier II instruction is provided through general education and can take place in or outside of the general education setting. Tier III provides students with additional instruction outside of the general education classroom using specified research interventions identified to meet the needs of the individual student.

The three–tier process includes an extensive progress monitoring of student data and collaboration among the teachers providing the instruction to the student. Individual student plans for interventions are developed at each school through the school-based Problem Solving Team (PST). The PST consists of teachers within the school or grade level who are familiar with the student and are able to make decisions regarding the development of the intervention plan.

Hillcrest School District

The Hillcrest School District consists of ten schools: two high schools, two junior high schools, and six elementary schools. Four of the elementary schools range from PreK–fifth grade. One elementary school consists of grades K–5. One of the elementary schools ranges from K–8th grade. The two junior high schools consist of students from the sixth to eighth grade. Both senior high schools have students from the ninth to the twelfth grade. The population of students served consists of 49% Caucasian, 48% African American, and 3% other races. The teacher demographics include 74% Caucasian and 26% minority. Administrators consist of 4 African Americans and 6 Caucasians.

The Hillcrest School District is home to approximately 3,700 students and a staff of approximately 500 full-time and part-time employees. The certified teaching staff consists of 293 teachers. Sixty-five percent of the certified teaching staff hold a master's or higher degree and meet the requirements of Alabama's standards for being highly qualified in accordance with NCLB. Hillcrest has one elementary, one junior high and one senior high that serves students from the north end of the school district. The other five elementary schools along with one junior and one senior high school serve students in the southern part of the school district.

Method

      Case study was the method of inquiry for this study. A qualitative approach was used in this study to conduct an in-depth investigation examining the implementation of Tier III instruction from the perspective of the teachers who implement the process in all grade levels across the school district and the administrators in their school. Following the approval of the school district where the research was conducted and the Institutional Review Board, the researcher conducted a purposeful sampling of teachers who implemented the Tier III instruction and school administrators. After a review of PST documentation from the previous school year and a review of the literature an interview protocol was developed to address the research questions of this study. Participants include administrators and teachers throughout the district who are responsible for providing Tier III RtI intervention to schools during the school year. Data collection included a review of all school district documents as well as interviews with the administrators and teachers. Data collection procedures are presented in more detail in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

      The researcher used open coding to analyze and separate the data into meaningful categories. "Coding is a procedure that disaggregates the data, breaks them down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 32). Content analysis was used to classify the information by identifying patterns and themes within the information. "Developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step in analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 463). After completion of the classification process the content of the documents and interviews were analyzed to identify areas of

significance (Patton, 2002). From these areas of significance themes were developed. Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea (Creswell, 2013). Following the identification of common themes throughout the data the researcher began the interpretation process by identifying areas of significance. Following Creswell's (2013) suggestions, these areas of significance were coded into themes or category ideas and used to interpret the data.

Significance of the Study

Although RtI intervention is being brought to the forefront as a process to improve student achievement throughout the country, there is not an abundance of research that explores process or the outcomes of these interventions. At this time, there has been only one other dissertation, which addresses the implementation of RtI in the State of Alabama. This study looked at the implementation process of a school district in the early stages of RtI implementation (Barlow, 2013). This study took the research a step further by looking at the RtI process and implementation in a rural school district in the state of Alabama that has been implementing the RTI process for five years. This study will provide significant information in regard to how the process is working after a five year implementation period, how it might be improved and whether these perceptions differ between teachers and administrators. It will provide important practical information for those who are implementing RtI, will add to the research on this important topic, and will hopefully foster additional research in the future.

Limitations

There were four primary limitations to the study:

1. This is a case study of one school district. The implementation model of this district may differ from other districts.

2. Although the researcher sought to have an adequate sample size and dealt with issues of validity of the data, the researcher is the instrument and may have bias that were not identified.

3. The school district did not anticipate being a case study and it is probable that not all data were collected at the beginning of the program implementation.

4. It is not possible to collect all possible data so some insights may not be collected.

Assumptions

Two assumptions guided the study:

1. People will be honest in answering questions.

2. Data retrieval will be accurate and adequate.

Definition of Terms

Appreciative Inquiry (AI): approach is a positive way to embrace change within an organization by discovering what is being done right rather than what is wrong.

Case Study: a study of research that includes a comprehensive record providing consideration over time to a specific person, group or situation.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): federal law that highly impacts the public school system across the nation. The law focuses on assessment driven reform, consequences for student failure, assessment accountability and standard-based assessment.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBS): is a research-based model, which focuses on improving academic achievement by reducing student discipline problems.

Positive Support Team (PST): team of educators within each school to guide the implementation and documentation process of RtI.

Public School: an elementary or secondary school that is part of a system of free school maintained by public taxes and supervised by local authorities.

Response to Intervention (RtI): the practice of providing quality instruction/ intervention which is matched to the learners need and performance over a period of time to make decisions which are important to the student's academic success.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD): a disorder that may interfere with the ability to understanding written or spoken language and which may also affect the capability to read, write, spell, speak, listen or do mathematical calculations.

Three-tiered Instruction: a delivery model, which includes three tiers of specialized instruction based on the student's skill need.

Conclusion

The introduction, purpose, research questions and significance of this study were presented in this chapter. The review of the literature is presented in Chapter II. Chapter III provides an explanation of the methods and processes used in the research study. The findings are presented in Chapter IV. The study concludes with Chapter V, which contains a discussion of the findings along with implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The publication of *A Nation at Risk*, in the United States in 1983 helped to initiate a national movement to raise the quality of public schooling to assure that all children are successful in their school endeavors. This publication, issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, centered its attention on the state of American education, and concluded that it was very bad. The report states that, "Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest test of everyday reading, writing and comprehension. About 13 percent of all 17 year olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate" (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 3). The report emphasized the need to improve the teaching and learning of all students by improving the quality of teaching and focusing on excellence in education.

This report led many to conclude that the situation was placing our society at risk (Goldberg, 1984), and that there was a desperate need to reform the public education system across the nation. This stimulated a national movement of educational reform and a great deal of political debate about the quality of education in the country resulting in a constant barrage of Federal and state legislation, focused on improving schools by encouraging or mandating that they implement major initiatives focused on structural, curricular and/or instructional change.

The Change Process

       Within this environment there has been a steady body of literature examining the change process in schools to help facilitate its success. This research study will examine a system engaged in a change process similar to the Three Step Change Process developed by Michael Fullan (2007). The Three Step Change Process includes (1) initiating the change (2) implementing the change (3) institutionalizing the change. Figure 1 depicts the three phases of the change process. It is followed by an explanation of Fullan's recommendations for steps.
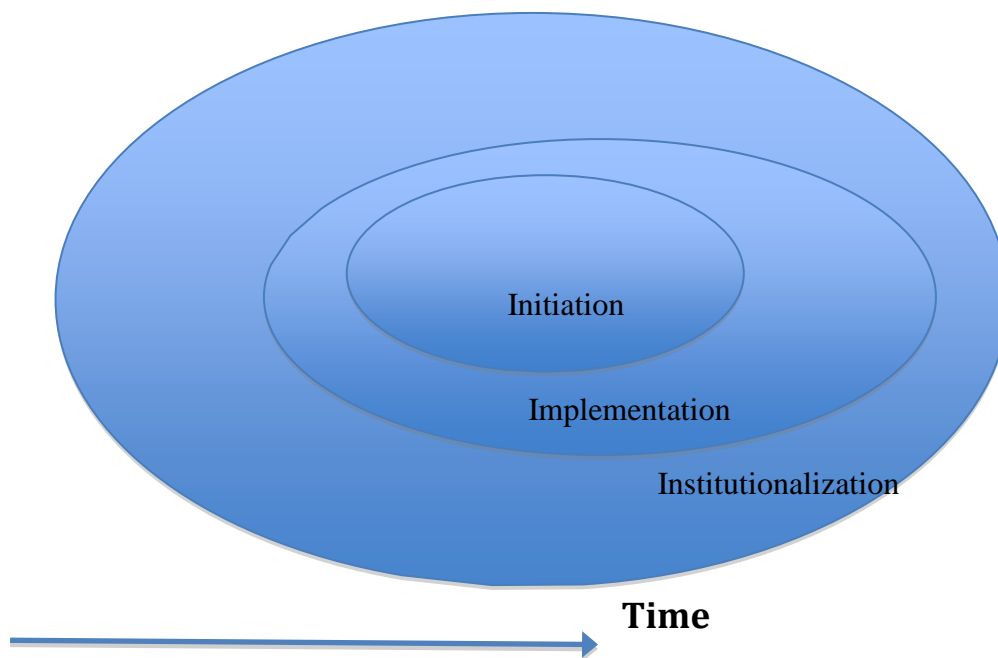
Figure 1. The three overlapping phases of the change process (Miles et al, 1987).

Initiate the Change

       The first phase of the change process is initiation. During this phase, a facilitator should present a well-planned presentation of the innovation. It is important that the creation of the innovation is meaningful due to the fact that the beginning will have an impact on the success of the innovation.

       The innovation awareness should include an explanation and rationale of the goals, practice, framework and timeline for all involved in making the change. It is essential that all stakeholder groups involved implementing the change be a part of the beginning stage. It is equally important that the participants understand that change is taking place for a meaningful purpose (Fullan, 2007).

Implement the Change

       During the implementation stage, emphasis is placed on putting the plan into action. Throughout this phase, the change is put in place in real and pragmatic ways. Attention at this stage is centered around the corrective feedback and support to ensure that the implementation is a success. Job embedded professional development helps to provide support in making sure that the change is implemented as planned. It is essential that the leadership maintain an active role in assisting with the implementation of the change (Fullan, 2007).

Institutionalize the Change

       The process of institutionalizing change is the most time consuming of the three-phase process. At this stage everyone is aware of the expectations of the change process and takes the responsibility to ensure that they comply. It is during this phase that the innovations being implemented are saturated throughout all aspect of the institution. It is

at this stage that the performance of the participants makes the greatest change as they move from the novice to a high competency and proficiency level. A support system is well defined and necessary to ensure that obstacles and challenges can be overcome during the journey. It is essential that the leadership maintain an active role in assisting with the implementation of the change (Fullan, 2007).

Research indicates that long-term change is dependent upon an extensive commitment to embedded learning and practice of the implementation process over a long period of time. Standard based reform influences and changes the classroom practices of educators, which in turn impacts students (Hord, Fullan, & Frank, 2015). The focus on school change, which began in the 1980s continues today. For example in 1989, President George W. Bush and 50 governors across the nation announced the National Education Goals (NEG) (National Education Goals http:www.ed.gov/legislation/Goals 2000/The Act/Index.html). The purpose of the NEG was to ensure that by the year 2000:

- All children in America would begin school ready to learn.

- Students in the United States would become first in science and math achievement.

- The rate for student graduation would increase to at least 90 percent.

- Every American adult would be literate and possess the skills necessary to compete in the world economy and practice citizenship.

- Every school would be contributing to learning and be drug, alcohol and violence free.

- All American students would leave grades four, eight and twelve with the competencies in all subject matter necessary to prepare for future learning, citizenship and employment.

- Every school will promote parental involvement that fosters the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

- Teachers will have access to professional development programs, which promote knowledge and skills to help students succeed in the next century.

In 1991, school readiness was re-defined by the National School Readiness Task Force to include:

- Self-confidence, physical health, social competence as well as academic knowledge;

- expectations of teachers and elementary schools to provide developmentally and culturally appropriate practice which takes in account class size, technology staff development;

- improving family environments of children and enhancing morale and skills of staff; and

- communities sharing in the responsibility of supporting families in the development of young children.

  (http://ww.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnment/go/93-3read.htm)

School reform initiatives did not end with this effort but continued to provide impetus in the transformation of K–12 education. The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESSA) of 1994 and Goals 2000: Educate America Act signed during the Clinton administration provided reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act (ESEA) now called IASA. Title I funding became the major funding source for elementary and secondary schools dependent upon state and local decisions. The primary purpose of Title I is to provide financial assistance to local school agencies serving students from low socio-economic backgrounds (McDonnell, 2005). The passage of these bills provided around 11 billion dollars for federal education programs in grades K–12 and enacted significant changes in the ESEA since it was initially passed in 1965.

One reason for the passage of the IASA, was a belief that economically disadvantaged students were stigmatized by being pulled from regular classrooms to receive small group instruction separated from their peers (Passow, 1992). There was also concern that the over-lapping of federal programs, inconsistence and confusion at the school level created the need for complete reform of Title 1 (Birman, 2013). This revision allowed schools and districts to use achievement standards for disadvantaged students that were less challenging than those for other students. It also helped to remove the identified problems in Title I requirements that were negatively impacting student learning." At the same time that public discourse reflected a sense that America needed a drastic education overhaul, there was growing dissatisfaction with the outcomes of K–12 federal education programs, particularly the large Title I's stringent monitoring requirements had begun to strike some barriers to good educational practice" (http://www.air.org/resource/three-decades-education-reform-are-we-still-nation-at-risk, ¶4).

The reauthorization of the IASA created a shift from tracking federal dollars, to funding school based reform focusing on school improvement and student accountability measures (http://ww.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/resessa_clinton_iasa_shtml).

Federal funds were provided to district schools systems and states to ensure that

economically disadvantaged students received the same standards-based education as

their peers across states and the nation. Title I grants for states were contingent upon the

development of school improvement plans, which required input being given by teachers,

parents and community stakeholders.

States were given one year to develop state standards and assessments after

receiving federal funds during the 1995 fiscal year or they could adopt standards from

another state. Emphasis was directed toward state planning that focused on "building

capacity" toward helping students meet high standards. Title I mandated school districts to

serve schools in ranking order if student poverty rates were 75 percent or more. Districts

were allowed to divide remaining funds among other schools according to ranking order or

grade span grouping.

The IAS deadline for developing performance and content standards was the 1997–

1998 program year and the year 2000 for assessments. The IAS required that each state

conduct an annual review of its Title I program using the state standards and determining

"adequate yearly progress" (Riddle, 2001).

Title I grants mandated assessment measures be aligned with content standards

between grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12. Student assessment results were to be disaggregated

by gender, race, disability, migrant status, limited English proficiency and economic status.

State plans were mandated to include measures to ensure adequately yearly progress,

strategies for professional development for teachers, service coordination among students

and the identification process used to identify student needs. School districts were

mandated to collaborate with parents, and community stakeholders, to develop a written parental involvement plan.

Title II of the IASA, referred to as the Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development Program, provided millions in funding between the years of 1985–1996 (www.ed.gov/pubs/.../126-97). The primary purpose of these funds was to provide professional development for teachers. In addition, funds were also allocated to local and state grants establishment for partnerships between school districts, higher education, and community organizations.

In conjunction with the IASA and Goals 2000: American Education Act, the *School to Work Opportunities Act* (WOA) of 1994 was vital in developing a relationship between secondary, postsecondary and the workplace. The WOA was established to provide students with meaningful work-based learning experiences that could be extended beyond high school to college and the workforce. All 50 states received federal funding to implement a school to work program which best met the needs of students, to facilitate their workplace opportunities.

A 2001 publication issued by the Institute on Education and the Economy at Columbia University entitled "School-to-Work; Making A difference in Education," reported that the Act was successful in:

- improving school attendance and decreasing chances of student dropout of workforce programs'
- creating enthusiasm among teachers and employers involved in the work place program;
- fostering the growth of the career academics in high schools

- expanding school to work place programs after funding ceased;

- developing small learning communities within schools

  (http://www.tc.columbia.edu/iee/papers/stw.pdf)

The *School to Work Act*, passed in 1994, demonstrated evidence that schooling can provide the fundamental knowledge for youths transitioning to the work force (Lewis, Madzar, Shipley, & Stone, 1998). With the funding for the WOA ending in 2001, school and employers were left to meet the financial burden of continuing to fund programs on their own.

The next major piece of legislation in school reform came with the reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) of 2004 (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/projects/evaluations/disabilities.asp). Its emphasis was specifically on the education of students with disabilities. The purpose of IDEA was to: ensure that all children would receive an education that is appropriate and free; assure parent and student rights are protected; give assistance to local, state and federal agencies to provide an education for all students with disabilities; assist states in providing early intervention for infants and toddlers with disabilities; ensure that parents and educators are able to improve the educational results of children with disabilities; and assess and guarantee the effectiveness of the efforts to educate students with disabilities. IDEA broadly addressed the overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority students in special education and allowed districts to utilize funding to provide early intervention services for students, struggling with academics or behavior but not yet identified as special needs students. Secondly, the law changed the identification process of students falling in the disability category of Specific Learning Disability by considering the monitoring and intervention process in the

21

general education setting. IDEA was crucial in providing the segway to improving the education outcomes for all students through systematic reform strategies and practices (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006).

Following this change in the Disabilities Act in 2002, under the presidency of George W. Bush, the U.S. Congress passed federal *Public Law 107-110, No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). This one piece of legislation historically expanded the influence of the federal government in its role over the 90,000 public schools across the nation. The NCLB law was the first piece of legislation to mandate comprehensive accountability for public schools through assessment measures for all students in reading and math in grades three through eight and at least once in grades 10 through12 (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Results from these assessments are rated according to student performance and disaggregated to identify key subgroups falling below the state's proficiency goal. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) for students, schools and the district are determined by these data results. School systems were expected to meet yearly goals in working toward having by the end of the 2013–2014 school year.

The NCLB guidelines outlined the foundation for public school reform and accountability. The law offered rewards for schools demonstrating exceptional improvement and sanctions for low performing schools. "A fundamental motivation for this reform is the notion that publicizing detailed information on school-specific performance and linking that 'high stakes' test performance to the possibility of meaningful sanctions can improve the focus and productivity of public schools" (Dee & Jacob, 2011, p. 148).

The law also created an impetus among educators to provide the necessary procedures within the schools to ensure that standards were being met and exceeding accountability measures related to adequate yearly progress. The phenomenal national attention and federal scrutiny of the school system's as well as media attention brought substantial attention to the public school system and created a sense of urgency among the parents, schools and the general public.

The effectiveness of the NCLB law is still open to debate. However there are indications that it has helped to promote reform within the public school system. For example, "in a report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Stullich et al. (2006, p. v) points out that achievement trends on both state assessments and the NAEP are 'positive overall for key subgroups' through 2005" (Dee & Jacobs, 2011). A more recent report by the Center of Education Policy (2008) concluded that state assessments indicate that achievement scores in the areas of reading and math showed an increase since 2002. Data from the state assessments and NAEP show an increase in scores. Both reports stress that the gains seen nationally should not necessarily be attributed to the effects of the NCLB.

Jennings and Tenter (2006) reported the findings of a four-year comprehensive review of NCLB by the Center on Education Policy and identified ten major effects of the law on public education in the America:

1. "State and district officials report that student achievement on state testing is rising, which is optimistic. However, it is not clear if students are gaining as much as the rise in percentages of proficient scores suggest.

2. Schools are spending more time focusing on reading and math. Emphasis has been taken away from subjects not tested.

3. Schools are aligning the curriculum along with the instruction more closely.

4. Schools considered to be low-performing are changing without being taken over by the state.

5. Progress has been made in insuring that teachers meet the law's qualifications for being 'highly qualified.'

6. There is an increase in the number of assessments that students are taking.

7. Achievement gaps are being monitored and attention is being given to learning needs of particular groups of students.

8. The number of schools on the states improvement list is not growing resulting in the need to offer public school choice or additional tutoring services.

9. The role of the federal government in public education has increased.

10. School districts and state governments have increased their role in school operations but most often without financial support of federal funds". (p. 110–112)

Due to the lack of real evidence about the outcomes of NCLB and because of problems with implementation, the law was revised in 2010. The revision of the NCLB through the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary (ESA) of 2010, focused on four key areas regarding student achievement.

1) providing extensive support and interventions for student learning and achievement for students attending the identified lowest performing schools in the country;

2) creating and implementing college-and career-ready standards and assessments aligned with those standards for all students and identifying areas which promote the effectiveness of teachers;

3) identifying areas which promote the effectiveness of teachers and administrators to ensure that all leaders are competent in providing meaningful instruction for all students; and

4) assuring that families were able to evaluate their children's schools (http://www2.edgov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf).

Recent Trends

More recently, in order to enhance and improve school performance, the Obama administration created a shift within the ESA of the NCLB from the federal level to allow more flexibility among states. The shift, part of the blueprint for educational reform, provided states with the opportunity to create their own innovative educational plans to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and future endeavors.

In President Obama's State of the Union Address in 2011, he emphasized the need for all students to succeed in school and pledged financial support to states that develop and carry out plans that improve student achievement. The president stated,

Over the next 10 years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education that goes beyond a high school education. And yet, as many as a quarter of our students aren't even finishing high school. To all 50 states, we said, 'If you show us your most innovative plans to improve teacher quality and student achievement, we'll show

you the money.' (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/

remarks-president-state-union-address)

All Educational State Agencies (ESA) requesting NCLB flexibility must identify schools as

Title or non-Title and meet the definition of reward, focus, or priority schools as outlined

by the United States Department of Education. ESAs may develop their own method for

making school determinations as long as the requisite numbers meet the ESA flexibility

guidelines.

Those responsible for developing the assessment system in this program must test

annually. Schools and local educational agencies must measure accountability for student

achievement and implement college-and-career-ready standards. Evaluation and

professional support systems must extend beyond test scores to include a variety of

feedback such as observations, student work, and feedback from parents, students and

stakeholder groups. States are also required to implement comprehensive plans for

professional development and evaluation of teachers and staff. States must also put in

place a plan to recognize and reward high performing schools and a comprehensive

support system for low performing schools to support the closing of the achievement gap.

This flexibility within this program allowed states across the nation to develop and

implement a plan, which is based on the individual needs of the student within the system

and each school (www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility).

In 2012, there were initially ten states that received a waiver for flexibility from No

Child Left Behind. These states were Colorado, Indiana, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky,

Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. Soon after, another 28

states followed in the waiver process with others coming on board later. During the 2013–

2014 school year, 34 states sought to renew their waiver from NCLB. States seeking

extensions must show that they are on track to meet their commitments and requirements

of the ESEA flexibility; have a plan for the 2015–2016 school year; provide intervention and

support to schools and subgroups; support teachers and protect students, and resolved any

monitoring findings or issues related to the ESEA flexibility (http://www.ed.gov/news/

press-releases/states-granted-waivers-no-child-left-behind-allowed-reapply-renewal-

2014-210). For example, in 2012 the waiver allowed the state of Massachusetts to support

low-achieving students district-wide by using Title I and Title II A funds of up to 100

percent. Programs were developed for schools that were identified as the lowest

performing in the state. The waiver impacted school-wide Title I programs for schools that

are identified as the lowest performing in the state (Massachusetts Department of

Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). The state of Louisiana used the flexibility

waiver to revamp the grading formula at the high school level to reward student

achievement on the Advanced Placement and international Baccalaureate Test and the

ACT. Students no longer receive points on grades for scores that are below proficient in the

School Performance Score (http://www.louisiannabelieves.com/accountability/federal-

accountability).

Factors that Impact Student Learning

In the midst of attacks on public education and federal and state legislation and

accountability measures, many researchers have been investigating the factors that foster

school improvement and student learning. Public expectations of what schools should

accomplish has continued to grow for many years. These expectations will continue to

grow as the informational stage of society continues to change (Hargreaves, 1999).

Research indicates that among these factors are the quality of the teacher, leadership in the school, student learning and professional development. These elements are discussed in the sections that follow.

Quality Teachers and Student Learning

Research supports President Barrack Obama's (2009) statement that,

From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their

success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents, it's the person

standing at the front of the classroom… America's future depends on its teachers.

Researchers have demonstrated that the quality of the classroom teachers is the most impacting factor in the academic success of the child (Darling-Hammond, 2000). High-quality teachers play an important role in ensuring that young people are equipped with the skills needed to participate in a democratic society in the United States (Murnane & Steele, 2007).

Standards-based reform is dependent upon the ability of the teacher to deliver quality instruction that uses effective teaching strategies and research-based methods. "The best thing we can do to help every student succeed is to provide good teachers, well versed in subject matter content and how to teach it" (Landgraf, 2003, para 5). When teachers provide a balance between understanding the content of what they teach and how students learn they are able to create a balanced shift between teaching and learning (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 1989; Shulman & Sparks, 1992). "This finding makes it imperative that states recruit and retain highly qualified teachers (Boyd, Goldhaber, Hamilton, Lankford & Wyckoff, 2007).

Effective Leadership

Although the quality of the teacher is the primary impact on student learning in schools, the quality of leadership in the school is also of utmost importance, second only to teacher quality (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Walstrom, 2004). School leaders are held accountable for all facets of school operations, which include personnel and students, programs to advance academic achievement, building parental and community stakeholder relationships (Green, 2012). In the past decade the responsibilities of the school administrator have evolved from providing teacher resources and managing the school environment to being directly connected to student achievement as the instructional leader of the school (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

The leadership of the school bears the responsibility of ensuring that the instructional program meets the needs of each student. School leaders are responsible for identifying a clear vision and goals to facilitate change within the school. Along with identifying goals based on students, the principal is in charge of ensuring that meaningful professional development is provided to teachers to improve instruction and sustain change in the classroom (Riekhoff & Larsen, 2012). Furthermore, it is imperative that school leaders possess the knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate high quality professional development for teachers that will help promote academic success and high school graduation (Moore, 2010).

High Quality Professional Development

Studies emphasize that the academic performance of students will not improve if the quality of the teaching does not improve. Thus, improving the quality of instruction requires continuous support for and in the development of teachers. Seferoglu (2010)

29

notes, "A teacher who has opportunities to learn and grow can provide more opportunities for young people" (p. 1). Thus, it is essential that schools focus on providing teachers training that is tailored to meet their needs so that they can address the needs of their students. It is also essential that the professional development being provided is of high quality so that it will enable teachers to enhance the quality of instruction and improve student's academic achievement (Kent, 2004). Examining the issues of the elements of high quality professional development, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) surveyed 1,027 mathematics and science teachers to examine the relationship between self-reporting changes in classroom teaching practices and structures of professional development found in the literature. The results of their study suggest three structural features of professional development found in the literature that have positive significant effects on teacher learning: a) form of the activity, b) time involved in the activity, and c) the participation of the teachers collectively from the same school, grade or subject. Fullan, Hord and Frank, (2015) suggest four learning forward standards for professional learning: 1) learning Communities, 2) leadership, 3) resources, and 4) learning design. When professional development is consistent and focuses on specific strategies there is an improvement in teacher practices (Desmone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002).

As schools grasp the idea that the purpose of professional development for schools is to enhance student learning, professional development becomes a tool to build the knowledge and skills of teachers to meet the needs of individual students. It is vital that schools plan and implement professional development opportunities for teachers which will enable them to be able to assess individual student needs, utilize student data to

identify and address those needs and plan together to build support for student learning (Mundry, 2005).

School Culture and Learning Communities

Almost two decades ago, Purkey (1990) documented that the culture of each school is unique and is created based on the particular group of people within it at any given time. He also concluded that a school culture is greater than the sum of individual contributions and demonstrate commonalities around issues such as leadership. He emphasizes that culture is the essential bond that enables or prevents a school from accomplishing its goals and mission. The importance of the culture of the school continues to receive attention and its importance cannot be underestimated. "Climate and culture both seem to contribute to students' academic performance as well as to their satisfaction with school" (Purkey, 1990, p. 565). Higgins-D'Alessandro and Sadh (1998) point out that culture and student attitudes impact each other. According to Kinney and Robinson (2005), effective leadership that focuses on instruction must include

Keeping the best interest of the students at heart; establishing a culture where teachers, parents, community members, and student work together to turn a shared vision of high expectations into reality; and thinking outside the box to continually challenge the status quo in the name of school improvement. (p. 19)

Marks and Prinity (2003) suggest that active collaboration among teachers and administrators provide shared leadership that lead to learning organizations that benefit from learning and perform at high levels.

The traditional culture of schools has been quite individualistic and isolated (Stoll, 1998). However student achievement is related to facts, which are, intrinsic and extrinsic

31

in nature. As previously noted, some intrinsic factors are found in skillful leadership and teaching and believing that all students can learn and teaching explicit habits which require students build effective intellectual habits. However, these factors also include constant renewal of knowledge and practice, collaborating with others in planning to learn best practices (Krovetz & Arriazza, 2006). Thus, to meet the demands of an ever-changing world, teaching and learning can no longer be left to the individual.

One method for sustaining meaningful reform within the schools is through the establishment of learning communities in which teachers can share and learn together (Stoll, Bolam, Mcmahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). Thus, Hord (1997) suggests that

Creating professional learning communities in the nation's schools is a primary goal. The current paucity of information about the process is frustrating for would-be creators of such communities. But, it reminds us again of the complexity of the change process and of the myriad factors that affect human endeavor and behavior. (p. 52)

Teachers and leaders must realize that student achievement is related to factors, which are intrinsic and extrinsic in nature. Intrinsic factors found in skillful leadership and teaching include: constant renewal of knowledge and practice, collaborating with others in planning to learn best practices from each other, believing that all students can learn and teaching explicit habits which require students build effective intellectual habits (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). To meet the demands of an ever-changing world, learning can no longer be left to the individual.

In terms of culture, academic achievement of students is higher in schools where the leadership is shared among the teachers and community (Seashore, Leithwood, Wahlstrom,

& Anderson, 2010). Whole school communities need to work and study together to find best practices, which will enhance the learning of students. The progress of educational reform is dependent upon the teacher's individual capacity and its relationship with the school-wide capacity to promote learning. Building capacity within the school setting provides individuals, group and systems the opportunities to sustain learning over time. Professional learning communities (PLCs) within schools provide the infrastructure for sustainability of effective practice among teachers. In a changing society whole school communities working together are essential to making the changes needed to improve student learning (Stoll, Bolam, Mcmahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). PLCs can be defined as

> The establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practices to improve student outcomes... The hypothesis is that what teachers do together outside of the classroom can be as important as what they do inside it affecting school restructuring, teachers' professional development and student learning. (Seashore, Anderson, & Riedel, 2003, p. 3)

PLCs provide schools and systems the power to sustain improvement over time. Professional learning communicates share five key characteristics:

1) Having a sense of a shared values and vision.

2) Sharing responsibility for student learning among PLC members.

3) Utilizing a "reflective dialogue" to promote conversations about educational practices and issues.

33

4) Collaborating and providing feedback to each other to promote a shared purpose.

5) Promoting individual and group growth. (Hord, 2004)

Need for Reform Initiatives

Initiatives to improve schools and student learning have taken many avenues. Prior to the NCLB Act of 2001 and IDEA, the identification of specific learning disabilities of students were based on data obtained directly from the "discrepancy model" which focused on the difference in the students' IQ score and their performance level. The revision of the language of the IDEA of 2004, allowed RTI to be implemented for the first time as an alternative method for identifying students for SLD (Hoover, Baca, Wexler, Love, & Saenz, 2008).

Response to Intervention

The changes within the law provide school districts that opportunity to investigate different paths to making a special education determination for students. "In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures" (IDEA 2004, Sec. 614.b.6.B). One of the most recent initiatives has been the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI). The purpose of RtI is to insure students the opportunity to be successful in school by identifying and providing appropriate support for students with learning and behavioral problems. With the goals of RtI being to include minimizing the long-term negative outcomes for students associated with behavioral issues and poor learning while strengthening the disability identification process (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). Fuchs and

Fuchs (2006) refer to RtI as a new alternative method to be used in the identification

process of identifying children with learning disabilities. They also note that RtI provides a

method to assist in the early intervention of students at risk of not being successful in

school. Basche et al. (2005) define RtI 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" (p. 3). RTI may also be defined

as an approach that incorporates the use of student responses to research based, high

quality instruction which then help to guide the decision making process that includes the

evaluation of the efficacy of the instruction, interventions and if need be the eligibility and

individual program design for special education (Mack, Smith, & Straight, 2010). RtI

requires schools to look at the quality of instruction in addition to scores from

standardized tests. More importantly, students identified as at-risk must receive additional

instructional support without the special education label (Ardoin et al., 2005). In general,

identification of students for special education services through the RtI process will require

a paradigm shift within the school (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005).

RtI Models

Consensus within the literature indicates that RtI delivery models should include at

least three or four tiers of instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Johnson, Mellard & McNight,

2006). Usually all RtI models include a problem solving team that monitors the

intervention, reviews data and ensures that the student is meeting their goal of

improvement. Student performance is monitored at each tier to determine the intensity

and progression of instruction (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). "Increasing intensity is achieved

by (a) using more teacher-centered, systematic, and explicit (e.g., scripted) instruction; (b)

conducting it more frequently; (c) adding to its duration; (d) creating smaller and more homogenous student groupings; or (e) relying on instructors with greater expertise" (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 94). RtI generally consists of four essential components:

1) a delivery system that includes evidence based services in instruction and behavioral support for prevention of school failures;

2) universal screening for all students;

3) progress monitoring based on the decision making process in the areas of academics and behavior;

4) movement within the multi-tiered system for students who do not make progress in response to the interventions. Students who do not respond to intensive intervention may be referred for special education evaluation. (www.rti4sucess.org)

Included within these major components lies the importance of matching the severity of the problem with the intensity of the intervention to ensure student success (Gresham, 2005). Communication among the intervention team is critical within each tiered instructional level and is essential to the overall outcomes of the RtI.

While many RTI delivery types are being implemented across the United States there is varied implementation across the states in terms of components, prominence and development. Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love and Saenz (2008) report that all states are implementing the RtI process in some form to assist struggling learners. Although the RtI progression may vary in terms of form most models consist of three tiers of instruction that intensifies instruction and duration according to the needs of the learner. The tiers and differentiation of instruction are the crucial factors in determining the success of any RtI

model (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Vaughn, 2003). The three-tiered model of RtI consists of hierarchal-tiers of instruction/intervention based on the student's needs (Barlow, 2013). This model is displayed in Figure 2 and described in the section that follows.
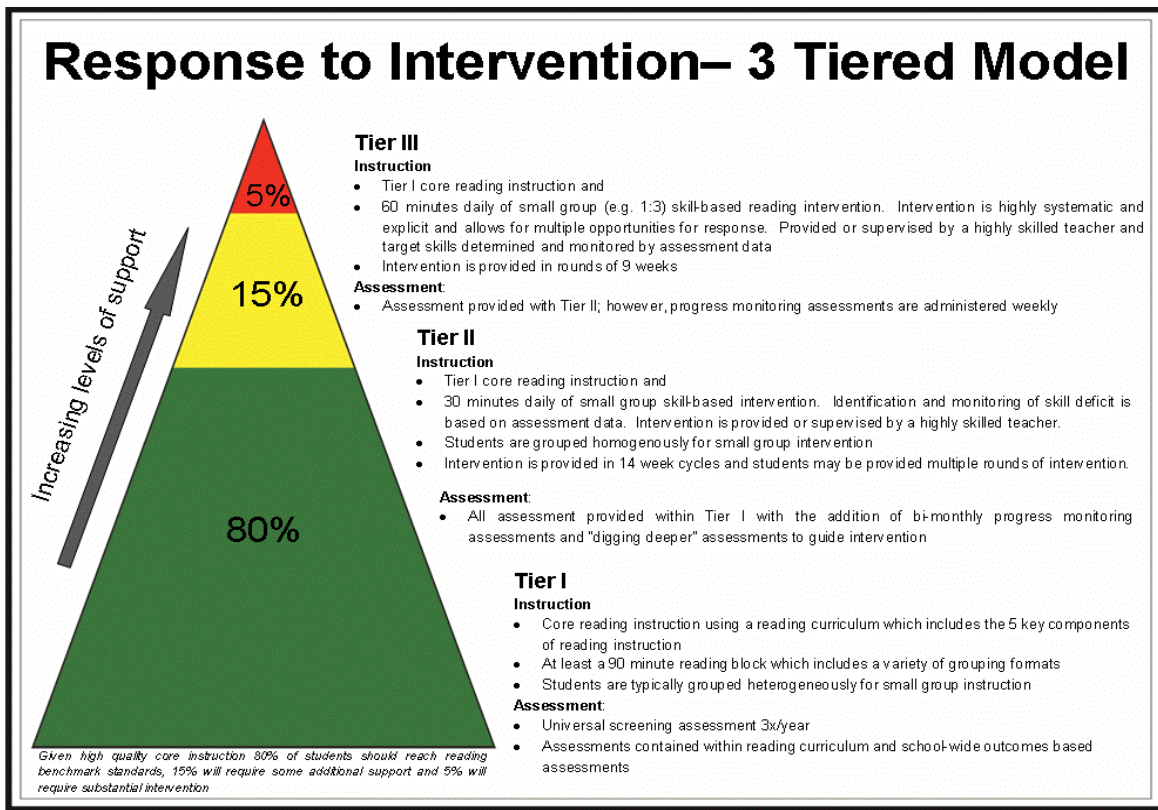
Figure 2. Response to Intervention – 3 Tiered Model

Tier I

As the RTI process begins at the beginning of the year, teachers must conduct a universal screening of baseline data for each student. The screening process provides the classroom teacher with benchmarking data for each student in comparison to the expectations for learning and achievement. The data collection provides teachers with the information that will assist them in identifying students in need of additional intervention support. The intervention team then reviews the screening data along with the classroom

teacher to identify areas of weakness identified within the assessment data. It is also important that teachers understand the collection of data and how it relates to each student's overall achievement (Gerzel-Short & Wilkins, 2009). It is essential that these data are reviewed and monitored for the fidelity of the instruction and intervention for each student (Bianco, 2010). The monitoring of data provides teachers with valuable insights into how well the intervention is working as well as how students are progressing in meeting their benchmark goals. The progress monitoring of data at the Tier I level also provides teachers with important information that can be used in making decisions regarding students who may have exceeded the benchmark requirements and need additional challenging instruction to move forward (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008).

Tier I includes the implementation of the general education curriculum by the classroom teacher using scientifically-based strategies which have been tested and proven to be effective in improving student achievement. The use of high-quality instruction in the general education classroom is essential to fostering student success. Instruction presented during Tier 1 must be taught to fidelity and implemented as it was designed (Adams, 2013). Typically 80% of all students should be successful at the Tier I level of classroom instruction (Mellard, Knight, & Jordan, 2010). Monitoring student performance and screening all students is a critical part of the Tier I process. Having all students in Tier I participating in universal screenings permits areas of weaknesses to be identified and supported through additional classroom interventions (Steker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). Screening measures include assessment data, teacher observations, report card grades and any other information, which will help in the identification of students who need additional instructional support. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) recommend that all students be monitored

for an additional five weeks after the initial screening to eliminate the over-identification of students at risk for additional tiered support. Progress monitoring and universal screening provide important assessment data for teachers and help to document student growth over time (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).

Tier II

Tier II intervention is offered for students who do not meet grade level expectations. Typically this number should not exceed approximately 15% of the student population. At the Tier II level, explicit and systematic instruction is provided in a small group setting by a highly qualified teacher to ensure that students receive the attention and support they need to be successful. Fuchs and Vaughn (2012) recommend that Tier II support be provided at least 3 to 5 days per week for at least 20 minutes a day and continue to be progress monitoring weekly. In determining the effectiveness of Tier I interventions, attention should be given to the quality of the alignment with the Tier I instruction. It is important that school leaders consider how the Tier II interventions fit into the entire intervention method. Tier II interventions that are not connected to the multi-tiered instruction may show a disconnect from the overall process (Hill, King, Lemons, & Patanen, 2012).

Tier III

Tier III intervention is provided for students who do not make sufficient gains after receiving Tier II services over a period of time. Students in need of Tier III intervention are usually only 5% of the student population. Tier III is considered to be the most intense of the multi-tiered model. Students in Tier III receive interventions that are intensive, individualized and based on their areas of weakness (Mack, Smith, & Straight, 2010).

Progress monitoring of student performance at Tier III is more frequent than at the prior levels of intervention. Tier III assessment data are essential in determining a student's need for special education services.

When students are placed in Tier III for additional instruction, it is important to focus on the specific area of learning that will be addressed during the intervention period. Tier III interventions require careful planning by the teacher and the intervention team. An intervention plan should describe the following:

1. "what the intervention will look like (i.e., its steps of procedures);

2. what materials and/or resources are needed and whether these are available within existing resources;

3. roles and responsibilities with respect to intervention implementation (i.e., who will be responsible for running the intervention, preparing materials, etc.);

4. the intervention schedule (i.e., how often, for how long, and at what times in the day) and context (i.e., where and with whom?);

5. show how the intervention and its outcomes will be monitored (i.e., compared to what criterion?)"

   (http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/)

If no progress is made in Tier III, students are referred for special education services.

Benefits of RtI

RtI provides schools and school districts with an alternative to the "wait to fail" approach when making decisions relating to referring students for special education services. Prior to the use of RtI, students received learning disability placement in special education based on the discrepancy of their IQ and their achievement scores or school

success level. In this model, students were made to fall substantially behind peers to qualify for additional support beyond the general education setting. RtI provides an alternative for teachers in assisting students before they reach the failure level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Swanson, Solis, Ciullo and McKenna (2012) conducted a study of elementary special education teachers to understand their perception of an operational RtI framework. Through interviews and focus groups, teachers identified the ability to identify students' learning needs early as the most commonly mentioned benefit of RtI. Teachers also mentioned that students could receive intervention support quickly and as early as kindergarten. According to Sanger et al. (2012), it is vital that struggling students are identified early. Tucker and Sornson (2007) found that early intervention provided by instructional support teams reduced the number of special education referrals by 45% in the early grades. The process was especially beneficial to minority students. According to Kavale and Flanagan (2007), the "real value of RtI lies in the prospect of providing a systematic and rigorous pre-referral process" (p. 134).

Additionally, RtI provides a multi-tiered delivery system for students with unmet academic and behavioral issues that include instruction as well as intervention (Glover, DiPerna, 2007). RtI affords teachers the opportunity to utilize a variety of data assessments, which focus directly on the achievement level and the interventions rather than the eligibility and classification requirement for services. RtI provides teachers and school leaders with a variety of data to assist in making informed decisions concerning student progress. According to Barlow (2013), it is vitally important that school staff

understand how to analyze both student and school-wide data to identify strengths and weaknesses in student achievement of state standards.

Formative assessment measures used routinely by teachers improve student learning specifically when the assessments are used to develop individualized instructions for students (National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008). RTI can provide schools with the ability to utilize the resources and services that are available to meet the needs of all student moving away from the identification and placement of services process (Sailor, 2009). RtI expands the opportunity for all struggling students to receive appropriate intervention matched to their particular need regardless of classification of disability. Prior models of special education only provided interventions to students with the determined identification of a disability.

In addition of these advantages the structure of the RtI framework allows students who would normally receive intervention in an isolated group setting the opportunity to learn in an environment that provides interaction with other peers. Instruction provided within a flexible small group setting provides students with the most effective learning opportunity (Brown-Chidsey, Bronaugh, & McGraw, 2009). Equally important, utilizing a small group in reading focusing on explicit instruction is key to helping students acquire the skills necessary to be successful in comprehending text fluently (National Reading Panel, 2000). Explicit instruction utilizing clear models in problem solving strategies, practice and review is essential for students who demonstrate difficulties with mathematics (National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008).

In addition to being of benefit to students, RtI has been found to benefit teachers and the school culture as a whole. In a research study of an elementary school, Greenfield,

Finaldi, Proctor and Cardarelli (2010) found that collaboration increased among classroom and special education teachers as a result of the RtI reform initiative. Teacher interviews suggested that there were advantages to having additional instructors providing classroom support for students that led to conversation concerning specific needs of students. Teachers also viewed the RtI culture as being a positive atmosphere to encourage change reform and collaboration among teachers.

Elements that Foster Success

Previously cited literature indicated that high quality professional development, high quality teachers, a collaborative culture and strong leadership lead to success in school in general, and to the creation of RtI programs particular. Research focusing specifically on RtI programs support and extend these findings.

White, Polly and Audette (2012) conducted a study of an elementary school in North Carolina during its first pilot year of RtI implementation. A team consisting of fifteen of the school and district leaders were interviewed to trace their involvement in the RtI process from the beginning of implementation and to share their benefits and challenges along the way. Multiple interview participants conveyed that the principal of the school was essential in ensuring that the RtI initiative was successful in the school. The positive attitude of the school level administrator proved to be instrumental in getting faculty members on aboard with the initiative. The commitment level of the school administrator was key in the recruitment process of getting other schools to join the RtI initiative the following school year. Thus, it appears that attributes of strong leadership are essential in promoting the RtI initiative in schools and school districts.

In the RTI model, it is vital that students participate in a universal screening to assist in the identification of difficulty in academics (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). In a study of 41 urban schools, with only 3 percent serving a large amount of low-socioeconomic students, Mellard, McKnight and Woods (2009) found that consistent use of student screenings and progress monitoring were vital to the success of the RtI implementation. Teachers indicated that they preferred making data-based decisions regarding student progress rather than non-data determinations. The National Center on Student Progress Monitoring (www.studentprogress.org) summarizes the benefits of progress monitoring to evaluating the effectiveness of instruction and the student learning.

When progress monitoring is implemented correctly, the benefits are great for everyone involved. Some benefits include:

- "accelerated learning because students are receiving more appropriate instruction;
- more informed instructional decisions;
- documentation of student progress for accountability purposes;
- more efficient communication with families and other professionals about students' progress;
- higher expectations for students by teachers; and
- fewer Special Education referrals (p. 1)

In an effort to ensure that RtI reform changes are maintained, the building of capacity at all system levels is required to sustain continuous improvement. According to Kozleki and Huber (2010), three fundamental shifts are essential to understanding systems and change reform. The first shift includes ensuring that RtI builds upon prior reform

efforts that have been successful within the school. Moreover RtI should be considered to

be a part of a larger multifaceted system that includes the impact of general and special

education. It is important to consider the influences, roles, knowledge and needs of each

individual team member with regard to challenges that RtI presents. Secondly, it is vital to

consider the setting for learning and the implications that come to bear for educators, as

well as the interactions within the culture in terms of practices and policy mandates.

In fact, RtI can only occur when the implementation design meets the needs of the culture.

Lastly, RtI practices must be viewed as a support system that changes the outcomes of

learning for students in the classroom to be effective in meeting the needs of students as

well as changing the roles of general and special education teachers.

Hindering the Success of the RtI Initiative

The RtI model of tiered instruction is being utilized in many districts across the

nation in many different delivery models and methods of providing services for students.

The implementation of the RtI delivery model varies among schools and states as they shift

to the intervention process. Shapiro and Clemens (2009) suggest that it may take as many

as 3 to 5 years to make the needed shifts and changes to fully implement the RtI delivery

model. As changes are made to the RtI model the amount of effort to fully implement RtI

intensifies for all who are involved in the implementation process. Just as there are

elements that foster success, there are those that can hinder progress. Among these are

time restraints, scheduling issues, inconsistency in how screening and progress monitoring

instruments are utilized by school staff, motivation to change, and the need for additional

training.

Research indicates that teachers consider time constraints to be a barrier in implementing the RtI model. According to a study conducted by Barlow (2013), time issues and scheduling difficulties were identified as obstacles that presented a challenge in implementing RtI effectively. Teachers emphasized concern with the inflexibility of the schedule along with not having enough time to adequately plan, assess and collaborate with others.

A study was conducted by Mellard, McKnight and Woods (2009) involving a survey of 41 schools, that had implemented the RtI initiative in their schools. In addition to the surveys administrators, school psychologists, special educators and teachers in five of the schools were interviewed to investigate their use of screening and progress monitoring instruments used in their schools. The researchers concluded that there was an inconsistency in the frequency of the use of the screening and progress monitoring instruments among schools. The patterns seen within their findings implied that the schools did not have a clear understanding of what the instruments were being used for and lacked the ability to make every day decisions based on the data collection. The variations of use in data collection may lead to equity and efficiency issues when implementing the RTI model. It is essential that administrators and teachers are provided adequate professional development that focuses on the entire implementation of RtI to ensure its success and that a framework for implementation is developed at the school level.

Summary of Literature Review

Primary themes and authors are presented for literature review in Figure 3. They are the basis for the conceptual framework that follows.

46

LITERATURE REVIEW MAP

Dewey, 2007; Nation at Risk, 1983; Public Law 107-10; NCLB Disabilities Act of 2004; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Mellard, Stern & Jenson, 2012; Erickson, Noonan, & Jenson, 2012; Hoover, Baca, Love, & Sanchez, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006

National Call for Reform

President Obama's Speech, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Green, 2012; Leithwood, Anderson, & Walstrom,, 2004; Riekhoff & Larson, 2012; Moore, 2010; Mundry, 2005; Purkey, 1990; Marks & Prinity, 2003; Seashore, Anderson, & Riedel, 2013

Quality Teachers, Effective Leadership and Student Learning

Hoover, Baca, Wexler, Love & Saenz, 2008; IDEA, 2004; Sec.614.b.6.B National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2002; Mack, Smith & Straight, 2010; Johnson, Mellard, & McKnight, 2006; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006

Response to Intervention Reform Initiative

IDEA, 2004; Alabama State Department Code 290-8-9-01 (2) (a), 2010; Alabama State Department Code 290-3-1.02(20), Alabama Accountability Act, 2013; Plan 2020

Alabama's Need for Reform

Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & McKenna, 2012; Tucker & Sorenson, 2007; Glover & DiPerna, 2007; Barlow, 2013; White, Polly & Audette, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Shapiro & Clemens, 2009; Mellard, McKnight & Woods, 2009

Benefits and Elements Fostering and Hindering RtI Success

Figure 3. Literature Review Map

Conceptual Framework of RtI

This research study examined one school systems' implementation of the RTI program as perceived by teachers and administrators involved in the process. It examined the elements that fostered and hindered success and the outcomes of the endeavor. The findings of the research on RTI leads to the development of a conceptual framework related to these issues, upon which this research is grounded. Figure 4 represents this framework.

Fostering Success	**Outcomes**	**Hindering Success**
Professional Development	Early Identification Before Failure	Lack of Training
Collaboration	Greater Academic Success	Time Restraints
Leadership	Small Group Instruction	Scheduling Conflicts
	Team Empowerment	
Data Usage	High Quality Instruction	Motivation for Change
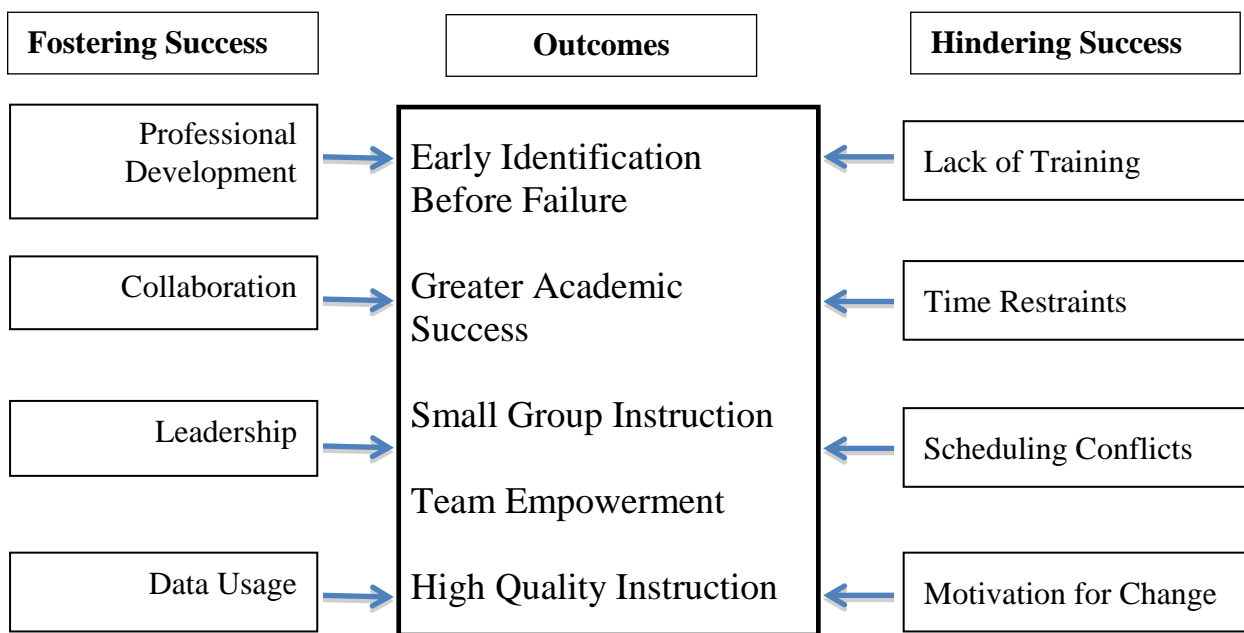
Figure 4. RtI Conceptual Framework

Alabama's Response to Intervention

This research study occurred in the state of Alabama so it is important to present an overview of the implementation and status of school reform and RtI within the state in order to understand the context within which the study was conducted. The reauthorization of the IDEA of 2004 brought RtI to the forefront in Alabama through changes in the Alabama Code with regard to the process of identifying students for special

education services. These changes require that child identification procedures must include the follow criteria:

The public agency shall ensure that: (a) Prior to, or as a part of, the referral process, the child was provided appropriate instruction in regular education settings, delivered by qualified personnel; and (b) Data-based documentation of repeated assessment of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction, was provided to the child's parents. (290-8-9-01 (2)(a)(b)

According to the Alabama Code, the procedures for determining eligibility also required school systems to ensure that students receive appropriate instruction before being considered for special education services. The procedures for determining special education must:

(e) Ensure that a child is not determined to be a child with a disability if the determinant factor is a lack of appropriate instruction in reading [including the essential components of reading instruction as defined in section 1208(3) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (PA, Phonics, Vocabulary Dev., Reading Fluency, and reading comprehension strategies], a lack of appropriate instruction in math; the child has limited English proficiency; or the child does not otherwise meet the eligibility criteria for specific areas of disability. (290-8-9-04(1)(e)

Beginning in 2007, the Alabama State Department of Education began the development of the RtI initiative. The RtI guidelines replaced the Building-Based School Support Team (BBSST) previously implemented across the state, to provide classroom

accommodations for students struggling with behavior and academic issues in the general

education classroom. Guidelines provided by the Alabama State Department of Education

outlined the instructional framework for RtI for school districts. At the beginning of 2010,

a memorandum was issued by the Alabama State Department of Education to all school

systems across the state stating that each school district would develop a plan for

implementing RtI. The March 9, 2010 memorandum issued by the State Department

included these requirements:

1. Each LEA will develop its own RtI plan based on the framework provided in the

   Response for instruction: Alabama's Core Support for all Students … document.

   There is no 'one-size-fits-all" requirement, as LEAs have unique strengths and

   challenges that can only be determined and addressed through your LEA plan

   development process

2. Documentation of student progress will be determined at the local level using the

   tools that LEAs determine best fit their individual needs.

3. To assist LEAs that may not have a strong professional learning community (PLC)

   Process active in their system, the *Problem-Solving Team Process* document may be

   used as a guide to the development of this process and may be adapted to meet the

   individual needs of your schools and school system.

4. In the development of our LEA plan, keep in mind the documentation requirements

   for a successful referral to special education … should that need occur after

   unsuccessful Tier I and Tier II and III interventions". (Alabama State Department of

   Education, Christine Spear, 2011).

The state department also mandated that each school district would be required to develop

a Problem Solving Team (PST) process.

> The problem solving teams will guide the intervention process of general education.
>
> These services will be for all students who are struggling with academics or
>
> behavior. The number of PST teams within each school will be determined at the
>
> school level with at least one team required per school. According to the law the
>
> PST must keep documentation required for special education services. Any student
>
> reevaluated and found not eligible for special education services must be referred
>
> back to the PST to make decisions on appropriate interventions to be utilized in the
>
> general education setting. (Alabama Administrative Code Public School Governance,
>
> 290-3-1.02(20) Problem Solving Teams)

The following model illustrates the RtI model implemented by schools and districts

across the state of Alabama. The model contains a brief description of the three tiers of

instruction included in the RtI process. The model is represented in Figure 5.

Three-Tiered Model of Response to Intervention

ACADEMICS		BEHAVIOR

INTENSIVE INTERVENTION
- Individual Students
- Diagnostic Assessments
- High Intensity

INTENSIVE INTERVENTION
- Individual Students
- Diagnostic Assessments
- High Intensity

5%

TARGETED INTERVENTION
- Some Students (at risk)
- Rapid Response
- Frequent Monitoring Progress

TARGETED INTERVENTION
- Some Students (at risk)
- Rapid Response
- Frequent Monitoring Progress

15%

RESEARCH-BASED CORE INSTRUCTION
- All Students
- Prevention
- Early Intervention

UNIVERSAL INTERVENTIONS
- All Settings. All Students
- Preventive, Proactive
- Classroom Management

80%

ALL 3 TIERS ON ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTINGS

Figure 5. Three-Tier RtI Model (Alabama State Department of Education, 2009)

Alabama's Change Reform Continues

RtI is part of a comprehensive reform approach in the state. This reform is continuing with new additions and approaches. On June 21, 2013, the U.S. Department of Education announced that the request for the ESEA waiver for flexibility for the Alabama State Department of Education had been granted which relinquished many of the requirements of the ESEA of 1965, as amended by the NCLB Act of 2001. Undoubtedly this opportunity for state flexibility is the beginning of many reforms across the states that are innovative and demonstrate commitment to student achievement. Alabama's waiver request includes the adoption of rigorous college-and-career-ready-standards, that include

both English and Math standards for students in grades K–12 which are aligned with the Common Core Standards and intertwined with specific state standards.

Additionally the plan focused on the improvement of accountability at the state and district level for all students. Alabama will provide resources to all schools and intensive support to the lowest performing schools through the newly created 11 Regional Planning Teams. These teams will include staff from the State's Regional Inservice Centers, the state educational agency, and higher learning institutions. These teams will partner with the district staff of priority and focus schools to assist in the development and implementation of school improvement plans. During the 2013–2014 school year the state will develop a multi-measured index to provide schools more information concerning their student achievement data (http://www.ed.gov). Alabama also established the Alabama Professional Evaluation Design Committee, which will serve as a task force worked through July of 2013 to develop guidelines to provide consistency with the teacher and principal evaluation and support system as required by the ESEA flexibility. Alabama was granted the waiver based on its ability to demonstrate that the state met all of the flexibility guidelines. A separate panel review was used to review the states comprehensive assessment plan, which included annual high quality assessments that measure student growth (http://www2ed.gov/poliy/eseaflex/seretary-letters/al.html).

In an effort to meet the NCLB flexibility requirements the state of Alabama developed a comprehensive eight-year strategic comprehensive reform initiative for public schools in grades K–12 known as Plan 2020. The major goal of Plan 2020 is to prepare all students to be college or career ready by the end of high school as well as to increase the number of high school graduates to 90% in the year 2020. Equally important the plan

emphasizes improving student growth, and the closing the achievement gap of student learning.

Priorities of Plan 2020 include goals for improving: Alabama's Learners, Support Systems, and Professionals and Schools/Systems. Alabama will create a revised Accountability/System/Report Card once baseline is set to align with the Alabama Accountability System. Alabama's 2020 Schools and Systems objectives are:

1. All schools and systems will receive adequate funding to meet the individual and collective needs of their students.

2. All schools and systems will be resourced and supported based on identified needs as determined from the state's accountability plan and additional indicators at the local level.

3. Schools and systems will be granted flexibility to innovate and create 21st learning environments to meet the individual and collective needs to their students.

4. Schools and Systems are resourced to create a 21st century learning environment for their students including infrastructure, building renovation/improvements, and technology.

(http://www.alsde.edu/sec/rd/Plan%202020/Alabama%20PLAN%202020.pd)

In conjunction with the rigorous content standard-based curriculum beginning with the 2013–2014 school year, Alabama added a comprehensive testing framework that included a continuum that reached from the elementary grades to high school using the American College Testing Program ACT as its foundation.

The passing of the Alabama Accountability Act AAA in 2013 brought many challenges for school districts across the state. According to Republican lawmakers responsible for the passing of the AAA, the purpose of the law is to advance the independence of local schools and districts in creativity and innovation by granting flexibility from regulations, state laws and policies by allowing school systems greater flexibility in meeting the educational needs of a diverse student population. As outlined in the law, a list was comprised of schools across the state deemed as failing. Schools that reported within the bottom 6 percent in the combined areas of reading and math over a six-year period were placed on the failing school list. The failing list identified 76 schools out of the 1,476 K–12 public schools across the state of Alabama. These numbers are representative of approximately 5 percent of all students who are eligible to transfer to a different school in the state of Alabama.

Equally important, the AAA also provides a refundable tax credit for taxpayers, who are parents of students assigned to a failing school to offset the cost of transferring the child to a non-failing public or non-failing of the parent's choice. Low–income students may also apply for a $3,500.00 tax credit scholarships funded by individuals or scholarship corporations. The tax credit for student transfers does not provide financial assistance for school systems, which face the high cost of providing bus transportation to students moving within and out of the school district. Alabama is one of thirteen states in the United States to provide educational tax credits and tax credit scholarships. Individuals and corporations that donate to the scholarship fund are also eligible to receive tax credit incentives.

As schools and school districts are faced with failing labels, charter schools and private school scholarships, it is essential that public education meet the needs of each student by providing support services to ensure that each student is successful. RtI may be one avenue for doing so. This study seeks to determine the elements that will help schools to enable this program to succeed.

CHAPTER III. METHODS

Introduction

This chapter explains the research methods employed in this study. The chapter

provides a detailed description of the purpose, significance of the study and research

questions. The methodology, rationale, data collection and analysis are also described

within the chapter as well as issues of validity and reliability.

Purpose

Since the passage of the NCLB l Act of 2001, states across the nation have sought to

find effective reform strategies to utilize within public school systems, which would

improve student achievement and meet the mandates as outlined within the law. The

purpose of the study was to investigate the implementation of a Response to Intervention

program (RtI) in a school system, which is part of the public school accountability and

reform efforts in Alabama, the state where the study occurred.

This study examined the application process of one school district in its journey to

implement and institutionalize a RtI intervention program mandated by the state. The

study examined the factors the fostered the success as perceived by those involved in the

implementation process in the school district. It also investigated the elements that served

as barriers to success and the perceived program benefits. This study was conducted

during the fifth year of implementation of the RtI process.

The research questions in the study included:

1.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that foster the success of Tier III in RtI?

2.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that serve as barriers to the success of Tier III in RtI?

3.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the primary benefits of Tier III RtI instruction?

4.   To what extent do perceptions of these issues differ between teachers and administrators?

Research Design

The objective of this research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the RtI program in terms of the elements contributing to the implementation of the program, at the Tier III level, within a K–12 public school setting as perceived by those involved in the initiative. Denzin and Lincoln (2011), state that qualitative research provides the researcher with an intuitive approach to studying and interpreting things in their natural settings. Therefore a qualitative method, within a case study, was considered to be the most relevant approach for this research study because the researcher was studying a real life case in progress within its environment (Creswell, 2013). As Stake (1995) suggests,

> As case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case, the single leaf,
>
> even a single toothpick, has unique complexities—but rarely will we care enough to
>
> submit it to case study. We study a case when the case itself is of very special
>
> interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its context. Case study is the

study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its

activity within important circumstances. (p. xi)

A case study methodology provided the researcher an opportunity to collect data from

teachers and administrators responsible for the delivery of the RtI initiative at the school

level. These data are described in the section that follows.

Data Collection Processes

Upon receiving approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board, a

recruitment script was conducted face to face to invite potential participants, which

included school administrators and Tier III teachers to participate in the study. The script

included a brief description of the study along with the purpose of the proposed research.

Potential participants were also provided written assurance that their participation was

strictly voluntary and confidential in a letter of consent (Appendix 1). Participants were

asked to sign the letter on a voluntary basis when they agreed to participate in the study.

Interview questions (Appendix 2) were used by the researcher to guide a semi-structured

interview with each of the research study participants.

The use of multiple sources of data collection which included document review,

teacher interviews and administrator interviews provided each individual participant's a

voice by the retelling of stories, comments, exchanges and perceptions pertaining to the RtI

initiative. By using a "bottom up" approach to build patterns, categories and trends within

the data, meaningful pieces of information were organized to develop an understanding of

the questions being addressed (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

Purposive sampling was chosen by the researcher to identify the participants for this study. "The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). The participants, school district and school sites were predetermined to provide the researcher an in-depth exploration into the implementation of the RtI process. "This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2011, p. 156). The size sample and detailed information from the participants are equally important when determining the size of the study sample (Creswell, 2011).

Administrators and teachers from the school district were chosen to participate in the study because of their ongoing involvement with the implementation of Tier III of the RtI process. The school district was in its fifth year of RtI implementation at the time of the data collection. There were 10 school principals. Since the number was moderate, it seemed feasible to include all of them; so all administrators were invited to participate. The final sample consisted of those who chose to do so. Teachers who were possible participants were limited to those who were involved as Tier III teachers for a minimum of three years. Three years was chosen to ensure that the teachers had been involved in implementing Tier III intervention for an extending period of time. There were 43 possible teachers. All were invited to participate. A sample of 10, teachers representing all school grade level distributions, were selected based on the grade levels they taught, number of years of experience, demographic make-up, educational level and subject expertise.

Table 1 provides a listing of prospective participants and their assigned school site. Table 1 also specifies the number of potential administrators and teachers participating in the study at each site. Instructional coaches are assigned to more than one site and are only listed one time on the table.

Table 1

Number of Potential Participants and their Assigned Schools

Name of School	Administrator	Teacher
Hand Elementary	1	2
Stone Elementary	1	1
View Elementary	2	9
Pine Elementary	1	9
Fair Elementary	1	7
Rise Elementary	1	6
Chase Middle	1	2
Edge Middle	1	4
Hope High	1	2
Brook High	3	2
	13	43

Data Sources

Patton (2002) states that by utilizing a variety of resources, the researcher can build upon the strengths of each type of data collection while minimizing the weaknesses of one

approach. Documents and interviews with two groups, (teachers and administrators) were the three types of data utilized by the researcher.

Patton (2002) notes that documents provide "a behind–the-scenes-look at the program that may not be directly observable and about which the interviewer might not ask appropriate questions without the leads provided through the documentation" (p. 307). Thus, documents provide an in-depth view into what may not be seen or heard. Document material included minutes from meetings, agendas, public records, and, a collection of archival data relating to the development of the program in the school district. These archival documents included those relating to the creation of the RtI process within the school district, and the implementation of the RtI process, professional development activities, and other correspondence regarding RtI within the school district or information from the State Department of Education.

Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information from the teachers directly responsible for the implementation of Tier III to students. Tier III teachers and administrators were interviewed individually. A set of questions developed from the literature review and conceptual framework were developed to guide the interviews. Open-ended interview questions, which asked those involved to add anything else they wished to say, were used to provide teachers and administrators an opportunity to add feedback or comments concerning their experiences with RtI.

Methodology

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was selected by the researcher as the approach for this study (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011). AI was chosen to provide the organization an opportunity to focus on the positive aspects of RtI Tier III intervention

rather than the problem solving aspect (Patton, 2002). AI creates an environment that promotes opportunities supportive of open dialogue for teachers and administrators to tell their stories. By generating a positive atmosphere and the opportunity to be heard, teachers and administrators receive the affirmation that what they are doing is of value not only to students, but to the system as well (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). This confirmation can lead to empowerment and transformation within the system. It is a positive method for examining organizational change (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). It does not eliminate the opportunity to express concerns and foster changes as, in this study, individuals were also asked to provide barriers to their success.

The AI process includes four stages, which are identified as discovery, dream, design and destiny. These stages are referred to as the 4-D Cycle. Each of these stages is significant in helping to provide the researcher insights into where they started and their experiences over the past five years of RtI. The four phases include: Discover – appreciating the best of what is; Dream – what might be-envisioning results; Design –what should be developed; Destiny – How to empower and sustain learning. Figure 6 depicts the 4-D process.

Discover
"what gives life"
The best of what is
appreciating

Deliver
" How to empower,learn
and adjust/improvise?"
Sustain

Dream
"what might be?"
Envisioning results

Design
"what should be"
Co-constructing

Adapted from http://www.publiclibrarieonline.org
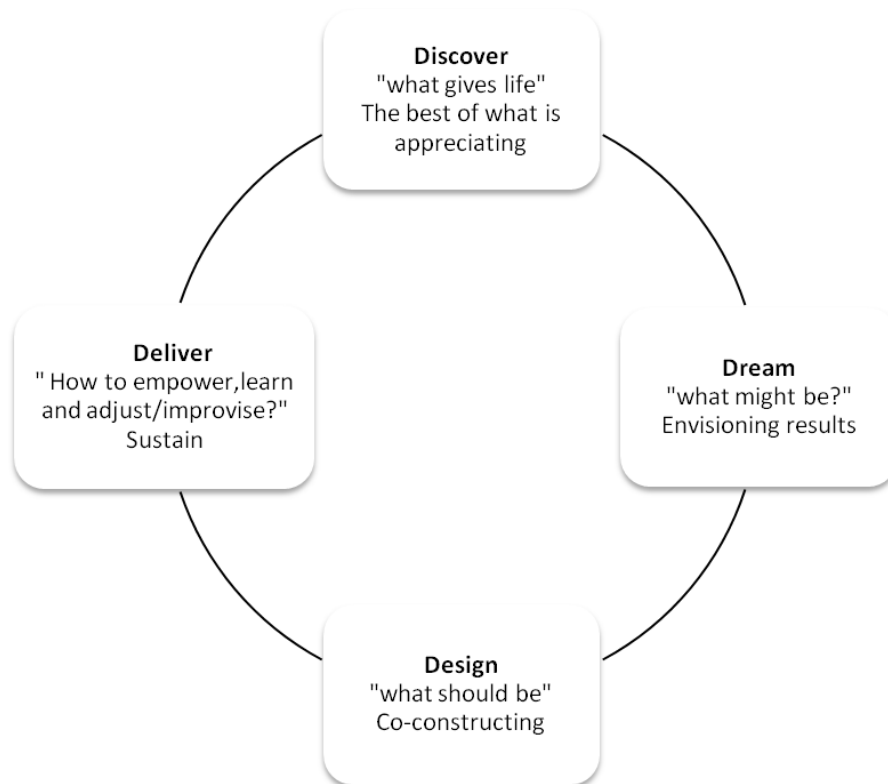
Figure 6. Affirmative Topic Choice 4-D Process

The interview questions for this study were developed using the components of

each phase. The interview questions focused on the positive aspects of Tier III rather than

the negative. At the beginning of the Discover phase the researcher began the framing of

the interview questions using an affirmative voice to enrich the dialogue and bring out the

positive aspects of implementing the RtI process. During the interview process,

participants were asked to share activities and stories detailing their role working with

students in Tier III and the successes they had encountered as a result of RtI.

During the Dream phase of the interview participants were asked to think about

past RtI experiences and to identify what worked in the process and what it could be like

moving forward. The Design phase provided participants an opportunity to think about the

changes that needed to be made in strategies as well as the overall structure of Tier III.

After sharing strategies and images of the organization, participants entered into the dream

phase by relating their ideas for change within the RtI model and expressing their future

commitment to the initiative and the benefits of the program to all those involved, to their

school and to the school system.

<p style="text-align:center">Context of Study</p>

Community and School District Demographics

The study was conducted in a rural school district with a county population of

34,241 (2010 United States Census). The 2010 Census county demographics were

reported as 47.8% male and 52.2% female; 58.8% White, 38.7% African American, 1.6%

Hispanic or Latino, and 0.9% Other.

The Hillcrest School District (HSD) (pseudonym) is located in the eastern part of the

state. The ADM of the school district has declined over the past ten years due mainly

families relocating to a different job market. At present, industries have begun to move

back into the area and the unemployment rate has dropped significantly.

The system is comprised of ten schools and a secondary career technical school that

serves both high schools. Table 2 provides a listing of each school (pseudonyms) and grade

levels located within the Hillcrest School System. The table also includes the enrollment

numbers of each school as well as the gender and ethnicity of the student population.

Table 2

Student Enrollment by School

School Name	Enrollment	Grade Levels	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Multi	Other
Hand Elementary	249	K-5	123	126	162	63	2	3	18
Stone Elementary	292	K-5	155	137	24	262	1	1	3
View Elementary	519	K-5	273	246	301	201	1	6	10
Pine Elementary	129	K-8	69	60	65	64	0	0	0
Fair Elementary	418	K-5	203	218	292	122	1	1	5
Rise Elementary	247	K-5	127	120	90	142	6	3	6
Chase Middle	157	6-8	90	67	8	147	0	0	2
Edge Middle	638	6-8	360	278	383	239	2	1	13
Hope High	213	9-12	130	83	29	223	0	0	1
Brook High	796	9-12	399	397	473	303	5	4	11

Data Analysis

The researcher used open coding to analyze and interpret the data and to organize them into categories of information (Creswell, 2013). Thematic analysis was used to categorize relationships within data. This involved identifying themes, categorizing and recategorizing them and labeling them until saturation (Patton, 2002). This process involved the analysis of all interviews, and documents to determine what topics and patterns were significant within the data. In making a determination of significance, an interpretation of the data is made to make sense of the information and create a meaningful interpretation Creswell, 2013). This interpretation becomes the foundation for

determining whether the data support or disprove the framework of this study.   By

combining a diverse data collection, a wealth of information is available to be used to

establish reliability and validity (Creswell, 2013). Since the researcher served as the

primary instrument for gathering data for this study, the research analysis was reviewed

by another researcher to ensure the validity of the findings of the study.

Validity and Reliability

Using multiple data methods of collection can protect the integrity of the

assumptions and conclusions discovered during the research process (Schwandt, 2007).

By combining diverse data a wealth of information is was available to be used to establish

reliability and validity of this study (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, another researcher

reviewed the data analysis to ensure validity.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

Chapter three provided a detailed depiction of the study participants, research

design, research methods, data collection and analysis of the data. The following chapters

describe the findings along with discussion, their implications and how they can be utilized

in future research.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine an Alabama school district during its fifth year of implementing a state mandated Tier III Response to Intervention (RtI) Initiative for struggling students. In this chapter the researcher presents a description of the findings related to the perceived elements that fostered and hindered success and the benefits of the Tier III intervention program.

The research involved a case study of a single school district, using a qualitative research design. Data were collected and analyzed from three data sources: interviews with school administrators, interviews with Tier III teachers, and documents.

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section includes a description of the background surrounding the data collection, demographic details and other information about the context within which the study occurred. The second section describes the primary factors that fostered the success of the Tier III intervention. The third section points out the elements that enhanced or improved the overall outcomes of the Tier III intervention. The final section presents strategies participants perceived as having the potential to improve or enhance the overall success of the Tier III intervention in their school district.

Context of Data Collection

The study was conducted in the Hillcrest School District, which is located in Central, Alabama. The student population of the Hillcrest School District is approximately 3,700

students and a staff of approximately 500 full time employees. Sixty-six percent of the certified staff possess a master's degree or higher. The Hillcrest School District covers a vast area within its attendance zone. One elementary, one junior and one senior high serve the students in the northern part of the school district. While the other five elementary schools along with the junior high and one senior high serve the students in the southern part of the school district.

The school district consists of 10 schools: two high schools, two junior high schools and six elementary schools. Four of the elementary schools include students in PreK–fifth grade. One elementary school has students ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade. One of the elementary schools has students from kindergarten to eighth grade. Two of the junior high schools consist of students in grades six through eight. Both of the senior high schools have students in grades nine through twelve. The student population of the district is comprised of 49% Caucasian, 47% African American and 4% of other races. Demographics of the teachers include approximately 75% Caucasian and 25% minority. Administrators consist of 4 African Americans and 6 Caucasians.

A document review as well as teacher and administrator interviews were the data sources for the research study. An administrator from each of the ten schools located within the Hillcrest school district participated in the interview process. One Tier III teacher from each of the ten schools was also chosen to participate as interview participants. Teachers were selected for the interview process based on their years of experience in working with Tier III students with three years being the minimum number of years of experience allowed for participation. The rationale for this selection was that it was believed that three years of participation in Tier III provided participants time to learn about the program and participate in the actual facilitation of the intervention. The teacher group included classroom teachers, instructional coaches, media

specialists, physical education and special education teachers, who were involved in Tier III intervention activities. The current position, race and gender for each of the teachers is listed in Table 3. Table 4 illustrates the years of experience and highest degree of teacher participants.

Table 3

Race and Gender of Teacher Participants

	Race		Gender	
Teaching Position	Black	White	Female	Male
Instructional Coaches		3	3	
Media Specialist	1		1	
Classroom Teachers	2	1	3	
Special Education Teachers	3		3	
Total	6	4	10	

Table 4

Years of Experience and Highest Degree of Teachers

Years of Experience	1-5	11–15	16–20	21–25	26–30
	1	3	2	2	2
Highest Degree	B.S.	Masters	Ed.S	Ph.D.	
	2	5	2	1	

The administrator group of participants consisted of an administrator from each of the ten schools represented in the study. Table 5 shows these data. Table 6 shows the degree and experience of each administrator.

Table 5

Race and Gender of Administrator Participants

		Race		Gender	
Positions		Black	White	Female	Male
Assistant Middle School Principal			1	1	
Assistant High School Principal		1		1	1
Elementary Principal		1	5	4	2
Middle School Principal		1			1
High School Principal		1		3	
	Total	4	6	6	4

Table 6

Years of Experience and Highest Degree of Administrators

Years of Experience	6–10	11–15	16–20	21–25	26–30
		3	3	1	2
Highest Degree	B.S.	Masters	Ed.S	Ph.D.	
		5	5		

Research Procedures

Each participant was provided with a *Request to Interview* and an *Informed Consent Form* giving permission to be interviewed and audio-taped. The researcher used a 16 question semi-structured interview guide with questions which focused on the elements

that fostered the success of Tier III, factors that hinder its implementation and benefits, which resulted from the intervention process. The researcher transcribed each of the interviews and participants were provided the opportunity to check the transcription for accuracy. Four research questions guided the study.

Research Questions

Four research questions were addressed as follows:

1.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that fostered the success of Tier III in RtI?

2.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that serve as barriers to the success of Tier III in RtI?

3.   What do administrators and teachers perceive as the primary benefits of Tier III RtI instruction?

4.   To what extent do perceptions of these issues differ between teachers and administrators?

Findings

Before presenting the findings related to each of the research questions, it is important to describe the initial implementation process of RtI, as the way in which programs are designed and initiated tends to impact their implementation. A first step analysis in determining this process was to conduct a review of the county system documents related to RtI and Tier III intervention. These documents included memos from the Alabama State Department of Education, the State Department Response to Intervention Support Document, district committee planning agendas, district professional

development agendas, and a *Response to Intervention Manual* for each year of implementation.

A review of the documents of the Hillcrest School District memo's and meeting agenda's suggest that the school system followed the mandate of the Alabama State Department of Education and began implementation of the Response to Intervention during the 2010–2011 school year. In an effort to plan for the Response to Initiative the school district developed a Roundtable Committee. The committee consisted of central office staff, school administrators and teachers. The purpose of the committee was to establish the policies and procedures to be utilized by the school district to ensure the proper implementation of RtI. A county *Problem Solving Team Manual* was created that outlined the policies and procedures for the school district and for the school teams to use in the implementation of the program. Written records of professional development indicate that the school district has provided professional development to administrators and teachers each year since the initiative first began. The professional development is provided to each of the schools toward the beginning of the school year. These sessions consist of a review of the district's *Problem Solving Team Manual* along with a time for administrators and teachers to provide feedback. These sessions are provided by the central office staff and are held at each individual school. The Problem Solving Team at each school monitors student progress. Documentation of student progress is also reported to central office staff at the end of each nine week grading period. The *Problem Solving Team Manual* is updated each year to reflect any changes necessary to improve tiered support for students

Facilitating Factors

There are several facilitating factors participants perceived as helping to make Tier III intervention successful. These factors include three categories: Clearly defined and implemented roles of Tier III administrators and faculties; this includes program design which includes the Problem Solving Team, collaboration and the use of data analysis. The third category is Program Support that includes professional development and resource materials. Each of these are described in the following sections.

Clearly Defined and Implemented Roles

Findings indicate that both the administrators and the teachers involved in this process had a very clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and implemented them as expected. This appears to provide teachers and students support in the successful implementation of the program. A review of the *Problem Solving Manual* for the district indicates that the roles and responsibilities of the Response to Intervention process are clearly identified within the document. This category includes two themes: leadership of school administrators and teacher understanding and implementation of their role.

Leadership of School Administrators

Findings indicated that, administrative leadership plays an important part in the Tier III intervention process. Research and the feedback from principals and teachers demonstrate that principals in each school must provide the time, schedule and resources for teachers to use to provide intervention for students. Each of the administrators spoke about leading the school Problem Solving Team and guiding the instructional decisions regarding tiered instruction for students. All of the administrators had a clearly defined

role in the process and all were able to share what that role was and how it impacted the Tier III intervention process.

For example, an elementary principal shared her role as the facilitator of Tier III intervention for students in her school. She said,

I ensure that the teachers are providing Tier III each day. I meet with teachers monthly. I look at the student's status to see what progress they are making. I meet with the teacher and instructional coach to determine what type of materials we need to be using with our students.

An elementary principal shared,

My role is to make sure that Tier III is getting done. I also hold data meetings, chart our student's growth with the teachers during grade level meetings. We move our children based on their scores and progress.

A middle school principal described his role when he said,

I look at the data and make sure that tier instruction is being implemented and that pull out is being done for students.

An assistant high school principal explained,

My main role for the areas of reading and math for Tier III is to make sure that we identify students who need to be on Tier III so that they don't fall through the cracks. I make sure that we identify those students and make sure that teachers are implementing Tier III for them. I make sure that they are posting their data in a timely manner as well, so that we can keep track of their progress.

Teachers are also aware of the role that their school administrator plays in the tiered intervention process. Several teachers commented in their interview that they were

well supported by their administrator in their attempt to provide Tier III intervention for their students. A classroom teacher shared, "My principal discusses different ideas and strategies with me that I can try."

Another classroom teacher added that her principal assisted her with reading instruction.

> The instructional coach and Ms. Smith our principal meets with the teachers and shows us things that we need to be doing in our classroom concerning reading. Ms. Smith also brings someone in to work on instruction with us and provides workshops for us.

Teachers Understanding and Implementation of Role

Teachers also have an important role in providing Tier III intervention for their students. They are charged with deciding on the intervention that meets the needs of each student as well as finding the teaching strategy that will benefit each individual student.

All ten of the teacher participants indicated that they take an active role in providing Tier III intervention for students. Each of the ten teachers was able to discuss their role in providing Tier III intervention for students in their school. One example was given by a special education teacher, who said,

> I work with third, fourth and fifth grade students. I usually help identify kids that need Tier III and if I have time throughout my day or if I have one student that may need what another student needs then I pull them into my groups. If I am working with a student I want to do their progress monitoring with them. I am in charge of the PST paperwork and the Tier III progress monitoring and I also attend the PST meetings.

A classroom teacher described her role in working with Tier III students. She explained,

I did reading the first two years and this is my second year to do math. I have done

both but my role is to collaborate with the teachers to see what the students that are

in my group are struggling with and what skills need to be reinforced. Then if it is

math I either go back to the textbook or I find online resources.

An instructional coach described what she does to assist with Tier III intervention.
She said,

I work with the teachers to help make sure that they have the proper materials. I do

a lot of the assessing myself. Then with the teachers we take the results to make

sure that the students are a true Tier II or Tier III student. I do pull some Tier III

groups myself. This year I am offering Tier III services to 1st and 2nd grade and will

soon be picking up a 4th grade class as well.

A special education teacher added,

I don't really do very much with reading. We have another teacher who does most

of our reading. With the math I'm the one who a lot of our students come to if they

are struggling in a class. I give them one-on-one help.

Program Design

The organization and structure of Tire III is a major element that promotes the

success of the intervention process. The program design includes three components:

Problem Solving Team, collaboration, and use of data analysis. Each of these elements will

be discussed separately in the following section.

Problem Solving Team

The Problem Solving Team (PST) in each school appears to be an important element

of success of Tier III intervention. The (PST) is comprised of administrators and various

teacher groups within the school. This team makes the decision about which students will receive Tier III intervention as well as what type of instruction the teacher will provide. Student data provides the PST with the information that they need to guide the intervention process. As noted earlier in the section on documents, there is a *Problem Solving Team Manual*, which provides guidance on how to develop and operate the team. The manual also provides information regarding the guidelines for screening and progress monitoring of students.

Team Collaboration

An important part of the program design, which fosters Tier III success, is collaboration. One hundred percent of administrators and ninety percent of teachers mentioned that collaboration occurs within the activities of the Problem Solving Team and within the program itself. Each of the ten schools has a Problem Solving Team (PST) in place. Some of the schools use a team that consists of grade level teachers, special education teachers and the administrators. Others choose to have groups of teachers within the school serve as part of the team. The administrator of each school attends each of the team meetings and collaborates with teachers on what intervention should be administered to students. Administrators and teachers shared how the team worked together to make instructional decisions for students. An elementary principal shared how his problem solving team worked together. He said,

> We meet together we talk about who needs what and who needs what when. And
> then we put together a schedule and then as we meet we look at the progress
> they're making in Tier II and Tier III to decide if they need to move up or down a
> tier.

A principal of an elementary and middle school shared,

> Since we are a small school we all meet together. All the teachers are on a problem
>
> based team. By having the elementary and middle school there together they can
>
> bounce ideas off of each other.

A middle school principal said,

> We look at tier II and put them on the log and then we look at Tier III. We pay close
>
> attention to whether the student is making academic or behavior progress. We look
>
> at the data and discuss different techniques. We are such a small school that when
>
> we meet we have a chance to collaborate as a team and spread the information.

An instructional coach stated,

> Well it is a committee that really offers suggestions and ways to help a child or
>
> suggestions of ways to do things differently with instruction. It is a way to monitor
>
> student progress.

Student Data Analysis

The Tier III program involves the use of data to make decisions about how to aid

students. PST plays an important role in fostering student data analysis to determine

which students are in need of Tier III intervention. A variety of data sources are used in

determine the academic strengths and weaknesses of each student. All twenty participates

mentioned the use of data in making decisions regarding Tier III placement and as a

method for monitoring student progress.

> An instructional coach shared,

> The problem solving team works together to look at all aspects of students. We first
>
> start when we get the baseline results. We look at progress reports and report

cards. After a teacher brings a child to the Problem Solving Team we look at everything. Now we use the Aspire scores, Global Scholar and Star data. We look at all kinds of data before the PST accepts that student. Once we decide that the child truly needs intervention we place them on the PST log and they start receiving Tier II first and if there is not any progress made in a certain amount of weeks then they go to Tier III.

An elementary principal discussed the different types of data that the Problem Solving Team uses to identify students in need of Tier III intervention. He said,

We look at various data whether it's standardized test scores from previous years, baseline test scores, or Global Scholar from the beginning of the school year. We take all of those things into account. We also look at the previous year to see if they finished the year up on tiered intervention and what tier they were on.

An elementary principal explained how her PST uses data to determine student placement in Tier III. She said,

They look at their data monthly when they meet and they determine if the students are making progress, or limited progress, or if the interventions need to change. If the student needs to move from Tier III to Tier II or from Tier II to Tier III the PST team looks at the data to determine these is a need and sets that up and coordinates that with the Tier III staff.

A special education teacher explained how student's data is utilized in her school when she shared,

We look at test scores, grades and behavior. We take all of their data and monitor the children to see how they are doing.

Student data forms are included in the school districts' *Problem Solving Team Manual* and are used by the team to monitor student progress. Data from these forms are compiled onto a PST log and turned into the administrator at each school and the district's central office.

Professional Development

Ninety percent of the participants shared information about professional development activities relating to RtI and Tier III intervention. Documents revealed that professional development sessions are provided by the school district each year by members of the central office staff. During the 2014–2015 school year 202 teachers and 13 administrators received professional development related to RtI provided by the central office staff. These sessions provided administrators and teachers with a review of the PST manual along with an opportunity for the staff to ask question or provide feedback on the RtI process. Many participants noted that professional development sessions that focus on how to implement the intervention materials for Tier III intervention are often provided at the school level. Interview participants stated that the professional development had been beneficial to them. A classroom teacher shared,

> The county has had training with us and we have it at our school. Our instructional
> coach has also provided Tier III instruction for our teachers. It is also reviewed
> monthly with the faculty.

Professional development is offered for all staff and may be based at the district or school or may be provided by groups outside of the system. A media specialist said,

> I attended some professional development last year on the reading series. It helped
> me find out what I needed to do to help my students. I was able to get the

information that was specifically designed for the media specialist that goes along

with the reading series.

Professional development has occurred in both formal and informal settings, and is

conducted by a variety of people and appears to be integrated into the daily life of the

schools. An elementary principal said,

We have done a lot of work with our staff through grade level meetings on Tier II or

Tier III. We have had several meetings where we have gone over our tier kit with

our teachers in the area of reading.

An instructional coach shared,

We are constantly doing in house professional development. We just did one

yesterday clarifying what actually takes place in Tier I, Tier II and Tier III.

An elementary principal commented,

It has been very helpful. Our instructional coach actually explains what we should

be doing. She demonstrates for the teachers and goes into the classroom and works

side by side with them.

Many of the teachers and administrators demonstrated their understanding of the

impact of professional development in assuring program success through comments

emphasizing the importance of continuing to provide this service. For example, a

classroom teacher said, "I think that we need some additional Tier III instruction." A

classroom teacher expressed her feelings about the need to continue to provide these

opportunities when she noted:

I just think that there are always new ideas coming along. Not everybody learns the

same way or teaches the same way. We can never learn too much about how to do

things.

A high school principal stated,

I think it needs to be a continuing process. The more we see it the better we will

understand it and be able to relay it to the teachers. The teachers can then relay it

to the students.

Resource Materials

Tier III intervention requires the use of individualized instruction based on the

specific skills identified as the student's weaknesses in reading or math. Participants

believe that the use of skill specific resource materials helps Tier III teacher provide the

necessary intervention for Tier III students. Ninety percent of the interview participants

shared that resource materials were available to them at their individual schools and made

a difference in the success of Tier III intervention. A media specialist shared her beliefs

about the resource materials that were available at her school. She said,

I think that our district is providing us with the best resources and giving us what

we need to help our children. We just have to apply what they bring.

An instructional coach stated very simply, "I think we have plenty of research based

programs to actually teach with." Another instructional coach said, "I feel like our county

has good materials, especially in reading."

These resources appear to be very varied and focused on meeting student needs in

multiple ways. An elementary principal shared,

Our computer-based program is really working for our middle school students. They are getting feedback right then on how they are doing. The teacher works with them individually and then she puts the child on the program and lets them work through the questions. It gives them a score and the teacher is able to see right away if the child has obtained the skill.

An instructional coach explained how the Tier III programs that she used helped her students to be successful. She said,

I think the programs that we use help to make Tier III successful when you are working with a group of three to five students. The program provides so much information to help with specific needs. I can go back if the child is not grasping those skills and the program will tell me exactly what I need to do to provide remediation.

Hindrances to Tier III Intervention

There were several factors identified by participants in this research study that are perceived as hindering the success of implementing Tier III instruction to students. The first of these factors is the structure of Tier III intervention, which includes time constraints and the scheduling of time. The second factor is resources, which includes available personnel limitations and teaching resources. Although these issues appear to be interrelated they will be separated for ease of understanding. Examples of each of these factors are discussed in the following section.

Time Factors

Eighty percent of administrators and teachers, who participated in this study agree that time is a factor that hinders the success of implementation of Tier III intervention in

their school. Although all ten schools are attempting to provide Tier III intervention to

their students, time constraints impact their ability to be successful in each individual

situation. Both high school principals shared that time constraints interfere with teachers

being able to provide adequate Tier III intervention for students. As one high school

principal explained,

> We only have fifty six minutes with students in the classroom. It is really hard to get
>
> good, effective Tier III, one-on-one instruction and still have time for your class to
>
> move on or progress like it needs too.

> An elementary principal also discussed the responsibilities that teachers face as

they try to teach the content for all of their assigned classes and still provide Tier III

interventions as well. He shared,

> My main concern with PST and RtI is the time. We have a certain number of minutes
>
> in the day and classroom teachers have responsibilities to teach all of those minutes
>
> of the day to cover all their content. Now with the Aspire and all the subjects being
>
> tested, not just reading and math not having time to address all of those is a
>
> problem. And then my auxiliary teachers that I mentioned like my PE and my media
>
> specialist or special education teachers or whoever, they still have their own
>
> schedules and have to get their everyday responsibilities done. So it's just finding
>
> that time to find to do that Tier III intervention.

A high school teacher also mentioned that due to the lack of time she didn't get to meet

with her coworkers very often.

> The obstacle that I face is really just the time. That means I do not always know if
>
> the child might be struggling somewhere else or may be performing well just in my

classroom. I never really have time to sit down with the others and share with each other what worked well in our classrooms.

Although it appears that administrators and teachers are faced with time constraints, it is evident that they still continue to see the importance of providing Tier III intervention. A middle school principal stated, "Tier III is time consuming, but it is needed."

Scheduling Issues

In addition to working with the constraints of time, administrators and teachers are also faced with developing and managing schedules that will allow RtI endeavors to operate. Seventy percent of administrators and sixty percent of teacher participants shared how scheduling issues created a conflict for them in providing Tier III intervention for their students. This is closely related to the previous issue of time, but it is still a factor of its own. According to a special education teacher time constraints affected her teaching schedule. Sharing about this, she stated,

I know it's hard because our scheduling is hard, but there needs to be some time built into our schedule so that those students that need help could go and get help. A lot of students struggle on the same concepts, same skills. If we have just maybe a few minutes built into the schedules so that they could get some assistance.

An elementary and middle school principal mentioned,

It makes it difficult when you have the middle and elementary together, because you have two different types of schedules going on in one school.

In addition to teachers struggling with their teaching schedule, scheduling is also an issue for students, who are leaving the regular education classroom to receive Tier III intervention. Talking about this issue, an elementary principal said,

86

Scheduling is an issue because when students come out for Tier III to their small

groups, they are missing Tier I and if they are struggling then teachers see that as a

problem.

Resources

The last barrier to the success of RtI is the need for additional resources. These

resources include personnel limitations and the need for teaching resources. Each barrier

will be discussed in the following section.

Personnel limitations. Seventy percent of the administrators and sixty percent of

teachers believe that additional personnel are needed to implement Tier III for students.

Although this limitation is related to scheduling, it appears to be a distinct issue on its own.

Most participants mentioned that they realized that funding was not provided by the state

for intervention teachers in each school. However, the need is still there. One principal

shared that it is difficult to find staff to implement Tier III without interfering with their

regular job responsibilities. He said,

Trying to find people that can do the Tier III instruction that doesn't interfere with

their regular job duties is hard. It is also hard to find staff that is competent and

skilled enough in the areas of reading and math.

Another principal shared,

The most difficult part of Tier III is scheduling and human resources.

He also added,

Just having the time and that person available to get with the kids during that

specific time is the biggest hurdle as far as Tier III goes.

An elementary and middle school administrator discussed the problems she faced with a small elementary and middle school. She said,

> I need to have more personnel because out staff is so small. If I had an individual that just worked with Tier III that would make it a lot easier to schedule. When you just have one teacher per grade or one per subject it makes it very difficult. They are pretty well tied up teaching the regular instruction and getting to Tier III is almost impossible.

As noted at the beginning of this section, the barriers to success are interconnected and overlapping. A special education teacher summed up her feelings and demonstrated the interconnectedness of all of the barriers to success when she said,

> It could always be improved if we had more faculty, more money and more time. That's what you need in education. You always need more people, you need more time. I think if we could get those things it would be amazing.

Teaching resource. The last hindrance to Tier III intervention is the need for readily available resources for teachers. Although the system provides many resources for teachers to use with their students, teachers and administrators noted this as a facilitating factor. Participants also identified a lack of resources, particularly in mathematics as being a factor that limits success. An elementary principal explained the need for a math intervention program. The percent of individuals nothing this factor was small and more principals (40%) shared this factor than did teachers (30%). An elementary principal said,

> If we had a math curriculum that was laid out, I think that would benefit us. We feel stronger in what we are doing with the reading Tier III. In math Tier III it's more of pulling from here and pulling from there and developing your own.

A classroom teacher shared,

> If maybe there was a program for math. We have that for reading and had that when I taught Tier III but with math it's just so broad. I'm always looking for something different.

An elementary principal also shared how more resources were needed for Tier III math intervention in general. She shared,

> Tier III is a work in progress. Our teachers have to pool different resources, so it's not a progression that maybe the students need. It is a hit or miss with the different skills that the teachers see the child needs sometimes the Tier III skills do not build upon each other. That is one area that I think that is not working as well as it should.

Another elementary principal also expressed a need for more resources for Tier III intervention. She shared,

> Finding the resources if they don't have them readily available is an obstacle. Whether it's finding them from other school or seeing what they are using and making sure to have those resources available to them.

Benefits of Tier III Intervention

Benefits of Tier III intervention fall into three major categories: benefits for teachers, benefits for students and benefits for both teachers and students. These benefits are strongly interrelated to one another. However, they are presented individually because they each appear to have some distinct features.

Teacher Benefits

There were two primary benefits of Tier III intervention for teachers. First it provided opportunities for teachers to enhance collaboration and build rapport with one another. Secondly, it enhanced teacher instructional strategies.

Rapport with Others and Collaboration

Ninety percent of the administrators and seventy percent of the teachers agree that Tier III intervention helped to enhance collaboration and rapport with others as teachers work and support each other in providing instruction to students. A middle school principal shared an example of how Tier III had helped his teachers work together to provide Tier III intervention for students. He said,

> Ms. Ford, who is a science teacher, benefits from some of the techniques that Ms.
>
> Smith is using and it eventually helps the student.

> A special education teacher seemed to think that discussing the needs of her

students with others helped her to gain insights into what specific intervention her students really needed.

> You get to know the students when you have them in a Tier III and a co-teaching
>
> setting. You already know their strengths and weaknesses and it makes the
>
> instruction so much easier because you are able to collaborate with their other
>
> teachers and get an understanding of the particular children that have needs.

A classroom teacher, who provides Tier III intervention for students, shared that she felt comfortable in helping other teachers by providing Tier III instruction to their students. She said,

> "The teacher can say Ms. Ford will you please work on this, for a certain student".

The dialogue between teachers helps to promote an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable in helping struggling students be successful in the classroom. A special education teacher commented:

As teachers, we struggle and we are upset when our students are not excelling and doing like they should. I think it helps us to have somebody helping that student and giving them a little extra time that we can't give them in the classroom due to everything else that we have to do. It benefits the teachers to get that other person to help the students so that they can be more successful when they are in the classroom.

A teacher also shared,

Tier III helps me to get to know my students personally. When I teach them in the regular classroom I have additional information that helps me determine what teaching strategies work best for them. Then I can collaborate with their other teachers about what works best for them. It is very helpful when you understand a particular child's needs.

An elementary principal shared how she included her faculty in discussions involving intervention for students in her school, thus fostering collaboration. She remarked.

The instructional coach and I will have conversations and bounce ideas off of each other. Well, what do you think about this or that or could we try this for Tier II or Tier III. Then, when we find a common ground we present it to the faculty.

These opportunities appeared to provide support for teachers that made their jobs easier. A classroom teacher shared her feelings about this when she said,

I think that our teachers and faculty work really well together and are always there

to help one another.

Enhanced Instructional Strategies

The second benefit for teachers identified in this study is enhanced instructional

strategies. Ninety percent of the administrators and eighty percent of the teachers believe

that Tier III intervention provides teachers the skills, knowledge and opportunities to

implement a variety of teaching strategies to assist struggling Tier III students. These

diverse strategies take into consideration that all students have different needs and

learning differently. This was noted by both teachers and administrators. For example, a

middle school principal shared,

The greatest progress that I have seen is the individual teachers grouping students

according to their academic achievement, and then looking at the different tiers and

implementing the small group inside the classroom to help those students.

A high school administrator also commented that,

Tier III helps teachers to understand the importance of kids that may not be on the

same level or may have different learning styles and abilities from others.

A middle school classroom teacher commented how participating in this endeavor helped

her to expand her teacher repertoire when she stated,

It helped me to develop different ways of teaching because every student does not

learn the same.

Tier III provides teachers with the opportunity to improve their intervention by

planning instruction that is based on the academic needs of students. A classroom teacher

stated,

It opened my eyes too because they're telling me 'Well I saw it this way.' Ah-ha, okay I need to do this. It helps me in my instruction.

An instructional coach shared that,

The small group or one on one setting allows us to work specifically to help a child fill in the gaps that somehow they missed. When you have them working at your table or working with them individually you know immediately whether or not that child is grasping the concept of if you need to back up and start over.

Benefits for Students

There were three student benefits identified in this study. As might be expected, teacher comments about using modified and varied instruction for meeting student needs is closely related and intertwined with student success and benefits. Early identification was also identified as the third benefits for students. These benefits are: improved opportunities for learning, improved attitudes and early identification.

Improved Opportunities to Learn

Tier III provides students the opportunity to improve their learning by receiving intervention that is academically appropriate for them. As student's instructional level improves so does their confidence and motivation and attitudes toward learning.

Improved Opportunities for Learning

Ninety percent of administrators and teachers agree that Tier III intervention provides students the opportunity to improve their learning. They also believe that the students are being more successful in learning. An elementary and middle school principal shared,

They are receiving that extra help that they need, they're actually receiving the exact

thing that they need. It's not a big group of children that you say 'All right we are

going to work on reading comprehension.' It's not that. It's an individualized

instruction for them.

A media specialist discussed the progress that her children in Tier III intervention had

made in reading.

I think it really helps them improve their comprehension, their fluency and

everything that goes along with the reading instruction program.

One administrator also shared

It helps them to get that extra help in a smaller group that is not just a reteaching of

the current material because a lot of times, even though they reteach that current

material in Tier II, that's not what they need. They need something on a lower level,

so it's something that's easier that's at a slower pace and that's more ability

appropriate for those particular kids at that time.

By providing Tier III intervention on a lower level students can establish a

framework for learning previously missed instruction. An elementary principal, noted this

when she said,

One of the most successful aspects is the fact that you can give them what they need

on the lower reading or math level, which helps to build the foundation while they

are receiving their general education curriculum on the appropriate grade level.

Attitudes Toward Learning

Tier III intervention provides the support that students need to be successful in the

classroom. As a result, thirty percent of administrators and sixty percent of teachers

94

agreed that student attitudes toward learning improved. They shared that because

students worked in small groups they feel comfortable and are more willing to take an

active part in their learning. Dealing with this, one classroom teacher commented,

> Kids, when they get in a large group, tend to be intimidated. They don't want to ask
>
> questions in front of others, especially at the middle school. They are very peer
>
> conscious, so with just being comfortable, being able to have multiple opportunities
>
> for engagement. They are more relaxed.

A special education teacher also shared,

> A lot of times children in Tier III have social issues. They have anxiety in school.
>
> They are not motivated. A lot of times, there's behavior issues in there, and a lot of
>
> times I find a way so that when I am working with them, I don't see those behavior
>
> problems, because it is things that they can do, and so they feel successful. It boosts
>
> their confidence. That's where I see the biggest benefits of Tier III. It is in their
>
> behavior and their confidence level and things like that. They grow as they see they
>
> can actually do something and they can actually make progress.

An elementary principal commented,

> The groups are so small that they do get some individualized help with their specific
>
> issues. It's outside the classroom so the students don't feel intimidated by their
>
> classmates or by people watching them get this extra help. I don't think they feel as
>
> different so they are more willing to work and listen.

An instructional coach added,

> I think that anytime a child can see that they have achieved their goals, if they can
>
> see any kind of success that makes them feel better about themselves.

Having another teacher involved in the Tier III intervention allows students the opportunity to receive instruction from someone other than their regular classroom teacher. The additional Tier III intervention teacher also serves as an additional support for the students. Reflecting on this, one elementary principal said,

> I honestly think that a lot of times it's having that extra teacher that the students need. It's not the same teacher that they have for their general instruction for tier I or for tier II. It's just another point of view and maybe another way of teaching, another personality, that may help the child feel better about themselves.

An instructional coach added,

> I think that anytime a child can see that they have achieved their goals, if they can see any kind of success that makes them feel better about themselves.

Early Identification

Findings indicate that early identification appears to be a benefit for students. Sixty percent of administrators and forty percent of teachers agree that Tier III intervention provides struggling students the opportunity to receive academic support early. Early identification of struggling students also helps to reduce the chances of a referral to special education. One elementary principal shared,

> Even in the lower grades like kindergarten we see Tier III as being beneficial to our students.

Several participants mentioned that more students needed to be identified earlier before reaching middle and high school. A high school administrator said,

> We need to identify students as early as possible so that when they get to our level, they can get the help that they need.

A high school special education teacher suggested,

> Maybe if we identify and start the interventions earlier then we could reach them
>
> before they fail a class.

Benefits for Teachers and Students

As noted earlier, although they were presented separately the benefits for teachers and students are interrelated. However, there was one benefit that clearly impacted both of them in a totally interconnected way: the development of positive student/teacher relationships.

Student/Teacher Relationships

Fifty percent of the administrators and seventy percent of the teachers believe that Tier III provided teachers and students an opportunity to build meaningful relationships as they participate in Tier III intervention. One instructional coach shared that she believed that this relationship was at the heart of Tier III effectiveness, when she commented,

> It's that interaction between the teacher and child that makes a true Tier III and a
>
> successful Tier III.

A media specialist added,

> It's more one on one personal time with the child. You get to know the child better.

One teacher discussed how the time spent working with students in Tier III had improved her relationship with her students. She said,

> I think it is that one on one time and you almost have a bond with those students
>
> because you spend 45 minutes a day with those children. They know that you are
>
> doing it for their benefit.

One teacher shared how her students responded in a positive way to her approach in working with them in a Tier III intervention setting by stating,

> It's amazing that you start quickly to see these children want to please you. There is not much that you can ask them to try that they are not willing to try.

A special education teacher shared,

> Getting to know those kids personally is a benefit because you have them in a Tier III setting and you may see them when you co-teach. You may already know their strengths and weaknesses, and how they learn. It makes instruction so much easier across the board.

Administrators and Teacher Perceptions

The last question investigated the degree to which there were differences between teachers' and administrators' perceptions related to each of three previous questions. The researcher used a three- step process to address this question. First, the responses were separated by individuals. Then the responses were organized into two groups: administrators and teachers representing each of the ten schools in the Hillcrest District. Next, the percent of administrators and teachers identifying each of the themes was computed. Finally, these percentages were compared.

Administrators and teachers strongly agree with one another in their perceptions of each of the components of the study with only a slight difference in the percent of responses from each of the groups in four areas. Possible reasons for this finding are discussed in Chapter 5. Table 7 provides a description of the percentages of each participant group for each category and theme.

Table 7

Teacher and Administrator Theme Responses Comparison Chart

Category	Percentage Agreement	
	Administrators	Teachers
Facilitating Factors:		
Clearly Defined and Implemented Roles		
Leadership of School Administrators		
Teachers Understanding and Implementation		
Program Design		
Problem Solving Team	100	100
Team Collaboration	100	90
Student Data Analysis	100	100
Program Support		
Professional Development	90	90
Resources	90	90
Hindrances		
Time Factors	80	80
Scheduling Issues	70	60
Personnel Limitations	70	60
Teaching Resources	40	30

(table continues)

Table 7 (continued)

Category	Percentage Agreement	
	Administrators	Teachers
Benefits:		
Benefits for Teachers		
Rapport and Collaboration	90	70
Enhanced Instructional Strategies	90	80
Benefits for Students		
Improved Opportunities for Learning	90	90
Attitudes Toward Learning	30	60
Early Identification	60	40
Benefits for Teachers and Students		
Building Relationships	50	70

As noted, teachers and administrators agreed about the categories and themes related to the research questions related to facilitating and hindering factors and benefits. However, there were some notable differences in the percent of teachers and administrators who identified some of these.

As identified in Table 7, although the same percentage of administrators and teachers identified resources provided by the school district as a facilitating factor to the overall success of Tier III, ten percent more of the principals then teachers shared their belief that a lack of appropriate resources can hinder program success. Data supports that Tier III provides struggling students the opportunity to be identified early to receive

intervention and both administrators and teachers mentioned that schools should continue

to identify students early and in some cases more students needed to be considered for

identification. However, sixty percent of administrators identified this as an issue whereas

only, forty percent of teachers did.

While both administrators and teachers also identified enhanced student/teacher

relationships and improved student attitudes as benefits of Tier III instruction, more

teachers (60%) identified attitudes toward learning than administrators (30%). When

dealing with benefits teachers (70%) identified building relationships as a benefit of the

program more than (50%) of administrators.

The possible reasons for these differences are unknown. However, possible reasons

for them are discussed in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This chapter presented teacher's and administrators' perceptions of the elements

that fostered and hindered the overall success of the Tier III program and the benefits that

ensued from its implementation in a rural school district in Alabama. Chapter V presents a

summary of these findings, their relationship to previous research, implications for

practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This research involved an investigation of the implementation of a Tier III intervention Response to Intervention (RtI) initiative in an Alabama school district during its fifth year of implementation. The Response to Intervention Initiative provides academic intervention in the areas of reading and math as well as behavioral support for struggling students by utilizing a tiered model of intervention for students.

The State of Alabama adopted the use of a three-tiered model for intervention in 2009. This means that school districts that engaged in incorporating this program into their school systems are at the implementation or institutionalization stage of the change process as defined by Fullan (2007). According to the RtI model, 80% of all students should reach academic success at Tier I which consists of whole group instruction (Mellard, Knight, & Jordan, 2010). Fifteen percent of the student population may require additional support from engaging in small group intervention activities provided by Tier II support. Tier III should consist of approximately five percent of struggling students. Students in Tier III should receive interventions that are individualized, intensive, and based on their weaknesses (Mack, Smith, & Straight, 2010). Student progress is monitored at each tier to determine the level and progression of instruction (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

The study used Appreciative Inquiry, and qualitative analysis within a case design to examine administrators' and teachers' perceptions of their school district's implementation

of an RtI program focusing on Tier III in the areas of reading and math. The study examined the elements that promoted success, factors that hindered success and the benefits of implementation. The study was conducted during the fifth year of the school system's implementation of the RtI program. The following four research questions guided the study.

1. What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that fostered the success of Tier III in RtI?

2. What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that served as barriers to the success of Tier III or RtI?

3. What do administrators and teachers perceive as the primary benefits of Tier III RtI instruction?

4. To what extent do perceptions of these issues differ between teachers and administrators?

Findings

This chapter summarizes and discusses the findings for each of the research questions along with their importance to the implementation of Tier III intervention. Each section examines the findings for one of the research questions, along with implications for practice.

Facilitating Factors

The first research question asked, "What do administrators and teachers perceive as the elements that fostered the success of Tier III in RtI?" There were five areas of Tier III intervention that were perceived of as facilitating the overall success of students. The first was a Clear Understanding and Implementation of Roles. This area has two sub-themes:

role of the school leadership and teacher understanding and implementation of their role.

The second finding was that elements in the program design fostered Tier III success. This

category has four themes: Problem Solving Team, collaboration, data analysis, and

resources. Each of these categories and themes are discussed separately; however, they

are interrelated. This relationship is noted when appropriate.

Clearly defined and implementation of roles. The data demonstrate that both the

school administrators and the teachers had a clear understanding of the roles and

responsibilities and that they implemented them accordingly. The administrator provided

the primary leadership function and the teachers and other professional school staff

implemented the instructional program.

Role of school leadership. Findings indicate that the leadership of the school

administrator is a major factor in fostering the success of Tier III intervention. Research

indicates that strong leadership is a key in promoting the RtI initiative in the schools

(White, Polly, & Audette, 2012) and is directly related to student achievement (Leithwood,

Seashore, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Therefore, this finding is consistent with other

research on the importance of school leadership to student success.

The administrators interviewed in this study were active participants in the

facilitation of the Problem Solving Team, which was itself, a facilitating factor. They are the

facilitator of the team and assist teachers in analyzing and reviewing student data that may

include screening results, test scores, grades and progress monitoring information.

Administrators schedule the Problem Solving Team meetings and ensure that the

necessary people are in attendance. In addition, administrators facilitate the discussions

and provide teachers the opportunity to take an active role in the decisions regarding

placement for struggling students in tiered intervention (Seashore, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010). In addition, administrators provide continuous support to teachers as they implement the intervention to students.

Administrators develop the school schedule that includes a time for students to receive tiered intervention. They assign teachers to provide intervention for students during their assigned times. Administrators are also charged with assuring that teachers receive the professional development that they need at the school level, although some of this responsibility is shared with other staff and district personnel.

Teacher understanding and implementation of role. Another major element that fostered the success of Tier III intervention for students is the clearly defined role of the teacher. Data from this study indicates that teachers understand the part they play in proving appropriate instruction to students. Research supports the fact that quality teachers are the most impacting factor in academic success of students (Darling-Hammond, 2000). These teachers must be well versed in their subject matter and how to teach it (Landgraf, 2003). Part of being a quality teacher is to understand and implement your professional roles and responsibilities.

Tier III intervention teachers are charged with determining the appropriate instructional strategy based on weaknesses identified from student data. The success of the Tier III intervention is dependent upon the teacher delivering quality instruction that is based on effective teaching strategies and research based methods. It appears that these teachers were able to do this. Influences that impact the role of the Tier III teacher include providing appropriate intervention that meets the needs of students and the use of the instructional strategies that support the intervention process to move students toward

academic success. Another factor, which will be discussed in a later section, is the

professional development these teachers received.

Program Design

Findings indicate that the program design of Tier III intervention is a primary

element that fostered the success of the program. Program design consists of three major

factors: 1) Problem Solving Team, 2) Collaboration, and 3) Use of Data Analysis. Each of

these will be discussed in the following section.

Problem Solving Team

The second element that fosters the success of Tier III intervention is the Problem

Solving Team. The purpose of the team is to guide the general education intervention

process (Alabama Administrative Code Public School Governance, 290-3-1.02(20) Problem

Solving Teams). It is evident from the interview participants that there is a PST in place at

each school. Each school team is comprised of a school administrator and teachers, who

have knowledge of the students that are being considered for intervention. The

administrator serves as the facilitator of each school team.

Collaboration

The organizational structure of the PST promotes collaboration among team

members. This collaboration is also an integral factor in Tier III success. Team members

share instructional strategies with each other and determine which one is most

appropriate for the student. Decisions relating to Tier III placement are a result of the

decisions of the PST members. The team continues to monitor the progress of students as

they participate in the intervention. The school administrator serves as the leader of the

Problem Solving Team and ensures that decisions regarding student placement are made based on the student's individual needs.

Research indicates that collaboration increases among teachers as a result of participation in RtI (Finaldi, Proctor & Cardarelli, 2010). According to the interview participants this is true in their school system. The environment of the PST appears to provide opportunities that encourage collaboration among team members throughout the RtI process. According to Marks and Prinity (2003), active collaboration among administrators and teachers provide shared leadership and promote learning. It appears that this collaboration is occurring in all PST groups and is recognized as being of value by all involved.

Although all ten of the schools have an active Problem Solving Team that consists of an administrator and teacher, the actual organization of the team may vary. Some schools have chosen to have groups of teachers serve on the team while other teams consist of teachers on the same grade level. The Problem Solving Team's major responsibility is to analyze student data and make decisions regarding intervention for struggling students. This process was identified as another important feature in fostering student success.

Use of Data Analysis

Screening data and progress monitoring results are important to the success of the RtI implementation (Mellard, McKnight, & Woods, 2009). This collection of data results is used to document student growth over time (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Findings indicate that the PST has a major role in analyzing student data. Team members discuss student data and determine the appropriate intervention to use to meet student needs. According to interview participants, a variety of student data sources are reviewed by the Problem

Solving Team to help make decisions about which students need Tier III intervention. Participants believe that this collaborative process is one of the most important responsibilities of the PST and that it enables them to meet student needs.

Program Support

Data indicates that program support appeared to be a major element in ensuring the success of Tier III intervention. Contributing factors within this category include professional development and resource materials.

Professional Development

Findings indicate that professional development opportunities relating to RtI and Tier III are provided to the interview participants by either their local school or the district and that these activities help to make RtI and Tier III instruction a success. The professional development provides administrators and teachers the support they need in implementing various teaching strategies to accommodate the different instructional levels of the students. According to previous research, the academic success of students will not improve unless the quality of instruction continues to improve (Seferoglu, 2010). Improving the quality of instruction requires the continuous support of teachers. Teachers should be given an opportunity to participate in professional development opportunities that focus on effective practices to improve student learning (Stoll, Bolam, Mcmahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). Findings indicate that this type of professional development is offered to a wide variety of professionals including librarians and other non-classroom professionals. The activities provided are varied and occur at the school and the district levels and are also offered at off-site meetings. The professional development activities appear to be integrated into the structure and operations of the school and are sometimes

provided by the Tier III teachers and others within the school. It thus appears that school personnel recognize the need to enhance their skills and abilities on a consistent basis. In fact, many individuals shared their view that professional development is and should be a continuous process. It appears that they value what they have learned and want to continue to expand their learning endeavors.

Resource Materials

Findings indicate that, particularly in the reading area, resource materials are available to teachers for Tier III intervention and that teachers and administrators believe that these materials help them to implement Tier III and foster student learning. The specific skill materials provide a guide for teachers to use with their students. Materials that are readily available to teachers help guide the delivery of intervention to students. Skill specific materials also help the teacher by being laid out in the order to be taught. This keeps the teacher from having to look for materials to use with students.

Findings suggest that teachers work together to combine a list of available intervention materials located in each grade level within the school. Teachers may also combine a list of needed intervention materials to purchase as funding becomes available. The instructional coach may also provide addition professional development on the use of instructional strategies that may be effective in Tier III intervention to be used along with the materials on hand. Administrators and teachers may also sometimes work with other schools to combine available resources.

Implications for Practice

Findings dealing with the factors that facilitate Tier III instruction within RtI have many implications for practice. Since they are interrelated, they are being discussed together in this section.

Consistent with research findings, leadership is vital to the success of schools and student learning. The findings reinforced those results. These administrators seemed to be knowledgeable about the program, the resources and the need for professional development for themselves and their professional staff. They also had a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities in the process.

Since administrators are so vital to the success of this program, it is important that school systems are careful in the selection of school leaders and that they actively involve them in the development of RtI endeavors through discussions and professional development activities, as it appears this system has done. These professional development offerings may include sessions that focus on differentiated instruction, data-based decision making and improving student achievement. Administrators may also benefit from professional learning communities that may take an extensive look at a particular topic of interest. Book studies and discussion groups might also help administrators stay abreast of new research-based strategies that can be used to differentiate instruction for students.

These findings also point to the importance of teachers having a clear understanding of their roles and having the ability to fulfill them. This involves engaging in collaboration with others, analyzing and using student data to determine student placement and instructional processes and properly using resources to support teaching and learning.

The professional development received, which was varied and provided by numerous people in diverse settings, the resources provided and the opportunities to collaborate appeared to be instrumental in fostering their ability to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

These findings support the importance of having teachers participate in ongoing professional development opportunities that focus on how to differentiate instruction for struggling students. The professional development activities that teachers participate in outside of the classroom are as important as what they do in the classroom (Seashore, Anderson & Riedel, 2003). Thus, schools should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for all teachers on how to differentiate instruction for students and their responsibilities in the RtI process.

These professional development opportunities may include becoming a part of a professional learning community. Additionally, scheduled meetings between colleagues will also ensure that teachers are provided the opportunities to collaborate with others and share ideas relating to improving instruction. Mentor teachers may also be assigned to new teachers who have not provided intervention for struggling students. This will foster collaboration and help to integrate it into the school culture.

Participants pointed to the importance of data analysis and use in ensuring student success in all aspects of student achievement. Since data analysis is a major part of the Problem Solving Team process, all teachers who implement instruction to students should understand it. Teachers should also understand the data sources that are used to identify and progress monitor Tier III students. Opportunities should be provided for teachers to discuss the various data sources that are used to determine intervention for students.

111

Further, it is important that teachers are also provided professional development that relates to the use of data to make instructional decisions for students. Additional support for professional development in this area may be able to be provided by members of the Problem Solving Team, due to the fact that they may have more knowledge of data sources.

Professional development should also be provided on using any specific resources. Instructional coaches that work with the school can also provide additional training on specific needs identified at the individual school or in a particular classroom. This may include book studies, focus groups or professional learning communities. These learning opportunities may promote shared responsibility for student learning, using "reflective dialogue" that promotes conversations about educational practices, and collaboration and feedback with others (Hord, 2004). As professional development needs may vary teachers should participate in the sessions that support their particular instructional need.

Hindrances

Participants identified two major factors that were perceived to hinder the success of Tier III intervention. Each of these factors includes two smaller subgroups. The first factor was Program Structure, time constraints, and scheduling. The second factor is Resource, which includes personnel and resources. Although each of these factors appears to be interrelated, they are presented individually for clarity of understanding.

Program Structure

Findings indicate that the organizational structure of the school served as an impediment to Tier III intervention. The major themes within this element are time constraints and scheduling.

112

Time constraints. Findings indicate that time constraints are a factor that hinders the overall success of Tier III intervention for students. Barlow (2013) also found this in his study pointing to a lack of time for planning and meeting. Administrators and teachers reported that time interfered with their ability to provide Tier III intervention for all students that required it. Administrators recognized that time influenced the overall success of Tier III intervention for students. Teachers are faced with the challenge of trying to teach all of the content for their classes in addition to Tier III as well. This presents an additional challenge for teachers in trying to find time to plan for lessons and meet with other teacher to discuss ways to help struggling students.

Scheduling issues. Scheduling is also a hindrance to the implementation of Tier III intervention. Scheduling of time and schedules are interrelated due to the impact each have on one another. The changing of classes and daily routine often also interfered with the scheduled time that Tier III leave the regular education classroom to receive Tier III intervention. Tier III students may miss part of their Tier I instruction. Classroom teachers are then challenged with having to ensure that students make up Tier I instruction at another time during the school day.

Administrators recognize the issues related to scheduling students for Tier III intervention. However, administrators often find it hard to develop a schoolwide schedule that allows for the additional Tier III intervention time for both reading and math. This relates back to the finite amount of time in a school day and the demands upon it

Resources. Findings demonstrate that resources are also an element that hinders the success of Tier III intervention. These resources include personnel limitations and teaching resources. Each of these will be discussed in the following section.

Personnel limitations. The first resource barrier identified by participants is the need for additional personnel to provide Tier III intervention to students. This limitation is closely connected to issues relating to the lack of time and scheduling. Time and scheduling issues might be fully or partially overcome if more personnel were available to provide tiered instructions for students.

This limitation is closely connected to issues of lack of time and scheduling, since these might be able to be fully or partially overcome if more personnel were available to help provide tiered instruction for students. Teachers and administrators recognized that the state does not provide funding for intervention teachers. However, they noted that they were still additional personnel.

In addition to lacking the number of personnel needed, administrators shared that it is often difficult to find staff to implement Tier III intervention without interfering with their regular job responsibilities. The number of students in each grade level needing Tier III often exceeds the number of personnel available to provide the intervention. In many instances auxiliary teachers, such as media specialists or physical education teachers are asked to provide Tier III intervention for students in addition to their regular job responsibilities. Although they are willing to take on the role, and often received professional development to support their efforts, these teachers may not be skilled in reading and math content. This lack of additional personnel appears to present greater hardships on the small schools that have fewer teachers to pull as intervention teachers. Since the quality of the teacher involves expertise in the subject area taught (Murname & Steele, 2007), this barrier may be particularly difficult to overcome.

Teaching resources. Although most participants identified having appropriate resources as a strength and an element that fostered success, particularly in the reading area, there were also some individuals who noted that a lack of appropriate materials and resources made it difficult to provide appropriate instruction. Several shared that at the elementary level there was a need for a math intervention program for Tier III students. Teachers mentioned that it was difficult to pull materials that focused on all of the skills that students had difficulties with in that subject area. Teachers also expressed a concern that perhaps Tier III intervention was not following a consistent progression in the way that if was being taught to students. It was mentioned at the secondary level that resource materials that included research based strategies were needed for Tier III intervention. The time constraints teachers must work under, previously identified as a problem, make the need to have appropriate teaching materials readily available vital.

Implications for Practice

The barriers to Tier III intervention center primarily around both human and physical resources. Assuming that additional state funds are not going to be made available to supply these resources, overcoming these barriers will require some innovative thinking and action.

In terms of dealing with the time issues, perhaps school and systems could consider providing Tier III interventions before and at the end of the school day. Students assigned to Tier III interventions could receive instruction during morning homeroom or at the end of the day while school is being dismissed. The arrival and departure time of teachers could also be adjusted to allow additional time after school to provide intervention for students.

Finding resources to do this will require some creative thinking. Perhaps parent teacher organizations (PTO) and community stakeholders could contribute to provide monetary help to pay teachers or provide transportation for students who do not have transportation home after school. It might be possible to find volunteers from the retired facility ranks who would be willing to provide assistance. Perhaps funds from within schools or the district could be reallocated in some manner to provide the necessary resources for such endeavors.

To improve the issues of scheduling, schools could consider providing a time within the daily schedule to provide Tier III intervention for struggling students. This time could also serve as an enrichment period for students who are not in need of the tiered intervention. By creating an intervention time on the daily schedule, students would not have to leave Tier I instruction to receive additional tiered support.

Schools could also implement alternate schedules that provide time for teachers to meet together to plan for instruction and collaborate with others. One option would be to provide grade level groups of teachers an extended lunch once every two weeks or once a month and allow them to meet together to talk and share during this period. Perhaps students could be involved in outdoor art or music activities or other enrichment endeavors during this time, with volunteers, aides or auxiliary staff work together with them.

Overcoming barriers related to personnel limitations may be more difficult and complex than dealing with teacher resources. When dealing with these issues, as school systems allocate teacher units, consideration should be given to providing an additional intervention teacher for each school. Just as schools might look at providing time for

intervention through some rescheduling efforts, schools may also look at their schoolwide schedule and determine if they can provide an intervention time within each grade level and designate a teacher to provide Tier III for students. This might also help to solve the issue of not having enough time to provide intervention and scheduling problems. Perhaps shortening class periods could solve this issue. In cases where it is imperative that auxiliary teachers are used to provide intervention to students, additional professional development sessions should be conducted so that they have a basic understanding of the content material they are asked to teach.

The physical resources issue may be easier to deal with than the personnel limitations. As schools and communities choose materials to use for instruction, consideration should be given to intervention. As material allocations become available schools should consider purchasing materials that include intervention for both reading and math at all levels. It might be valuable to survey teachers and schools about the areas in which they view resources as lacking.

Another way to enhance teaching resources is to have administrators and instructional coaches work together to create a school-wide resource list for teachers to ensure that they are aware of materials that are available to them at their individual schools. These resource materials may also be shared across the school system to accommodate different learning needs.

Benefits of Tier III Intervention

Benefits include three major categories: benefits for teachers, benefits for students and benefits for both teacher and students. These benefits are strongly interrelated.

Teacher Benefits

According to the findings, Tier III intervention enhanced teacher collaboration and created an opportunity to build rapport with others. Teachers shared that working and collaborating together was beneficial in helping them to understand the content of what they teach and how students learn (Shulman & Sparks, 1992). In addition teachers also often meet and share with colleague's and share instructional strategies that have been effective in working with their struggling students. This is very helpful to teachers, who are struggling to find a specific teaching strategy to implement with a struggling student on their own. Teachers shared that collaboration with others helped them to gain a better understanding of the particular needs of their students. The dialogue between teachers also helps to promote an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable working together.

Enhanced Instructional Strategies

The second benefit for teachers is the use of expanded instructional strategies. Findings indicate that that Tier III intervention provides teachers with the knowledge, skills and opportunities to utilize a variety of instructional strategies with struggling Tier III students. Through the use of tiered intervention, struggling students receive instruction that is appropriate for their individual learning needs. Teachers better understand the importance of students being placed in different tier groups based on their individual skill needs. Teachers who provide Tier III intervention also recognize that students may have different learning styles. Small group instruction allows teachers to spend more time with students and focus on gaps in their knowledge base that students have missed in previous grades.

Benefits for Students

Three student benefits were identified in this study. These benefits include improved opportunities for learning, improved attitudes of students and early identification. Each of these will be discussed in the following section.

Tier III provides students the opportunity to improve their learning by receiving Tier III intervention that is academically appropriate for their individual learning needs. As students make progress academically their confidence level and their motivation for learning is enhanced. Tier III also provides students the opportunity to receive early intervention, thus increasing their ability to perform in the general education setting.

Improved opportunities for learning. Findings indicate that Tier III intervention provides students the opportunity to improve their learning and have more success as they learn. Tier III enables students to receive instructional in a small group setting (Brown-Chidsey, Bronaugh & McGraw, 2009) with extensive intervention that meets their individual needs (Mack, Smith & Straight, 2010). Since Tier III intervention focuses on the lower levels of instruction, students are able to build upon a foundation in reading or math that they previously have missed in the general education classroom. For example, explicit instruction in reading may help students acquire skills necessary to improve their reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000) while utilizing problem solving strategies, practice and review is important for students with difficulties in mathematics (National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008). By providing Tier III in a small group setting teachers are better able to focus on specific skills that students need.

Attitudes toward learning. According to research the learning environment and student attitudes impact each other (Kinney & Robinson, 2005). Data indicates that Tier III

interventions helped to improve students' attitudes toward learning. Teachers shared that

students feel more comfortable in small groups and take an active role in their learning.

Students appear to be more willing to participate without the fear of intimidation from

peers. Since students are comfortable teachers feel that the engagement of students is

much better. Having an additional teacher involved in the intervention process creates an

additional support for students. As additional teachers participate in providing Tier III,

students have the opportunity to gain exposure from a different perspective as well as

perhaps a different personality and way of teaching. As students make progress they begin

to feel better about themselves.

Early identification. Research indicates that for Tier III intervention to be

successful students must be identified early (Sanger et al., 2012). According to Tucker and

Sornson (2007), early intervention provided by intervention support teams reduced the

rate of special education referrals by 45% in the early grades. Interview participants

indicated that early identification of student enhanced their chances for academic success

in the regular classroom. Secondary participants mentioned that early identification of

struggling students at the elementary level helped to decrease the number of high school at

risk students. Several participants also mentioned that identifying students early for Tier

III intervention helped to keep students from being referred for special education testing.

Benefits for Teachers and Students

As previously mentioned student and teacher benefits are interrelated. However

one benefit was particularly interconnected and was identified as a separate category. The

theme for this interconnected benefit was stronger relationships.

Stronger relationships. As described earlier, there were some benefits for students and teachers that were interrelated. However the development of positive student/teacher relationships clearly impacts both of them concurrently. Tier III provides the opportunity for teachers and students to interact with each other at a very personal level. As teachers and students spend time together, often a bond will form between the two of them. The positive learning environment created by this positive teacher and student relationship has been found to promote the chance that student achievement will be successful (Purkey, 1990).

It is important that teachers and students are provided opportunities to work together to enhance positive teacher and student relationships. School administrators can encourage positive student and teacher relationships by implementing an advocacy program that encourages teachers to mentor students within the school that they do not teach every day.

Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions

The last question investigated the degree to which there were differences between teachers' and administrators' perceptions related to each of the three previous questions. There is strong agreement between the administrators and teachers in each of the components of this study. There do not appear to be any major disagreements between the two groups. In terms of the items that facilitate the program, there was very close similarity in the percent of teachers and administrators who identified each of these items. Consistency in perception may be one possible reason for this may because the Tier III intervention initiative has been in place for the past five years. Therefore teachers and administrators have had extensive opportunities to work together and to build an

121

understanding of the program, their roles and responsibilities and the benefits from it. They appear to be at the institutional stage identified by Fullan (2007), meaning they have invested themselves in the program and integrated it into their operational processes.

The only differences between teachers' and administrators' perceptions were the number of individuals who identified one of the barriers to success and three of the benefits. Principals identified lack of resources as a barrier more often than did teachers (administrators, 40 %; teachers, 30%). In terms of benefits, administrators identified collaboration, and early identification of students more often than teachers. These findings may have something to do with the role of administrator and his/her point of view. Administrators see the entire school and the many elements within it. Also, they may be concentrating on trying to foster collaboration within their school, assuring that teachers have the resources they need, and provide students with the appropriate Tier III placement.

Teachers mentioned attitudes toward learning and building relationships more often than administrators. This may be because administrators are not as directly involved in working with students each day as are teachers. Thus, teachers have more of a personal view of students and their own relationships to and with them.

Conceptual Framework Comparison and Development

This section discusses the initial conceptual framework and presents a revised framework based upon the findings of this study. The following figure represents the conceptual framework of the literature review included in chapter two of this study. It was based upon the literature review related to school involvement in implementing school change and Response to Intervention programs.
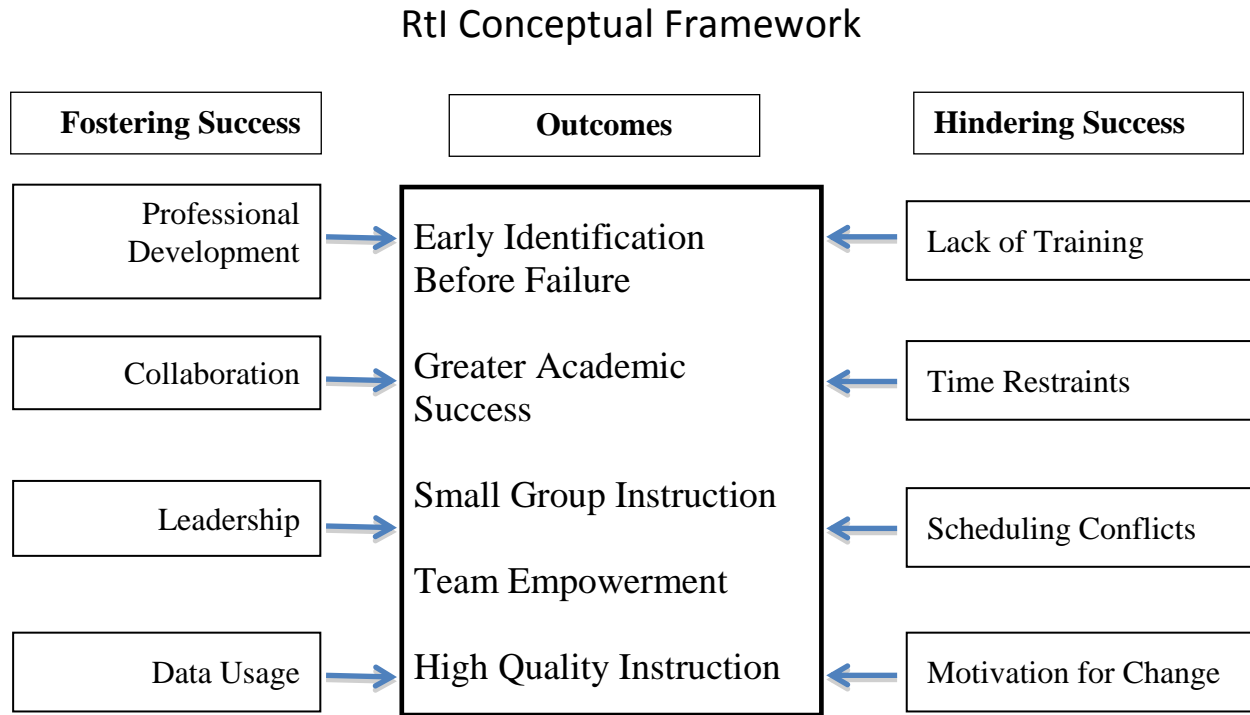
RtI Conceptual Framework

Fostering Success	Outcomes	Hindering Success
Professional Development	Early Identification Before Failure	Lack of Training
Collaboration	Greater Academic Success	Time Restraints
Leadership	Small Group Instruction	Scheduling Conflicts
	Team Empowerment	
Data Usage	High Quality Instruction	Motivation for Change

Figure 7. RtI Conceptual Framework

Discussion

In general, the facilitating factors, benefits, and barriers identified in this research are closely related to the elements used in the conceptual framework for this study. However, there were some differences. Findings from this study indicate that understanding and implementing the role of leadership and quality teaching is essential to the success of Tier III intervention. Professional development, data analysis and collaboration were also found to be elements that fostered the success of Tier III. These findings are consistent with previous research findings and were contained in the original conceptual framework.

A factor identified in this research, which was not identified in previous research, was the structure, which was used to implement Tier III intervention. The Problem Solving

Team at each individual school provided the mechanism through which collaboration and data analysis occurred. Findings indicate that the Problem Solving Team is a major factor in ensuring that students receive the academic support they need to be successful. Not only does the Problem Solving Team provide leadership and guidance in the data analysis and student placement it also supplies the opportunity for teachers to collaborate and work with others. This aspect of what type of structure is incorporated into RtI bears further study and examination. It also indicates that schools and systems must consider the method that will be used to foster the important aspects of RtI and make Tier III instruction successful.

Additionally, findings about collaboration are consistent with previous research concerning Tier III enhancing the collaboration efforts of teachers. The findings of this study goes a step further and indicates that the collaborative efforts of teachers also included the opportunity for relationship building between teachers and students. This in turn became a benefit for teachers and students as they form a meaningful teacher and student relationship, which helps to enhance student learning.

Findings indicate that the elements of time constraints, personnel and resources were also found to be barriers to the success of Tier III intervention. Although Barlow (2013) found that a lack of resources was also a barrier to success this finding was not identified extensively in the research and therefore this barrier was not included in the original framework. Although the lack of resource materials was identified as a barrier, this was also identified as a facilitating factor. When resource materials are available for Tier III intervention they appear to facilitate success and when they are not available they are considered to be a hindrance. Thus the identification, availability and use of resources

in the implementation of RtI seem to be a very important factor that bears further examination.

Although the original conceptual framework identified motivation for change as a significant element that hindered the success of Tier III intervention, Barlow,(2013), who conducted his research in the same state as this study, found that resistance to change was a barrier to RtI implementation, this factor was not identified as an issues in this research. This difference may be due to the fact that the school district has been implementing Tier III intervention for five years and appear to be in the institutional change stage.

The original framework also included the lack of training as a barrier to RtI implementation. However, this element also was not found as a problem in this study. As noted, professional development was viewed as a facilitator and participants stress how important this was to their success. Although administrators did note that personnel limitations meant that some teachers might not have the knowledge and training they needed to implement Tier III, a lack of training was not identified as a problem. This district appeared to provide extensive and intensive professional development, which was varied and suited to teacher needs. The district also provided teacher resource materials to help them understand the Tier III process. The fact that teachers had many opportunities for professional development offerings and support in making the necessary steps toward implementing Tier III intervention to students may explain their acceptance of their role in the change and their ability to perform their roles.

Findings indicate that enhanced instructional strategies, improved opportunities for learning, and early identifications were benefits that are consistent with previous research. The element of collaboration was also consistent with previous research findings; however, this study found that in addition to collaboration administrators and teachers discussed how collaboration

led to building positive rapport with others. Perhaps this is because the Tier III process has been in operation over the past five years and teachers are more comfortable in working together. This is also closely related to team empowerment that was previously mentioned in prior research as a benefit.

Attitude toward learning was not included as a significant benefit in the original conceptual framework. Findings indicated that Tier III helped to promote positive attitudes of students toward learning. This is closely related to building relationships, which was perceived as a benefit for students and teachers. Findings support that Tier III provides teachers the opportunity to get to know their student through positive small group or one on one interactions.

Figure 8 represents the conceptual framework developed from the findings of this study. Those elements in the findings that differ from those in the original framework are written in bold text for ease in identification.

Conceptual Framework

Facilitating Factors

Hindrances

Understanding and implementing the role
Effective Leadership
Quality Teachers

Program support
Professional Development
Resources

Program Design
Problem Solving
Use of Data Analysis

Tier III Intervention

Structure
Time Constraint
Scheduling

Resources
Personnel
Resource Material

Benefits

Teacher Benefits
Building Rapport and Collaboration
Enhanced Instructional Strategies

Student Benefits
Improved Opportunities for Learning

Attitudes Toward Learning
Early Identification

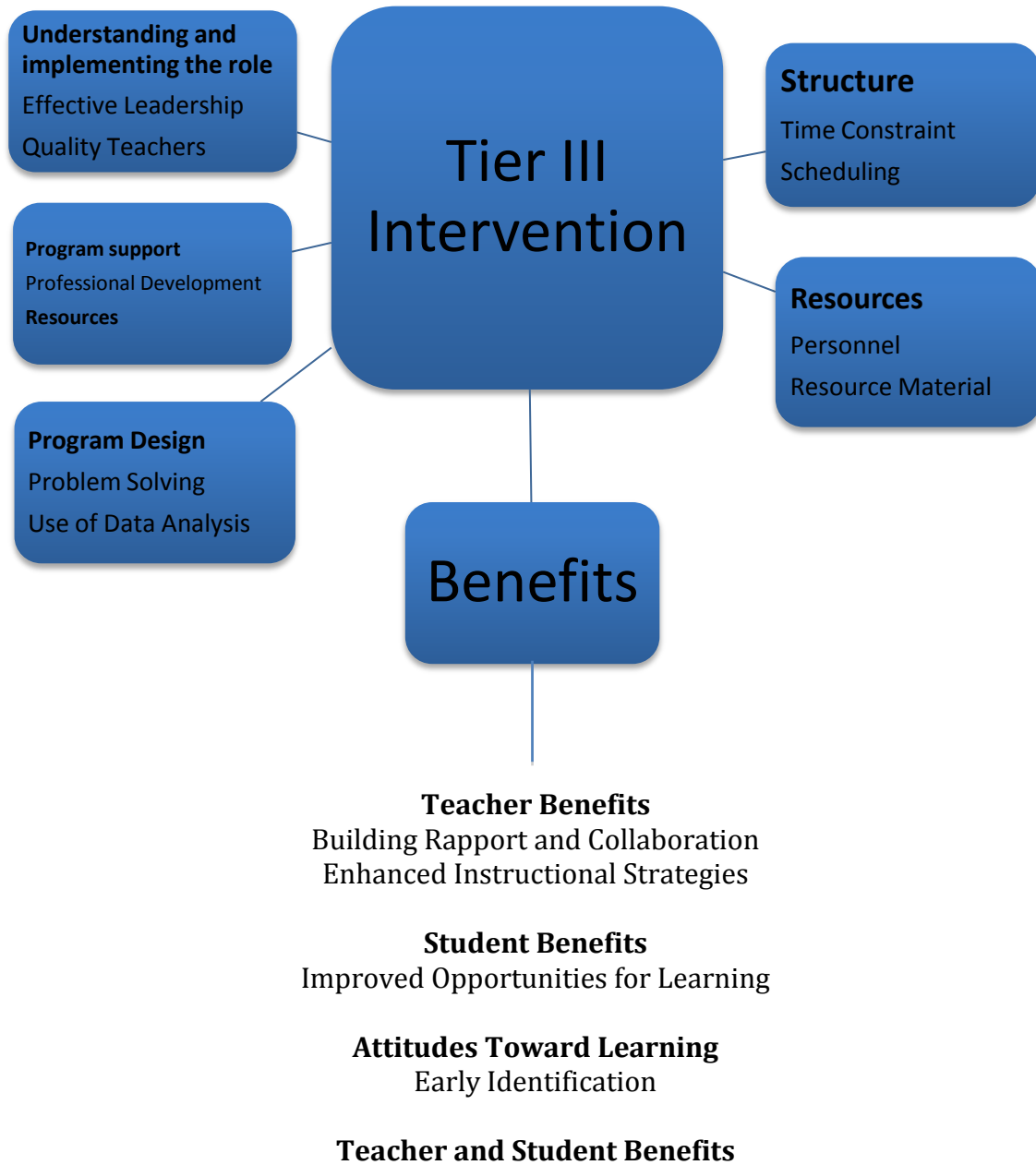**Teacher and Student Benefits**

Figure 8. Revised Conceptual Framework

Building Relationships

Teacher collaboration was found to be a benefit for teachers in this research study along with team collaboration as a facilitating factor for success. The combination of these two elements are both transforming to the school change process. It would be beneficial for educators to know if these elements could be replicated in other areas of student learning.

Building relationships between teachers and students was found to be a benefit for both teachers and students. This finding opens many opportunities for researchers to investigate the social and cultural aspects of tiered intervention in addition to focusing on the academic needs of struggling students.

Time constraints and scheduling were mentioned in this study as hindrances to Tier III intervention. It would be valuable to take a look at what other school districts are doing in relation to how the scheduling for Tier III is being done. The lack of personnel was also mentioned as a hindrance to the implementation of Tier III intervention. A survey could be used to see how other school districts were using classroom and auxiliary teachers to effectively provide Tier III intervention to students.

The use of data to make instructional decisions was identified as a facilitating factor that promoted the success of Tier III intervention. An additional look at the different data sources that other school districts are using would be vital information for educators as they search to find the most effective research programs and teaching practices to use with students.

The main focus of this study was to take an in-depth look at Tier III intervention in a single school district. It would be beneficial to replicate this same study in another district

to make a comparison of best practice used to serve Tier III students. It would also be helpful to conduct other studies that focus on Tier I and Tier II intervention. By having research on all three tiers educators will have a better picture of what is really taking place in Response to Intervention.

Finally, this study sought to investigate the facilitating factors, hindrances and benefits of a Tier III intervention program as perceived by administrators and teachers in a single case setting. With Tier III being only one part of the tiered intervention model these is much more to be learned about tiered instruction for students. In order to have a complete framework and understanding of tier intervention, additional research would be beneficial that focused on the major elements of Tier I and Tier II intervention. Research in these areas would help to create a full understanding of the tiered instruction process.

Summary

Findings from the study indicate that the Hillcrest School District appears to be operating within the institutionalization phase of Fullans' three-step change process. Administrators and teachers understand the elements of Tier III that are necessary to implementing Tier III intervention for students. Participants indicated that they have seen positive changes that have taken place over the past five years and believe that they now know more about what is expected of them.

This study verifies the importance of allowing people to have time to understand, accept and implement change. Areas that are in need of support are in the refinement stage at this time. Any changes made to the program at this time will result in helping to promote a positive outcome.

Conclusion

This study investigated and identified the facilitating factors, hindrances and benefits that are beneficial to implementing an RtI Tier III intervention program for students in a single school district. This research was conducted during the fifth year of a school district's implementation of the intervention and appears to be the first such study. The research verified findings of previous research on this topic, but also unearthed some additional information. Although the findings cannot be generalized to all settings, it is hoped that these findings will help to create a better understanding of the Tier III intervention process and lead to future interest and research on this topic.

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APPENDIX 1

Informed Consent Letter

AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

College of Education

Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology

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

**Educators Perceptions of a Response to Intervention Program:
Benefits and Facilitating Factors**

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine teachers and administrator perceptions of their school district's implementation of a Response to Intervention Program. It will focus on Tier III in the areas of reading and math. The study will also examine the elements that promote success, ideas for improvement and the benefits of implementation.

This study is being conducted by Nancy Maples, under the direction of Dr. Frances Kochan in the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology. You were selected as a possible participant because of your role in providing tier III intervention support to students in your school. If you decided to participate in the study you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will last between thirty to sixty minutes. The interview will be audiotaped and the recordings will be destroyed once the transcriptions are complete. A pseudonym will be used to ensure your anonymity.

In order to deal with issues of confidentiality I want to assure you, that I will be the only person who will know that you are a part of this research study. Any information that links you to what you say confidentially will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. When the research results are discussed at conferences or published no information will be used to reveal your identity. Any audiotapes that I make during the interview will be destroyed once the interview is transcribed. A pseudonym will be used for all transcriptions.

Along with your perceptions this study will provide insight into the facilitating factors and elements of success that tier III intervention provides to students to improve academic achievement. There are no cost to participate. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Participant's initials_____

4036 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 368449-5221   Telephone 334-844-4460 Fax: 334-844-3072

Page 1 0f 2

146

This study is voluntary you may change your mind about participating at any time. You may withdraw from the study at anytime. If you choose to withdraw your data will be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology or this school.

Your name will not be used in connections with this study, but your title in your organization will be used. Your privacy will be protected. Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, a journal publication, or a professional presentation.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Dr. Francis Kochan at kochafr@auburn.edu or Nancy Maples at maplenc@tigermail.auburn.edu or 706-773-5963. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

You may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 884-5966 if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or email hsubjet@auburn.eduor 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 PARTCIPATE.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date   Investigator obtaining consent Date

_____   _____
Printed Name   Printed Name

                                              _____
                                              Co-Investigator   Date

                                              _____
                                              Printed Name

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL GUIDE

Interview Guide for Administrators and Teachers

1. Tell me about your

   a. Years of experience in education
   b. Highest Degree
      i. Bachelor's Degree
      ii. Master's Degree
      iii. Doctorate Degree

2. How is Tier III intervention organized for students in your school?

3. What is your role in implementing Tier III interventions to students in the areas of reading and math?

4. What experiences have you had in working with Tier III students?

5. What do you think are the most successful aspects of Tier III?

6. Are there any others that you think are important to note?

7. What do you perceive as benefits of Tier III intervention for students?

8. What do you perceive as benefits of Tier III intervention for teachers

9. Are there any other benefits?

10. What are the three primary things you think help to make Tier III successful in your school? Are there any other things that contribute to this success?

11. What suggestions do you have for improving Tier III in your school and/or the school district?

12. What professional development activities have you been involved in relating to RtI and Tier III instruction for students? To what degree have they been helpful? How could they have been improved?

13. Are there any resources, support and/ or professional development you think would have been or could be helpful in improving the implementation of Tier III within your school to ensure that Tier III is implemented effectively?

14. Can you give me an example of something that is really working in Tier III? How has it improved the Tier III?

15. How can the district help in implementing Tier III in your school?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add about this program that you think
    is important to share?