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An Examination of Readiness for Response to Intervention Implementation in a Rural School District in North Carolina

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AN EXAMINATION OF READINESS FOR RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION IN A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT IN NORTH CAROLINA

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Abstract

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In 2015, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Exceptional Children Division proposed policy changes, effective July 1, 2020, on how students with specific learning disabilities are defined, evaluated, and identified. A student in North Carolina is now identified for special education through the use of how they respond to high-quality core instruction and research-based instruction. This study examined this process in a rural school district in North Carolina to determine how schools can support educators who do not have the appropriate background knowledge and skills to sustain MTSS, how educator perceptions influence the sustainability of MTSS, and what can be done to change the perceptions of teachers for MTSS to be successful. The findings of this study were that more training is needed district-wide in the key components of MTSS. The assessments showed inconsistencies among the perceptions and beliefs that participants had about MTSS. Recommendations included consistent and supportive professional development provided by the state for each staff member to see an increase in academic achievement among all students.

Keywords: multi-tiered system of supports, response to intervention, exceptional children, special education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2004, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) supported the use of Response to Intervention (RTI) for students who are demonstrating academic difficulties (Shores & Chester, 2009). IDEA (2004) stated, "A state must adopt a consistent criteria for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability" (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). States did not need to determine special education eligibility by identifying a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement, but instead they could create an alternative research-based model to determine eligibility. Since that time, many school districts in the United States have begun utilizing RTI in some way (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Fuchs & Bergeron, 2013). By 2010, 17 states required a structured RTI protocol (Hauerwas et al., 2013). Implementation of RTI as an alternative method of determining special education placement or as education reform in North Carolina was done with some reluctance by some school districts (Fixsen et al., 2013). The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI, 2015) redefined RTI as "Responsiveness to Instruction" based on the statewide initiative of focusing on strong core curriculum and support of all students.

The goal in RTI implementation was to reduce the amount of special education referrals by providing quality research-based interventions (Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports at the American Institutes for Research, n.d.). Students labeled as learning disabled constitute half of the students receiving special education referrals, and many of those students have been misdiagnosed due to outdated procedures of identification (Rosenblum et al., 2010). School districts are using RTI as a whole school

process that provides proactive assistance to students experiencing academic problems (Cummings et al., 2008). When an entire school implements RTI, it "requires a different sort of climate in the school and a change in how educators teach, learn, and interact with others" (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012, p. 492).

Prior to the adoption of IDEA (2004), many had the opinion that the IQ discrepancy process used to identify students with learning difficulties was a "wait-to-fail" method of determination (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2010; White et al., 2012). The discrepancy model could not be used until a child was able to read (Hall, 2008). Teachers would try to provide interventions to students in first through third grade without formal guidance on what would benefit them for their specific learning needs, but the learning gap would continue to increase until the student would be identified for special education services in third grade (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010). Since appropriate data-driven research-based interventions were not being provided, students were not being identified early enough, which is a reason why the discrepancy model was often referred to as the wait-to-fail model.

Explanation of RTI

RTI is a multi-tiered problem-solving way to deliver instruction that includes research-based interventions to guide student learning using universal screening, frequent progress monitoring, and early and appropriate interventions (Hoover & Love, 2011; Tilly, 2008; Yell, 2012). Interventions typically increase in intensity depending on the student's need throughout three or four tiers (Hoover & Love, 2011; NCDPI, 2011). Students receiving interventions at the highest tier may become eligible for special education services (Buffum et al., 2010; Byrd, 2011; VanDerHeyden, 2011). Students

receive instruction based on instructional needs and continuously monitored rates of academic improvement instead of special education classification or results of psychological assessments.

The RTI model most often consists of three tiers (Buffum et al., 2010; Byrd, 2011; VanDerHeyden, 2011). Tier 1 interventions are usually part of the core curriculum, provided by the classroom teacher to all students. Tier 2 interventions are more intense and are used with a smaller group of students. These interventions are provided by classroom teachers or instructional specialists. Tier 3 interventions are considered the highest level in the continuum of support throughout the school. These interventions are more individualized (Greenfield et al., 2010). Tier 3 interventions are intensive and based on student needs (Swanson et al., 2012). Students in Tier 3 could possibly meet the necessary requirements for special education entitlements. Research has been conducted on how effective Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions can be in reading and math, where RTI is mostly used (Gersten et al., 2009; Intervention Central, 2010). Many of the studies found that Tier 2 interventions that are provided with fidelity for 3 to 9 weeks have been useful for improving performance of at-risk students (Gersten et al., 2009; Intervention Central, 2010).

RTI policies and procedures vary in each state, but consistency is evident in five key components. The first component is the use of problem-solving strategies as a way to assist students with academic difficulties. The second is the use of data to drive decisions about interventions to use or intervention intensity. Third is the utilization of research-based strategies and flexible student grouping. Universal screening is the fourth component. This component is necessary to monitor student learning and to identify at-

risk students (Swanson et al., 2012). The fifth component is curriculum-based assessments that are essential to ongoing progress monitoring of effectiveness and fidelity of instruction and interventions (Hall, 2008; Hoover & Love, 2011; Tilly, 2008; Ysseldyke et al., 2010). Progress monitoring is a way teachers can monitor student learning constantly (Sanger et al., 2012; Werts & Carpenter, 2013).

In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) began a transformation in federal education, administered by states, to increase achievement across all subject areas. NCLB was designed to reduce gaps in performance throughout all races and socioeconomic statuses of students (Dee & Jacob, 2011). More accountability among teachers and administrators was monitored through state and federal systems in the form of student assessments. NCLB created guidelines and contributed to a shift in thinking among educators. A directive that came from NCLB was that all students would be proficient on state assessments by 2014 and made it mandatory for school districts to implement research-based intervention plans. While state-mandated accountability systems could aid in measuring the progress of students, schools, and entire districts, they may also result in educators only focusing on tested subjects and ignoring other subjects (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Teachers may teach to the test and not focus on overall academic improvement. This practice contributes to widening achievement gaps among students, and those gaps cannot decrease when teachers teach to the test (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

Billions of dollars have been expended to increase student achievement in reading, but there has not been evidence of an overall increase in reading assessment scores (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011), the average reading score of students in the fourth

grade did not change from 2009 to 2011. Students in eighth grade saw a 1 point increase from the 2009 scores to the 2011 scores.

Jehlen (2011) asserted that high stakes testing is not what is needed to close the achievement gap. High stakes testing has made teachers feel that they had to do anything to ensure student proficiency on state assessments, so they are teaching students what is needed to pass the test and not what students need to know to read for success (Jehlen, 2011).

Teaching students ways to better their reading skills is a necessity (Peterson & Taylor, 2012). “Students beyond the primary grades, effectively analyzing and comprehending text is a complex process that is central to academic success” (Lesaux & Kieffler, 2010, p. 598). Students struggling in reading is a major issue throughout the United States (Bauerlein, 2011). Sometimes students leave elementary school without the necessary readiness to become good readers due to ineffective reading instruction, low English skills, or learning disabilities (Fuchs, L. et al., 2010). Academic deficits experienced by students can intensify and grow in number as students progress through school. A study conducted by Vaughn et al. (2010) showed that students who participate in small-group tutoring in elementary school may have more serious deficits in middle and high school, making many students resistant to remediation at the secondary level. Students at the secondary level experiencing reading difficulties present a variety of weaknesses, making it difficult to address academic needs.

Substandard reading skills may cause students to be denied advancing to the next grade level. Reschly (2010) described grade retention as “the practice of holding students back to repeat a grade for which they have not met academic or social expectations” (p.

69). Schools and districts are required to use results from state assessments to decide on promotion or retention of students (NCLB, 2002). Rubin (2011) reported that these mandates from NCLB were the reason retention rates were increasing. Students demonstrating reading difficulties are more susceptible to grade retention (Griffith et al., 2010). NCES (2009) reported that 10% of students are retained at least once between kindergarten and eighth grade. According to an analysis conducted by Warren and Saliba (2012), roughly 447,000 students in first through eighth grade were retained in 2008-2009 in the United States. Three in 10 of the students were retained in first grade. Ou and Reynolds (2010) studied the long-term effects of low-income, minority students retained in lower grades in Chicago on postsecondary attendance and welfare receipt. Ou and Reynolds's findings showed that early grade retention had no effects on welfare benefits by the age of 24, but grade retention in early grades did decrease the chances of high school completion and enrollment in a postsecondary school. Jacob and Lefgren (2009) also conducted an analysis of the Chicago accountability policy that based grade promotion on standardized test results, finding that retention of eighth-grade students significantly increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school. Their data showed that students retained earlier than eighth grade have the opportunity to catch up with their peers. According to an analysis by Andrew (2014) of causal effects of grade retention at the elementary level on secondary performance and how students may recover from the effects of grade retention, primary grade retention reduces the chances of high school completion by 60% when comparing retained and non-retained students. Students have a better chance of completing high school if they can recover from the negative effects of retention by middle school.

RTI is a plan to increase positive behavior and academic success by utilizing interventions tailored to individual student needs (Sansosti et al., 2010). It is imperative to evaluate teacher implementation of RTI to improve reading skills of their students who are on different academic levels (Orosco & Klinger, 2010). The intent of RTI implementation is to reduce the number of students experiencing reading difficulties and the number of students receiving special education referrals (Johnson & Smith, 2011). Another goal of RTI identified by Fuchs and Fuchs (2009) is to identify students having difficulties and not responding to interventions and to determine what services they need.

A critical focus of RTI implementation is the integrity and fidelity that lead to effectiveness (Eichhorn, 2009). Eichhorn (2009) suggested that it is necessary to use further testing to ascertain the cause of deficiencies students are experiencing academically. Progress monitoring is a vital part of the model (Eichhorn, 2009).

> Progress monitoring is used to assess students' academic performance, to quantify a student rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction, and to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class. In progress monitoring, attention should focus on fidelity of implementation and selection of evidence-based tools, with consideration for cultural and linguistic responsiveness and recognition of student strengths. (Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports at the American Institutes for Research, n.d.)

Progress monitoring allows educators to determine if students are learning at a satisfactory progression (Mellard et al., 2009). If teachers wait until summative assessments, there may be missed opportunities for remediation and reteaching. Common

formative assessments can be used to be aware of student progress (Pyle, 2011). Progress monitoring is used to identify appropriate RTI interventions for students. Progress monitoring leads to data-based decision-making. An outcome expected from progress monitoring is the prevention of academic and behavioral problems related to the curriculum (Mellard et al., 2009). Problems arise during implementation when there are inconsistencies in progress monitoring processes (Mellard et al., 2009). Mellard et al. (2009) conducted a survey about progress monitoring in 42 schools. Participants were principals, teachers, and psychologists. Results showed that too many students may be identified as at risk or with a learning disability because of lack of experience in screening and progress monitoring.

Research has shown that RTI is a process that is being used throughout the United States (Bender, 2009; Spectrum K12, 2011; Swanson et al., 2012) that can be beneficial for all students academically (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010). Despite the fact that RTI began as a special education initiative, it is quickly becoming a part of the general education process as a way to support academic excellence for every child (Artiles et al., 2010; Buffum et al., 2010; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; NCDPI, 2011). According to the Spectrum K12 (2011) study, 94% of the schools in the nation have implemented RTI in some capacity. A growing number of teachers are recognizing that RTI can help all students (Harr-Robins et al., 2009). Spectrum K12 also reported that 81% of the school districts across the nation have their RTI implementation led by general education teachers or a combination of general education and special education teachers. Working as a team allows for educators to see the benefits of RTI for all students (Sanger et al., 2012).

With the implementation of RTI, graduation rates in the United States have increased, with the highest rate being 92.4% for 18- to 24-year-olds in 2014 (McFarland et al., 2018). Even with this increase in graduation rates, a million students between the ages of 15 and 24 dropped out of school without a high school diploma or some sort of high school equivalent such as a General Education Diploma. Supporting the students who are at risk of dropping out of high school is equally as important as increasing the graduation rate.

RTI in North Carolina

According to NCDPI's (2015) Exceptional Children Division, policy changes on how students with specific learning disabilities are defined, evaluated, and identified should be based on how students respond to high-quality core instruction and research-based interventions. This division proposed that the changed policy become effective July 1, 2020. North Carolina has been working towards RTI implementation since 2000, starting with an RTI study group. Five pilot sites were selected in 2004 to implement and evaluate RTI. Statewide training for RTI began in 2006. Schools were working toward moving away from the discrepancy method of identifying students with specific learning disabilities to using RTI. With this policy change on how students are identified, the state is hoping to eliminate the over-identification concerns of students who are considered to be slow learners.

Schools throughout North Carolina have moved toward the use of RTI/MTSS since the statewide training began. Across the state of North Carolina, a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is used to address the needs of the whole child by providing interventions academically through RTI and behaviorally through Positive Behavior

Intervention and Support (PBIS). Even with the shift toward using this process for identifying students with learning disabilities, the percentage of students identified in North Carolina has remained consistent. In 2015-2016, there were 73,689 students identified with specific learning disabilities, which accounts for 41.1% of students receiving special education services. Students receiving services due to other health impairments were at 19.4% of students. The majority of those students classified under other health impairments were identified because of ADHD as a primary factor. These percentages were higher than the national percentages of 38.8% specific learning disabilities and 15.0% other health impairments.

According to the Public Schools of North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction's (2018) Report to the North Carolina General Assembly for 2016-2017, there were 11,097 dropouts recorded in 2016-2017. The dropout rate increased from 2.29% in 2015-2016 to 2.31% in 2016-2017. Students in special education programs faced 24.7% of the short-term suspensions in North Carolina in 2016-2017. Of the long-term suspensions reported, 14.2% were received by special education students in 2016-2017. Eighteen students were expelled that same year, and four of those were students with an Individualized Education Plan. Of the 79,627 days spent in in-school suspension by exceptional children, 34,800 days were by students with specific learning disabilities, and 24,455 days were by students with other health impairments. Alternative learning placements were assigned to 1,270 students with disabilities for disciplinary reasons. Of that number, 482 placements were for students with a specific learning disability, and 353 placements were for students identified as other health impaired. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2017) reported that

73% of students in special education graduated from high school in North Carolina in 2014-2015, 5% received certificates, and 22% dropped out of school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of an RTI program in a rural school district in north-central North Carolina. The study explores the perceptions of RTI and the impacts on sustainability the perceptions may have. The study provides suggestions on how to improve the sustainability of RTI at all levels.

Even with implementation of RTI (MTSS), we still have students who are struggling in school and many identified for special education. This study was designed to examine one school district that is in the implementation process to determine the barriers the district is facing in implementation and to overcome those barriers to ensure student success. This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How can schools support educators who do not have the appropriate background knowledge and skills to sustain MTSS?
2. How do educator perceptions influence the sustainability of MTSS?
3. What can be done to change the perceptions of teachers for MTSS to be successful?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although RTI began in special education, it is quickly becoming a term widely used in general education (Buffum et al., 2010; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; NCDPI, 2011). RTI was developed as a result of the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), and the legality of "appropriate" services (e.g., Free Appropriate Public Education or FAPE) when working with students with disabilities in the general education environment (Yell, 2012). Several court cases have determined the need for schools to evaluate students for special education if they have reason to think a student may have a disability and the student may benefit from special education services (*El Paso Ind. Sch. Dist. v. R.R.*, 2008). RTI was designed for early detection, prevention, and support for students who were experiencing academic difficulties in school, avoiding referrals to special education if they were not warranted and closing achievement gaps (Gersten et al., 2009). RTI can be used in place of the achievement discrepancy model when trying to determine if a student should be able to receive special education services (Zirkel & Krohn, 2008). The IRIS Center, funded by the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs defined the achievement discrepancy model as,

> The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is the traditional method used to determine if a student has a learning disability and needs special education services. The discrepancy model is based on the concept of the normal curve. The discrepancy model assesses whether a substantial difference, or discrepancy, exists between a student's scores on an individualized test of general intelligence (IQ test, such as *WISC-IV*) and his or her scores obtained for one or more areas of academic achievement (e.g., *Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test*). The accepted

> criteria to identify a student as having a learning disability using the IQ-achievement discrepancy is a difference of at least two standard deviations (30 points). (The IRIS Center Peabody College Vanderbilt University, 2020, What is the IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model Section).

Multiple RTI models are being used, but most have common components of multiple tiers of evidence-based instruction, interventions, and data-based decision-making (Burns & Gibbons, 2012; Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Stoiber, 2014). Reports claim that RTI is being used nation-wide (Hauerwas et al., 2013; Spectrum K12, 2011; Zirkel & Thomas, 2010), but many educators are still unsure how to continue RTI implementation with fidelity (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). A study by Greenwood and Min Kim (2012) on using ecobehavioral data for intervention decisions in RTI demonstrated the importance in building educator capacity by increasing skill development. Greenwood and Min Kim conducted the study based on teacher concerns about a student demonstrating behavioral and academic problems and issues with concentration. By viewing RTI through an ecobehavioral perspective, teachers can discover how their students learn best and how to ensure they are providing the students what they need. This approach to RTI measures the classroom arrangement, the teacher, and the student in 15- to 20-second intervals. This system is helpful in allowing educators to monitor trends in students with challenging behaviors and to examine which interventions would be beneficial for social and academic improvements. Greenwood and Min Kim studied a third-grade student two times for 30 minutes each. One observation was in an art classroom, and the other observation was in a regular language arts classroom. They noticed several instances of inappropriate behavior in both settings.

They noted a behavioral pattern of looking around, self-stimulation, and noncompliance throughout the two observations. Greenwood and Min Kim then observed a teacher-nominated peer in the class to form a comparative analysis of the students' behavior. A total of twelve 30-minute observations were conducted to find trends over time. These observations led Greenwood and Min Kim to create a hypothesis of what was causing behavioral problems in the first student. Interventions were created based on when the student demonstrated the highest level of engagement and academic responding. Greenwood and Min Kim chose classroom peer tutoring to reduce the amount of lecture in the classroom and to increase overall academic responding for all the students. The student also received small-group reading instruction, he became part of the Social Skills Club, and he participated in a Check in/Check out program. He was monitored over a period of time, and Greenwood and Min Kim found that his inappropriate behaviors were declining.

The Educator's Role in the RTI Process

The quality of an educator is not based on knowledge alone but also on the skill of teaching (Szabo, 2009). Skills needed for implementation and sustainability of RTI pertain to data-based decision-making (Brown-Chidsey, & Steege, 2010; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012), academic and behavioral evidence-based instruction and intervention throughout all tiers (Freeman et al., 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009), collection of data (Roach et al., 2014), and the use of technology to distribute data (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Much research exists about teacher pedagogical content knowledge, but there are few studies about teacher knowledge of implementing RTI.

Communication and collaboration among education staff is necessary for RTI

implementation to be effective. Howell et al. (2008) noted that NCLB (2002) stressed the importance of collaboration in order to meet student educational needs with prevention and anticipatory intervention. The focus of collective responsibility is a change of how teachers have historically worked in isolation (Buffum et al., 2009). Buffum et al. (2009) stated, "RTI can help harness, systematically and coherently, the resources and expertise of specialists in general education, Title I education, English-language learner education, and special education" (p. 23). Increased collaboration and data-based decision-making among general education teachers, special education teachers, and families may increase the academic achievement of students at risk (Harn et al., 2011). RTI implementation can only be sustained school-wide if the stakeholders believe in the initiative and are involved in the process (Greenfield et al., 2010).

A teacher's role in the RTI process is critical for success. According to Bandura (1993), self-efficacy is believing that one can influence change with his or her own achievement. Educators with low efficacy and experiencing difficulty with managing a classroom may experience anxiety because they feel they cannot influence the atmosphere in the classroom (Chang, 2009). This could result in teachers giving up on classroom management (Ross et al., 2011). A study conducted by Ross et al. (2011) included a sample of 40 elementary schools in the implementation phase of RTI. Teachers at schools implementing with high fidelity had high levels of efficacy and diminished feelings of burnout when compared to teachers at schools implementing with low fidelity.

RTI implementation calls for school leaders to comprehend the fundamentals of RTI and to be able to manage the changes in instruction and culture to build and sustain

the RTI process (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). Professional development provided for educators should be pertinent to the process by providing the background information needed and ideas for improvement that will lead to success. Professional development for schools implementing RTI should be ongoing and relevant to sustain the initiative for all stakeholders (Sullivan & Long, 2010). Stakeholders involved are teachers, administrators, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, and district leadership teams.

Sullivan and Long (2010) conducted a study using a nationwide sample of 557 school psychologists inquiring about their training, involvement, and general thoughts about RTI. Results showed that they participated in multiple trainings that were provided in a variety of ways. The majority of participants (92.3%) responded that they received some sort of training, formal or informal, about RTI. Workshops or conferences accounted for training for 76.7% of the participants; 51.7% reported they received training via site-based in-services, 30.6% took graduate courses; and 20.9% received training through supervised fieldwork experiences. Of the school psychologists in this study who had less than 5 years of experience, 58.7% reported they received training through graduate-level courses, and 37.58% stated they had completed fieldwork experiences involving RTI. Of the school psychologists who had been in the profession for greater than 5 years, 12% reported that they received formal training in graduate coursework. The results of this study show that staff with less experience may be more prepared for RTI than their more experienced peers as a result of the amount of training received.

Some studies suggest that general education teachers appear to have very little knowledge of RTI at the beginning of their careers (Hougen, 2014; McCombes-Tolis &

Spear-Swerling, 2011; Schwarts et al., 2009). This indicates that university programs training future educators should teach students the proper knowledge and skills about RTI as part of their programs. Results of a study by McCombes-Tolis and Spear-Swerling (2011) showed that preservice teachers had little to no training in RTI. The reasoning behind their study was to investigate how well universities in Connecticut prepared elementary teachers to provide literacy instruction in an RTI framework. The core of their study was about preservice educator experiences with developing assessments and lesson plans focusing on the five essential elements of reading and their exposure to key RTI concepts. In order to conduct the research, they collected 29 syllabi from nine degree-granting institutions. Three of the institutions were public, and six were private. After examining the course syllabi, McCombes-Tolis and Spear-Swerling determined that students were not receiving the necessary information to help understand the components of RTI, such as terms, concepts, and applications. They did find evidence that adequate knowledge in the content area was provided by the assessment results and course completion requirements of the students. Two thirds (82.8%) of the syllabi had no mention of formative assessment, and none of them mentioned anything about RTI. One syllabus did include the idea of progress monitoring (3.4%).

According to surveys of teachers by the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Statewide Implementation Project (2010) by Prasse et al. (2012), there is an indication that aspiring teacher programs need to put more effort into preparing future teachers about RTI. When asked about the use of data for educational decision-making, 25% of new teachers indicated the need for considerable support, and two thirds of the participants reported needing some support. One third of the beginning teachers reported

needing substantial support using data for discipline decisions. Fifty-eight percent of new teachers and 36% of teachers in years 1-4 reported that support was needed for determining the current academic level of students. Forty percent of beginning teachers reported needing assistance in determining what step of RTI is appropriate for the target student. There is confusion about adjusting core instruction or using supplemental instruction. Approximately 60% to 75% of beginning teachers reported needing assistance with finding appropriate academic and behavioral interventions for students at each tier.

A survey developed by Schwarts et al. (2009) was used to study teacher educator knowledge of RTI, where they received their knowledge, and how they planned to train future educators. The survey was administered to 84 faculty members from various institutions throughout New York State. The participants who responded varied from general to special education, including all levels: early childhood, childhood, and adolescence. The survey results showed that special educators were more adept in RTI than general educators. Respondents who specialized in both general and special education had even more background knowledge of RTI. Those who only specialized in general education had the lowest percentage of proficiency about RTI. Seventy-two percent of the participants said that they were “very familiar” or “familiar” with RTI. Twenty-eight percent reported that they were “somewhat familiar” or “not familiar at all,” even though this survey was completed 5 years after IDEA (2004) and the introduction of RTI.

If educators enter the workforce with limited knowledge of RTI, it becomes the responsibility of district administrators and principals to provide the information through

extensive professional development prior to their use of RTI (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011). RTI alters the roles and responsibilities of educational staff and the way their professional development and collaboration is occurring. Teacher preparation programs need to train their faculty about RTI so they can transfer that knowledge in their preservice programs to address the demands of classrooms today (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011).

One of the goals of RTI is that students receive appropriate instruction in the general education classroom (Sullivan & Long, 2010). If the instruction and curriculum is not effective in the general education classroom, the basic framework of RTI is at risk. Educational disadvantage cannot be considered a factor if students do not experience adequate instruction (Sullivan & Long, 2010). A study conducted by Vaughn et al. (2010) began with providing professional development to core academic teachers on how to integrate vocabulary and reading instruction in Tier I throughout the school day. They randomly assigned at-risk students who were identified through the previous year's testing to groups. One group experienced traditional school services, and the other groups participated in Tier 2 interventions focused on decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension for 32-36 weeks. The Tier 2 interventions were delivered in groups of 10-15 students. One group received instruction for 100 hours per student, and the other group received instruction for 111 hours per student. The findings of their study showed that the Tier 2 intervention did not increase the chances of the students passing the state assessment.

Stuart et al. (2011) studied educator perspectives about the RTI model. The study took place over a 3-year time span while the investigators conducted interviews of

educators at an urban elementary school about their views of RTI, while following the implementation and effectiveness of RTI. The study indicated teacher viewpoints of RTI became positive over time. The study followed elementary educators from the planning phase of RTI through the implementation of RTI. During this time, participants were provided with professional development. Stuart et al. noted transformations to the core curriculum. One participant reported that with the invention of a core curriculum and the implementation of progress monitoring, they were able to realize changes in grades and provide interventions as soon as they were needed. There was a shift in focus to student needs rather than a focus on one curriculum that was used with every student. They began to focus on differentiation and delivery that could change depending on the students (Stuart et al., 2011).

Critical elements needed for implementation and sustainability of RTI include effective leadership, collaboration, professional development, and fidelity. Leadership can provide support by establishing a vision and culture that supports data-based decision-making (Shepherd & Salembier, 2010). Some studies are starting to focus on the purpose of school leadership in regard to RTI implementation (Bernhardt & Herbert, 2011; Buffum et al., 2010; Hoover et al., 2008; Wright, 2010), but VanDerHeyden and Burns (2010) reported that "leadership models within RTI are not well articulated" (p. 103). According to VanDerHeyden and Burns, drafts for RTI implementation have been promoted by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education at the school level (Kurns & Tilly, 2008) and at the district level (Elliott & Morrison, 2008), but they do not fully address leadership issues. Fewer studies have specifically researched the role the principal plays in RTI implementation and sustainability in North Carolina.

School reform advocates from all over the United States are wanting change and accountability to encompass the following: early screening and continuous monitoring of all students (Whitelock, 2010), high stakes testing (Ravitch, 2010; Steele et al., 2010), educator accountability (Lumby & English, 2010), and data-driven decisions (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Lumby & English, 2010; Steele et al., 2010). Harlacher and Siler (2011) searched literature related to RTI and found that generating ownership and buy-in among school staff is a critical process for implementing and sustaining an RTI initiative. They analyzed factors and experiences from actual RTI implementations and categorized them according to importance. Staff buy-in was a common factor in 50% of the references used. RTI ensures equitable access to various tiers of support for students without consideration of special education labels (Artiles et al., 2010). The focus of RTI is on measurable goals, data, ongoing progress monitoring, and intervention fidelity (Bernhardt & Hebert, 2011; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Hall, 2008; Hoover & Love, 2011; Tilly, 2008; Ysseldyke et al., 2010). RTI is causing financial decisions to be centered on how resources are used for students and what the outcomes will be (Pascopella, 2010). According to Pascopella (2010), RTI has been implemented in more places due to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Race to the Top program. Pascopella based her findings on successful RTI implementation in various school districts such as Lamar County, Mississippi; Tigard, Oregon; Manteno County, Illinois; and Conroe, Texas. The school districts in these locations focused their spending on screening and monitoring, behavioral interventions, and technology tools for data analysis throughout their implementation. Districts have 15% of funds allocated legally for special education to develop or maintain intervention or prevention plans for students

at risk academically (Pascopella, 2010; Samuels, 2008). Within RTI, the funding can benefit a greater number of students. Although there is more funding needed for RTI implementation, principals may feel secure in using those funds because of the data supporting its effectiveness in improving student performance (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012).

Potential Barriers to the Success of RTI

When teachers feel there is a lack of support, barriers may develop in their efforts of implementation. Using all available staff (Lembke et al., 2010), including enhancement teachers, therapists, social workers, and so on (Averill et al., 2014), to offer support to teachers may help in diminishing resistance. While many schools have implemented RTI, there is little guidance on how teachers are expected to give effective assessments and research-based interventions and how to best manage their time (Averill et al., 2014; Whitelock, 2010). Additional available technology teachers can use for meaningful student engagement (Whitelock, 2010) and for analyzing data efficiently may help teachers feel supported.

Principals need to be aware of the barriers that are influencing the teachers and whether the barriers are hindering implementation of RTI. A study completed by Barrio and Combes (2014) revealed that those entering the general education setting may not fully understand how to implement RTI effectively. Their mixed-method research design was used to gauge how preservice teachers felt about RTI. The preservice teachers varied in levels of candidacy and areas of expertise. Barrio and Combes sought to discover the greatest concerns about RTI the preservice teachers felt. A web-based questionnaire and two focus group interviews were used. The preservice teachers were students at a

university located in the Southwest United States that was accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. A total of 302 preservice teachers who were in the last 2 semesters of their educator preparation program were participants in the study. The results of the study indicated that preservice general education teachers demonstrated a lack of interest and engagement in RTI. While they understand that familiarity with RTI is important in their careers, they may have feelings of concern if they have a lack of knowledge of how to implement it. Other concerns the preservice teachers had were based on their experiences in school. The participants in the study reported they had knowledge of the purpose of RTI, the role teachers play in implementation, and the support needed from administrators. They did, however, express concerns on how to use RTI in the actual classroom setting. They viewed RTI as being reactionary rather that precautionary, and they were concerned about how to provide what each student in a classroom needs. Accounting for teacher perceptions of RTI throughout the process may help with resistance (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). Principals can rely on teachers to assist in setting goals (Stuart et al., 2011) in order to develop a shared vision. A study of a 2-year process of implementing RTI in an urban elementary school by Stuart et al. (2011) revealed a change in mindset of teachers between Year 1 and Year 2. The first year, staff felt that RTI was an administrative directive. At the end of that year, the teachers were progress-monitoring, and they were beginning to develop clearer goals and began effective collaboration. Teachers began holding higher expectations for students, which led to greater student achievement. Fostering this collaboration, teachers may develop the sense of being educational leaders and agents of change (Stuart et al., 2011). When teachers feel they are part of the process

instead of feeling victim of the top-down approach, they are more likely to remain positive and driven to implement RTI successfully. A few studies have shown that educators with less experience are less likely to be positive about RTI (Carlson et al., 2010). Educator perceptions of RTI may vary based on age or experience, whether or not they teach regular or special education, or grade-level teaching assignment.

Castro- Villarreal et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative analysis of teacher perceptions and attitudes regarding RTI. The study was conducted in a large city in the Southwest United States with 100 educators. Castro-Villarreal et al. examined teacher knowledge of RTI, teacher perceptions of barriers and facilitators to RTI, and what teachers felt would improve RTI in their schools. Many of the respondents had some idea of what RTI is, while a few felt that RTI was just paperwork to complete for special education services. Participants named 185 barriers that compiled five themes: training, time, resources, process, and paperwork. Forty percent of the participants noted that more adequate professional development was needed for data collection, interventions, and progress monitoring. Thirty-eight percent did not understand what should happen at each tier and when students should transition from one tier to another. Several of the participants spoke about not having adequate time to plan and analyze data. They reported losing valuable instructional time when providing interventions and recording data. Some of the group mentioned a lack of support and access to intervention materials. Several participants felt the process was a barrier to learning by delaying the services students needed. Many felt the amount of paperwork and documentation was unmanageable.

Several researchers have stated that examining the barriers to RTI can help

districts move toward implementation and sustainability (Friedman, 2010; Greenfield et al., 2010; Hoover et al., 2008; LaRocco & Murdica, 2009; Nunn et al., 2009). An analysis was conducted by Greenfield et al. (2010) of eight elementary educators about their perceptions of RTI after the first year of implementation using the *RTI: Implementation and Change Interview*. The teachers who participated in the study averaged 5.9 years of teaching experience and 4.2 years of employment at the school where the analysis occurred. Several barriers surfaced such as not knowing how to proceed if interventions were not working, needing more time to analyze data, and having a full understanding of the differences between Tier 2 and Tier 3. Acknowledgement and identification of barriers allow leaders to determine where efforts and resources are needed. Principals should also take notice of the differences in perceived barriers so they can plan how to meet teachers' individual needs. If the barriers are not examined, it is possible that principals will not be able to overcome them. School leaders must remain open to perceived barriers or they may become overwhelmed. It can be beneficial to organize teacher perceived barriers into three categories: (a) vision (Martinez & Young, 2011), (b) professional development (Burns & Gibbons, 2012; Friedman, 2010), and (c) resources (Friedman, 2010).

Researchers have found that a major vision barrier is the perception that RTI is a pre-referral step for special education eligibility (Carlson et al., 2010). Some teachers feel that students who will eventually qualify for special education services will not be successful with interventions, and the process to them receiving special education resources is delayed. To some, the perception is that RTI is a refusal of special education services (Carlson et al., 2010). Another vision barrier is the resentment in altering roles

and responsibilities in the overwhelming assessment and data gathering process (Martinez & Young, 2011). Some educators feel they understand student needs without the RTI process of assessments, progress monitoring, and data collection. Without a clear vision of how RTI can help the academic outcomes of all students, teachers may feel a lack of energy or willingness to immerse themselves in the process.

These vision barriers are correlated to the barriers of inadequacy of professional development and resources. If teachers participate in appropriate professional development and receive adequate resources, their overall vision of RTI may improve. Teacher buy-in is critical for successful RTI implementation and sustainability (Lembke et al., 2010). Lembke et al. (2010) came to this conclusion after a study of a diverse elementary school in the Midwest. The school had used a 3-tiered system for behavior and expanded the process to academics. The principal and the staff collaborated on decisions during implementation. There were some non-negotiables in place, such as the need for a research-based core reading program; but staff had input on the reading program and interventions used. Administrators conducted fidelity implementation checks on a regular basis to ensure the curriculum was being used as designed. After 3 years into the implementation process, the percentage of students in Tier 1 went from 30% to 44%; Tier 2 was about the same; and Tier 3 went from 44% to 41%. Teachers may feel the barrier of not having enough professional development and not feeling they have enough knowledge about RTI (Carlson et al., 2010). Professional development barriers may come from differing levels of skill among teachers and administrators, limited opportunities, and inaccurate information about RTI. Some teachers may lack the ability to progress monitor, provide appropriate interventions, and make data-based

decisions due to feeling inadequately trained to do them with fidelity.

Professional development should be continuous and intensive (Wei et al., 2010) to help teachers gain confidence and proficiency in the RTI processes. The success and sustainability of the RTI process is only as strong as the level of fidelity of implementation. There is little research available about professional development and teacher preparation for RTI implementation (Mitchell, 2009).

There is research that shows that teachers need additional training in some areas of RTI. Teachers do not have enough knowledge about what scientifically research-based interventions to use (Burns & Gibbons, 2012) and how to offer interventions with fidelity (Friedman, 2010). A lack of available resources is also a barrier (Carlson et al., 2010). There are costs that come with providing appropriate personnel, professional development, and research-based programs to support RTI implementation (Friedman, 2010). When student needs increase, the amount of resources needed also increases (McIntosh et al., 2010). This can lead to frustration if teachers feel the cost factor is a barrier. It is up to school leaders to achieve the highest student gains with limited resources. In order to pay for more instruction time, cutting supplies may be necessary (Miller & Lee, 2014). Resources may be shifted to ensure that all students receive the instruction needed instead of being allocated for determining special education eligibility (Hale, 2008). Teachers may demonstrate signs of resistance when allocation of resources begin to change. Building-level administrators may rely on the assistance from the district level for resources for RTI implementation (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012).

An effective system for RTI implementation and sustainability should be comprised of the following elements:

- adjustments of schedules (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Whitelock, 2010);
- scheduled, uninterrupted intervention time (Brady et al., 2009; Whitelock, 2010);
- collaborative teams that work to make data-driven decisions (Averill et al., 2014; Whitelock, 2010);
- professional development specifically focused on improving the quality of interventions (Averill et al., 2014);
- groups selected for effective interventions (Brady et al., 2009);
- a collaborative team from various backgrounds that works to provide an RTI support system (Averill et al., 2014; Little, 2012);
- a culture of data-based decision-making for continuous improvement (Brady et al., 2009); and
- making the best use of physical space (Averill et al., 2014).

A structured RTI implementation may help improve teacher feelings of negativity and sense of barriers to success.

One essential barrier to consider is time (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012) because of the effort teachers have to put in to alter their schedules to focus on RTI. Leaders are expected to provide blocks of uninterrupted time (Brady et al., 2009), but there is no research as to how teachers can best use this time (Averill et al., 2014). Teachers may feel discouraged with the extra time if they have not received the proper training on how to best use the time (McIntosh et al., 2010). Teachers also feel frustrated by the amount of time it takes to document properly (Jenkins & Sekayi, 2014).

Researchers have found that RTI is mostly scrutinized in the implementation

phase rather than the problem-solving process. A study of educators in a southeastern state using a self-report survey to examine skills elementary educators felt they had to implement RTI called the *Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey* found that faults in the RTI process are found in lack of fidelity and inconsistent implementation (Castillo & Batsche, 2012). The survey was conducted twice, once in the spring of 2008 with 2,397 educators and again in the spring of 2010 with 1,961 participants. The costs incurred with personnel and time needed to provide interventions effectively could be problematic for some schools (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012; Ysseldyke et al., 2010). Some researchers question the inefficient ways resources and assessments are managed and sustained (Friedman, 2010; Little, 2012). They found there might be confusion about the roles and responsibilities people have in an RTI framework (Hazelkorn et al., 2011; Hoover et al., 2008). A search of professional literature to determine how aware general educators were about the RTI process and its implications revealed that the majority of research published in journals related to special educators rather than general educators. This could be because RTI was created by special educators for use in general education. There were 128 articles used in the study from five electronic databases: EBSCOhost, ERIC, Exceptional Child Education Resources, Searchasauras, and Psychological Abstracts. Fifty-eight percent of the articles referred to RTI as an instructional strategy. The majority of the articles focused more on special educators rather than general educators. Some critics claim that RTI is a recycled version of clinical-based problem-solving (Feifer, 2008). Reynolds and Shaywitz (2009) asserted that RTI has moved us from a wait-to-fail model to a “watch-them-fail” process.

A case study of RTI implementation in a large elementary school in North

Carolina was conducted by White et al. (2012). A combination of 15 team leaders from the school and district were interviewed, and their answers were examined in a descriptive way. White et al. reported that several feelings surfaced, including frustration felt about the discrepancy model for special education eligibility, wavering roles of educators, and performance of students. They also found that principals play a strong role in RTI implementation. Principal commitment to RTI was needed to hold high expectations of staff to make RTI a priority to help student achievement. Principals in favor of RTI could also persuade their peers to implement RTI in other schools. Principals can also create the needed buy-in of teachers by providing the necessary resources. They can also bridge the gap between general education and special education at the district level.

White et al. (2012) found that even though strong leadership is necessary for successful RTI implementation, there are significant obstacles principals in North Carolina may encounter. One obstacle was the mental fatigue felt from the amount of training needed for RTI implementation in addition to training required for other initiatives. Another barrier is the feeling of being overwhelmed by the amount of data collection and data entry. In addition, a lack of clear expectations of RTI from the district may cause some confusion. White et al. reported that there is a lack of data from the state reporting the impact of RTI on end-of-grade student testing. Even with all these obstacles, White et al. found that the feeling of new hope in the benefits of RTI could help with maintaining staff spirit and support during the implementation phase.

In order to implement and sustain any new initiative, it is imperative to study the knowledge, abilities, and perceptions of staff. Continuing to seek out perceptions of RTI

of all staff is necessary for sustaining and improving RTI (Bineham et al., 2014). Understanding the perceptions of staff is necessary for implementation (Fixsen et al., 2013; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012). Werts et al. (2014) studied how barriers and advantages of RTI were influenced by the perceptions of special education teachers. The teachers felt that more time was needed due to the workload, time spent implementing interventions, and progress monitoring. They also felt that training was not adequate, especially for their regular education counterparts. They believed that the attitudes of teachers, resistance to change, and few resources prevent RTI from being successful. The benefit reported in this study was the improvement seen in students when assessments and data were used to provide early interventions to struggling students.

King and Lemons (2014) reported differences between perceptions of elementary and secondary educators based on their exploratory study. The survey assessed familiarity with RTI among special and general educators. An email was sent to 609 randomly chosen educators in Pennsylvania. A total of 554 responses were received. Differences in the use of RTI among grade levels were reported. More elementary educators (76.2%) reported the use of RTI than the secondary educators (44.7%). Elementary educators reported having more professional development (54%) than secondary educators (31%). This lack of professional development may hinder staff buy-in that is critical for the success and sustainability of RTI. Participants noted that reading remediation was used more at the elementary level than the secondary level. Secondary educators felt that RTI was used for behavior and content area remediation. Progress monitoring is more evident at the elementary level. Many of the secondary educators reported a lack of proficiency in progress monitoring.

Sansosti et al. (2011) conducted a focus group study to investigate special education director feelings about barriers and practices related to RTI in secondary schools. Seventeen special education directors from a Midwestern state participated in one of the two focus group sessions. The participants varied in experience and backgrounds. The results from the questioning were categorized into four themes: systems structures, roles and attitudes, evidence-based practices, and training and professional development. According to the responses, system structures were seen as a barrier to RTI due to inflexible student schedules that make finding time for interventions difficult in the secondary schedule. Some of the participants felt that providing interventions may sacrifice student access to other subjects such as the humanities or the arts. The directors reported that teachers at the secondary level do not have time to effectively participate in RTI activities such as planning, collaboration for problem-solving, and data collection. The participants noted that roles and attitudes need to change in order to sustain RTI. Their roles as special educators need to evolve to include more collaboration with district-level administrators. Principals need to have appropriate knowledge of grade-level content and expectations. Secondary teachers need to focus on all areas of student success, not just their own limited block of instruction. Parent perceptions must shift away from RTI being the pathway to obtaining an Individualized Education Plan. A lack of evidence-based practices at the secondary level was also noted as a barrier. The participants of the focus groups noted that quality professional development is needed to have success with RTI, especially at the secondary level.

When a school begins the RTI process, all staff are responsible for the implementation and success of the initiative. In order to be successful, it is important to

fully understand the barriers and determine what can be done to overcome them. The majority of the criticisms reported are due to the process, not the problem-solving. Hall and Hord (2011) stated that it is important to "develop and understanding and appreciation of the personal side of change" (p. 18).

Staff perceptions of new initiatives can affect the sustainability of the initiative. Educators who are experiencing barriers may hinder the success of RTI. Teachers will only be successful with RTI if they feel the benefits are positive for both students and staff. It is important to examine these barriers to improve the perceptions teachers have of their influence on student learning and behavior in regard to RTI. According to a study by Nunn et al. (2009) of 429 support staff, teachers, and administrators in a variety of school districts in a western mountain state, when perceptions of the RTI process is improved, teacher efficacy increased. The goal of this study is to identify the perceptions of RTI in a school district in order to overcome the perceived barriers of implementation to increase teacher efficacy in the RTI process.

Assessing staff perceptions throughout the implementation process will allow leaders to address barriers, perceptions, and additional information needed for full implementation and sustainability. The data gathered throughout the process can guide schools toward professional development and instructional coaching necessary for success. This study looked at one district's level of implementation and determined what was needed to address perceptions and staff knowledge in order to achieve full implementation of MTSS by July 1, 2020 and to sustain the framework.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Problem Statement

On February 4, 2016, the North Carolina State Board of Education approved an addendum to the *Policies Governing Students with Disabilities* that was implemented on July 1, 2020. The addendum changes the way students can be identified with a specific learning disability. Student identification will come from data gathered from multiple assessments that show low achievement and their response to core instruction and research-based interventions, rather that the discrepancy model that has been traditionally used. A memo sent from the director of the North Carolina Exceptional Children Division, William J. Hussey, on August 30, 2016, suggested that LEAs complete the self-assessment of MTSS (SAM) to guide their steps toward implementation. The purpose of this study was to identify the current level of implementation, to identify staff perceptions and barriers to implementation and sustainability, and to determine supports needed for full implementation by July 1, 2020.

Background Information

The school district in this study began the journey to MTSS implementation in the spring of 2006. The district serves 3,100 students in Grades Pre-K through 12. The district has six schools: four elementary, one middle, and one high. The NCPDI Exceptional Children Division reports that 16.88% of students in the district are labeled as exceptional children.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics District Demographic Dashboard for 2012-2016, the school district is part of a rural community with a total population of 23,094. The community demographics are 61% Caucasian, 33% African

American, 4% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 2% Two or More Races. The majority of the households with children in public school speak English only (93.1%). The median income of households with school-aged children is $44,598 per year, with 27.6% of families earning wages below the poverty level. Eighty-four percent of parents are employed. Parent levels of education range from 16.4% not obtaining a high school diploma, 33.9% graduating from high school, 35.7% attending some college, and 13.8% earning a bachelor's degree or higher.

According to the Superintendent's Academic Report to the Board of Education from 2016-2017, none of the schools in the district met growth status as measured by the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). EVAAS reports growth over time by students, comparing student performance to their own prior performance. All the schools in the district had school performance grades of C or D. The high school had a school performance grade of 55, which is a C. The middle school had a school performance grade of 43, which is a D. Three of the elementary schools had school performance grades of C, ranging from 55 to 58. The other elementary had a D performance grade of 43.

Data from the NCDPI Accountability and Services Division show that for the 2017-2018 school year, two of the schools (high school and one elementary school) maintained a school performance grade of C, while the other four schools had a school performance grade of D, even though two of the six schools met growth. The decrease in school performance grades put the district on the North Carolina low-performing district list. In order to be considered a low-performing district, the majority of the schools in the district receive school performance grades of D or F and a growth score of met or not met

as defined by G.S. 115C-83.15.

According to the Exceptional Children director, the district has been working toward implementation of MTSS/RTI since 2006. The following description includes a timeline on steps taken, provided by the director.

The Exceptional Children director reports that in the spring of 2006, the elementary/Title I director and the Exceptional Children director attended a presentation by NCDPI on the RTI model for intervention and Exceptional Children referrals. The presenter shared that the process would reduce Exceptional Children referrals. In the summer of 2008, one of the elementary schools sent a team to an 8-day training on the 4-tier model for RTI. Members of the team were the assistance team chairperson, lead Exceptional Children teacher, district Exceptional Children program specialist, district behavior specialist, and the district Exceptional Children director.

The Exceptional Children director added that from the fall of 2008 until the fall of 2013, the district held trainings for the assistance teams from each elementary school on the RTI model, which focused on steps for Exceptional Children referrals. The RTI model used by the district did not address core instruction and vaguely addressed Tier 2 supplemental instruction. The focus of the trainings was on personalized education plans and targeted interventions.

In the spring of 2013, three elementary schools sent representatives from their assistance/RTI team to a state training on the 3-tier model. This training gave information about the background and purpose of the 3-tier model and what each tier represented. There was an emphasis on the importance of Tier 1, core instruction. One school had representation from the principal and two teachers. Another school had the principal and

the school counselor attend. The assistance team chairperson attended from the other school. Teams with principals returned and began to focus on core instruction. Tier 2 interventions were not fully developed at these schools because the teams decided that the core instruction should be the main priority at this point in the implementation process.

The other elementary school sent a team to the Exceptional Children Summer Institute for a 4-day training on MTSS procedures in the summer of 2014. The focus of the training addressed the 3-tier model. This training had the same information as the training the other three schools attended in the spring of 2013, but the school team focused on the referral process. The work the school team did has not been sustained because as of now, only one person of the five-person team remains at the school. Most of the team left 2 or 3 years after the training, according to the Exceptional Children director.

During the spring of 2015, NCDPI decided to mandate the MTSS process as the method for Exceptional Children eligibility by July 1, 2020 in the proposed policy revisions for students with learning disabilities Specific Learning Disability Task Force report. The district was invited to participate in Cohort 3 of the current NCDPI MTSS training in the summer of 2016. The superintendent assigned the Exceptional Children director to lead the MTSS district team. Curriculum directors and accountability directors were members of the team.

The Exceptional Children director reported that during the 2016-2017 school year, the district brought in leadership teams from each of the schools, including middle and high, to discuss core instruction. The teams recognized the need to focus on the core,

and they requested special PBIS training. The PBIS training was held for five of the six schools in the spring of 2017.

The SAM was completed by all the schools to set a baseline of level of implementation of the MTSS framework in June of 2017. The SAM is a self-report tool schools and districts used during the MTSS implementation process (NC MTSS Implementation Guide, n.d.). The tool could be used anytime but needed to be administered at least once per year. In July 2017, there was principal turnover in four of the six schools. The schools hired instructional coaches to support core instruction; but according to district-wide expectations, they were not intended to take direct support of the school-wide MTSS implementation.

Throughout the 2017-2018 school year, the MTSS district team reviewed Module 2 of the state-provided training while giving the schools support on core and supplemental instruction by beginning the implementation of several intervention programs at the elementary schools. School-level teams met with district support to review the MTSS framework and to gain access to module training at the individual schools. The SAM was administered for a second time to all the schools in June 2018 to compare the current level of implementation to the previous year's level of implementation of the MTSS framework.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the MTSS district team decided to focus most of its attention on core instruction with the implementation of Engage NY and Eureka Math in Grades K-12 as its instructional guide. Engage NY was the curriculum used by the district in Grades 6-12 to strengthen core instruction in English and language arts. Eureka Math was the curriculum used throughout all grade levels, K-12, for core

instruction. Schools continued to build supplemental supports by reviewing mCLASS and end-of-grade assessment data at the elementary schools. mCLASS is a progress monitoring tool that assesses phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, accuracy, comprehension, and vocabulary (mCLASS, 2019). Supplemental interventions included Corrective Reading, Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention, and double doses of Fundations from Wilson Language provided by enhancement teachers, assistants, and tutors. All these programs were used as Tier 2 interventions for students who were not successful with only core instruction. The program used was chosen by the area of need and degree of difficulty each student was having. At district-wide administrator meetings, MTSS topics of implementation were addressed regarding intervention protocol. In the spring of 2019, NCDPI began to share Tier 3 and criteria for eligibility for students with learning disabilities with districts around the state on the NC MTSS Implementation Guide (n.d.) website.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of the current MTSS implementation in a rural school district in North Carolina. MTSS has been partially implemented in various degrees in the four elementary schools and the middle and high school. The study determined the level of implementation to determine the next steps needed for full implementation required by North Carolina on July 1, 2020. The research will help to determine level of supports needed for teachers who do not have appropriate background knowledge of MTSS and educator beliefs and perceptions of MTSS that may create barriers to full implementation. Other school districts in various stages of implementation could benefit from the study as well when analyzing their own readiness for full implementation of MTSS.

Methodology

Before any research was conducted, the Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study was sent to the superintendent of the school district being studied (Appendix A). NCDPI (2019) reported that the Facilitated Assessment of MTSS-School Level (FAM-S) will be used to measure implementation of MTSS and to prioritize steps needed toward full implementation (Appendix B). The FAM-S is an instrument that measures school-level implementation of MTSS. The FAM-S consists of 41 items covering leadership, building capacity/infrastructure for implementation, communication and collaboration, data-based problem-solving, 3-tiered instruction/ intervention model, and data evaluation. The majority of the FAM-S was created and validated in Florida when those items made up the SAM that was originally used in North Carolina beginning in 2016. Various stakeholders from the MTSS Consortium and content experts from across North Carolina worked together to revise the instrument to include items relating to North Carolina MTSS professional development and PBIS. The FAM-S by the NCDPI MTSS Division was released in 2019 to be used in North Carolina as a guide for leadership teams.

The FAM-S was completed by each school in the district by their school leadership team. Each member of the leadership team received a copy of the FAM-S to review and to provide individual responses to each of the items. The members of the team met for approximately 1.5 to 2 hours to complete the document for the school. A facilitator entered the team response from a consensus from the group as well as evidence for each descriptor. Total scores were calculated for each item, and an overall score was determined. The scores guided the leadership team on next steps for MTSS

implementation. The results of the FAM-S were compared to the previous SAM completed by each school in the district during the summer of 2018 to detect growth between the two. Once the FAM-S was complete, a district-wide view of trends, patterns, and possible barriers of implementation were identified. A comparison between each of the six schools was conducted to determine where there were similarities and differences between each of the schools in the current level of implementation. This showed what steps were needed for full implementation and sustainability for each individual school as well as district-wide.

Instructional staff were also asked to complete a Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey developed by the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project (Appendix C). This survey showed what support educators felt they need to be successful in the MTSS process. The survey had 50 items that looked at MTSS practices, the use of data, and technology. Each instructional staff member from each of the six schools received a link to complete a Google Doc at one of the first staff meetings of the year. I attended each of the meetings to explain the procedures. Participants had the option of completing the survey during the meeting if they wished. All the responses remained anonymous. Staff had the choice of opting out if they did not wish to complete the survey, or they could choose to complete it at a later time. The participants selected the level of skills they had regarding MTSS. All questions on the survey measured the background knowledge of the participants. Every question on this instrument addressed the research question pertaining to how schools can support educators who do not have the appropriate background knowledge to sustain RTI. All the questions inquired about respondent skills in the use of RTI academically and behaviorally. This would assist in

guiding what further training and procedures the educators would need for full implementation and sustainability of MTSS.

In addition to the skills survey, the Florida Beliefs on RTI Scale created by the Florida Problem-Solving/Response to Intervention Project team was given to all instructional staff in each of the schools (Appendix D). Participants were given access to the survey via Google Docs at one of the first staff meetings of the 2019-2020 school year. I attended a meeting at each of the schools to explain the survey. Staff were able to complete the survey during the meeting or at a later time, and all the responses remained anonymous. Staff members had the choice of opting out if they did not wish to complete the survey. The survey measured how the educators felt about student learning, problem-solving, and expectations of MTSS. The survey had 22 items where participants rated their agreement/disagreement using 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. The first five questions asked for respondents to fill in years of experience in education, the number of years in their current position, and highest degree earned. This was used for comparison of beliefs of people in various jobs and years of experience. All the remaining questions on this survey addressed the second research question of how educator perceptions influenced the sustainability of RTI by helping to gauge the perceptions of educators and how they were affecting the implementation of RTI. Analyzation of the results included calculating the average belief level of the participants and the frequency of each response for each item.

Educator willingness to implement new initiatives is influenced by their beliefs about student learning and how it occurs and the effect of instructional strategies (Sparks, 2002). Change in education is successful when individuals feel there is a need for change

(Fullan, 2009). This tool demonstrated each participant's beliefs about MTSS. Beliefs can influence the success or failure of a new initiative (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). This survey allowed me to determine the beliefs the educators possessed that can support or hinder implementation and sustainability of MTSS.

Permission to use both surveys from the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project has been granted via an email request (Appendix E).

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, I first looked at the background knowledge, skills, and perceptions of the sample school district. Questions 1-41 of the FAM-S found in Appendix B addressed educator perceptions of MTSS. The leadership teams from each school had the opportunity to rate their perceptions of the structures that were in place at the school and district level.

The Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey found in Appendix C allowed me to identify perceptions and beliefs of individual staff members. Each question in this survey measured the background knowledge and skills of the district's educators in order to answer Research Question 1. Staff rated their own level of knowledge and skills they had regarding MTSS. This allowed me to focus on what supports the educators needed in order to increase these levels if necessary.

The Beliefs Survey found in Appendix D was used to gauge current perceptions participants had regarding MTSS, which can influence the sustainability of an effective system of support. The first four questions of the survey were for demographic purposes and to examine if perceptions differ based on position, experience in education, or degree obtained. The remainder of the questions were used to address Research Question 2 about

staff perceptions of MTSS.

Once the FAM-S was completed by school leadership teams, an analysis was completed to determine the level of academic, behavior, and social-emotional supports that were currently in place for MTSS in the district. The data from this survey were compiled for the district to determine supports that were not being implemented, emerging, operationalizing, or optimizing. I summarized the data from the six domains of leadership, building capacity/infrastructure for implementation, communication and collaboration, data-based problem-solving, 3-tiered instruction/intervention model, and data evaluation. The collected and analyzed data helped to determine what the leadership teams across the district felt their individual schools had in place for MTSS. This allowed me to recognize the varying levels of support throughout the district to see if there was a discrepancy from one school to another. I was able to determine the knowledge and skills the schools had regarding MTSS in order to be able to address the supports needed for the schools for Research Question 1.

Once the responses for the Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey were collected, I examined the responses to each question. A comparison using a frequency table between elementary responses and secondary responses was conducted to identify similarities or differences among the responses at each level. I identified the perceptions that had the most frequent responses of not having the skill, having minimal skill, and having the skill but still needing support. I also identified if there were significant anomalies between the elementary- and secondary-level responses. An examination of relative frequency distribution indicated patterns of perceived strengths and weaknesses at each level and were examined to see if certain items stood out from the others in order to determine if

the respondents felt they had adequate skills to contribute to the sustainability of MTSS. Using a frequency table allowed me to identify areas for improvement at the elementary and secondary level.

Once the Beliefs Survey was completed by participants, a comparison across subgroups was conducted based on job description, years of experience, number of years in current position, and highest degree earned. I calculated the means of each of the responses to identify trends in the beliefs held by participants in different positions and years in their career to determine if certain groups had different beliefs. I identified the responses that had the most agree and strongly agree and disagree and strongly disagree. Examining these data allowed me to identify the supports each subgroup needed in order to maintain a sustainable MTSS. The information was presented by providing a comparison of responses in a table. Once the data were presented, I provided a description of areas of strength and needed improvement among each subgroup.

After all the data from each survey were summarized, I presented a summary of supports needed for the district to have a sustainable MTSS.

Summary

The school district in this study has taken steps towards transitioning to the use of the MTSS/RTI model for determining eligibility for special education services. The research completed in this study allowed me to determine where the district was in the implementation process and what more needed to be done. The responses from the Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey and the Belief Survey completed by individual instructional staff members were compared to the FAM-S completed by school leadership teams to determine if the leadership teams accurately reported how the

individual staff members perceived themselves and the schools concerning RTI. This showed if the leadership teams in the school had an accurate view of how individual staff members viewed RTI and their personal abilities when using RTI. Once this comparison was complete, I was able to determine what next steps were necessary for a complete RTI implementation.

The state of North Carolina is transitioning from a traditional discrepancy model for determining if students are eligible for Exceptional Children's services to the use of RTI to determine eligibility. The state has determined that beginning July 1, 2020, all school districts should have fully implemented RTI. The research completed assisted me in determining the background knowledge and perceptions of instructional staff and the supports that were needed.

The following chapters include a summary and comparison of the data collected and a plan necessary for the school district if the district was not ready for the July 1, 2020 deadline (NCDPI, 2015). Findings and trends from the surveys are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes an in-depth discussion of the findings to determine what the district needs to address for a sustainable RTI/MTSS structure and answered the questions:

1. How can schools support educators who do not have the appropriate background knowledge and skills to sustain MTSS?
2. How do educator perceptions influence the sustainability of MTSS?
3. What can be done to change the perceptions of teachers for MTSS to be successful?

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The North Carolina State Board of Education approved an addendum to the *Policies Governing Students with Disabilities* that changes the way students can be identified with a specific learning disability. This method of identification was to be implemented on July 1, 2020. RTI (MTSS) is the method being used in North Carolina as the alternative research-based model to determine eligibility. RTI is a multi-tiered model that includes universal screening; frequent progress monitoring; and early, research-based appropriate interventions (Hoover & Love, 2011; Tilly, 2008; Yell, 2012).

This study examined the readiness of a rural school district in North Carolina for the full implementation of MTSS by the July 1, 2020 deadline. This chapter focuses on the results of the FAM-S, the Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey, and the Florida Beliefs on RTI Scale. The responses to each of the surveys served as a guide to answer the research questions:

1. How can schools support educators who do not have the appropriate background knowledge and skills to sustain MTSS?
2. How do educator perceptions influence the sustainability of MTSS?
3. What can be done to change the perceptions of teachers for MTSS to be successful?

The surveys provide information on where the district currently stands in the MTSS implementation process, which provides insight into steps that need to occur for full implementation and how to address the research questions.

FAM-S Results

The FAM-S was given to all six school leadership teams in the district to complete during the summer of 2019. The FAM-S is a qualitative tool that has 41 questions based on six domains of leadership, building capacity/infrastructure for implementation, communication and collaboration, data-based problem-solving, 3-tiered instruction/intervention model, and data evaluation. During the administration of the survey, each of the 41 items is reviewed; and the school team comes to a consensus on a response of not implementing, emerging/developing, operationalizing, or optimizing based on the team's discussion of evidence for each item. School results are aggregated to calculate the mean for each item to determine the district implementation percentages. The survey is intended to be completed by school leadership teams to measure the school's level of implementation of MTSS. Data received from the FAM-S are designed to assist schools in prioritizing implementation steps.

Three of the six schools completed the FAM-S during the summer of 2019. The high school and two of the elementary schools had results that were recorded for the district. The middle school and one elementary school were facing changes in administration during the time the schools were asked to complete the survey. The other elementary school did not have an existing leadership team to complete the survey due to teacher turnover. The district implementation percentage was based on the average of the three schools that completed the survey. The lack of completion by the other three schools did not affect what was reported for the district. The total FAM-S district implementation percentage was 52.8%. Table 1 presents the district implementation percentages for each of the critical components that resulted from the responses to the

survey.

Table 1

District Implementation Percentages for Critical Components of the FAM-S

Critical component	Percentage
Leadership	48.1%
Building the capacity/infrastructure for implementation	42.4%
Communication and collaboration	61.1%
Data-based problem-solving	61.9%
3-tiered instruction/intervention model	63.5%
Data evaluation	48.1%
Total FAM-S	52.8%

Three of the critical components had percentages that were below the district implementation percentage for the total FAM-S. They were leadership (48.1%), building capacity/infrastructure for implementation (42.4%), and data evaluation (48.1%). Each of the critical components with percentages below the total district implementation percentage will be further described below using data collected from the FAM-S.

According to the results, the leadership component was rated emerging/ developing in four areas. Those areas were active involvement of the principal, professional development led by a school-based team and instructional coaching, the existence of an MTSS implementation plan, and the use of MTSS in school improvement planning by the school-based team. The FAM-S describes emerging/developing for the leadership component as a district where the principals of the schools are communicating the need for MTSS implementation, participating in professional development opportunities for MTSS, and establishing a vision for MTSS. The leadership teams of the emerging/developing schools have started working toward developing a plan to support implementation based on teacher beliefs, knowledge, and skills. They are working

towards determining needs, resources, and barriers by communicating with district, family, and community stakeholders. The school leadership teams are planning the school-wide implementation of the essential elements of MTSS as part of the school improvement plan.

The school leadership teams responded that the critical element Building the Capacity/Infrastructure for Implementation was emerging/developing in nine of 11 areas. The nine elements the teams chose as emerging/developing, based on the descriptions given in the FAM-S, are the understanding of MTSS by the staff, professional development in assessments and data sources, training in data-based problem-solving, coaching in tiered instruction and intervention, coaching to support MTSS, schedules that allow for professional development, time to administer assessments, established decision rules about MTSS, and allocated resources for MTSS. Addressing these elements will help to assist in the sustainability of MTSS by ensuring that all staff are knowledgeable about the MTSS process for the district. According to the data included in the FAM-S, in order to be emerging/developing, the schools are meeting the following stages of the MTSS implementation process. The schools are defining the essential elements for MTSS. The school staff members are participating in the beginning stages of job-embedded professional development focusing on administering assessments and using the data received from the assessments to make instructional decisions to meet the needs of all learners as well as how to communicate with parents about the assessments and data. The initial stage of the professional development is providing the staff with problem-solving steps to address learner needs and the rationale for the use of data-based problem-solving. The roles and responsibilities of all staff members are being defined.

School-wide expectations for behavior are being established. Staff are also receiving training on intervention design and delivery. Instructional coaches are actively modeling the components of MTSS when working with staff. School staff are able to participate in staff development, and they schedule time during their days for universal screening of all students, with a goal of being able to have time to complete progress monitoring with fidelity. Processes and procedures for making decisions based on data-based problem-solving using available resources have been developed. The school leadership teams are working toward providing more resources, such as personnel and materials, to support MTSS implementation. These data showed that the district is in the initial stages of implementation, but there needs to be a focus on ongoing professional development as well as modeling, practice, and collaborative feedback. Schedules need to be adjusted for the ongoing coaching, and there should be time for staff to administer intervention progress monitoring assessments for students who are receiving supplemental or intensive supports. Once the decision processes and procedures have been clearly defined on how a student goes through the MTSS process, the steps of problem-solving; procedures for accessing, submitting, and using data; and the rules needed to make reliable decisions need to be communicated to staff. Once these have been accomplished, the district will be in the operationalizing phase of implementation according to the FAM-S.

The areas of using data to evaluate the impact of MTSS, the allocation of available resources, and the monitoring of assessment data were rated emerging/ developing, causing the district implementation percentage for data evaluation to be 48.1%, which is lower than the total FAM-S percentage of 52.8%. According to the

rating scale on the FAM-S, in order for leadership teams to determine if they are emerging/developing in the area of data collection, they must have identified sources that provide data that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of MTSS. Resources are beginning to be allocated based on what the data show students need. Leadership teams should also be working on ensuring that staff understand the importance of accurate, consistent data and procedures used for collecting data in a timely manner.

The critical component 3-tiered instruction and intervention had an implementation percentage of 63.5%, which was 10.7% higher than the total FAM-S implementation percentage. One area that was rated emerging/developing by two of the three schools was about core academic practices. According to the survey, core academic practices have been defined across all grade levels or subject areas in one of the following areas: instruction, curriculum, or environment. In order to increase the rating, more areas must have core academic practices defined.

Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey Results

The Perceptions of RTI Skills survey, developed by the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project, was presented to 181 certified staff members from the district. The survey consisted of 50 items that allowed participants to rate their perceptions of practices, the use of data, and technology when implementing MTSS. The survey was discussed at a staff meeting at each school. Staff members had the option to complete the survey. Sixty-two staff members completed the survey. Forty-five surveys were completed by elementary school staff, eight by middle school staff, and nine by high school staff. The middle school and high school responses were combined into one category to analyze the results based on elementary and secondary responses.

For each question on the survey regarding participant perceptions of RTI skills, there was a Likert scale with the choices of “I do not have this skill at all,” “I have minimal skills in this area; need substantial support to use it,” “I have this skill, but still need some support to use it,” “I can use this skill with little support,” and “I am highly skilled in this area and could teach others this skill.” The responses indicating that support was needed were the responses that were examined from this survey. The responses used were “I do not have this skill at all,” “I have minimal skills in this area; need substantial support to use it,” and “I have this skill, but still need some support to use it.” Any questions that had more than 50% of the responses in those combined choices were noted.

The elementary participants had 15 questions that had more than 50% with those combined responses that indicated more support was needed. Table 2 presents the 15 questions and the percentages for each choice that participants chose indicating their need for support.

Table 2

Elementary Responses to Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey Questions Indicating the Need for Additional Support

Question	I do not have this skill at all	I have minimal skill in this area; need substantial support to use it	I have this skill, but still need some support to use it
I can calculate the gap between student current performance and the benchmark for behavior.	6.7%	17.8%	26.7%
I can identify the most appropriate type(s) of data to use for determining reasons that are likely to be contributing to the problem for academics.	0%	8.9%	44.4%
I can identify the most appropriate type(s) of data to use for determining reasons that are likely to be contributing to the problem for behavior.	2.2%	4.4%	48.9%
I can identify the appropriate supplemental intervention available in my building for a student identified at-risk for academics.	2.2%	15.6%	40.0%
I can identify the appropriate supplemental intervention available in my building for a student identified at-risk for behavior.	4.4%	20.0%	31.1%
I can access resources to develop evidence-based interventions for:			
Behavioral core curricula	4.4%	8.9%	37.8%
Academic supplemental curricula	0.0%	13.3%	44.4%
Behavioral supplemental curricula	4.4%	13.3%	37.8%
Academic individualized intervention plans	0.0%	15.6%	35.6%
Behavioral individualized intervention plans	4.4%	8.9%	44.4%
I can construct graphs for large group, small and, and individual students:			
Draw an aim line	6.7%	20.0%	28.9%
Draw a trend line	8.9%	17.8%	22.2%
I can make modifications to intervention plans based on student response to intervention.	2.2%	13.3%	35.6%
I can disaggregate data by race, gender, free/reduced lunch, language proficiency, and disability status.	8.9%	20.0%	26.7%

(continued)

Question	I do not have this skill at all	I have minimal skill in this area; need substantial support to use it	I have this skill, but still need some support to use it
I can facilitate a Problem Solving Team (Assistance Team) meeting.	11.1%	20.0%	31.1%

All the elementary responses that indicated the lowest perception of RTI skills and the need for more support for MTSS implementation focused on the identification and analyzation of appropriate data and providing or adjusting interventions.

Over 50% of the secondary participants responded to 50 questions with one of the responses that indicate that they perceive they need more support with MTSS. Even though for this study the high school and middle school responses were combined to provide secondary data, it was noted that all the high school participants had lower levels of their perceptions of skills. Table 3 presents the 50 questions the secondary participants responded to as their perceptions of MTSS, suggesting that they needed more support.

Table 3

Secondary Responses to Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey Questions Indicating the Need for Additional Support

Question	I do not have this skill at all	I have minimal skill in this area; need substantial support to use it	I have this skill, but still need some support to use it
I have the skill to access the data necessary to determine the percent of students in core instruction who are achieving benchmarks in:			
Academics	5.9%	29.4%	23.5%
Behavior	23.5%	11.8%	29.4%
I have the skill to use data to make decisions about individuals and groups of students for the:			
Core academic curriculum	5.9%	23.5%	29.4%
Core/Building discipline plan	11.8%	17.6%	35.3%
I can use data to define the current level of performance of the target student for:			
Academics	5.9%	23.5%	29.4%
Behavior	11.8%	17.4%	29.4%
I can determine the desired level of performance for:			
Academics	5.9%	17.6%	29.4%
Behavior	11.8%	11.8%	29.4%
I can determine the current level of peer performance for:			
Academics	5.9%	23.5%	35.3%
Behavior	11.8%	17.6%	35.3%
I can calculate the gap between student current performance and the benchmark for:			
Academics	11.8%	35.3%	23.5%
Behavior	17.6%	29.4%	23.5%
I can use gap data to determine whether core instruction should be adjusted or whether supplemental instruction should be directed to the target student for:			
Academics	11.8%	41.2%	17.6%
Behavior	17.6%	35.3%	17.6%
I can develop potential reasons that a student or group of students is/are not achieving desired levels of performance for:			
Academics	5.9%	35.3%	23.5%
Behavior	11.8%	29.4%	23.5%

(continued)

Question	I do not have this skill at all	I have minimal skill in this area; need substantial support to use it	I have this skill, but still need some support to use it
I can identify the most appropriate type(s) of data to use for determining reasons that are likely to be contributing to the problem for:			
Academics	11.8%	29.4%	29.4%
Behavior	17.6%	29.4%	23.5%
I can identify the appropriate supplemental intervention available in my building for a student identified as at-risk for:			
Academics	17.6%	17.6%	17.6%
Behavior	23.5%	11.8%	17.6%
I can access resources to develop evidence-based interventions for:			
Academic core curricula	11.8%	35.3%	11.8%
Behavioral core curricula	11.8%	23.5%	23.5%
Academic supplemental curricula	11.8%	29.4%	17.6%
Behavioral supplemental curricula	17.6%	23.5%	17.6%
Academic individualized intervention plans	11.8%	23.5%	17.6%
Behavioral individualized intervention plans	17.6%	17.6%	23.5%
I can ensure that any supplemental and/or intensive interventions are integrated with core instruction in the general education classroom:			
Academics	11.8%	23.5%	23.5%
Behavior	17.6%	17.6%	23.5%
I can ensure that the proposed intervention plan is supported by the data that were collected for:			
Academics	17.6%	23.5%	17.6%
Behavior	23.5%	17.6%	17.6%
I can provide the support necessary to ensure that the intervention is implemented appropriately for:			
Academics	11.8%	35.3%	17.6%
Behavior	17.6%	29.4%	17.6%
I can determine if an intervention was implemented as it was intended for:			
Academics	11.8%	29.4%	23.5%
Behavior	17.6%	23.5%	23.5%
I can select appropriate data to use for progress monitoring of student performance during interventions:			
Academics	17.6%	29.4%	23.5%
Behavior	23.5%	29.4%	17.6%

(continued)

Question	I do not have this skill at all	I have minimal skill in this area; need substantial support to use it	I have this skill, but still need some support to use it
I can construct graphs for large group, small group, and individual students:			
Graph target student data	11.8%	47.1%	11.8%
Graph benchmark data	11.8%	47.1%	5.9%
Graph peer data	11.8%	47.1%	5.9%
Draw an aim line	17.6%	47.1%	11.8%
Draw a trend line	17.6%	47.1%	11.8%
I can interpret graphed progress monitoring data to make decisions about the degree to which a student is responding to intervention.	17.6%	17.6%	29.4%
I can make modifications to intervention plans based on student response to intervention.	17.6%	11.8%	23.5%
I can use appropriate data to differentiate between students who have not learned skills from those who have barriers to learning due to disability.	17.6%	23.5%	17.6%
I can collect the following types of data:			
Curriculum-Based Measurement	11.8%	35.3%	17.6%
DIBELS	29.4%	23.5%	29.4%
Access from appropriate district- or school-wide assessments	23.4%	17.6%	29.4%
Standard behavioral observations	17.6%	23.5%	35.3%
I can disaggregate data by race, gender, free/reduced lunch, language proficiency, and disability status.	11.8%	29.4%	29.4%
I can use technology in the following ways:			
Access the internet to locate sources of academic and behavioral evidence-based interventions.	0.0%	35.3%	23.5%
Use electronic data collection tools	11.8%	29.4%	17.6%
Use of a progress monitoring system	5.9%	23.5%	35.3%
Use of a school-wide information system for Positive Behavior Support	5.9%	29.4%	35.3%
Graph and display student and school data	11.8%	35.3%	23.5%
I can facilitate a Problem Solving Team meeting.	11.8%	17.6%	35.3%

The secondary surveys had greater than three times more responses, suggesting the need for more support in MTSS than the elementary responses. Every question from

the secondary responses had more than 50% of the answers in the three answer choices of not having the skill at all, having minimal skill and needing substantial support, and having the skill but still needing support.

The data from the Perceptions of RTI Skill Surveys indicate that the perceptions of the participants from the elementary and secondary levels in the use of research-based interventions, universal screening, progress monitoring and data interpretation, which are primary components of an effective MTSS, are not sufficient for MTSS to be successful. The participants indicated that even if they had some skill in each area, they felt that more training was needed. The responses show that even though more support is needed, the elementary staff has a higher perception of their skills. It appears that elementary and secondary participants perceive themselves not as skilled as they should be for full MTSS implementation; but since the elementary schools have received more training, there needs to be a focus on the secondary schools while maintaining support in the elementary schools.

Beliefs on RTI Scale Survey Results

The Beliefs Survey was also presented to 181 certified staff members from all the schools in the district. Seventy-one people provided responses to the survey, for a response rate of 39.2%. Fifty-two general education teachers, seven special education teachers, four principals, three school counselors, one instructional coach, and four others completed the survey online. From the total responses, 40 participants reported that they have had training in MTSS, while the other 31 did not. The school district provided professional development to 29 of the participants. Three received training through a college or university degree program. The remaining nine said they received training

elsewhere. Table 4 presents where the 40 trained participants responded they received training for MTSS categorized by their job description.

Table 4

Where Training Was Received for MTSS Based on Job Description

Job description	School district professional development	College or university degree program	Other
Instructional coach	1	0	0
Teacher-general education	19	2	3
Teacher-special education	3	0	4
School counselor	1	1	0
Principal	3	0	1
Other	2	0	0

Of the 52 general education teacher responses, 24 participants reported having training in MTSS. Nineteen of those trainings were provided by the school district, two from a college or university degree program, and three from other places. Thirty-seven participants teach at the elementary level, six at the middle school level, and nine at the high school level. The teachers ranged in years of experience in education: one, less than 1 year; 11, 1-4 years; 11, 5-9 years; four, 10-14 years; six, 15-19 years; five, 20-24 years; and 14, 25 or more years. Table 5 presents the years of experience for each participant at the level where they teach.

Table 5

Years of Experience of Each General Education Participant

Level of school	Less than 1 year	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20-24 years	25 or more years
Elementary	0	7	9	4	2	5	10
Middle	0	1	0	0	3	0	2
High	1	3	2	0	1	0	2

Table 6 presents the responses for the general education teachers to the questions

from the Beliefs Survey.

Table 6

General Education Teacher Responses to Beliefs Survey

	Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
1.	I believe in the philosophy of No Child Left Behind even if I disagree with some of the requirements.	13	18	20
2.	Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	7	7	37
	b. Math	7	7	35
3.	The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	6	6	39
	b. Math	6	5	38
4.	The majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	45	5	1
	b. Math	42	6	1
5.	The majority of students with behavioral problems achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	29	18	4
	b. Math	25	18	6
6.	Students with high-incidence disabilities who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	19	17	15
	b. Math	17	17	15
7.	General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.	6	9	37
8.	General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.	1	1	50
9.	The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	4	7	41
10.	Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.	5	10	35
11.	The “severity” of a student’s academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	8	13	29

(continued)

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
12. The "severity" of a student's behavioral problem is determined not by how inappropriate a student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	16	13	22
13. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identify effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.	12	18	20
14. Many students currently identified as "LD" do not have a disability, rather they came to school "not ready" to learn or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.	13	13	25
15. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only "teacher judgment."	6	15	29
16. Evaluating a student's response to intervention is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from "tests."	2	14	36
17. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or able benchmarks.	19	13	20
18. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.	3	12	35
19. A student's parents (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about a student.	0	1	51
20. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.	1	12	38
21. All students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support.	23	12	17
22. The goal of assessment is to generate and measure effectiveness of instruction/intervention.	7	3	42

These data show that general education teachers believe that with effective core instruction, 80% of students should be proficient. The teachers did identify that the majority of students with learning disabilities and behavioral issues are not meeting

grade-level benchmarks. The majority of the teachers responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with the need for general education teachers to provide more interventions that would lead to student success and that early interventions would lead to fewer referrals for special education; however, many disagreed or strongly disagreed to all students being able to achieve grade-level benchmarks with sufficient support. The general education teachers reported that parents/guardians should be involved in the intervention process and that it would lead to greater success. Approximately half of the general education participants felt that students identified as learning disabled came to school not ready to learn and fell too far behind for interventions to be effective, while the other half either disagreed or remained neutral.

All seven of the special education teachers reported having training in MTSS. Three received training from the school district, and the other four received training from other places. Three of the special education teachers teach at the elementary level, three at the middle school, and one at the high school. Two of the teachers have 10-14 years of experience, one has 15-19 years of experience, three have 20-24 years of experience, and one has 25 or more years of experience. Four of the participants have a B.A./B.S. degree, and three have an M.A./M.S degree.

Table 7 shows the responses of the special education teachers to the Beliefs Survey.

Table 7

Special Education Teacher Responses to Beliefs Survey

	Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
1.	I believe in the philosophy of No Child Left Behind even if I disagree with some of the requirements.	0	3	4
2.	Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	0	2	5
	b. Math	0	1	6
3.	The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	1	3	3
	b. Math	1	3	3
4.	The majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	4	3	0
	b. Math	4	3	0
5.	The majority of students with behavioral problems achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	3	4	0
	b. Math	3	4	0
6.	Students with high-incidence disabilities who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	0	5	2
	b. Math	0	5	2
7.	General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.	1	2	4
8.	General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.	0	2	5
9.	The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	0	1	6
10.	Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.	0	1	6
11.	The “severity” of a student’s academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	0	2	5

(continued)

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
12. The "severity" of a student's behavioral problem is determined not by how inappropriate a student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	0	3	4
13. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identify effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.	0	3	4
14. Many students currently identified as "LD" do not have a disability, rather they came to school "not ready" to learn or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.	2	2	3
15. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only "teacher judgment."	0	2	5
16. Evaluating a student's response to intervention is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from "tests."	0	3	4
17. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or able benchmarks.	2	2	3
18. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.	0	2	5
19. A student's parents (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about a student.	0	0	7
20. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.	0	1	6
21. All students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support.	1	4	3
22. The goal of assessment is to generate and measure effectiveness of instruction/intervention.	0	1	6

The data from the special education teachers show that it is clear they believe students with learning disabilities and behavioral problems are most challenged in achieving benchmarks. Their responses were similar for reading and math. Their

responses indicate that interventions and prevention activities would be beneficial, although only three participants agreed or strongly agreed that all students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support. It is interesting to note that many of the special education responses were the same; there is a discrepancy in the responses about the accuracy of students being labeled as learning disabled. The responses for that question were diverse. The participants also were not in agreement about the allocation of resources and which students should receive these resources first.

All four of the principals who responded to the survey reported having training in MTSS, and all four work at the elementary school level. Three received training from the school district, and the other received training from an NCDPI consultant. Two have 15-19 years of experience, one has 20-24 years of experience, and one has 25 or more years of experience. Three have received an M.A./M.S. degree, and one has received an Ed.S. degree.

Table 8 shows the responses of the principals to the Beliefs Survey.

Table 8

Principal Responses to Beliefs Survey

	Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
1.	I believe in the philosophy of No Child Left Behind even if I disagree with some of the requirements.	0	0	4
2.	Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	0	0	4
	b. Math	0	0	4
3.	The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	0	0	4
	b. Math	0	0	4
4.	The majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	3	0	1
	b. Math	3	0	1
5.	The majority of students with behavioral problems achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	3	0	1
	b. Math	3	0	1
6.	Students with high-incidence disabilities who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks in:			
	a. Reading	1	2	1
	b. Math	1	2	1
7.	General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.	0	0	4
8.	General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.	0	0	4
9.	The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	0	0	4
10.	Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.	0	0	4
11.	The “severity” of a student’s academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	0	0	4

(continued)

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
12. The "severity" of a student's behavioral problem is determined not by how inappropriate a student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	0	1	3
13. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identify effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.	1	0	3
14. Many students currently identified as "LD" do not have a disability, rather they came to school "not ready" to learn or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.	0	1	3
15. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only "teacher judgment."	0	0	4
16. Evaluating a student's response to intervention is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from "tests."	0	0	4
17. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or able benchmarks.	1	0	3
18. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.	0	0	4
19. A student's parents (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about a student.	0	0	4
20. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.	0	0	4
21. All students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support.	2	0	2
22. The goal of assessment is to generate and measure effectiveness of instruction/intervention.	1	0	3

Many of the responses from the principals were the same for each question on the survey. When asked if all students could achieve grade-level benchmarks with sufficient support, there was a split in the responses, with 50% disagreeing and 50% agreeing. The

data also identify that most of the principals who responded feel students with learning disabilities or behavioral problems do not meet grade-level benchmarks in reading and math. There was one participant who did not agree with the other three about the use of the results from IQ and achievement testing, the allocation of resources, and the goal of assessment.

Of the three school counselors who participated in the survey, two have received training in MTSS: one from the school district and the other from a college or university degree program. There was one response from each level of school. One participant has 20-24 years of experience, and the other two have 25 or more years of experience. All three school counselors have an M.A./M.S. degree.

Table 9 shows the responses of the school counselors to the Beliefs Survey.

Table 9

School Counselor Responses to Beliefs Survey

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
1. I believe in the philosophy of No Child Left Behind even if I disagree with some of the requirements.	1	0	2
2. Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	0	3	0
b. Math	0	3	0
3. The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	0	2	1
b. Math	0	2	1
4. The majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	3	0	0
b. Math	2	0	1
5. The majority of students with behavioral problems achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	2	0	0
b. Math	1	1	1
6. Students with high-incidence disabilities who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	0	3	0
b. Math	0	3	0
7. General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.	0	0	3
8. General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.	0	0	3
9. The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	0	1	2

(continued)

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
10. Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.	0	0	3
11. The "severity" of a student's academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	1	1	1
12. The "severity" of a student's behavioral problem is determined not by how inappropriate a student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	0	2	1
13. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identify effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.	0	3	0
14. Many students currently identified as "LD" do not have a disability, rather they came to school "not ready" to learn or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.	1	1	1
15. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only "teacher judgment."	2	1	0
16. Evaluating a student's response to intervention is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from "tests."	0	2	1
17. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or able benchmarks.	2	1	0
18. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.	0	2	1
19. A student's parents (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about a student.	0	0	3

(continued)

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
20. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.	0	0	3
21. All students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support.	1	1	1
22. The goal of assessment is to generate and measure effectiveness of instruction/intervention.	1	1	1

The school counselor responses indicate that there is an agreement that students with learning disabilities and behavioral problems struggle meeting grade-level benchmarks. Each of the participants responded differently about all students meeting grade-level benchmarks, how to identify the "severity" of a learning discrepancy, and the goal of assessments. It is interesting to note that this was the only group that felt that teacher judgment was more effective than data when determining the effectiveness of interventions.

With only one instructional coach response, that survey is combined with the other four surveys where participants chose "other" as their job description. Three participants reported that they had received MTSS training, all from the school district, although one did note that it was very brief and there was still clarification needed on how speech/language fits into the framework. All five of the staff members from this category work in an elementary school. One person has 5-9 years of experience, two people have 20-24 years of experience, and two people have 25 or more years of experience. Two people selected that they have an M.A./M.S. degree, and one person selected that they have an Ed.S. degree. Two people did not answer the question pertaining to the highest degree earned.

Table 10 shows the responses of the participants who identified themselves as "other" on the Beliefs Survey job description.

Table 10

Other Participant Responses to Beliefs Survey

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree		Strongly agree/ agree
1. I believe in the philosophy of No Child Left Behind even if I disagree with some of the requirements.	0	2	3
2. Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	0	2	3
b. Math	0	2	3
3. The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	0	2	3
b. Math	0	2	3
4. The majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	0	2	3
b. Math	0	2	3
5. The majority of students with behavioral problems achieve grade-level benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	0	5	0
b. Math	0	5	0
6. Students with high-incidence disabilities who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks in:			
a. Reading	2	3	0
b. Math	2	3	0
7. General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.	0	2	3
8. General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.	0	0	5
9. The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	1	1	3

(continued)

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree		Strongly agree/ agree
10. Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.	0	3	2
11. The "severity" of a student's academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	0	2	3
12. The "severity" of a student's behavioral problem is determined not by how inappropriate a student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	1	2	2
13. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identify effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.	1	2	2
14. Many students currently identified as "LD" do not have a disability, rather they came to school "not ready" to learn or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.	0	3	2
15. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only "teacher judgment."	0	1	4
16. Evaluating a student's response to intervention is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from "tests."	0	2	3
17. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or able benchmarks.	2	1	2
18. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.	0	2	3
19. A student's parents (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about a student.	0	0	5

(continued)

Question	Strongly disagree/ disagree		Strongly agree/ agree
20. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.	0	0	5
21. All students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support.	1	1	3
22. The goal of assessment is to generate and measure effectiveness of instruction/intervention.	0	2	3

This group of participants who self-identified their job category as “other” agreed with the other groups that students with learning disabilities have difficulties meeting benchmarks in reading and math. All of this group that identified as “other” remained neutral about students with behavioral problems and their academic success. These participants were also split about the allocation of resources among students who are not reaching benchmarks and those who are meeting benchmarks.

According to the surveys, the only participants who disagreed that core instruction should be effective enough for 80% of students to be successful in meeting benchmarks were general education teachers. Only general education teachers strongly disagreed that students with specific learning disabilities who are receiving special education services could be successful on grade-level benchmarks. The only participants who disagreed that prevention activities and early intervention strategies would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education were general education teachers.

The staff members who reported that they have had MTSS training ranged in years of experience. Two people have 1-4 years of experience, six people have 5-9 years of experience, five people have 10-14 years of experience, seven people have 15-19 years

of experience, eight people have 20-24 years of experience, and 12 people have 25 or more years of experience. The majority of the staff members received training from the school district, with 21 from elementary school, six from middle school, and six from high school. Two people from elementary school and one from middle school reported receiving training from a college or university program. Four elementary staff members said they received training from somewhere else. Twenty-three elementary school staff members, three middle school staff members, and five high school staff members answered that they had not received training in MTSS. Those participants vary in years of experience. One has less than 1 year, nine have 1-4 years, six have 5-9 years, one has 10-14 years, two have 15-19 years, four have 20-24 years, and eight have 25 or more years.

The leadership team responses to the FAM-S indicate that the district is in the developing stages of MTSS. The FAM-S data show the need for improvement in leadership, building capacity and infrastructure for implementation, and data evaluation. The data from the Beliefs Survey show that staff have some of the core beliefs of MTSS, but additional training is needed for them to fully understand the purpose of MTSS. Even though they may believe in the MTSS process, the Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey responses indicate participants do not feel they have the skills needed to implement MTSS. They reported a lack of skills in finding and providing interventions to students. Also, it was noted that graphing data was important to the MTSS process, but they do not have the skills to graph the data and to analyze the data once they are gathered. The responses to all three surveys aligned with each other in showing the need for more professional development in how an effective MTSS should look, how to increase skills in data evaluation, and what to do with the data once they are analyzed. The surveys

indicate more training is also needed in finding and providing research-based interventions and how to create schedules that will provide time for the interventions to be done with fidelity. Without proper and consistent training for each staff member in the district at the elementary and secondary level, there cannot be an effective and sustainable implementation of MTSS.

The data from the FAM-S, the Beliefs Survey, and the Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey are consistent in showing that the district is currently lacking critical components of a successful MTSS. The surveys show that there is a need to address leadership, infrastructure for implementation, and data evaluation. The data indicate that there needs to be a better understanding of MTSS and more time and resources to carry out the needed components of MTSS, such as analyzation of data and providing interventions. In order to be successful, the district needs to consistently provide support to the staff who do not have the knowledge and skills needed for MTSS. It is imperative that background knowledge, abilities, and perceptions of staff be addressed in order to have a successful and sustainable MTSS.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the results and how the research questions were addressed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The NCDPI (2015) Exceptional Children Division changed the procedures for identifying students with specific learning disabilities by monitoring how students respond to high-quality core instruction and research-based interventions. North Carolina has been working towards RTI implementation since 2000. According to the NCDPI (2015) Exception Children Division, the goal for school districts in North Carolina was to have a fully developed MTSS by July 1, 2020. This study examined MTSS in a school district in rural North Carolina and the ability of the district to sustain an effective MTSS.

Staff Perceptions of MTSS

According to Bineham et al. (2014), analyzing staff perceptions of MTSS is important for sustainability and improvement. Three surveys were used for this study to gather information about the perceptions and beliefs of staff in the district. The FAM-S was provided to the leadership team of each school, and the Perception of RTI Skills Survey and the Florida Beliefs on RTI Scale were given to all the certified staff members in each school. Three of the six schools in the district had leadership teams that completed the FAM-S during the summer of 2019. Sixty-two certified staff members completed a Google Form with responses to the Perception of RTI Skills Survey. Seventy-one certified staff members submitted Google Forms for their responses to the Florida Beliefs on RTI Scale. The responses to each of these surveys indicate that there is still more work for the district to do in order to have a fully implemented, sustainable MTSS. The data from the surveys indicate that the staff do not have the background knowledge and skills pertaining to MTSS that will lead to sustainability.

Background Knowledge of MTSS

MTSS implementation requires that educators have background knowledge and skills for sustainability. Educators who feel a low sense of efficacy may have difficulty with the MTSS process (Chang, 2009). Studies have suggested that many general education teachers enter the profession without enough background knowledge about MTSS (Hougen, 2014; McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011; Schwarts et al., 2009). The study completed by McCombes-Tolis and Spear-Swerling (2011) indicated that preservice teachers received little to no training in MTSS. A study by Prasse et al. (2012) indicated that teacher preparation programs need to focus more on preparing teachers for MTSS. The participants in that study reported needing support in the use of data for educational decision-making. They also indicated the need for support in determining the academic level of students, the steps of MTSS, adjusting core curriculum, and using supplemental instruction. The teachers in the study felt that more assistance was necessary to find the appropriate academic and behavioral interventions needed for students in all tiers.

A survey of teachers by Schwarts et al. (2009) was distributed to educators in various stages of their careers. The participants of the survey were educators at all levels, and there was a mix of general educators and special educators. The results of the survey showed that the special educators were much more proficient than general educators in regard to MTSS. According to Burns and Gibbons (2012), teachers do not have enough background knowledge about what interventions to use, and Friedman (2010) included that they do not know how to use the interventions with fidelity.

When teachers have a limited amount of knowledge about MTSS, it becomes the

district's responsibility to provide extensive professional development before MTSS can be implemented and sustained (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011). Professional development provided to teachers should be ongoing and relevant to sustain MTSS for everyone involved in the process (Sullivan & Long, 2010). The professional development provided for staff will provide the background information needed that will lead to success. Without sufficient professional development, there will be a lack of staff buy-in that is necessary for a successful MTSS.

An effective MTSS is based on measurable goals, data, ongoing progress monitoring, and intervention fidelity (Bernhardt & Hebert, 2011). The data from this survey show that teachers have difficulty determining which interventions to use and how to work through them with fidelity. There is also some confusion about how to transition between the tiers. The staff members reported a need for assistance with data collection and data entry.

The results from this survey are similar to the King and Lemons (2014) exploratory survey of elementary and secondary educators. According to the data, respondents indicated that remediation is more prevalent in the elementary setting than in the secondary setting. Progress monitoring was reported by more elementary respondents than secondary respondents due to a lack of skill at the secondary level. Secondary educators are more skilled in the behavior part of MTSS than the academic part.

Professional Development

The data from the Beliefs Survey indicated that there is a need for professional development in MTSS due to the number of participants who indicated they had not received training. The training needs to be consistent since some participants were not

trained by the school district. A lack of professional development could decrease staff buy-in that is crucial for the success of MTSS. The differing beliefs about MTSS could come from various skill levels of teachers, limited opportunities for training, and inaccurate information about MTSS. Some may feel uncomfortable with MTSS and the effect it may have on students due to feeling inadequately trained. According to Carlson et al. (2010), not having enough professional development and not feeling like they have enough background knowledge about MTSS could be barriers for teachers. Wei et al. (2010) reported that professional development should be continuous and intensive for staff to increase proficiency in MTSS. In order to be sustained successfully, MTSS should be implemented with fidelity.

The school leadership teams reported on the FAM-S that leadership relating to MTSS is emerging/developing. The decision to rate leadership as emerging/developing was based on involvement of the principal, professional development and coaching led by a school-based team, the existence of an MTSS implementation plan, and school improvement planning driven by MTSS. According to Kozleski and Huber (2010), principals should fully understand MTSS to be able to lead the school in the changes in instruction and culture that occur during implementation. In order for principals to lead a successful implementation that can be sustained, it is important to provide all stakeholders the necessary background information and ideas for improvement that will give them the reason why MTSS is beneficial. Principals, along with the district administrators, need to provide extensive professional development for staff before expecting them to implement MTSS with fidelity (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011). The professional development should be ongoing and relevant to sustain the

initiative (Sullivan & Long).

The school leadership teams indicated that more work was needed in the areas of staff understanding of MTSS, professional development focused on assessments, data and data-based problem-solving, coaching in tiered instructions and providing interventions, overall support for MTSS, flexible schedules that allow for professional development, time for teachers to administer assessments, clear guidance on the MTSS process, and allocated resources for MTSS. Data evaluation was noted as an area that needed improvement, including the use of data to evaluate the MTSS impact, the use of data to allocate resources, and monitoring assessment data.

The Perceptions of MTSS Skills Survey was used to assess the levels of skills the participants felt they had in MTSS. The elementary and secondary participants responded that they felt their skills in primary components of MTSS were not sufficient. The components they identified were use of research-based interventions, universal screening, progress monitoring, and data interpretation. Elementary participants indicated they had more training than secondary participants, but they noted that more training was needed.

Educator perceptions can influence the success and sustainability of MTSS. Understanding staff perceptions of MTSS is necessary for implementation (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012). Continuously monitoring staff perceptions is needed for sustainability and improvement (Bineham et al., 2014). A search of literature about MTSS completed by Harlacher and Siler (2011) found that a sense of ownership and staff buy-in is critical to the success of MTSS. When everyone is involved in the process, staff resistance will decrease (Lembke et al., 2010). An analysis of teacher perceptions of MTSS was influenced by barriers they felt regarding training, time, resources, process,

and paperwork (Castro- Villarreal et al., 2014). One perception staff may have is that MTSS is a pre-referral step for special education eligibility (Carlson et al., 2010). This may cause staff to feel like interventions would not be successful, and it would create a delay in a student receiving special education services. Without understanding the purpose of MTSS, staff might be resistant to the process.

The perceptions of teachers must be changed for MTSS to be successful. School-based teams can assist with MTSS implementation to help foster a shared vision and to account for teacher perspectives. This approach can make staff feel like educational leaders in the process (Stuart et al., 2011). Feeling like they are a part of the initiative, staff may feel positive about MTSS and encouraged to implement it successfully. Stakeholders should be involved throughout the entire process of MTSS. Leadership teams can work with principals to develop a detailed plan for implementation, assist with professional development and instructional coaching, and ensure that MTSS drives the school improvement process. This will lead to buy-in among all involved to ensure sustainability because they are a part of the process, rather than using a top-down approach to implementation. Effective leadership, collaboration, professional development, and fidelity are critical for implementation of a sustainable MTSS.

The FAM-S completed by the school leadership teams mimics the data received from the Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey and the Beliefs Survey. All the data show that the participants are facing the same barriers from the qualitative analysis completed by Castro- Villarreal et al. (2014) of 100 educators in a city in the Southwest United States. Those barriers were training, time, resources, process, and paperwork.

The district in this study needs to provide quality professional development for all

stakeholders to ensure that everyone has the background knowledge and skills to sustain MTSS. Throughout the professional development, the district should see the same results Stuart et al. (2011) observed about educator perspectives of MTSS. With effective professional development over time, changes to the core curriculum will occur. Once that happens, the staff will be able to focus on individual student needs to provide interventions, rather than using the same curriculum for every student.

While focusing on ensuring that all staff have a true understanding of MTSS, the district should also monitor staff perceptions throughout the process. Negative perceptions can have a detrimental effect on the process. Addressing staff perceptions can help with resistance to the process, which will lead to a lack of sustainability of MTSS. The implementation will be more successful if staff remain positive about the process.

In order to improve staff perceptions for MTSS to be successful, administration can rely on teachers to assist in setting goals to make it a shared process (Stuart et al., 2011). Stuart et al.'s (2011) study of a 2-year implementation process showed that staff may feel like they are a part of the process, which could lead to higher expectations and greater achievement for students. The staff in Stuart et al.'s study were driven to implement MTSS successfully once they felt it was not an administrative directive. While there are some non-negotiables that must occur for MTSS to be successful, it is important to gather staff input in as much of the process as possible. Collaboration is important among principals and staff members to get teacher buy-in, which is critical to the success of MTSS (Lembke et al., 2010).

Professional development is needed for the school district to support the educators who do not have the appropriate background knowledge and skills to fully implement and

sustain MTSS. It would also be beneficial if university educator preparation programs provided training for preservice teachers on the MTSS process. If staff is properly trained, they will fully understand the purpose of MTSS and the steps needed to be successful, which could ensure a positive perception of MTSS. Not having a clear understanding of the district plan for MTSS could cause some confusion. Professional development needs to be ongoing and relevant for this district to be successful. The lack and inconsistency of professional development may be hindering the staff buy-in that is needed for MTSS to be fully implemented and sustainable. The data show that the district has focused more on the elementary level, but MTSS needs to continue through the secondary level. Once the staff know exactly what is needed for MTSS, they will be able to sustain the initiative and see success in all students.

The staff in the district have had various levels of professional development in the MTSS process. Professional development for all staff is needed to review the fundamental components of MTSS, such as what MTSS is and what each tier represents. The training should be continuous and intensive while remaining supportive. Once each staff member has completed professional development in the general overview of MTSS, training modules for each of the five key components of MTSS, problem-solving strategies, use of data, research-based strategies and flexible student grouping, universal screening, and curriculum-based assessments and progress monitoring should be provided for staff. After the beginning training and all of the modules have been completed, staff should complete the Perception of RTI Skills Survey and the Beliefs Survey again to measure the effectiveness of the modules. These modules need to be available for staff at any time if there is a need to review the information. Individual

modules can be assigned to staff by principals if they see that the staff member needs additional training and support.

North Carolina mandated the use of MTSS on July 1, 2020 for the identification of students in need of special education services based on their response to high-quality core instruction and research-based interventions. The percentage of students identified with learning disabilities has remained consistent throughout the state. The state has been using the train the trainer model since the statewide training began in 2006. The state should revisit how they are providing the training for the districts, and provide modules for each of the five components, so that training will be consistent state-wide. State funding for individualized professional development should also be available if districts or individuals have the need for further training. With consistent training among all districts, North Carolina would see fewer referrals for special education and tremendous growth for all students academically.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral student enrolled in the Gardner-Webb University. I am writing to you to request permission to conduct my doctoral research in your school district in order to fulfill my doctoral requirements. The purpose of this study is to investigate background knowledge and perceptions of staff about RTI/MTSS, and the impact it will have on the deadline for full implementation mandated by North Carolina. The research will show what supports will be needed for the district to be prepared for the July 1, 2020 deadline.

In order to conduct this study, I will need access to the FAM-S completed by each school. In addition, instructional staff of all the schools will be asked to participate an educators' perception survey and an educators' beliefs survey.

Participation is completely voluntary. All information collected during this research will be kept confidential. No written reports or publications will contain any information that would identify the study location or its participants. Although there is no direct benefit to any of the participants, it is hoped that the findings of this study will provide insight and suggestions for this district and potentially similar districts on how to successfully implement and sustain an RTI/MTSS model of instruction.

Thank you for anticipated support. I greatly appreciate your consideration of my request.
Sincerely,

Carla Murray

Appendix B

Facilitated Assessment of MTSS-School Level (FAM-S)

Rationale

It is the vision of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) that every NC Pre K-12 public education system implements and sustains all components of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to ensure college and career readiness for all students. The NC FAM-S measures school-level implementation of NC MTSS. The purpose of administration and its resulting data is to help school and district-level personnel identify and prioritize implementation steps. The instrument contains 41 items in 6 domains (Leadership, Building Capacity/Infrastructure for Implementation, Communication and Collaboration, Data-based Problem-solving, Three-tiered Instruction/Intervention Model, and Data-Evaluation).

History

Most items in the NC FAM-S were originally developed and validated in Florida as part of the Self-Assessment of MTSS (SAM). North Carolina began using the items in 2016 after a diverse group of educational professionals examined each item to determine its accuracy and validity for use in North Carolina. In 2018, stakeholders from the NC MTSS Consortium as well as a group of identified content experts from across the state again reviewed and revised the instrument to include essential features from both NC MTSS professional development and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support. This review panel included institute of higher education professionals as well as district and school level practitioners. The revised instrument, released in 2019, provides the field with an integrated tool which assesses the breadth and depth of academic, behavior and social-emotional supports.

Recommended Use

The FAM-S is intended to be used within a **facilitated administration** setting which would allow the district personnel to review evidence to support the school team's proposed score. NC DPI recommends an annual facilitated administration between April and June. The facilitated administration should be led by the district MTSS/PBIS Coordinator and/or another member of the District MTSS Team. The instrument can be used at any time as an implementation self-report and guide for school leadership teams.

Administration Guidelines

Prior to Administration

- Schedule 1.5 - 2 hours for facilitation of the tool with the school team.
- Provide the school team with a copy of the FAM-S.
- Instruct the school leadership team that EACH member should review the item descriptors independently and provide a personal response to each item.

During the Facilitated Administration (including all school leadership team members & designated facilitator from the District MTSS Team)

- Each item will be reviewed, and the school team members will come to a consensus on a response for each item.
- The facilitator will assist the team in determining appropriate evidence for each item.
- The facilitator will enter each response and its supporting evidence in the FAM-S scoring system.
- Total scores for the facilitated administration will produce a percentage for each critical component, as well as an overall percentage.
- The facilitator will assist the team in using the data to plan the school's next steps for MTSS implementation.

After the Facilitated Administration

- The District MTSS Team will examine data from each administration site to identify district-wide trends and patterns.
- The District MTSS Team will use the data to inform district-wide professional development and coaching.

NC FAM-S 2.2019

Item	**Not Implementing (0)**	**Emerging/ Developing (1)**	**Operationalizing (2)** *Includes Emerging/Developing*	**Optimizing (3)** *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
1. The principal is actively involved in and facilitates **MTSS implementation.**	The principal does not actively support MTSS.	The principal is actively involved in MTSS implementation by communicating an urgent desire to implement MTSS, participating in professional development on MTSS, and establishing an MTSS vision.	The principal actively supports the leadership team and staff to build capacity for implementation.	The principal actively supports data-based problem-solving use at the school.

Related Notes

Responsibilities for facilitating **MTSS implementation** are not limited to, but can include:

- Promoting a school-wide vision and mission for MTSS implementation, including the development and dissemination of a school-wide implementation plan that outlines attendance, behavior, social-emotional, and academic areas
- Allocating resources (e.g., time, personnel, materials) for planning and delivery of evidence-based assessment, instruction and intervention
- Providing ongoing professional development and coaching support to school staff
- Collecting and analyzing data on MTSS implementation efforts

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- School Improvement Plan shows evidence of MTSS systems and practices
- Agendas and meeting rosters showing evidences of principal participation
- PD plan(s) with MTSS systems and practices showing principal involvement
- Staff/student handbook with evidence of MTSS practices

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging /Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
2. A **leadership team** is established that includes 5-7 members, has **crossdisciplinary representation**, and is responsible for facilitating **MTSS implementation**.	No leadership team with explicit responsibility for leading MTSS implementation exists.	A leadership team exists that includes cross-disciplinary representation.	The leadership team has explicit expectations for facilitating MTSS implementation.	The leadership team members have the beliefs, knowledge, and skills to lead implementation efforts.

Related Notes

At the school level, a school-based **leadership team** should guide implementation of an MTSS. This may take place within the structure of the School Improvement Team or may be a subset of this team that is charged with implementation planning. Teams may differ based on several factors, but a connection should always be made in order to facilitate effective implementation. A long-term plan for implementation of MTSS should be developed by the school-based leadership team. This may be a part of the school improvement plan or separate. If it is separate, there should be clear alignment of the MTSS implementation plan with the overall goals and action steps within the school improvement plan.

Cross-disciplinary representation may include administration, teachers, content area experts, student support personnel, instructional support personnel, individuals with expertise in behavior and social/emotional skills, and student and family representation when appropriate.

Responsibilities for facilitating **MTSS implementation** are not limited to but can include the following:

- Promoting a school-wide vision and mission for MTSS implementation, including the development and dissemination of a school-wide implementation plan
- Allocating resources (e.g., time, personnel, materials) for the planning and delivery of evidence-based assessment, instruction and intervention
- Providing ongoing professional development and coaching support to school staff
- Collecting and analyzing data on MTSS implementation efforts

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Leadership team roster and roles

- Leadership team meeting agendas/minutes
- Leadership team's participation in professional learning opportunities

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
3. A **linked teaming structure** exists that facilitates the implementation of a multitiered system of support for attendance, behavior, socialemotional, and academic support.	No linked teaming structure exists.	A linked teaming structure exists that demonstrates 1 of the following: 1) Teams meet regularly and have regular meeting formats/agendas, minutes, and defined meeting roles. 2) Team members have expertise in the area being problem solved, administrative authority, knowledge of the student(s), and knowledge of the school operations. 3) Team members include family, community, and multi-agency support when appropriate. 4) District or school contact person(s) with access to external support agencies and resources for planning and implementing non-school-based interventions (e.g., intensive mental health) when appropriate.	A linked teaming structure exists that demonstrates 2-3 of the following:	A linked teaming structure exists that demonstrates all of the following:

Related Notes

A **linked teaming structure** refers to the teams in a school charged with implementation of MTSS. Multiple teams at a school may be charged with implementation of MTSS (e.g., school leadership team, school improvement team, grade-level teams). A formal communication protocol between teams and overlapping membership across teams exists.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Team rosters and roles
- Teams' meeting agendas/minutes
- Formal communication plan
- School organizational chart
- Meeting role descriptions

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
4. The leadership team ensures staff are actively engaged in ongoing **professional development and coaching** necessary to	The leadership team does not have a needs-based plan to provide staff with professional development or coaching to support MTSS implementation.	A needs assessment is conducted to gather information on beliefs, knowledge, and skills to develop a professional development plan to support	A professional development plan is created based on the needs assessment and used to engage staff in ongoing professional development and coaching.	Ongoing professional development activities are informed by data collected on the outcomes of professional development and coaching for continuous improvement.

support MTSS implementation.		MTSS implementation.		

Related Notes

Professional development and coaching are ongoing activities that develop the capacity of staff to implement MTSS. Professional development ideally includes a coaching component, so the two terms are used together throughout this tool. Efforts should be aligned with results of school needs assessments and modified based on the results of professional learning.

"Coaching" is defined as technical assistance and support provide to school staff to improve implementation of components of an MTSS model, including co-planning, modeling/demonstration, co-facilitation, and guided practice with high quality feedback.

"Coaching does NOT necessarily have to be completed by one person. Coaching can be provided by a number of different individuals depending upon their specializations, skill sets, as well as the particulars of the context of activities. It is unreasonable to assume that just one individual, or one coach, will have all the skills required to effectively provide coaching for MTSS in every given situation that may arise."

March, A.L. and Gaunt, B.T. (2013). Systems Coaching: A model for building capacity.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Professional development and coaching plan
- Professional development roster(s)
- Needs assessment
- Professional development and coaching evaluation data
- Coaching follow-up meeting notes
- Staff handbook

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
5. A **plan for MTSS implementation** is developed and aligned with or part of the school improvement plan.	No plan for MTSS implementation exists.	The leadership team is engaging district, family, and community partners to identify stakeholder needs, as well as resources for and barriers to MTSS implementation.	As part of the school improvement planning process, a plan is developed that specifies MTSS implementation.	A plan for MTSS implementation is updated, as needed based on student outcome and implementation fidelity data, as part of the school improvement planning process.

Related Notes

At the school level, a school-based **leadership team** should guide implementation of an MTSS. This may take place within the structure of the School Improvement Team or may be a subset of this team that is charged with implementation planning. Teams may differ based on several factors, but a connection should always be made in order to facilitate effective implementation. A long-term plan for implementation of MTSS should be developed by the school-based leadership team. This may be a part

of the school improvement plan or separate. If it is separate, there should be clear alignment of the MTSS implementation plan with the overall goals and action steps within the school improvement plan.
A **plan for MTSS implementation** should address the following components (at a minimum): ● Communication and collaboration strategies ● Capacity building targets and activities ● Data to monitor implementation fidelity of the critical elements of MTSS ● Evaluation of outcomes

Examples of Supporting Evidence

● MTSS implementation/strategic plan with alignment to or as a part of the School Improvement Plan ● Leadership team meeting agenda/minutes ● Implementation fidelity data

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
6. The leadership team is actively **facilitating implementation of MTSS** as part of their school improvement planning process.	The leadership team is not actively engaging in efforts to facilitate MTSS implementation.	The leadership team engages in planning and has created a plan to facilitate implementation of the **essential elements** of MTSS.	The leadership team provides support to educators implementing the **essential elements** of MTSS identified in the plan.	The leadership team uses data on implementation fidelity of the **essential elements** of MTSS to engage in data-based problem-solving for the purpose of continuous school improvement.

Related Notes

Different approaches to **facilitating school-wide implementation of an MTSS** model can include: ● The focus on a three-stage model of consensus building, infrastructure development, and implementation of practices consistent with an MTSS model ● The focus on a specific set of activities related to successful implementation of a designated model of service delivery (e.g., National Implementation Research Network framework) ● The approach to facilitating school-wide implementation of an MTSS model should be connected to the School Improvement Plan (SIP), as well as other schoolwide plans
Responsibilities for facilitating **MTSS implementation** are not limited to but can include the following: ● Promoting a school-wide vision and mission for MTSS implementation, including the development and dissemination of a school-wide implementation plan ● Allocating resources (e.g., time, personnel, materials) for the planning and delivery of evidence-based assessment, instruction and intervention ● Providing ongoing professional development and coaching support to school staff ● Collecting and analyzing data on MTSS implementation efforts

Essential elements of MTSS communicated to staff include the following:

- Curriculum and instruction frameworks and support (e.g., reading, math, behavior, social-emotional learning)
- Assessment
- Multiple tiers of instruction and intervention (i.e., three-tiered instruction/intervention model)
- Data-based problem-solving

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- School improvement plan with evidence (direct language or components explicitly mentioned) of MTSS
- Professional development plan
- Implementation fidelity data

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
7. The **essential elements** of MTSS implementation are defined and understood by school staff.	No information on the essential elements of the school's MTSS is available.	The essential elements of MTSS are in the process of being defined.	The essential elements of MTSS are defined and communicated to school staff.	The curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices that define the school's essential elements of MTSS can be communicated by all school staff.

Related Notes

Essential elements of MTSS communicated to staff include the following:

- Curriculum and instruction frameworks and support (e.g., reading, math, behavior, social-emotional learning)
- Assessment
- Multiple tiers of instruction and intervention (i.e., three-tiered instruction/intervention model)
- Data-based problem-solving

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Common instructional framework for academics and behavior
- At least 10% of staff members can define critical aspect of a tier and a content area (e.g., "Tell me one critical aspect of Core, Supplemental, or Intensive instruction for literacy, math or behavior at your school.")
- Formal comprehensive assessment system
- Formal core and intervention matrix
- Defined data-based problem-solving model

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
8. The leadership team ensures **professional development and coaching** for all staff members on assessments and data sources used to inform decisions relative to job roles and responsibilities.	Initial professional development is not provided to all staff members.	The staff engages in initial, job-embedded professional development focusing on the following: 1) purpose and administration of assessment tools, 2) role of assessment/data sources in making instructional decisions, 3) analyzing and using assessment results to improve instruction, 4) using various types of data to inform instructional practices to meet the needs of diverse learners, and 5) communicating and partnering with families about data and assessment practices.	The staff engages in ongoing professional development and coaching related to the administration of assessments and interpretation of the data/data sources. Professional development includes the following: 1) changes or updates to assessments/data sources, 2) changes to data collection, tracking and analysis, and 3) ongoing coaching on instructional practices and interpreting assessment results	The leadership team analyzes feedback from staff as well as outcomes in order to identify professional development and coaching needs in the area of assessment/data sources in support of continuous improvement.

Related Notes

Professional development and coaching are ongoing activities that develop the capacity of staff to implement MTSS. Efforts should be aligned with results of school needs assessments and modified based on the results of professional learning.
"Coaching" is defined as technical assistance and support provide to school staff to improve implementation of components of an MTSS model, including co-planning, modeling/demonstration, do-facilitation, and guided practice with high quality feedback. "Coaching does NOT necessarily have to be completed by one person. Coaching can be provided by a number of different individuals depending upon their specializations, skill sets, as well as the particulars

of the context of activities. It is unreasonable to assume that just one individual, or one coach, will have all the skills required to effectively provide coaching for MTSS in every given situation that may arise." March, A.L. and Gaunt, B.T. (2013). Systems Coaching: A model for building capacity.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Professional development plan/calendar that includes training content on assessments and data sources
- PLC/Grade level/Department team agendas that include professional learning on assessments and data sources
- Other evidence of coaching or PD specific to job roles/responsibilities on assessments and data sources, professional development evaluation data

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
9. The leadership team **ensures professional development and coaching** for staff members on **databased problem-solving** relative to their job roles/responsibilities.	Professional development does not focus on data-based problem-solving.	Initial professional development on data-based problem-solving is provided that includes the following elements: 1) rationale for use of databased problem-solving, 2) problem-solving steps to address school-wide, classroom, small-group and individual student needs, and 3) roles and responsibilities for team members engaging in data-based problemsolving.	Ongoing professional development and coaching on data-based problem-solving is delivered and includes the following elements: 1) differentiation of professional development based on staff roles/responsibilities, 2) coaching, 3) modeling, practice, and collaborative feedback on problem-solving steps, and 4) support for collaboration and teaming skills.	Data on use of problemsolving skills and application are used to inform continuous improvement of professional development and coaching efforts.

Related Notes

Professional development and coaching are ongoing activities that develop the capacity of staff to implement MTSS. Efforts should be aligned with results of school needs assessments and modified based on the results of professional learning.

Data-based problem solving refers to a multi-step process that includes examining performance related to goals/expectations (problem identification), understanding variables causing problems (problem analysis), selecting/designing and implementing strategies to lessen barriers and achieve goals (instruction/intervention delivery), and monitoring effectiveness (monitoring/evaluation).

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Professional development plan/calendar that includes training content on assessments, data sources, data-based problem-solving
- PLC/Grade level/Department team agendas that include professional learning on assessments, data sources, data-based problem-solving
- Other evidence of coaching or PD specific to job roles/responsibilities on assessments and data sources
- Staff handbook

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
10. The leadership team ensures **professional development and coaching** for all staff on **multi-tiered instruction and intervention** relative to their job roles/responsibilities.	No explicit connection to multi-tiered instruction and intervention is evident in professional development provided.	Initial professional development on multi-tiered instruction and intervention is provided that includes the following elements: 1) rationale for and modeling of **instruction and intervention design and delivery**, 2) alignment/integration between the practices and MTSS, 3) guidance around data informed instruction design and delivery, as well as intervention design and delivery, that ensures optimal learning opportunities for all sub-groups of students, and 4) orientation on the essential behavioral practices	Ongoing professional development and coaching on multi-tiered instruction and intervention is provided that includes the following elements: 1) differentiation of professional development and coaching based on staff roles/responsibilities, 2) on-going coaching, and 3) modeling of, practice of, and collaborative feedback on, evidence-based practices.	The leadership team regularly uses data on student needs and implementation fidelity of evidence-based practices to continuously improve professional development and coaching efforts.

		of teaching school-wide expectations, acknowledging appropriate behavior, correcting errors.		

Related Notes

Professional development and coaching are ongoing activities that develop the capacity of staff to implement MTSS. Efforts should be aligned with results of school needs assessments and modified based on the results of professional learning.
Multi-tiered instruction and intervention refers to the concepts of multiple layers of support for staff and students as well as the specifics of core and intervention support which may be found in the district/school core matrix and intervention matrix.
Instruction and intervention design and delivery includes factors such as standards, instructional routines, universal behavior supports, lesson planning for active student engagement.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Professional development plan/calendar that includes training content on multi-tiered instruction and intervention content
- PLC/Grade level/Department team agendas that include professional learning on multi-tiered instruction and intervention
- Other evidence of coaching or PD specific to job roles/responsibilities on multi-tiered instruction and intervention
- Implementation fidelity data
- Staff handbook, lesson plans for teacher professional development

Item	**Not Implementing (0)**	**Emerging/ Developing (1)**	**Operationalizing (2)** *Includes Emerging/Developing*	**Optimizing (3)** *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
11. **Coaching** is used to support MTSS implementation.	No coaching is provided to build staff capacity to implement the critical elements of MTSS.	Initial coaching is occurring that is focused primarily on facilitating or modeling the components of MTSS.	Coaching activities are expanded to include the following: 1) opportunities to practice and 2) collaborative and performance feedback.	Data on professional development, implementation fidelity, and student outcomes are used to refine coaching activities.

Related Notes

"Coaching" is defined as technical assistance and support provide to school staff to improve implementation of components of an MTSS model, including co-planning, modeling/demonstration, do-facilitation, and guided practice with high quality feedback. "Coaching does NOT necessarily have to be completed by one person. Coaching can be provided by a number of different individuals depending upon their specializations, skill sets, as well as the particulars of the context of activities. It is unreasonable to assume that just one individual, or one coach, will have all the skills required to effectively provide coaching for MTSS in every given situation that may arise." March, A.L. and Gaunt, B.T. (2013). Systems Coaching: A model for building capacity.

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
12. **Schedules** provide adequate time for **professional development and coaching** support.	Schedules do NOT include time allocated to professional development and coaching for MTSS.	Schedules include time allocated to professional development	Schedules include time for ongoing coaching support	Schedules permit personnel to access additional professional development and coaching support that is differentiated based on their needs.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Coaching logs/documentation of coaching activities/opportunities
- School improvement plan includes information about coaching supports and structures around MTSS
- PLC/Grade Level/Department Team meetings logs evidencing coaching opportunities
- Professional development and coaching evaluation data
- Implementation fidelity data

Related Notes

Schedules refer to both the year-long schedule of activities that may include professional development and coaching, universal screening/benchmark assessments, and data-analysis. Schedules also refer to on-going (e.g., weekly) activities related to professional development and coaching, assessment, and data-analysis.

Professional development and coaching are ongoing activities that develop the capacity of staff to implement MTSS. Efforts should be aligned with results of school needs assessments and modified based on the results of professional learning.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Master schedule has time provided for PD and coaching
- PLC/Grade level/Department agendas evidence coaching support/coaching opportunities
- PD calendar

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
13. **Schedules** provide adequate time to administer academic, **behavior, and social-emotional assessments** needed to make data-based decisions.	Schedules do NOT include time allocated to administer assessments needed to make decisions across tiers.	Schedules include time for administration of academic, behavior, and socialemotional assessments for all students (e.g., universal screening).	Schedules include time to administer progress monitoring assessments for students receiving supplemental and intensive support as specified (e.g., weekly or monthly assessments).	Schedules permit personnel to administer additional assessments (e.g., diagnostic assessments) across content areas when needed for databased problem solving.

Related Notes

Schedules refer to both the year-long schedule of activities that may include professional development and coaching, universal screening/benchmark assessments, and dataanalysis. Schedules also refer to on-going (e.g., weekly) activities related to professional development and coaching, assessment, and data-analysis.

Behavior/Social-Emotional Assessment:

Screening - Recommended Behavior/Social-emotional screening data include reviewing and analyzing all students' adherence to school-wide expectations through collection of the following:

- Minor problem behavior (classroom managed)
- Major problem behavior (office discipline referral)
- Attendance patterns
- Other areas that some schools may choose to universally screen in the area of Behavior/Social-emotional skills using a school-wide screening for internalizing behaviors (e.g., depressive symptoms, anxiety, etc.).

Diagnostic - Diagnostic assessments for behavior/social-emotional skills include use of functional behavior assessments in order to find the root cause for the student's difficulties.

Progress-Monitoring - In the area of behavior/social-emotional functioning, the monitoring of student progress with the intervention should be matched with the problem of concern. Teams will want to consider monitoring frequency, duration, intensity, and latency recording.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Master schedule or master calendar with time for data collection included
- Assessment calendar
- Progress monitoring fidelity data

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
14. The **master schedule** provides adequate time for multiple tiers of evidencebased instruction and intervention to occur.	The master schedule is developed without consideration of student data and does not include time for multi-tiered interventions.	The master schedule is developed utilizing student data and includes time for multi-tiered interventions.	The master schedule facilitates effective implementation of multitiered interventions matched to student needs by area and intensity (core, supplemental, intensive).	The master schedule allows for flexible student groupings.

Related Notes

The **master schedule** refers to allocation of resources daily (e.g., staff, time). The master schedule may also include on-going/weekly activities such as time for staff to engage in problem-solving and data-analysis.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Master schedule with evidence of intervention/instruction time based on needs of school population (adequate time for Core, Supplemental and Intensive)

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
15. The **master schedule** provides adequate time for staff to engage in collaborative, data-based problem-solving and decisionmaking.	The master schedule does not provide opportunities for collaborative, data-based problem-solving and decisionmaking among staff.	The master schedule provides opportunities to engage in collaborative, data-based problem-solving and decisionmaking among staff.	The master schedule provides sufficient time for the process to occur with fidelity.	The master schedule provides opportunities for collaborative, data-based problem-solving and decision making among staff to occur in settings such as leadership team meetings, grade-level meetings, cross grade-level meetings, professional learning communities.

Related Notes

The **master schedule** refers to allocation of resources daily (e.g., staff, time). The master schedule may also include on-going/weekly activities such as time for staff to engage in problem-solving and data-analysis.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Master schedule with evidence of data-based problem-solving time reserved
- Meeting agendas/minutes (staff meetings, PLC meetings, etc.)

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
16. **Processes/procedures and decision-rules** are established for **data-based problem-solving** at each tier.	No systematic processes/procedures or decision-rules are established.	Processes/procedures and decision-rules needed to engage in data-based problem-solving are developed and existing structures and resources are incorporated.	The following are communicated to staff: 1) steps of problem-solving, 2) procedures for accessing, submitting, and using data, and 3) decision-rules needed to make reliable decisions.	Data-based problem-solving processes/procedures and decision-rules are refined based on data and feedback from staff, schedule changes, and resource availability.

Related Notes

Districts and schools develop **processes/procedures and decision rules** to establish and communicate the problem-solving process to be used, specific steps to be followed, and criteria to use when making decisions (e.g., what is good, questionable, or poor response to instruction/intervention). Processes/procedures include procedures for staff, parents, and stakeholders requesting assistance. Schools should consider district and state guidelines when available.

Data-based problem solving refers to a multi-step process that includes examining performance related to goals/expectations (problem identification), understanding variables causing problems (problem

analysis), selecting/designing and implementing strategies to lessen barriers and achieve goals (instruction/intervention delivery), and monitoring effectiveness (monitoring/evaluation).

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Evidence of processes, procedures and decision-rules for tiers of instruction found in implementation plans, guidance or school improvement plans
- Data-decision rules outlined on some type of planning document that is evident to teams across the school building
- Staff feedback
- Staff handbook
- Clear policy/procedure (e.g., flowchart) for addressing office-managed versus staff-managed problems.

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
17. **Resources** available to support MTSS implementation are identified and allocated.	No process exists for mapping and allocating resources available to support MTSS implementation.	Leadership team members are gathering information on the personnel, funding, materials, and other resources available to support MTSS implementation.	Resource inventories are established using the gathered information on the personnel, funding, materials, and other resources available to support MTSS implementation and plans for allocating the resources are established.	Existing resource maps and resource allocations are updated at least annually based on student need, available personnel, funding, materials, and other resources.

Related Notes

Resources encompass not only available monetary assets but also available personnel, instructional materials, and time that will facilitate the implementation and sustainment of an MTSS as a framework for supporting all students.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Resource allocation documentation (i.e., maps, inventories, etc.)
- MTSS implementation plan
- School Improvement Plan

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*

18. **Staff** is **engaged** in consensus building activities for MTSS implementation.	Staff is not provided opportunities to gain understanding of the need for MTSS.	Staff is provided opportunities to gain understanding of the need for MTSS.	Staff has opportunities to gain understanding of its relevance to their roles and responsibilities.	Staff understands the need for MTSS and its relevance to their roles and responsibilities and has opportunities to provide input on how to implement MTSS.

Related Notes

Staff refers to employees at the school that will be impacted by or will be involved in implementation of MTSS. This will always include administration, teachers, other professionals and para-professional support staff. The degree to which other employees (e.g., bus drivers, cafeteria workers, administrative support staff, etc.) are included may be determined by their level of involvement with/implementation of MTSS components at the individual school level.
Efforts to **engage** staff should align with district and state guidance regarding MTSS implementation to facilitate staff understanding of connections between school, district and state initiatives.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- NC Beliefs Survey results indicating consensus
- Agenda and minutes from meetings where data is discussed that indicates good staff representation in problem-solving
- Professional development calendar
- Staff input/feedback, i.e. surveys
- Staff handbook

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
19. Staff is provided **data** on MTSS implementation *and* student outcomes at all tiers.	Staff is not provided any data regarding MTSS implementation nor student outcomes.	Staff is provided data 1x/per year regarding MTSS implementation and student outcomes.	Staff is provided data 2x/per year regarding MTSS implementation and student outcomes.	Staff are regularly (≥3x/year) provided data regarding MTSS implementation and student outcomes.

Related Notes

Data on student outcomes, school-level implementation fidelity, the capacity of educators to implement, and commitment from staff are needed to inform implementation. Staff roles and responsibilities will drive the specific data they need to inform implementation.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Meeting minutes/agendas/notes from various platforms that show presentation of both outcome and implementation data to staff- representative of the number of times per year they are reporting sharing of data
- Student outcome data
- Implementation data (i.e., FAM-S results, % of students receiving intervention with fidelity, etc.)

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
21. Educators actively engage students, families, and community stakeholders at all tiers of MTSS.	Staff do none of the following:	Staff do 1 of the following:	Staff do 2-3 of the following:	Staff do ALL of the following:
	1) engage students and families that represent the diverse population of the school 2) engage students and families in problem solving when their children need additional supports 3) provide intensive outreach to **unresponsive families** 4) increase the skills of families to support student learning			

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
20. The infrastructure exists to support the school's goals for **family and community engagement** in MTSS.	Family and community engagement are none of the following:	Family and community engagement are 1 of the following:	Family and community engagement are 2 of the following:	Family and community engagement are all of the following:
	1) defined and monitored with data 2) linked to school goals in MTSS plan 3) include documented procedures for facilitating 2-way communication			

Related Notes

Family and community engagement is the active and meaningful partnership that educators build and maintain with students' families and the broader community for the purpose of supporting student learning.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Intentional connection and involvement of families in School Improvement Planning
- Family engagement plan/protocol for all populations
- PTA documentation
- Family and community engagement data (e.g., attendance at activities)
- Family and community input surveys

Related Notes

Intensive outreach to **unresponsive families** refers to additional activities undertaken by the school to engage families of students who need additional supports but are not engaging with the school's typical outreach practices (e.g., letters, phone calls, etc.) Intensive outreach is an individualized approach requiring information gathering and problem solving to identify outreach strategies that are more likely to be successful for a family.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Family attendance and active participation at problem-solving meetings evidenced through meeting minutes
- Family attendance and active involvement during leadership or school improvement meetings evidenced through meeting minutes
- Protocols for family engagement clearly communicated through handbooks, guides, expectations, etc.

- Evidence of outreach using a variety of venues (i.e., websites, videos, mass phone messages, emails, handouts, parent nights, etc.)
- Documentation of information provided to families regarding interventions, student response and progress on repeated assessments
- Student/family handbook

Related Notes

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
22. ACROSS ALL TIERS, **Integrated data-based problem-solving** for student attendance, behavior, socialemotional, and academic outcomes occurs across areas and grade levels.	Attendance, behavior, socialemotional, and academic data may be collected BUT integrated data-based problem-solving by a team does not occur: 1) in 2 or more areas 2) in at least 50% of grade levels 3) at any tier.	Integrated data-based problem-solving by a team occurs: 1) in at least 2 areas 2) in at least 50% of grade levels 3) at a single tier.	Integrated data-based problem-solving by a team occurs: 1) in at least 3 areas 2) in at least 75% of grade levels 3) at least two tiers.	Integrated data-based problem-solving by a team occurs: 1) across all areas 2) in all grade levels 3) in all tiers.
Integrated data-based problem-solving should occur (1) across attendance, behavior, social-emotional, and academic content areas (e.g., literacy, math) for a school) (2) within and across grade levels (e.g., horizontal meetings for 6th, 7th, 8th, as well as vertical meetings), and (3) across tiers (performance data in response to instruction used to engage in problem solving for all students [Core], for some students receiving supplemental instruction [Supplemental], and for students receiving individualized support [Intensive]).				
Data-based problem solving refers to a multi-step process that includes examining performance related to goals/expectations (problem identification), understanding variables causing problems (problem analysis), selecting/designing and implementing strategies to lessen barriers and achieve goals (instruction/intervention delivery), and monitoring effectiveness (monitoring/evaluation).				

Examples of Supporting Evidence

Meeting minutes from data-based problem-solving meetings (i.e., SIT, MTSS leadership team, PLC/Grade level/Department meetings, Individual Student Problem-Solving Team meeting, etc.) indicate problem-solving is occurring

- MTSS Implementation Plans document procedures aligned with model
- Observation of data-based problem-solving occurring with fidelity
- Multiple sources of data used
- School policy (TFI)
- Formal decision rules

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
Problem Identification 23. ACROSS ALL TIERS, multiple sources of data are used to identify the difference or "gap" between expected and current student outcomes relative to attendance, behavior, social-emotional, and academic goals.	The gap between expected and current student outcomes is NOT identified.	The gap between expected and current student outcomes is identified.	The gap between expected and current student outcomes is associated with specific attendance, behavior, socialemotional, and academic goals.	The data are used to identify the appropriate tier of instruction/ intervention (i.e., "Is the gap best remedied through core changes, supplemental intervention matching, intensive intervention matching or a combination of these?")

Related Notes

Rubric scoring example:
0 - There is a problem in reading in 4th grade.
1 - Reading appears to be a problem in 4th grade, only 47% of students met the benchmark on the universal screening. That is consistent with previous year's performance. 2 - 47% of students met the benchmark on the universal screening. That is consistent with previous year's performance. We want 75 - 80% of students to meet the benchmark.
3 - 47% of students met the benchmark on the universal screening. That is consistent with previous year's performance.
We want 75 - 80% of students to meet the benchmark. This problem should be solved by making changes to our core instruction.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Meeting minutes from data-based problem-solving meetings (i.e., SIT, MTSS leadership team, PLC/Grade level/Department meetings, Individual Student Problem-Solving Team meeting, etc.) indicate problem-solving is occurring
- MTSS Implementation Plans document procedures aligned with model
- Observation of data-based problem-solving occurring with fidelity
- Formal decision rules

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
Problem Analysis	**Hypotheses** are not developed			

24. ACROSS ALL TIERS, attendance, behavior, socialemotional, and academic data are used to analyze and hypothesize reasons students are not meeting expectations.	for why students are not meeting expectations.	Hypotheses are developed across relevant domains (instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner) for why students are not meeting expectations.	Hypotheses are tested using multiple sources of data and across relevant domains (instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner).	Problem analysis results in a precise problem statement.

Related Notes

Reasons why students are not meeting expectations are sometimes referred to as **hypotheses** or barriers to learning. The big idea is that schools identify potential curriculum, instruction, environment (e.g., peer distractions, classroom management issues), and learner (e.g., skill deficits) for why the student is not meeting expectations and collect data/information to determine which reasons are contributing to the problem.

Rubric Scoring Examples

- Only 47% of student met the reading universal screening benchmark due to lack of explicit comprehension and vocabulary instruction.
- Only 47% of students met the reading universal screening benchmark. From reviewing, interviewing, observing, we know that rate and accuracy appear intact and that our school-wide literacy plan does not emphasize vocabulary instruction and explicit comprehension instruction.
- From reviewing, interviewing, observing, we know that rate and accuracy appear intact and that our school-wide literacy plan does not emphasize vocabulary instruction and explicit comprehension instruction. Only 47% of students met the reading universal screening benchmark due to a lack of explicit comprehension and vocabulary instruction across grade levels.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Meeting minutes from data-based problem-solving meetings (i.e., SIT, MTSS leadership team, PLC/grade level/department meetings, Individual Student ProblemSolving Team meeting, etc.) indicate problem-solving is occurring.
- MTSS Implementation Plans document procedures aligned with model
- Observation of data-based problem-solving occurring with fidelity
- Instruction and intervention plans show use of measures that inform "root cause" or answer the reason why students are not meeting expectations (i.e., diagnostic assessments/processes)

Item	**Not Implementing (0)**	**Emerging/ Developing (1)**	**Operationalizing (2)** *Includes Emerging/Developing*	**Optimizing (3)** *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
Plan Implementation	Instructional/intervention plans are NOT developed.	Instructional/Intervention plans are developed based on	Instructional/ intervention plans consistently specify	Specific instructional/ intervention plans are

25. ACROSS ALL TIERS, specific **instructional/ intervention plans** are developed and implemented based on verified reasons why students are not meeting attendance, behavior, social-emotional, and academic expectations.		verified reasons students are not meeting expectations.	what will be done, by whom, when, and where with enough detail to be implemented.	implemented with fidelity.

Related Notes

Specific **instruction/intervention plans** may be found in the district/school core matrix and intervention matrix. Plans should include the following information:

- The goal of the intervention/action plan (e.g., SMART goal)
- What intervention or action steps (e.g., curriculum adjustments, instructional processes and procedures) will be put in place
- How often (daily/weekly/etc.) the intervention will be utilized
- How long each session is to be implemented
- Who is responsible for intervention implementation and support
- Where and when the intervention will happen
- Plan for monitoring instruction/intervention fidelity and progress towards identified goals
- Timeframe (dates) for periodic review of progress monitoring data and decision points

Resources for goal setting

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Meeting minutes from data-based problem-solving meetings (i.e., SIT, MTSS leadership team, PLC/Grade level/Department meetings, Individual Student Problem-Solving Team meeting, etc.) indicate problem-solving is occurring
- MTSS Implementation Plans document procedures aligned with model
- Observation of data-based problem-solving occurring with fidelity
- Instruction/intervention plans with corresponding information
- Instruction/intervention implementation fidelity data
- Random selection of student support plans

Item	**Not Implementing (0)**	**Emerging/ Developing (1)**	**Operationalizing (2)** *Includes Emerging/Developing*	**Optimizing (3)** *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
Plan Evaluation				

26. ACROSS ALL TIERS, student progress specific to attendance, behavior, social/emotional, and academic goals are monitored (this includes progress towards **IEP goals, DEP goals, LEP goals**)	Progress monitoring does NOT occur, and student progress is NOT evaluated.	Plans for monitoring progress toward expected student outcomes are developed.	In most cases, data are collected to monitor student progress and intervention fidelity.	Changes are made to instruction/ intervention based on student responses.

Related Notes

Specific **instruction/intervention plans** may be found in the district/school core matrix and intervention matrix. Plans should include the following information:

- The goal of the intervention/action plan (e.g., SMART goal)
- What intervention or action steps (e.g., curriculum adjustments, instructional processes and procedures) will be put in place
- How often (daily/weekly/etc.) the intervention will be utilized
- How long each session is to be implemented
- Who is responsible for intervention implementation and support
- Where and when the intervention will happen
- Plan for monitoring instruction/intervention fidelity and progress towards identified goals
- Timeframe (dates) for periodic review of progress monitoring data and decision points

Resources for goal setting

IEP - Individualized Education Program
DEP - Differentiated Education Plan
LEP - Limited English Proficiency

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Meeting minutes from data-based problem-solving meetings (i.e., SIT, MTSS leadership team, PLC/grade level/department meetings, Individual Student Problem-Solving Team meeting, etc.) indicate problem-solving is occurring
- MTSS Implementation Plans document procedures aligned with model
- Observation of data-based problem-solving occurring with fidelity
- Progress-monitoring graphs utilizing valid and reliable assessments
- Intervention fidelity data
- Student progress monitoring data (e.g. % of students meeting goals)

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
27. ACROSS ALL TIERS: **Data-based problem solving** includes regular analysis of performance of **diverse groups** across all areas.	Data is not collected on student performance across diverse groups.	Data on student performance across diverse groups is collected.	The patterns of student performance are identified across tiers of instruction.	Data on student outcomes is used in MTSS evaluation.

Related Notes

Integrated data-based problem-solving should occur (1) across attendance, behavior, social-emotional, and academic content areas (e.g., literacy, math) for a school) (2) within and across grade levels (e.g., horizontal meetings for 6th, 7th, 8th, as well as vertical meetings), and (3) across tiers (performance data in response to instruction used to engage in problem solving for all students [Core], for some students receiving supplemental instruction [Supplemental], and for students receiving individualized support [Intensive]).
Data-based problem solving refers to a multi-step process that includes examining performance related to goals/expectations (problem identification), understanding variables causing problems (problem analysis), selecting/designing and implementing strategies to lessen barriers and achieve goals (instruction/intervention delivery), and monitoring effectiveness (monitoring/evaluation).
Diverse groups include racial/ethnic, cultural, social-economic, language proficiency, disability status

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Meeting minutes from data-based problem-solving meetings (i.e., SIT, MTSS leadership team, PLC/grade level/department meetings, Individual Student Problem-Solving Team meeting, etc.) indicate problem-solving is occurring with specific groups of students
- MTSS Implementation Plans document procedures aligned with model
- Observation of data-based problem-solving occurring with fidelity

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
28. Resources for and barriers to the implementation of MTSS are addressed through a data-based **problem-solving** process.	Data-based problem solving of resources for and barriers to implementation of MTSS does not occur.	School leadership discusses resources for and barriers to implementation of MTSS, but does not collect data to assess implementation levels or develop action plans toncrease implementation.	School leadership discusses resources for and barriers to implementation of MTSS and does <u>one</u> of the following: 1) collects data to assess implementation levels 2) develops action plans to increase implementation	School leadership discusses resources for and barriers to implementation of MTSS and does <u>both</u> of the following: 1) collects data to assess implementation levels 2) develops action plans to increase implementation

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
29. Core academic practices exist that are defined across grade levels/spans and content areas by essential components of instruction, curriculum and environment (ICE). These are refined based on both student outcome and implementation data for continuous improvement.	Core academic practices have not been defined across instruction, curriculum and environment for all grade levels/spans and content areas.	Core academic practices have been defined by all grade levels/spans and content areas AND include 1 of the following:	Core academic practices have been defined by all grade levels/spans and content areas AND include 2-3 of the following:	Core academic practices have been defined by all grade levels/spans and content areas AND include all of the following:
	1. Instruction specified design of culturally responsive instruction, practices for ensuring student engagement, opportunities for scaffolding, description of practice opportunities, etc. 2. Curriculum materials/resources utilized, standards/goals addressed, defined scope/sequence of skills, etc. 3. Environment grouping options, time (duration and frequency), **behavioral expectations** of students, etc. 4. Academic instruction defined in consideration of behavior and social-emotional instruction			

Related Notes

Structured **problem solving** is utilized to identify resources that can be used to facilitate implementation and barriers that are hindering implementation for the purpose of developing specific action plans to increase implementation levels.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Resource allocation maps with evidence of data-based problem-solving use
- School Improvement Plan with evidence of resources allocated to sustaining an MTSS
- MTSS implementation plan with evidence of data-based problem-solving use
- Data-based problem-solving meeting agendas/minutes
- Implementation fidelity data

Related Notes

Behavioral expectations for instruction often include elements related to the instructional routine (e.g., whole-group, small-group, and independent practice), amount of time dedicated to instruction, and which evidence-based instructional strategies are used.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Core academic matrix
- Instructional framework
- Classroom walkthrough documents

- Instructional plans
- School Improvement Plans/MTSS implementation plans

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
30. Core behavior practices exist that are defined schoolwide or across all grade levels/spans by essential components of instruction, curriculum and environment (ICE). These are refined based on both student outcome and implementation data for continuous improvement.	Core behavior practices have not been defined across instruction, curriculum and environment schoolwide or for all grade levels/spans.	Core behavior practices are defined at the school and/or grade level AND classroom level AND incorporate 1 of the following:	Core behavior practices are defined at the school and/or grade level AND classroom level AND incorporate 2-3 of the following:	Core behavior practices are defined at the school and/or grade level AND classroom level AND incorporate all of the following:
	1. Instruction culturally responsive design and delivery of explicit instruction for schoolwide **behavior expectations** *and* classroom rules, routines/procedures (e.g., classroom management) on an established schedule 2. Curriculum a matrix of school-wide behavioral expectations with operational definitions of expected behavior by setting (behavior matrix), student/staff acknowledgement system for appropriate behaviors, and a well-defined continuum of consequences for problem behaviors 3. Environment adult routines to promote success (i.e., active supervision, pre-corrects, clear definition of major/minor problem behaviors, consistent logical consequences, schedule for delivery of positive reinforcement, etc.) 4. Behavior practices defined in consideration of academic and social-emotional instruction			

Related Notes

Structured instruction of **behavioral expectations** is provided to all students. Classroom routines and classroom management strategies are embedded into instruction. School climate and environments support student well-being. A small number of clearly defined school-wide expectations that are positively stated are a foundational element of core school-wide behavior practices. Routines and procedures should emphasize proactive, instructive, and/or restorative approaches to student behavior.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Core behavior matrix
- Classroom walkthroughs
- School Improvement Plan
- Plans for classroom management
- Clear policy/procedure (e.g., flowchart) for addressing office-managed versus staff-managed problems.
- Behavior lesson plans
- Staff/student handbook
- School policy, code of conduct

Related Notes

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
31. Core social-emotional practices exist that are defined schoolwide or across all grade levels/spans by essential components of instruction, curriculum and environment (ICE). These are refined based on both student outcome and implementation data for continuous improvement.	Core social-emotional practices have not been defined across instruction, curriculum and environment schoolwide or for all grade levels/spans.	Core social-emotional practices are defined at the school and/or grade level AND incorporate 1 of the following:	Core social-emotional practices are defined at the school and/or grade level AND incorporate 2-3 of the following:	Core social-emotional practices are defined at the school and/or grade level AND incorporate all of the following:
	1. Instruction specified design and delivery of culturally responsive **social-emotional skill instruction** 2. Curriculum materials/resources utilized, standards/goals addressed (including **social-emotional learning competencies**) 3. Environment grouping options, time (duration and frequency) of instruction and instructional delivery settings (i.e., within academic subject areas, separate time in the day, etc.) 4. Social-emotional practices defined in consideration of academic and behavior instruction			
Structured instruction of **social and emotional skills** is provided to all students. Classroom routines include social and emotional learning principles and is embedded into instruction. School climate and environments support student well-being.				
Social-emotional learning competencies can be found in the NC Healthful Living Standards and NC Guidance Essential Standards. Additional resources for SEL can be found at https://casel.org/.				

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Core SEL matrix classroom walkthroughs
- School Improvement Plan
- Plans for SEL instruction
- SEL lesson plans

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">32. Supplemental academic practices exist that are defined across grade levels/spans and content areas by essential components of instruction, curriculum and environment (ICE).

These practices are specified in standard treatment intervention protocols.

These practices are refined based on both student outcome and implementation data for continuous improvement.</td><td>Supplemental academic practices have not been defined across instruction, curriculum and environment for all grade levels/spans and content areas. All content areas and grade spans do not have a standard treatment protocol/intervention matrix linked to core instruction.</td><td>Across all grade spans/content areas, a supplemental level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with 1-3 of the following:</td><td>Across all grade spans/content areas, a supplemental level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with 4-5 of the following:</td><td>Across all grade spans/content areas, a supplemental level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with all of the following:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4"><u>Instruction</u> includes explicit instruction, modeling, guided practice, independent practice and culturally responsive practices
<u>Curriculum</u> systematic sequence of skills with frequent formative assessment
<u>Environment</u> students grouped appropriately by targeted skill areas and size based on program recommendations
Clear and consistently applied data decision rules for intervention entry/exit
Defined methods of monitoring student progress
Supplemental academic practices are defined in consideration of core instruction and behavior and social emotional instruction</td></tr>
</table>

Related Notes

Intervention protocols are readily accessible to students based on predetermined data decision rules.
Intervention protocols include plans for intensification (see item 34).

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Intervention protocols/Intervention matrices and data decision rules
- Supplemental intervention fidelity checks
- Supplemental problem-solving documentation, random review of

- student support plans
- Progress-monitoring data on groups of students

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
33. Supplemental behavior and social-emotional practices exist that are defined schoolwide or across grade levels/spans by essential components of instruction, curriculum and environment (ICE). These practices are specified in standard treatment **intervention protocols**. These practices are refined based on both student outcome and implementation data for continuous improvement.	Supplemental behavior and social-emotional practices have not been defined across instruction, curriculum and environment schoolwide or for all grade levels/spans. All content areas and grade spans do not have a standard treatment protocol or intervention matrix linked to core instruction.	Schoolwide or across all grade spans/levels, a supplemental level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with 1-3 of the following:	Schoolwide or across all grade spans/levels, a supplemental level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with 4-5 of the following:	Schoolwide or across all grade spans/levels, a supplemental level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with all of the following:
	1. Instruction includes modeling, guided practice and independent practice across settings to encourage generalization, and culturally responsive practices that is matched to student need 2. Curriculum clear goals that include a systematic sequence of skills with frequent formative assessment 3. Environment students grouped appropriately by targeted skill areas and size based on program recommendations 4. Clear and consistently applied data decision rules for intervention entry/exit 5. Defined methods of monitoring student progress 6. Supplemental behavior and social emotional practices are defined in consideration of academic instruction			

Related Notes

Intervention protocols are readily accessible to students based on predetermined data decision rules.
Intervention protocols include plans for intensification (see item 35).

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Intervention matrix and data decision rules
- Supplemental intervention fidelity checks

- Supplemental problem-solving documentation, random review of student support plans
- Progress-monitoring data on groups of students

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
34. Intensive academic practices exist that are defined across grade levels/spans and content areas by essential components of instruction, curriculum, environment and learner (ICEL). These practices are specified in **intervention protocols**. These practices are refined based on both student outcome and implementation data for continuous improvement.	Intensive academic practices have not been defined across instruction, curriculum, environment and learner for all grade levels/spans and content areas. All content areas and grade spans do not have a standard treatment protocol/intervention matrix.	Across all grade spans/content areas, an intensive level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with 1-3 of the following:	Across all grade spans/content areas, an intensive level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with 4-6 of the following:	Across all grade spans/content areas, an intensive level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with all of the following:
	1. <u>Instruction</u> includes explicit/direct instruction, repeated modeling, more intensive scaffolding, guided and independent practice, and culturally responsive practices 2. <u>Curriculum</u> systematic sequence of skills with frequent formative assessment 3. <u>Environment</u> students grouped appropriately by targeted skill areas and size based on program recommendations 4. Diagnostic processes for individual learners to ensure appropriate curricular and instructional match as well as appropriate intensification 5. Clear and consistently applied data decision rules for intervention entry/exit 6. Defined methods of monitoring student progress 7. Consideration of behavioral and social-emotional skill instruction/support			

Related Notes

Intervention protocols are readily accessible to students based on predetermined data decision rules.
Intervention protocols include plans for intensification (see item 32).

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Intervention matrix and data decision rules

- Intensive intervention fidelity checks
- Intensive problem-solving documentation, random review of student support plans
- Progress-monitoring data/diagnostic data on individual students

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2)	Optimizing (3)
35. Intensive behavior/socialemotional practices exist that are defined across grade levels/spans and content areas by essential components of instruction, curriculum, environment and learner (ICEL). These practices are specified in **intervention protocols.** These practices are refined based on both student outcome and implementation data for continuous improvement.	Intensive behavior/socialemotional practices have not been defined across instruction, curriculum, environment and learner for all grade levels/spans and content areas. All content areas and grade spans do not have a standard treatment protocol or intervention matrix.	Across all grade spans/content areas, an intensive level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with 1-3 of the following:	Across all grade spans/content areas, an intensive level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with 4-7 of the following:	Across all grade spans/content areas, an intensive level of support is defined within an intervention matrix with all of the following:
	1. Instruction includes culturally responsive strategies on preventing, teaching and responding to ensure skill generalization across multiple settings 2. Curriculum sequence of targeted skills with frequent formative assessment 3. Environment students grouped appropriately by targeted skill areas and size based on program recommendations, strategies for removing rewards for problem behaviors, specific rewards for desired behaviors, and safety elements where needed 4. Diagnostic processes that include operational description of the problem behavior, identification of context where problem behavior is most likely to occur and maintaining reinforcers of problem behavior 5. Clear and consistently applied data decision rules for intervention entry/exit 6. Defined methods of monitoring student progress and assessing ongoing fidelity of implementation			

	7. Family and/or community (may include mental health service provider) connection and two-way communication is specified with appropriate memorandums of understanding established with outside agencies 8. Consideration of needed academic supports when appropriate

Related Notes

Intervention protocols are readily accessible to students based on predetermined data decision rules. **Intervention protocols** include plans for intensification (see item 33). Protocols include community providers where appropriate.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Intervention matrix and data decision rules
- Supplemental intervention fidelity checks
- Supplemental problem-solving documentation, random review of student support plans
- Progress-monitoring data on groups of students

Item	**Not Implementing (0)**	**Emerging/ Developing (1)**	**Operationalizing (2)** *Includes Emerging/Developing*	**Optimizing (3)** *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
36. A comprehensive assessment system is established, and staff understand and have access to academic, behavior and social-emotional data sources that address the following purposes of assessment: 1) identify students at-risk academically, socially, and/or emotionally 2) determine why students are at-risk 3) monitor student academic and social-emotional growth/progress	Staff does not have access to and understand attendance, behavior, social-emotional, and academic data sources that address the purposes of assessment.	Staff understands the purposes of assessment within MTSS and the leadership team selects measures for the purposes of assessment across attendance, behavior, socialemotional, and academic areas that are reliable, valid and accessible, as well as culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate.	Staff engages in assessment with fidelity to do the following: 1) identify students who are at-risk (at least 3-4 times/year) 2) determine why students are at risk 3) monitor student growth/progress 4) inform instructional/intervention planning 5) determine student attainment of academic, behavior, and socialemotional outcomes	The leadership team and/or staff collaboratively and systematically evaluate and adjust assessment practices to ensure availability of accurate and useful data to inform instruction, and assessment tools are evaluated for continued value, usefulness, and cultural, linguistic, and developmental appropriateness.

4) Inform academic and social-emotional instructional planning 5) determine student attainment of academic/behavioral outcomes.				

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Assessment plan (within or separate from MTSS implementation plan), Assessment inventory
- School Improvement Plan, student outcome data
- Screening results and use in identifying students at-risk
- Intervention plans
- Evaluation data

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
37. **Policies and procedures for decision-making** are established for the administration of assessments, access to existing data sources, and use of data.	No policies and procedures are in place.	The leadership team outlines policies and procedures for decision-making that include schedules for screening, use of diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring frequency, and criteria for determining tier(s) of support needed.	Staff consistently administer assessments, access data sources and make data-based decisions using policies and procedures for decisionmaking with fidelity.	Adherence to and effectiveness of policies and procedures for decision making are evaluated regularly for efficiency, usefulness, and relevance for students and staff, and data are used to adjust the policies.

Related Notes

Districts and schools develop **processes/procedures and decision rules** to establish and communicate the problem-solving process to be used, specific steps to be followed, and criteria to use when making decisions (e.g., what is good, questionable, or poor response to instruction/intervention). Processes/procedures include procedures for staff, parents, and stakeholders requesting assistance. Schools should consider district and state guidelines when available.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Assessment inventory, calendar
- School Improvement Plan
- Progress-monitoring data
- Evaluation data

- Staff handbook
- School website, newsletter, policy

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
38. Effective data tools are used appropriately and independently by staff.	Staff does not have access to tools that efficiently provide data needed to answer problem solving questions for academics and behavior.	The leadership team ensures availability of tools that can track and graphically display academic, behavior and social-emotional data, and staff is trained on the use of the tools, as well as on the responsibilities for data collection, entry, and management.	Staff uses the data tools and is provided assistance as needed.	Data tools are periodically assessed, and the necessary changes are made in order to improve functionality, efficiency, and usefulness. Also, staff is proficient and independent with data tools and can easily support new staff members.

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
39. Data sources are used to **evaluate the implementation and impact of MTSS** at least annually. Outcomes are shared with stakeholders. Evaluation should occur across: ● All areas ● All tiers ● All diverse groups (e.g.,	No data sources to evaluate implementation of the critical elements of MTSS have been identified.	The leadership team has identified data sources that will be used to evaluate implementation of the essential elements of MTSS.	The leadership team uses data sources to evaluate implementation and to make systemic improvements to the essential elements of MTSS.	The leadership team periodically conducts analyses to determine how implementation of essential elements of MTSS relate to positive student outcomes.

racial/ethnic, cultural, social-economic, language proficiency, disability status)				

Related Notes

Essential elements of MTSS communicated to staff include:

- Curriculum and instruction frameworks and support (e.g., reading, math, behavior, social-emotional learning)
- Assessment
- Multiple tiers of instruction and intervention (i.e., three-tiered instruction/intervention model)
- Data-based problem-solving

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Meeting minutes/agendas
- School improvement planning
- Walkthrough data
- Fidelity tools
- Student outcome data
- District reports
- Staff, student, and family survey data
- Intervention enrollment data

Related Notes

Resources encompass not only available monetary assets but also available personnel, instructional materials, and time that will facilitate the implementation and sustainment of an MTSS as a framework for supporting all students.

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
40. Available **resources** are allocated effectively.	Resources are NOT allocated based on student need and the availability of time, available personnel, funding, and materials.	Resources are allocated based on student need.	The relationship between the resources allocated and the outcomes of students is evaluated at least annually.	Processes and criteria for resource allocation are refined annually based on strategies that result in improved student outcomes.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- School Improvement Plan or MTSS implementation plan with evidence of resources allocated to sustaining a MTSS
- Evaluation data
- Resource inventories and mapping

Item	Not Implementing (0)	Emerging/ Developing (1)	Operationalizing (2) *Includes Emerging/Developing*	Optimizing (3) *Includes Emerging/Developing & Operationalizing*
41. Data sources are monitored for consistency, accuracy, and timeliness in collection and entry procedures.	Data sources are NOT monitored for accuracy or consistency.	The leadership team ensures that staff understands the importance of accurate and consistent data collection practices and have provided professional development on policies and procedures for methods, types and frequency of data collection.	The leadership team uses a protocol (e.g., email notifications for failure to take attendance, reminders to staff regarding classroom managed vs. office managed problem behavior, etc.) to monitor data consistency and accuracy.	The leadership team periodically conducts analyses to determine consistency and accuracy of data and adjusts as necessary.

Examples of Supporting Evidence

- Assessment plan (within or separate from implementation plan)
- Professional development/coaching plans on data tools use
- Meeting minutes from leadership team discussion of fidelity with data use

Scoring Record score below for each item:

Leadership (Items 1-6)	**Building the Capacity/Infrastructure for Implementation** (Items 7 – 17)	**Communication and Collaboration** (Items 18 – 21)	**Data-Based Problem-Solving** (Items 22 – 28)	**Three-Tiered Instruction and Intervention Model** (Items 29 – 35)	**Data Evaluation** (Items 36 – 41)

1		7		18		22		29		36	
2		8		19		23		30		37	
3		9		20		24		31		38	
4		10		21		25		32		39	
5		11				26		33		40	
6		12				27		34		41	
		13				28		35			
		14									
		15									
		16									
		17									
Total:		Total:		Total:		Total:		Total:		Total:	

All Items Total:	

Leadership Percentage: (Leadership Total/18) x 100	
Building the Capacity Percentage: (Building the Capacity Total/33) x 100	
Communication and Collaboration Percentage: (Communication Total/12) x 100	
Data-Based Problem-Solving Percentage: (Data-Based Total/21) x 100	
Three-Tiered Instruction and Intervention Model Percentage: (Three-Tiered Total/21) x 100	
Data Evaluation Percentage: (Data Evaluation Total/18) x 100	
FAM-S Total Percentage: (All Items Total/123) x 100	

Appendix C

Perceptions of RTI Skills Survey

Please read each statement about a skill related to assessment, instruction, and/or intervention below, and then evaluate YOUR skill level within the context of working at a school/building level. Where indicated, rate your skill separately for academics (i.e., reading and math) and behavior.

NS = I do not have this skill at all
MnS = I have minimal skills in this area; need substantial support to use it
SS = I have this skill, but still need some support to use it
HS = I can use this skill with little support
VHS = I am highly skilled in this area and could teach others this skill

The skill to:	NS	MnS	SS	HS	VHS
1. *Access* the data necessary to determine the percent of students in core instruction who are achieving benchmarks (district grade-level standards) in:					
b. Use data to define the current level of performance of the target student for:					
• Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
• Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Determine the desired level of performance (i.e., benchmark) for:					
• Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
• Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Determine the current level of peer performance for the same skill as the target student for:					
• Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
• Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Calculate the gap between student current performance and the benchmark (district grade level standard) for:					
• Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
• Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Use gap data to determine whether core instruction should be adjusted or whether supplemental instruction should be directed to the target student for:					
• Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

• Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Develop potential reasons (hypotheses) that a student or group of students is/are not achieving desired levels of performance (i.e., benchmarks) for:					
a. Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Identify the most appropriate type(s) of data to use for determining reasons (hypotheses) that are likely to be contributing to the problem for:					
a. Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Identify the appropriate supplemental intervention available in my building for a student identified as at-risk for:					
a. Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Access resources (e.g., internet sources, professional literature) to develop evidence-based interventions for:					
a. Academic core curricula	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavioral core curricula	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Academic supplemental curricula	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Behavioral supplemental curricula	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Academic individualized intervention plans	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Behavioral individualized intervention plans	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Ensure that any supplemental and/or intensive interventions are integrated with core instruction in the general education classroom:					
a. Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Ensure that the proposed intervention plan is supported by the data that were collected for:					
a. Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Provide the support necessary to ensure that the intervention is implemented appropriately for:					

a. Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Determine if an intervention was implemented as it was intended for:					
a. Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Select appropriate data (e.g., Curriculum-Based Measurement, DIBELS, FCAT, behavioral observations) to use for progress monitoring of student performance during interventions:					
a. Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Construct graphs for large group, small group, and individual students:					
a. Graph target student data	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Graph benchmark data	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Graph peer data	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Draw an aimline	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Draw a trendline	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. Make modifications to intervention plans based on student response to intervention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. Collect the following types of data:					
a. Curriculum-Based Measurement	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. DIBELS	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Access data from appropriate district- or school-wide assessments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Standard behavioral observations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Use technology in the following ways:					
a. Use electronic data collection tools (e.g., PDAs)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Graph and display student and school data	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix D

Florida Beliefs on RTI Scale

Job Description:

O PS/Rt1 Coach O Teacher-General Education OTeacher-Special Education

O School Counselor O School Psychologist O School Social Worker

O Principal O Assistant Principal

Other(Please specify):

Have you ever received training in MTSS/RTI?

0 Yes

0 No

If yes, where was the training offered?

0 School District Professional Development

0 College or University Degree Program

0 Other

Years of Experience in Education:

O Less than 1 year
0 1-4 years
0 5-9 years
0 10-14 years
0 15-19 years
0 20-24 years
0 25 or more years
O Not applicable

Number of Years in your Current Position:

0 Less than 1 year
0 1-4 years
0 5-9 years
0 10-14 years
0 15-19 years
0 20 or more years

Highest Degree Earned:

O B.A./B.S. O M.A./M.S. O Ed.S. O Ph.D./Ed.D.

Other (Please specify):

Directions: Using the scale below, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements by shading in the circle that best represents your response.

Strongly Disagree (SD)
Disagree (D)
Neutral (N)
Agree (A)
Strongly Agree (SA)

	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I believe in the philosophy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) even if I disagree with some of the requirements.					
7. Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in					
7.a. reading					
7.b. math					
8. The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in					
8.a. reading					
8.b. math					
9. The majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in					
9.a. reading					
9.b. math					
10. The majority of students with behavioral problems achieve grade-level benchmarks in					
10.a. reading					
10.b. math					
11. Students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g. SLD) who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) in					
1 1.a. reading l					
l.b. math					

12. General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.
13. General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.
14. The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.
15. Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.
16. The "severity" of a student's academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.
17. The "severity" of a student's behavioral problem is determined not by how inappropriate a student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.
18. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identity effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.
19. Many students currently identified as "LD" do not have a disability, rather they came to school "not ready" to learn or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.
20. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only "teacher judgment."
21. Evaluating a student's response to interventions is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from "tests" (e.g., IQ/Achievement test).
22. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or above benchmarks.
23. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.

24. A student's parents (guardian) should be involved in the problemsolving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about the student.

25. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.

26. All students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support.

27. The goal of assessment is to generate and measure effectiveness of instruction/intervention.

Appendix E

Permission to Use Surveys

Hi Carla,

The Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project received your email dated May 2, 2019, requesting permission to reproduce the following:

- Beliefs Survey
- Perceptions of RtI Skills Survey

Permission is granted by the copyright holder to print and use for educational purposes with the following conditions:

- An appropriate acknowledgment of the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project (a collaborative project between the Department of Education and the University of South Florida) is included.
- The material is not used for commercial purposes.

Thank you for your interest in these resources. Please contact me if you need further assistance.

Sincerely,

Judi