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Impact of Transformational Leadership Behaviors on the Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support with Emphasis on Cultural Leadership

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Impact of Transformational Leadership Behaviors on the Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support with Emphasis on Cultural Leadership

By
Donna Johnson Heavner

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Donna J. Heavner under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Abstract

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Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are frameworks used to assess individual needs of students and the supports needed to meet those needs. An MTSS is complex with components which impact core instruction, curriculum, formative assessment, interventions, summative assessment, and problem solving. All of these components are a part of a school's culture, and the success of this framework is dependent upon the leadership in a school. This study is important because it addresses the complexities of assessing individual student needs and the planning required to meet those needs. The purpose of this research was to study the implementation an MTSS with emphasis on school culture and leadership. A case study design was used within a quantitative and qualitative framework to study the essential character of a Multi-Tiered System of Support and its impact on school culture and leadership. Findings from this research indicate the importance of four mindset shifts relative to implementation of an MTSS including shared ownership, success for all, data-informed decisions, and collaboration. Transformational leadership was found important during MTSS implementation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Problem

Human interactions are at the very core of every human experience. We have thousands of interactions each day. We interact with our children, spouse, parents, siblings, and our environment. Peck (1978) wrote, “all human interactions are opportunities either to learn or to teach, and when we neither learn nor teach in an interaction we are passing up an opportunity” (p. 179). Those who serve in an educational setting have a duty to use these opportunities to learn and teach. In order to see each interaction as a chance to learn and teach, one must be open to the work involved to do so. All students can learn, but schools miss this opportunity and miss the chance to meet some of the basic human needs of those they serve. There is a large body of research focused on the elements of effective school cultures, and research relative to leadership in those schools has allowed administrators to become better at assessing the needs of the students and designing a plan to meet those needs.

This study is important because it addresses the complexities of assessing individual student needs and the planning required meeting those needs. If all students can learn, then what do we do when students do not learn? If all students learn at a different pace, then what do we do when a student learns more quickly? Some schools and school systems have implemented systems to assess individual needs and implemented the planning required to meet those needs. Some schools have missed the opportunity to learn and teach during their interactions with their students, teachers, parents, and community. What creates a school culture conducive to meeting these learning and teaching opportunities?

This study addresses the impact on school culture of a system of support for

students. The research also addresses the impact of school culture on the implementation of a system of support. Leadership behaviors were also studied as a system of support was implemented and sustained.

Brief Review of Behavioral, Cognitive, and Social/Emotional Theories

Abraham Maslow was one of the first psychologists to address the importance of meeting human needs. Maslow's (1968) five levels of needs include the need for food and water, the need for personal safety, the need to belong, esteem needs, and the need for personal fulfillment. By meeting these five basic needs, humans may be more likely to live the life they aspire to have. When these needs are met, the person is motivated and driven to meet his/her personal goals. When these needs are not met, the person struggles to make the growth needed to achieve his/her goals. Glasser's (1986) work in Choice Theory is based on five basic needs as well. The five basic needs included in Choice Theory are the need to survive, the need to love and belong, the need for power and/or recognition, the need for freedom, and the need for fun. Glasser's work stated that every human makes choices, and the choices we make are based on our drive to meet one or more of the five basic needs. Alderfer (1972) proposed a three-level hierarchy of needs called Existence, Relatedness, and Growth. Alderfer's first level of Existence included those needs which were basic for survival. His Relatedness level included those skills needed for interaction with other human beings. The Growth level was comprised of those needs which allow humans to live the life they have dreamed. Bloom (1976) wrote about the influence of student background or past experience on student achievement. Bloom's research shows students can master the majority of content if they are provided a favorable learning environment. He also wrote discrepancies in rate of learning occurred when the learning environment did not meet the needs of the students.

Bloom believed most students could master any topic if just placed in the right learning environment.

We need to consider some of the major behavioral, cognitive, and social/emotional theories which influence the educational setting today. There are some developmental theorists who support the importance of a system of support in a school setting and some who do not. Skinner (1965) believed internal needs were not important, but external motivators controlled behaviors. His theory is called operant conditioning. Many components of operant conditioning can be observed in schools. Educators frequently refer to reinforcement and punishment. Reinforcers include those actions increasing the likelihood a behavior will happen again. Punishments are those actions which decrease the likelihood a behavior will be replicated. Canter (2010) also developed a behavioral theory; he emphasized the teacher's control of the classroom. His techniques are called Assertive Discipline. One of the key components of Assertive Discipline is catching students doing well. In this method, students obey the rules because the strategy is meeting one of their needs. These theories are evident in many schools; however, do these theories and methods create an environment where students' needs are assessed? Do these theories and methods create school environments where staff actively plan how to meet students' needs?

Glasser (1998) proposed all action is behavior, and we choose our behaviors to meet one of the five basic needs. He proposed we can only control our own actions and not the actions of others. Bandura (1997) developed Social Learning Theory incorporating his findings which stated behaviors are learned using both cognitive and social skills. Social Learning Theory incorporates the importance of modeling into human development. He outlined three types of modeling: live, verbal, and symbolic.

Live modeling involves the observer watching the behavior in a person; verbal modeling happens when the observer is being instructed to promote the behavior; and symbolic modeling happens when the observer learns behaviors from television, videos, and reading material. Learning occurs when one observes the behavior of others and the consequences for the behavior. Bandura called this vicarious reinforcement. He proposed the importance of an antecedent or stimulus prior to the behavior, the importance of feedback for a behavior, and the importance of prior learning or experience in behaviors. Bandura believed cognitive, behavioral, and social learning influence each other.

Cognitive theorists such as Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, and David Ausubell have been instrumental in the development of learning theory for schools. Piaget (1971) was the first to describe a cognitive theory. He noticed children thought differently than adults. His cognitive theory is known for the stages of thought he believed all children experienced while maturing. The stages are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal/abstract operational. Piaget proposed children have unique cognitive needs at each one of these stages. Bruner (1976) is the father of the Constructivist Theory. The Constructivist Theory states students are active learners who create their own understandings by linking new learning to past experiences or learning. Bruner believed children have a predisposition or need to learn. Ausubel (1969) wrote about the importance of connecting new learning to prior learning or experiences. He supported the use of graphic organizers and mental models to help students organize thoughts and place the new learning in long-term memory.

There are also social theorists who have an impact on school culture today. Maslow (1971) included as one of his basic human needs as the need to belong. This

need to belong includes friendships, family, social groups, and romantic attachments. Maslow believed this desire to belong influenced social behaviors. Jung (2006) wrote of individuation which is a process for a person to become whole and achieve all of their dreams. To achieve individuation, a person must assimilate the conscious and unconscious beliefs, needs, and experiences to realize their dreams. Rogers (2003) espoused a humanistic approach to social and emotional development. He proposed the student is the most important person in the educational setting. He believed teachers can only facilitate learning because learning comes from one's past experiences. A school should be open to learning from the students and also work to make connections for students. The teacher's role is as guide rather than the expert who tells. This philosophy is instrumental in creating a student-centered classroom and school.

National Studies

All of these theorists and beliefs have an impact on classrooms and schools today, but how do we provide a school setting in which student needs are being met and where students become productive members of society? It is important for students to continue to grow as individuals, but it also affects our nation as a whole. If students grow, they achieve self-actualization and society benefits from this growth. If students do not grow, the American education system and society suffer. There have been many national studies to address the changes needed in American education. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) addressed the immediate need to make changes in education due to severe underachievement on national and international measures. The report addressed five areas of change: content, standards, time in school, teaching, and federal involvement. The National Commission on Time and Learning (1994) published their report relative to the number of minutes in a school day, days in a school year, and

how those minutes and days were used. The commission recommended reinventing the schools around learning needs instead of time, and schools should use the time in new ways. Schools were introduced to action plans where schools needed to review data for their students and create a plan to address the needs of the students. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1998) described a goal of providing all American students with teachers who understand the needs of their students and have the skills to plan and execute instruction to meet those needs.

Legislation

In the 1960s and 1970s, a series of laws changed how students access public education. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which prohibited discrimination based on race, sex, and disability, respectively, made civil rights enforcement a fundamental and long-lasting focus of the Department of Education (United States Department of Education, 2010).

School accountability is a priority at the national, state, and local levels. Parents, community members, and legislators want to know children are getting an appropriate and adequate education. This can be seen on local news broadcasts, in national papers, and in federal legislation. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) are two pieces of legislation to protect the educational rights of students by requiring prevention, early intervention, and services for those in need. With the authorization of NCLB, schools were held accountable for individual subgroups of students. Schools could no longer use an overall performance score to decide if the school was successfully meeting the needs of the students in the community.

The school had to look at the individual needs of each of the subgroups defined by this legislation. It was a turning point in American history because this legislation was an all-or-nothing mandate. Schools had to meet the needs of all of the subgroups in order to make annual yearly progress (AYP). Section 1001 of Public Law No. 107-110 (NCLB, 2002) stated its purpose is to ensure all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.

The goals of NCLB were that all students would attain proficiency or better in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014; all limited English students would become proficient in English; all teachers will be highly qualified by 2005-2006; all students would be educated in safe, drug-free environments; and all students would graduate from high school.

This relentless focus on individual subgroups required a new type of leadership for schools. Leadership became data-informed and centered on growth of each and every student in a school because every student was in a subgroup or possibly more than one subgroup. Accountability for some schools showed students were not growing at an appropriate rate; and the individual school communities, the state legislators, and the federal government began to ask why.

The problem of students graduating without adequate reading skills to perform jobs in society is a growing issue. The gap continues to widen between what the nation needs in the American workforce and global arena and what the students graduating from American schools can actually perform.

The emphasis on all students and not just a select group of students will require a different response to high school dropouts. Jobs for students who did not finish high

school were available in the past, but those opportunities for work are dwindling. The readiness for college or work is a concern due to the new jobs created in a new world. The need for factory jobs may be limited, but the number of innovative jobs is unlimited (Friedman, 2007, pp. 268-269). This new economic reality has created a need for new responses.

This shift in the requirements of the American workforce is not new. There have been many revolutions in American history such as the change from an agrarian society to an industrial society. Our industrial society has now shifted to one with a focus on intellectual capital. This can be seen in North Carolina with regards to the history of transportation. The North Carolina Transportation Museum is located in the small town of Spencer, North Carolina. The museum is comprised of several facilities which were once used to service steam engines on the trip from Washington, D.C. to Atlanta, Georgia. Steam engines would stop in Spencer to get serviced before completing their journey to Atlanta. This service allowed Spencer to grow into a center of commerce, industry, and employment. Thousands of people were employed at the train yard, and the community prospered. All of this growth changed with one new invention: the diesel engine. With the addition of the diesel engine, trains no longer needed to stop in Spencer to have service. The trains could continue on longer journeys without stopping; therefore, the need for service in Spencer slowly stopped. Employees for the facility were dismissed and commerce slowed. The community was not ready for the rapid response needed to transform, change, and evolve. The massive buildings once full of thousands of workers are now being used by the North Carolina Transportation Museum to teach others about these historical transformations in transportation.

Education is experiencing this type of critical crossing between changing needs

and response like the small town of Spencer, North Carolina. The rapid changes in education today have created a need to respond differently than any other time in history. School administrators, teachers, students, and parents are trying to respond to a changing economic environment. Canton (2006) identified four abilities needed for the future: anticipation, adaptation, evolution, and innovation. He wrote about the need for readiness for different situations and innovation in response to those needs (Canton, 2006, p. 16). Wagner (2008) wrote that all students will need new skills such as problem solving, collaboration, adaptability, and curiosity. The world is changing, and schools are slow to respond to these new areas of need (Wagner, 2008, p. 8).

Transformation

The response to the new educational reality from administrators, teachers, and students will lead to further transformation. Principals are leaders in the transformational journey to teach students to anticipate, adapt, evolve, and innovate. The school leader must know the history and current status of the school while harnessing a vision for the future. This vision begins with the beliefs and values of the principal. The principal must be ready to assess his or her own core beliefs and how those core beliefs affect the school. The vision must incorporate creating readiness to respond to changing economic, social, and educational needs in the community served by the school. The principal sets the course and monitors progress towards those goals. He or she responds quickly when the school veers off course. This is strategic leadership at its best. Principals must be passionate about the vision for the school and must be curious enough to find innovative ways to adapt the structure of the school to meet current and future changes. Friedman (2007) wrote about the importance of the curiosity quotient and the passion quotient. He explained the sum of these two matters more than someone's intellectual quotient

(Friedman, 2007, pp. 314-315).

Teachers have their own core beliefs and values in a school, and those core beliefs direct their decisions and actions. Teachers must buy into and support the school vision. They must decide to get involved and act in response to the readiness level of their students; and for some, this can be the most difficult part. Teachers must have a core belief that all students learn differently, but all students can learn. They must have an understanding of the difference between equity and equality. They must be people of action to respond when a student does not learn or a student is ready to learn more quickly. This can transform a school to be a place where every student learns and feels success. The school culture changes to one of acceptance, success, and response.

The students are the most important component of a highly effective school. The teachers and administrators help the students prepare for a rapidly changing future. One of the first steps is to assess the students for readiness. Teachers and administrators need to know if the students are making progress. If the students are not making progress, then instructional and behavioral adjustments must be made to help the student grow. The school must be ready to respond to these diverse needs. The school first needs to assess the students for readiness early in the year to determine students' needs. This school-wide assessment can be scheduled multiple times during the year to determine current readiness of the students. The data collected from the school-wide assessments inform and drive the responses to those students' needs. The responses may be in the form of differentiation in the classroom, an intervention program, an enrichment program, or specially designed instruction. Administration and teachers need to monitor the progress of the response to ensure the strategies are effectively meeting the needs for each student.

What is not known is why some schools are successful with implementation of a

system of supports and other schools are not. Variables in implementation include but are not limited to school culture (experiences, beliefs, and behaviors), principal and teacher leadership behaviors, size of school, demographics of a school, and grade configuration.

This study is significant for school leadership, teams of teachers, individual instructors, parents, and students. Meeting the basic human needs of the people served by an organization will provide a culture of growth. Leadership in an organization meeting these basic human needs is crucial for implementation and sustenance of the program. An effective educational program produces effective citizens in our society.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to research the impact of implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) on school culture and the leadership behaviors needed to implement and sustain an MTSS. An MTSS is a system of assessing the individual needs of all students and implementing a plan to meet those needs. A quantitative and qualitative design was used because of the complexities of the areas to be studied. Quantitative data were collected by using Likert scale questions. Qualitative data were collected by using focus groups and face-to-face interviews. There are several assumptions relative to a qualitative study. One assumption is humans construct meaning as they engage with their environment; therefore, survey questions included open-ended responses so participants could share their views. Another assumption in this study includes the influence of past experiences and beliefs on a person's view. The third assumption is the data collected allowed for inductive reasoning. A case study methodology was chosen to allow for in-depth analysis of the elements of an MTSS within the complexities of a school's culture.

There were two areas to be studied. The first area involves the impact or lack thereof between an MTSS and the experiences, beliefs, and behaviors that influence school culture. This possible relationship was studied by collecting quantitative and qualitative data in the form of surveys, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups. The quantitative data were subject to inferential statistical analysis and interpretation in the form of Chi-Squares to find the significance of a relationship between the independent variable, the MTSS, and the dependent variable, the school culture.

The second area involves finding the leadership behaviors needed to implement and sustain a culture of an MTSS. These leadership behaviors were studied using quantitative and qualitative research methods in the form of surveys and face-to-face interviews. The quantitative data were subject to inferential statistical analysis and interpretation in the form of Chi-Squares. The qualitative data in the form of open-ended responses and recorded interviews were analyzed for frequency of response. Themes and patterns from the frequency of responses emerged from all of the participants. These themes answered the research question for the setting studied: What is the impact of leadership behaviors on the implementation and sustainability of an MTSS? Four research questions emerged to be studied.

1. What is the impact of an MTSS on a school's culture?
2. What are the common experiences associated with an MTSS that impact school culture?
3. Are there identifiable traits within the organization impacting the implementation of an MTSS?
4. Are there identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the potential for and the sustainability of an MTSS?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The review of the literature is divided into three sections. The first section provides the research relative to how educators have implemented practices to contribute to a system of individual needs assessment and individual planning or an MTSS. The second section provides the research relative to educational practices considered to be effective in transforming school culture. The third section provides the research relative to effective transformational leadership in schools.

MTSS

MTSS is a system of prevention, early intervention, and support which ensures all students are learning from the instruction they are receiving. Many schools use a variety of interventions and numerous ways to monitor student learning under the names of “early intervening services” and “response to intervention” (RtI). MTSS is a set of evidenced-based practices implemented across a system to meet the needs of all learners. The MTSS framework is broader than RtI or problem solving alone. It establishes a system intentionally focusing on leadership, professional development, and empowering culture within the context of assessment, curriculum, and instruction, which ultimately supports the selection and implementation of increasingly intense research-based interventions provided to students in response to their academic and/or behavioral needs. This includes high-quality instruction and intervention to meet the needs of both struggling and advanced learners. MTSS establishes a progress monitoring process including ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of instruction to ensure each student achieves to high standards (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI, 2015) defined a MTSS as a multi-tiered framework which promotes school improvement through engaging, research-based academic and behavioral practices. North Carolina MTSS employs a systems approach using data-driven problem solving to maximize growth for all. The vision for MTSS as stated by NCDPI includes every North Carolina prekindergarten-12 public education system to implement and sustain all components of an MTSS to ensure college and career readiness for all students. The components of an MTSS include leadership and shared responsibility, curriculum and instruction, problem solving and data-driven decision making, assessment, collaboration, and sustainability and integration. The mission of NCDPI is to prepare and support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to implement an MTSS for total school improvement by providing professional development, coaching and technical assistance, research and evaluation, and communication and visibility which result in college and career readiness for all students. NCDPI believed MTSS is the most effective and efficient approach to improving school outcomes and student performance thereby ensuring equitable access to a sound basic education.

MTSS is a coherent continuum of evidence-based, system-wide practices to support a rapid response to academic and behavioral needs, with frequent data-based monitoring for instruction decision making to empower each student to achieve high standards. The goal of an MTSS is to provide an integrated systemic approach to meeting the needs of all students. Resources must be used in an effective and efficient way to enable every student to be successful. An MTSS does not necessarily require additional resources or adding on to existing practices, but it involves evaluating current practices to identify those practices which yield evidence of effectiveness, addressing

missed areas, replacing missed areas, and replacing ineffective or inefficient approaches with support by research and addressing an area of need. MTSS is an overarching framework guiding the improvement processes and planning to include early identification and quick response to the needs of all learners (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

The MTSS framework seeks to be preventative and works to connect the supports within schools. All aspects of the system become integrated to support and sustain student learning. The principles and practices of MTSS are based upon what research has shown to be effective in both creating successful and sustainable change as well as what is necessary in providing the most effective instruction to all students. An MTSS is designed to address the academic and behavioral needs of all students, regardless of whether they are struggling or have advanced learning needs. Research notes the interconnectivity of academics and behavior; and by addressing the behavioral issues within buildings, improvement is seen in student performance and engagement. The inverse is true: When schools work systematically to address improved student learning, behavioral issues decrease. The intention of intervening early is important for two reasons. Intervening early in the student's school career can prevent failure. Intervening at the earliest indication of need at every grade level will make the best use of time and continual learning (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

It is important to expect and plan for the reality of students with varying levels of need for support. It is further recognized despite delivering the most effective educational practices possible in each and every classroom, there will be some students for whom the practices are not sufficient. Additional supports targeting individual needs are also needed. It is much less important to debate how many "tiers" are needed, than it

is to understand the system concept and match instruction to the needs of each student. Within and across the multiple tiers, there is an expectation that instructional groups are fluid; that is, students may access the instruction and curriculum most closely matched to their need whenever needed. In the same vein, the concept of differentiation is pervasive across every aspect of an MTSS. This differentiated curriculum and instruction should occur during all instruction. Regardless of whether working at the whole classroom level, the small group level, or the individual student level, differentiation is central to effective teaching (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

Data-informed decision making and using a problem-solving process is inherent within a well-functioning MTSS. Teams use data to guide initial efforts in the design of the system, use data to determine whether the system created is achieving the desired results, and then use data to refine the system until the desired results are achieved (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

An MTSS includes deciding what students should learn, using instructional strategies to help students learn, keeping track of how students are doing, and making changes according to the results collected. Core beliefs within an MTSS include every child learns and achieves to high standards; learning includes academic and social competencies; and every member of the learning community continues to grow, learn, and reflect. Every leader at all levels is responsible for every child, and change is intentional and dynamic (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

The core beliefs are achieved in a variety of ways. A rigorous and research-based curriculum is used, and all children are provided effective and relentless teaching. The need for interventions is identified as quickly as possible. Teachers develop expertise to build capacity and sustain effective practice. Resources are continuously redesigned to

match student needs. Principals are responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating. Academic and behavioral data are used to inform decisions. The school culture empowers staff to be responsible for student success (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

A significant aspect of changing to an MTSS involves a shift in the thinking about how a system should respond to student need. The school culture shifts from matching students to programs to becoming focused on understanding student need and designing services and supports to meet those needs. The MTSS is not tied to a specific content or curriculum, but the focus shifts to curriculum, instruction, and environment and assessment which directly influence the ability to meet each student's needs. An assessment system must be used which allows for universal assessment, diagnostics/functional behavioral assessment, and progress monitoring. There are multiple tiers of support which need to be available to meet the needs of all students within the system. There are three levels of intervention within the multi-tiered system. The first level is for all students and includes the educational experience for all students. Within a well-functioning MTSS, the school seeks to provide a strong core of instruction which will meet the needs of the maximum number of students possible but also recognizes there will be some students who will need additional supports in order to continually learn and achieve to high expectations. The second level is considered supplemental. The use of this process to make data-informed decisions regarding grouping and instruction of students is essential at this level. Data-informed decision making may be conducted in various configurations such as grade-level teams, departmental teams, and student improvement teams. The goal is to analyze student data obtained through universal screening and diagnostic assessments and to make decisions regarding how to match

interventions to student needs. The intervention students receive is more explicit and intense through smaller group size guided by the research or enrichment for advanced learning. The third level of intervention is the most intensive intervention within a school. The support provided at this level is even more explicit and systematic than at the supplemental level. This is created through even smaller groups, as guided by research, increased instructional time, potentially different curricular materials and/or instructional practices. The students receiving the third tier are progress monitored more frequently. The focus is on understanding what the students' needs are and carefully customizing intervention efforts to meet the identified needs. The third tier may also involve collaboration with other agencies working with the student. Frequent reviews of students served by the third tier allow for quick changes to the interventions used if the student does not show success. The three tiers represent programs of increasing customization and individualization of the instructional support students receive. It is important to recognize the need to provide support at all levels, because there will be students who are not eligible for special education services. These students may continue to need customized supports too (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

The building leadership is led by the building principal. It is the responsibility of this leadership team to ensure the system has all the pieces that are functioning in such a way where results of student learning are monitored and evaluated. The leadership team must analyze student data to determine whether the MTSS is responsive to the needs of the students. Adjustments to the MTSS may be needed, and the leadership team determines the actions to be taken to change the system. The leadership team, including the principal, has the ultimate responsibility of ensuring the system is being purposefully redefined so each student's needs are being met (Kansas State Department of Education,

2009).

Baca (2011) focused on a major urban district in southern California which had started one of the largest K-12 implementations of an MTSS in the entire nation. The purpose of this qualitative and phenomenological study was twofold: (a) to explore the RtI implementation experience of school-based leadership teams in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California; and (b) to investigate experiences surrounding levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components of RtI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) at these same 22 schools.

The researcher collected data by conducting small qualitative focus groups with teams from 22 different RtI Cohort 1 schools. Several key themes emerged in the qualitative data, including RtI was an effective framework for instruction, the need of an understanding of the big picture of RtI, the need for a strong leadership team including administrative support, support from the district was helpful, implementing and revising RtI is a recursive process, as well as themes surrounding levels and fidelity of implementation of the three core components. Findings from this research study supported several conclusions about RtI implementation, including full implementation takes 3-5 years; strong leadership is required; ongoing, differentiated district support is beneficial; and RtI is an effective way to organize instructional efforts for struggling students. Study outcomes recommend the following for the district under study: maintain focus on RtI as the central reform effort and continue with implementation efforts until full implementation is achieved; continue to invest time, training, and resources towards building collaborative cultures at school sites; district policy and reference guides should provide an outline of structures, programs, and detailed schedules with the logistical

items related to the multi-tiered service delivery system; and the problem-solving process needs to be streamlined in order to increase use. Broader recommendations include RtI shows promise as a school-wide initiative and, contingent upon further research, should be considered as a viable method of school reform for school districts.

Haynes's (2012) research was to analyze the impact of implementing MTSS/RtI on academic outcomes for all students, especially students receiving special education, on a large scale. Three research questions emerged. Do reading scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) improve in schools implementing MTSS/RtI compared to similar schools not implementing MTSS/RtI? What is the impact of MTSS/RtI on reading scores of students identified for special education in an urban district? What trends are observable in scores for students identified for special education versus trends for all students? The participants in this study were third-grade students in 62 elementary schools in one large, urban district in the Southwest United States over a 6-year period. They were selected to measure and compare the effects of implementing MTSS/RtI focused on reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade during 2002-2007. Thirty-two elementary schools were identified as a treatment group implementing MTSS/RtI. Additionally, 30 elementary schools were identified as a comparison group not implementing MTSS/RtI. This MTSS/RtI model was determined significant for the treatment group and trend analysis indicated implementation of MTSS/RtI to be effective in improving overall school reading mean scale scores. Additional observable trends in the data indicate an abrupt increase in treatment school mean scale scores. The first year after implementation of MTSS/RtI in the district, mean school reading scale scores for the treatment and comparison groups both rose over 40 points. The implementation of MTSS/RtI appeared to be ineffective in improving school

reading mean scale scores for students receiving special education.

Griggs (2013) completed a case study on teachers' perceptions regarding implementation of RtI in the upper grades. An exploratory case study research design was implemented to examine how an elementary school reduced the number of special education referrals in Grades 5 and 6 using READ 180, an RtI program. Teachers' perceptions of the effect of RtI on the rate of referrals to special education in fifth and sixth grades were explored. Other factors contributing to fifth- and sixth-grade teachers' decisions regarding special education referrals were examined. Evidence collected for this study was generated from interviews, documents, and observations. Data analysis identified central themes contributing to the understanding of teachers' perceptions of the implementation of RtI in Grades 5 and 6: (a) the role of teachers in RtI, (b) teachers' perceptions of the off-the-shelf RtI program, and (c) teachers' perceptions of special education referrals. The findings from this study indicated referrals for special education went down while the READ 180 program was in use. Data analysis also indicated other factors may have influenced the reduction in referrals, such as (a) anxiety of parents, (b) mentoring and empowerment of teachers, and (c) the level of support available from the special education department.

Frigmanski (2014) completed a study of administrators as change agents in implementing an MTSS. The purpose of her study was to review and investigate three broad areas relating to the practice of leadership and the implementation of RtI. The first objective was to investigate administrators' beliefs and attitudes regarding the responsibilities, as well as outcomes, as they relate to the implementation process of RtI. The second objective was to determine if challenges identified throughout the research on organizational change management and leadership align with actual challenges school

administrators face when charged with implementing RtI. The third objective was to determine if school administrators are equipped with the skill set necessary to successfully employ an operational framework for the implementation of RtI in the building or school district in which they work.

Frigmanski (2014) used a mixed-method survey research design to gather information from administrators throughout the State of Michigan regarding their beliefs, perceptions, and challenges and perceived skill sets pertaining to the implementation of RtI. Closed and open-ended questions were asked to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The target population in the study included LEA special education directors and supervisors, and building-level administrators including principals, curriculum directors, dean of students, and assistant principals from districts in Michigan. The instrument for this study was a questionnaire formatted in Survey Monkey, an online survey program. There were 27 questions of various formats: multiple choice, short answer, and open-ended questions. Seventy-nine administrators completed the survey. The results of the study showed 83.6% of the respondents identified building-level administration as having primary responsibility for implementation of RtI. School administrators indicated they believed (72.9% strongly agree, 27.1% agree) RtI improves student outcomes. Respondents identified supports needed in order to carry out successful RtI practices. Those include training and staff development (instructional delivery, differential instruction, classroom management, curriculum, data analysis, and data-informed instruction), vision for carrying an RtI initiative, funding, and additional staff. Themes found in the study include communication, visionary leadership, setting high expectations, sticking to the plan, data-informed decisions, changing the culture of the school, and administrators taking a leadership role in the process.

Effective School Cultures

Marzano (2003) described school-level factors as functions of school policy and school-wide decisions and initiatives. He wrote about five school-level factors: a guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parent and community involvement, a safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism. These were listed in order of impact on student achievement. Marzano analyzed the school-level factors of other researchers. Edmonds's (1979) research provided these school-level factors: strong administrative leadership, emphasis on basic skill acquisition, high expectations for student achievement, safe and orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, and frequent monitoring of student progress. Levine and Lezotte (1990) provided their own list of school-level factors such as productive climate and culture, focus on central learning skills, appropriate monitoring, practice-oriented staff development, strong leadership, salient parent involvement, high expectations and requirements. Sammons (1999) provided these school-level factors: professional leadership, concentration on teaching and learning, shared vision and goals, learning environment, high expectations, positive reinforcement, monitoring progress, pupil rights and expectations, and home-school partnerships. Scheerens and Bosker (1997) identified eight school-level factors in rank order of their impact on student achievement: time, monitoring, pressure to achieve, parental involvement, school climate, content coverage, school leadership, and cooperation. Marzano stated leadership is an overarching variable impacting the effective implementation of all other factors.

The first of Marzano's (2003) school-level factors is a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Marzano described this factor as a combination of opportunity to learn and time. There are five action steps to implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum:

identify and communicate the content considered essential for all students; ensure the essential content can be addressed in the amount of time available for instruction; sequence and organize the essential content in such a way students have ample opportunity to learn it; ensure teachers address the essential content; and protect instructional time (Marzano, 2003, p. 31).

The second of Marzano's (2003) school-level factors is challenging goals and effective feedback. Marzano described this factor as high expectations and the pressure to achieve. Lipsey and Wilson (1993) found the act of setting academic goals had an effect size of .55, and Schmoker (2006) noted having academic goals at the school level has an effect on effectiveness. Little (1990) found shared responsibility for common goals was more important in establishing collegiality than interpersonal friendships. Edmonds (1979) believed a school must challenge all students to be truly effective. Reynolds and Teddlie (2000) commented that teachers should communicate high expectations directly to students, which implies clear goals for all students should be established. Hattie (1992) found the most powerful single modification enhancing achievement is feedback. Marzano recommended three action steps to implement challenging goals and effective feedback. First, implement an assessment system providing timely feedback on specific knowledge and skills for specific students. Secondly, establish specific, challenging achievement goals for the school as a whole. Lastly, establish specific goals for individual students.

Parent and community involvement is Marzano's (2003) third school-level factor. Reynolds and Teddlie (2000) indicated many of the studies examining the impact of parent involvement commonly include elements of community involvement. Tangri and Moles (1987) found the same conclusion. Effective parental and community involvement

incorporates three features: communication, participation, and governance. An action step to include is to establish vehicles for communication between schools, parents, and the community in order to establish multiple ways for parents and community to be involved in the day-to-day running of the school.

Marzano (2003) wrote, “If teachers and students do not feel safe, they will not have the necessary psychological energy for teaching and learning” (p. 53). In a safe and orderly school, the basic human needs are being met and energy can be spent for learning and teaching. A safe and orderly school environment may be established by having clear school-wide rules and procedures for general behavior, enforcing appropriate consequences for violations of rules and procedures, teaching self-discipline and responsibility to students, and designing a system which allows for the early detection of students with extreme behaviors.

The final school-level factor is collegiality and professionalism. Professionalism includes a sense of efficacy and pedagogical knowledge (Ferguson, 1991). To create a collegial and professional school culture, one must establish norms of conduct and behavior for the staff, design governance structures which allow for staff involvement in decisions and policies for the school, and engage teachers in meaningful staff development activities (Marzano, 2003).

Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Many (2010) wrote about several of these same factors. They defined Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (p. 11). PLCs include six processes:

1. A focus on learning,

2. A collaborative culture with a focus on learning for all,
3. Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality,
4. Action orientation,
5. A commitment to continuous improvement, and
6. Results orientation.

Dufour et al. also included the creation of systematic interventions to ensure extra support for students to learn successfully.

Leadership Behaviors

Leadership is considered the single most important aspect of effective school reform (Marzano, 2003). At the building level, research suggests the role of the principal is the most critical component to the success of a multi-tiered system (McCook, 2006). Implementing an MTSS requires close consideration from the leadership regarding the school's culture and providing the appropriate professional development to all staff members. The principal must take an active role in supporting the change, not only in actions but with the allocation of resources and full participation on the leadership team. The principal must take the lead role and participate in all aspects of the process if success for all students is to be achieved (McCook, 2006). Instructional leadership is essential in the process of creating a multi-tiered system. Schools cannot improve until the building leader works cooperatively with fellow educators to oversee and create an environment where the priority is improving instruction (Schmoker, 2006). An effective school leader is crucial to creating a responsive school culture.

Collins's (2001) research resulted in five levels of leadership. The levels range from highly capable individuals, contributing team member, competent manager, effective leader, and Level 5 executive. Collins described Level 5 leaders as those who

“build enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will” (p. 21). Level 5 leaders are self-effacing individuals with fierce resolve to do whatever is needed to make the company great. These leaders are incredibly ambitious for the institution and not for themselves. They are modest and willful. They are ordinary people who get extraordinary results. Collins described Abraham Lincoln as a Level 5 leader due to his humbleness, but fearlessness. A Level 5 leader sets up a successor for success. These leaders are concerned for sustainability of programs long after they are gone. Level 5 leaders have ferocious resolve with stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done, and they are fanatically driven by an incurable need to produce results. Collins talked about the Level 5 leader as a window giving credit to those outside themselves when things go well and a mirror by accepting responsibility when things do not go well. There are specific behaviors of Level 5 Leaders. Collins called one of the behaviors First Who . . . Then What. The components of this behavior include being rigorous, but not ruthless. This behavior allows for leaders to know when to make people changes and then act on this knowledge. Level 5 leaders put their best people on the biggest opportunities, not the biggest problems. Level 5 leaders confront the brutal facts. They have knowledge of the changing world around them and confront the brutal facts head-on and completely change the entire system in response to data. Good decisions, diligently executed are one of the signs of a Level 5 leader. Collins wrote,

Leadership is about vision. But leadership is equally about creating a climate where the truth is heard and the brutal facts confronted. There is a huge difference between the opportunity to have your say and the opportunity to be heard. The good to great leaders understood this distinction, creating a culture

wherein people had a tremendous opportunity to be heard and ultimately, for the truth to be heard. (p. 74)

Level 5 leaders lead with questions and not answers; they have unwavering faith amid the brutal facts. Challenges are opportunities, not liabilities; there is a resiliency and persistence in all they do.

Level 5 leaders demonstrate The Hedgehog Concept. The Hedgehog Concept involves taking a complex world and simplifying it. They see what is essential and ignore the rest. Level 5 leaders see through complexity and discern underlying patterns in it. They understand what they do well, and they have an understanding of what they do not do well. The economic denominator or profit per unit such as profit per customer is extremely important to these leaders. In a school environment, this translates into growth per student.

Level 5 leaders believe in a culture of discipline. This culture of discipline incorporates the idea of freedom and responsibility within a framework. These leaders fill the culture with self-disciplined people who are willing to go to extreme lengths to fulfill their responsibilities. There is an extreme focus on what needs to be done.

Collins (2001) also wrote of the Flywheel Effect. The Flywheel Effect explains the amount of time it takes to become great. Collins said,

There is no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, or no solitary lucky break. It is a cumulative process-step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn by turn of the flywheel adds up to sustained and spectacular results. Level 5 Leaders achieved great results by managing change, but they never really spent much time thinking about it. The change over time was utterly transparent to them. (p. 165)

Reeves (2006) described the Leadership for Learning Framework. He described some leaders engage in self-defeating behavior by doing the same thing and expecting different results. He called this belligerent indifference as professionals who persist in leadership and teaching practices which are not working. Reeves included the concept of leadership, teaching, and adult actions matter. He believed there are particular leadership actions which show demonstrable links to improved student achievement and educational equity, and leadership is neither a unitary skill nor a solitary activity. Reeves stated,

We know some schools achieve higher test scores with improvements in teaching and leadership practices, and others abuse the system. If the only objective is improved test scores, it's much faster and easier to have underperforming students drop out of school than to craft effective intervention programs for them. (p. 2)

Reeves (2006) wrote about the dimensions of leadership which include visionary leadership, relational leadership, systems leadership, reflective leadership, collaborative leadership, analytical leadership, and communicative leadership. Visionary leadership is crucial for an effective leader. Effective visions help individuals understand they are part of a larger world and also reassure them of their individual importance to the organization. Relational leadership involves trust and integrity. Effective leaders have appropriate, meaningful relationships which involve empathy, inquiry, and a respect for confidentiality. Relational leaders exhibit a passion for their mission and the people around them. The leader with systems intelligence takes the time to understand each interaction and its impact on the entire system and communicates this complexity in a manner enabling each member of the organization to understand and consistently use these important interconnections. Systems leadership is not merely about complexity but about an even greater challenge: simple patterns. Reflective leaders take time to think

about the lessons learned, record their small wins and setbacks, document conflicts between values and practice, identify the difference between behaviors, and notice trends emerge over time. Collaborative leaders understand they can make decisions with their authority, but they can implement those decisions only through collaboration. Improved organizational performance happens through networks, not individuals. If the only source of inspiration for improvement is the individual leader, then islands of excellence may result, and long-term system-wide improvement will continue to be an illusion. Analytical leaders understand the complexities of life and challenge assertions and uncomfortable truths. Communicative leaders express gratitude, recognition, and appreciation. They encourage and nurture others.

Burns (1978) wrote about transformational leaders who are able to inspire others to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work towards a common goal. Transformational Leadership is based on the leader's beliefs (vision) and behaviors (change by example). Transformational leaders have a moral imperative to work toward the vision. Bass and Riggio (2006) later created Bass' Transformational Leadership based on the work of Burns (1978). Bass and Riggio wrote transformational leaders are trusted, respected, and admired by their followers because they inspire others to achieve extraordinary outcomes and develop their own leadership capacity.

Transformational Leadership inspires followers with challenge and persuasion, providing both meaning and understanding. The leadership is intellectually stimulating, expanding the follower's use of their abilities. Finally, the leadership is individually considerate, providing the follower with support, mentoring, and coaching. (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 5)

Bass and Riggio (2006) later defined Transformational Leadership as having four

components: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. When a leader uses individualized consideration, the leader serves as a teacher and a coach to others. The leader accepts individual differences and supports each person based on their individual needs. Intellectual stimulation occurs when the leader promotes creativity and stimulates new processes. Leaders who inspire others by explaining why a process needs to change demonstrate inspirational motivation. The leader maintains a positive vision for the followers, and followers are personally compelled to work toward the vision. Individualized influence is demonstrated by leaders when they are admired and trusted by the followers. The leaders show persistence and determination. Bass and Riggio (2006) wrote, “The leader reassures others that obstacles will be overcome” (p. 6).

Summary

Within the complexities of the contexts of an MTSS, school culture, and leadership, the following specific research questions were answered.

1. What is the impact of an MTSS on school culture?
2. What are common experiences associated with an MTSS that impact school culture?
3. Are there identifiable traits within the organization impacting implementation of an MTSS?
4. Are there identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the potential for and the sustainability of an MTSS?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Many behavioral, cognitive, and social/emotional theorists have written about the importance of meeting the needs of children. Maslow (1971), Glasser (1998), Bloom (1976), and Piaget (1971) are just a few. Each of these theorists have their own understanding of the needs of children and adults, but they all emphasize the importance of recognizing the stages of human development and meeting the needs of the individuals in each stage. All of these theories have an impact on the educational setting for students. Teachers and administrators have an understanding of these theories, and some schools have implemented systems to assess individual needs of the students and have implemented supports to meet those needs. This system of individualized support is called an MTSS. An MTSS is complex with components which impact core instruction, curriculum, formative assessment, interventions, summative assessment, and problem solving. These core components of an MTSS can impact how a school functions. The beliefs and behaviors of those in a school make up the school's culture. The vision, communication, and expectations are important when one considers school culture. One of the most important elements to impact a school's culture is the school's leader or leaders. The school's leader sets the tone for the school. Some leaders are transactional, and some are transformational. Transformational leaders are inspiring, charismatic, and intellectually stimulating. These transformational leaders consider the individual needs of those they serve.

This study is important because it addresses the complexities of assessing individual student needs and the planning required to meet those needs. The study asks what creates a school culture conducive to meeting these individual needs.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this research was to study the implementation an MTSS with emphasis on school culture and leadership. The complex themes associated with MTSS, school culture, and leadership were an important part of determining the methodology used for this study. Each of these topics of study is complex alone and to be studied together adds to the complexity of the research questions. The data collected were quantitative and qualitative in nature. Qualitative data were analyzed for impact and themes. Data studied consisted of Likert scale results and words shared during surveys and interviews. There is an abundant amount of research relative to effective school cultures and leadership, but this research offers a new slant on this research with the application of an MTSS to each of these bodies of research.

Several questions were considered in making a decision relative to the methodology used in the study. The research questions studied were considered in determining the method used. The study proposed to answer the following research questions.

1. What is the impact of an MTSS on school culture?
2. What are the common experiences associated with an MTSS that impact school culture?
3. Are there identifiable traits within the organization impacting the implementation of an MTSS?
4. Are there identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the potential for and the sustainability of an MTSS?

Research Design

A case study design was used within a quantitative and qualitative framework to

investigate the essential character of an MTSS and its impact on school culture. A survey titled Impact of MTSS on School Culture Instrument (Appendix A), interviews (Appendix B) and focus groups (Appendix C) were used to collect the qualitative data. The surveys were web-based using K12Insight.com. There are clear advantages to web-based surveys over traditional methods such as mail surveys. One advantage is the rate or number of days associated with the respondent returning the survey. Another advantage is the opportunity to type open-ended responses in a text box. A third advantage is the amount of time saved by the researcher. This allows for more time for focus groups and face-to-face interviews.

Content Validity

The draft of the Impact of MTSS on School Culture Instrument (Appendix A) was reviewed by a panel of MTSS state and regional consultants. The panel was made up of five MTSS experts from all over the state. Survey questions were validated by five experts to see if the survey questions answered the four research questions. If four of five or five of five of the MTSS state and regional consultants considered the survey question valid, then the survey question was considered valid for the purposes of the research. Those survey questions considered by three or fewer of the MTSS experts as valid were either removed or changed according to the experts' recommendations. Feedback on the instrument was considered and revisions were made in accordance with the feedback. After the survey instrument was finalized, protocol for obtaining permission from Gardner-Webb University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was completed. The research was conducted after IRB approval. A field test for the survey instrument was completed after the invitation letter (Appendix D) and the informed consent (Appendix E) were distributed to the field test participants. The surveys were administered to 10

staff members of a school who are not part of the study. After completing the survey, the field test group members were asked to provide feedback on access to and navigation within the survey, technical difficulties experienced, clarity of instructions, grammatical errors, and general observations. The field test results and test participant feedback supported the validity and clarity of the survey and data collection method.

Research Participants

The population for this study consisted of four elementary schools in three different school districts in North Carolina. The location of the schools ranged from the mountains to the piedmont of North Carolina. All of the schools were Title I schools, and all of the schools were MTSS Pilot Schools in each of the respective school districts. The schools ranged in average daily attendance from 420 students to 500 students. All of the schools studied have implemented and sustained an MTSS. Purposeful sampling was used to identify schools included within all of the schools in North Carolina meeting specific criteria. The MTSS state and regional consultants gave input on the schools to include in the study. The criteria for selection included the elements of an MTSS.

1. Schools which have implemented a prevention, early intervention, and support for students.
2. Schools which have received staff development relative to curriculum, assessment, instruction, and environment to implement the MTSS.
3. Schools which have a problem-solving process.
4. Schools which are willing to participate in the study.

The rationale for selecting the first criterion was for the school to currently have the supports in place to address the needs of their students. This is important because these supports demonstrate the planning needed to meet the individual needs of the

students. The second criterion was chosen because of the importance of common experiences when making massive changes in school culture. Criterion three is important because of the influence of beliefs on one's actions. The problem solving and reflection is crucial in the MTSS process.

Research Instrumentation

One of the instruments for this study included a survey titled Impact of MTSS on School Culture Instrument (Appendix A). The survey was formatted on K12 Insight (www.k12insight.com), an online survey program. The survey included an invitation letter (Appendix D) with instructions on how to complete the survey as well as an explanation on anonymity and how the information collected would be used (Appendix E). The survey was comprised of 44 total questions organized into five sections. The responses ranged from open-ended responses and responses in the form of a Likert scale. The Likert scale consisted of the following choices: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. There were also open-ended responses on the survey. There were four questions regarding demographics to seek descriptive data about the participants: gender, age, years of experience, and educational level.

There were 40 questions to answer the four research questions. In order to answer Research Question 1 (What is the impact of an MTSS on a school's culture?) and Research Question 2 (What are the common experiences associated with MTSS that impact a school's culture?), participants were given a variety of questions utilizing a Likert scale to address the components including common experiences of an MTSS and how it changed the common experiences, beliefs, and behaviors within the school's culture. Additionally, participants were asked to write open-ended responses relative to how their common experiences, beliefs, and behaviors have changed with the

implementation of an MTSS. Displayed in Table 1 are the survey items related to each component of an MTSS and the impact on the common experiences, beliefs, and behaviors. These are indicators of an MTSS which impact school culture which are found in the work by Kansas State Department of Education (2009).

Table 1

Survey Items for Research Question 1 and Research Question 2

Impact	Survey Item
Instruction	5
Early Intervention	6
Academic Supports	7, 14
Curriculum	8
Formative and Summative Assessment	9, 13, 15, 17
Problem Solving	10
Communication	16
Empowerment	11, 12, 18, 19

In order to answer Research Question 3 (Are there identifiable traits within the organization impacting implementation of MTSS), participants were given a variety of questions utilizing a Likert scale to address the components common experiences, belief, and behaviors of an effective school culture and the school culture's impact on the implementation of an MTSS. Additionally, participants were asked to write open-ended responses relative to how their common experiences, beliefs, and behaviors have impacted the implementation of an MTSS. The themes were recorded in a frequency distribution table. Displayed in Table 2 are the survey items related to each component of an effective school culture and its impact on the implementation of an MTSS. These are the identifiable traits according to school culture research by Marzano (2003).

Table 2

Survey Items for Research Question 3

Impact	Survey Item
Communication	25, 30, 32, 35
Vision	23, 27, 31, 32
High Expectations	20, 22, 34
Culture of Change	24, 26, 33
Leadership	21, 28, 29, 36

In order to answer Research Question 4 (Are there identifiable leadership beliefs and behaviors impacting the sustainability of an MTSS?), participants were asked a variety of questions utilizing a Likert scale to address the components of Transformational Leadership and its impact on the implementation of an MTSS. Additionally, participants were asked to write open-ended responses relative to how Transformational Leadership affected the implementation of an MTSS. Displayed in Table 3 are the survey items related to each element of effective leadership and the impact on the implementation and sustainability of an MTSS. These are the identifiable traits of Transformational Leadership according to Bass and Riggio (2006).

Table 3

Survey Items for Research Question 4

Transformational Leadership	Survey Item
Idealized Influence	38, 44
Inspirational Motivation	37, 42
Intellectual Stimulation	40, 41
Individualized Consideration	39, 43

Data Collection

Each principal received an email identifying the researcher and the research study, and the email asked the principal to assist the researcher in the dissemination of the survey to the target population. A copy of the Invitation to Participate letter intended for the potential participants (Appendix D) as well as the IRB approval letter were included in the email. The email additionally contained key dates of when the survey window closed.

Data collection began in February 2015 and was completed by March 2015. Surveys were emailed to the schools, and principals of each school received a phone call from the researcher prior to distribution of the survey. Respondents were assured neither their personal identity nor the identity of the school would be released in the dissertation. Participants were asked to respond in 1 week, and the principals received a second phone call when the responses from each school increased to 70%. The completed surveys generated data into the survey program database (K12Insight.com). The data were placed into frequency distribution tables using frequently occurring themes. The descriptive data included those themes relative to MTSS such as instruction, intervention, academic

supports, curriculum, formative assessment, summative assessment, problem solving, and empowerment. All of these data points are those listed as necessary for an MTSS. The descriptive data also included themes relative to school culture such as communication, vision, expectations, change, and leadership. These themes are those found in the research of effective school cultures. Leadership data included themes relative to the four components included in the Transformational Leadership research of Burns (1978) and Bass and Riggio (2006). Transformational Leadership includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Data were recorded in frequency distribution tables for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the survey instrument was statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the data analysis provided by K12 Insight. Descriptive statistics were used by including frequency, number, and cumulative percentages. The data used were in the form of themes relative to the implementation of an MTSS, elements of school culture, and elements of Transformational Leadership. The data collected included themes relative to MTSS such as instruction, intervention, academic supports, curriculum, formative assessment, summative assessment, problem solving, communication, and empowerment. The frequency data table for school culture included themes relative to school culture such as communication, vision, expectations, change, and leadership. The frequency data tables for leadership included themes relative to the four components included in Transformational Leadership. Transformational Leadership includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These descriptive statistical elements were provided by K12Insight.com software. Inferential statistics were used in the form of a Chi-Square

Test for the Likert scale survey items. A Chi-Square Test was used to determine whether or not sample proportions match the theoretical values. The objective for a Chi-Square Test is to determine if the distribution of the data is equal to the hypothesized distribution. The SPSS system provided output stating the null hypothesis, a significance level, and acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis. A significant Chi-Square Test indicates the data vary from the expected values. A test which is not significant indicates the data are consistent with the expected values.

The degrees of freedom were calculated by the number of categories minus 1, and the significance level was set at .05. The null hypothesis stated there was no significant difference between the expected and observed frequencies. The alternative hypothesis stated they were different. The Chi-Square Table provides the table value for the Chi-Square. If the Chi-Square Test value was equal to or greater than the table value, then the null hypothesis was rejected. Rejection of the null showed the differences in the collected data are not due to chance alone. A Chi-Square did not provide the strength of the relationship.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to better understand the impact of implementation of an MTSS on school culture and the leadership behaviors needed to implement and sustain an MTSS. A case study method was chosen to allow for in-depth analysis of the elements of an MTSS within the complexities of a school's culture. There were two areas to be studied during the research. The first area of study was the relationship or lack thereof between an MTSS and the experiences, beliefs, and behaviors influencing school culture. The second area of study involved finding the leadership behaviors needed to implement and sustain a culture of an MTSS. These two areas of

study led to the collection of multiple data sets. One data set included the collection of themes discussed during face-to-face interviews and focus groups. The themes discovered were organized into frequency data tables. The second data set included the responses collected during the administration of an online survey. These responses were organized into frequency data tables using the online software, and inferential statistics were used in the form of Chi-Square Tests to determine if there were any possible relationships.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this research was to learn more about the impact of the implementation of an MTSS on school culture and the impact of school culture on the implementation of an MTSS. This research will be valuable to schools and school districts that are working to implement an MTSS. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2015) has defined an MTSS as a multi-tiered framework which promotes school improvement through engaging, research-based academic and behavioral practices. North Carolina MTSS employs a systems approach using data-driven problem solving to maximize growth for all. The vision for MTSS as stated by NCDPI includes the implementation of MTSS in every North Carolina Prekindergarten-12 public education system. Implementation includes all components of an MTSS to ensure college and career readiness for all students. The components of an MTSS include leadership and shared responsibility, curriculum and instruction, problem solving and data-driven decision making, assessment, collaboration, and sustainability and integration. The mission of NCDPI is to prepare and support LEAs to implement an MTSS for total school improvement by providing professional development, coaching and technical assistance, research and evaluation, and communication and visibility which result in college and career readiness for all students. NCDPI believed that MTSS is the most effective and efficient approach to improving school outcomes and student performance thereby ensuring equitable access to a sound basic education.

Participant Demographics

Faculty members from four elementary schools in North Carolina were surveyed. Focus groups and administrators from these schools were also interviewed. Table 4 provides the data which describe the participants for the research. These descriptive data

include data relative to gender, age, years of experience, and highest education degree earned. The group surveyed included 77 females and seven males. The largest group surveyed included those in the 32 to 42 years of age range. The largest experience groups reported having 1 to 3 years of experience and 15 or more years of experience. The largest group reported having earned a bachelor's degree as their highest educational level attained.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Study Group

Data	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Males	7	8.33%
Females	77	91.67%
Age		
22-32	24	28.57%
32-42	25	29.76%
43-52	21	25.00%
52+	14	16.67%
Years of Experience		
1-3	23	27.38%
4-6	10	11.90%
7-9	9	10.71%
10-15	20	23.81%
15+	22	26.19%
Highest Educational Level		
Bachelor's	44	52.38%
Master's	37	44.05%
Specialist	3	3.57%
Doctorate	0	0.00%

Research Question 1

What is the impact of an MTSS on a school's culture? This research question examined the impact of an MTSS on the many facets of school culture. Survey questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 were presented in Likert scale format. Each of these questions asked respondents to reflect on their own beliefs relative to the impact of MTSS on their

school's culture. Table 5 provides the responses to these questions. Question 12 was an open-ended question which allowed respondents to reflect on how the implementation of an MTSS changed their school. Table 6 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the responses. Questions 1, 2, and 6 during the focus group interviews also examined the impact of MTSS on a school's culture. Table 7 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the focus group responses. Questions 1, 2, and 6 during the interviews with administration examined the impact of MTSS on a school's culture from a school leader's perspective. Table 8 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the administrative interviews.

Table 5

Chi-Square Test Results for Questions 5-11

Question	SA	A	N	D	SD	Chi-Square
5. Beliefs about instruction	20	41	19	3	1	p<0.001
6. Beliefs about early intervention	24	39	19	2	0	p<0.001
7. Beliefs about academic supports	22	42	18	2	0	p<0.001
8. Beliefs about curriculum	16	40	20	6	1	p<0.001
9. Beliefs about assessment	21	37	22	3	1	p<0.001
10. Beliefs about problem solving	20	45	16	2	1	p<0.001
11. Beliefs about empowerment	42	33	9	0	0	p<0.001

Table 6

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes from Survey Question 12: How has the implementation of an MTSS changed your school?

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Success for all students	30	35.71%
Data informed decisions	14	16.67%
Teamwork/collaboration	9	10.71%
Reflect on teaching	7	8.33%
More effective grouping	6	7.14%
Urgency	6	7.14%
Researched based interventions	6	7.14%
Staff helping upper grades	1	1.19%
Student growth	1	1.19%
Targeted resources	1	1.19%
Empowered teachers	1	1.19%
Increased communication	1	1.19%
Problem solving increases	1	1.19%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from open-ended survey data. One respondent to Question 12 said, “The implementation of an MTSS has changed our school by improving core instruction and empowering educators to problem-solve student weaknesses. It has provided better support for educators to implement research-based interventions that help each child more efficiently.” Another respondent described how data are used to diagnose and intervene:

The MTSS has allowed us to better serve our students based on their individual needs. We use student data to drive instruction and small group interventions. By using and tracking student data we can also see when our students are succeeding and when they need more individualized instruction. As teachers we have a better understanding of our standards and the progression of them so that we know

where to begin instruction.

A third response to Question 12 talked about the constant reflection relative to students' success: "We look more closely when teaching methods work and when they do not work. We make changes to our techniques when necessary to ensure each individual student's success in learning." A fourth respondent shared thoughts about the shared ownership of the students:

I think we have an "all hands on deck" mentality more than ever before. To the majority of the staff this system is invaluable and makes us feel like our children will get whatever they need, no matter what it takes. We look at each child and what they need and create a group that best suits their need. When making our groups we also try to pair the adults with certain children to ensure they are getting their best chance. I think it has changed our school because the mentality of only helping kids in your class is no longer acceptable.

Table 7

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Focus Groups

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentages
Collaboration	12	18.46%
Whole Child	7	10.77%
Accountability	5	7.69%
Success	5	7.69%
Targeted Instruction	4	6.15%
Data	4	6.15%
Process	3	4.62%
Growth	3	4.62%
Efficacy	3	4.62%
Student Focus	3	4.62%
Student ownership	2	3.08%
Core Instruction	2	3.08%
Paperwork	2	3.08%
Change process	1	1.54%
Reflective	1	1.54%
Pride	1	1.54%
Central Office Support	1	1.54%
Coaching	1	1.54%
Urgency	1	1.54%
Communication	1	1.54%
Diagnosis	1	1.54%
Resources	1	1.54%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from focus group interviews.

One respondent said,

People are not thinking, well, those are my kids. I want to teach them in my way.

It is more of this collaborative decision making process that has everybody talking about the data. It makes it more objective and less subjective. They don't take any type of decision made about students personally. I think that has made a major impact on the staff and for me. I feel like if one of my kids that I work with

is not being successful I know I can go to a team or teacher and say I don't see the movement in the data and I don't know what to do. It is not about me; it is about the kid. What can we do to help this kid? What aren't we trying? MTSS has made a huge difference.

A second respondent described the care for students:

I think MTSS makes students feel like they are cared about which also helps the culture of the school. When students feel like they are loved and they are cared about then they are going to want to do better because you perform better when you know you are cared about.

A third response to the focus group interview question included information about data-informed decisions:

I think the MTSS process has caused teachers to be more focused on student data. You really use assessments to modify your instruction instead of using assessments to just look back to see if they got it. You are assessing at the beginning so you know where you need to go with the kids and it helps us to focus on the individual needs of the students. When I first started teaching we did assessments, but now you analyze it. You look at the error patterns for that student and the accuracy rate.

A fourth respondent said, "We do hold each other accountable for every child. It is not my child or your child. They are our children. We all seek help and support from every grade level."

Table 8

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Administrative Interviews

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentages of Responses
Collaboration/Team	10	18.52%
Mindset Shift	6	11.11%
EC Placement	5	9.26%
All students	5	9.26%
Data	5	9.26%
Schedules	4	7.40%
Vision	4	7.40%
Coaching	4	7.40%
Trust	3	5.56%
Common Language	2	3.70%
Accountability	2	3.70%
MTSS Process	2	3.70%
Hiring	2	3.70%
Reflection	2	3.70%
Culture of Growth	2	3.70%
Respect	1	1.85%
Shared Leadership	1	1.85%
Candid Conversations	1	1.85%
Professionals	1	1.85%
Planning	1	1.85%
Urgency	1	1.85%
Individualized Consideration	1	1.85%
Celebration	1	1.85%
Success	1	1.85%
No Stigma	1	1.85%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from administrative interviews. One respondent stated thoughts about the mindset shifts:

There has been a change in teachers' mindsets about our purpose here. I think there has been a change in focus. It is not just classroom teachers who are in charge of educating children, but it is everybody in this building. Regardless of your role or job description we are all working toward the same goal to teach

children. How each role does it may be different, but we have the same goal in mind. That has changed for us and everyone is focused together.

A second respondent said it this way:

I think there has been a change in mindset, the language and change has been a change. Teachers are willing to change things up. If they are trying something new and we go through a whole session and nobody in that group makes progress then let's not do that again. Let's change it up.

Another administrator answered,

It causes the adults to focus on every child can learn, but also that every child is important because as a teacher it is easy to just be involved with your kids in your room and shut your door. Everybody can do what they want; these are your kids. In MTSS they are not just your kids they are everybody's kids and everybody loves these kids enough to spend the time to find out what they need.

A fourth respondent described the success of the students and teachers:

Students believe more in themselves because teachers believe more in themselves. They celebrate successes. The teachers will bring students to me and say you are not going to believe this. The student's face lights up and he shines. They want to share their successes because they see that their teachers are so proud of them. It goes back to that intrinsic piece. Teachers need to be intrinsically motivated. I used to send cards home to the staff and little things, but they were being motivated by those things more than what was happening in their classroom. Now that they are being intrinsically motivated, student successes have had more impact than here are two dozen donuts in the lounge. They want me to come to the classroom and say I looked at your data and your kids are rocking it out. That

is where they are getting their inspiration from versus me putting a pen in their boxes. That has changed their beliefs.

A fifth administrator talked about transformation:

It is a total school transformation. When you have implemented to fidelity and everything is firing on all cylinders it is a total school transformation because you are focusing in on reading and math. You focus in on student deficits to fill the holes for the students. A lot of people think MTSS is a fast track to EC, but that is not the fix. EC is just a type of intervention. It will change your whole school. It is a way to improve student outcomes.

Research Question 2

What are the common experiences associated with an MTSS which impact school culture? This question measured those experiences included in the implementation of an MTSS and how these experiences impact school culture. Survey questions 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 were presented in Likert scale format. Each of these questions asked respondents to reflect on experiences when implementing an MTSS at their school. Table 9 provides the responses to these questions. Question 18 was a question which asked respondents to rank the importance of three experiences associated with MTSS as defined by NCDPI (2015) and the Kansas State Department of Education (2009). Respondents were asked to rank the importance of the universal screening process, interventions, and progress monitoring. Table 10 provides the responses when asked to rank these experiences. Question 19 was an open-ended question which allowed respondents to reflect on those experiences during implementation of an MTSS which changed their beliefs and behaviors. Table 11 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the responses. Questions 3 and 6 during the focus group

interviews also examined the respondents' experiences associated with MTSS and how those experiences impacted school culture. Table 12 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the focus group responses. Questions 3 and 6 during the interviews with administration examined the experiences associated with MTSS for school leaders and how those experiences impacted the school's culture. Table 13 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the administrative interviews.

Table 9

Chi-Square Test Results for Questions 13-17

Question	SA	A	N	D	SD	Chi-Square
13. Universal Screening	21	40	20	0	0	p<0.010
14. Intervention	31	37	11	2	0	p<0.001
15. Progress Monitoring	29	38	13	1	0	p<0.001
16. Communication	23	40	15	2	0	p<0.001
17. Data-informed Decisions	34	44	3	0	0	p<0.001

Table 10

Ranking of Impact of Components of MTSS

Components	1st	2nd	3rd	Sum
Implementing universal screening	28	19	32	162
Implementing interventions	43	28	8	123
Implementing progress monitoring	9	32	38	187

Table 11

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Question 19: What experiences have you had as your school has implemented an MTSS you feel have changed your beliefs and behaviors?

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Student Growth/Success	20	30.30%
Data Informed Decisions	11	16.67%
Focus on all Students	8	12.12%
Diagnosis	6	9.09%
Targeting Instruction	4	6.06%
Teamwork	4	6.06%
Interventions	4	6.06%
Culture of Urgency	2	3.03%
Core Instruction	2	3.03%
Common Expectations	2	3.03%
Reflect on Instruction	1	1.52%
Shared Resources	1	1.52%
Assistance Team	1	1.52%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from open-ended survey data. One teacher answered Question 19 as a first year teacher:

This is my first year working with an MTSS, but in this short amount of time I have witnessed children develop a love for learning and a drive to do their best in reading and math. I think this is directly related to the time children spend in our designated MTSS time each day because I believe that children respond differently to different teachers and teaching styles. They get to experience these differences each day.

A second respondent answered, “Visual representation of the data which shows the growth of students who are impacted by interventions. Students show growth and get needed support through interventions without being identified as EC.” A third teacher

described data-informed decisions:

Having a MTSS makes me more data driven as a teacher. I base my instruction heavily on this data. I also value progress monitoring a lot more because it allows me to track the growth of my students so that I can quickly see a change in their needs. I also feel like it has made us stronger as a staff because we work together to serve these students and to problem solve together.

A fourth respondent answered by describing the success for students:

I have seen the big impact that the MTSS has had. I see students getting the support they need and it seems much easier to find areas of need with universal screening. Interventions help bridge the gap and give all students the opportunity to succeed.

Table 12

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Focus Groups

Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Teacher Efficacy	8	13.56%
Change Process	7	11.86%
Collaboration/Teamwork	6	10.175%
Paperwork	5	8.47%
EC Process	5	8.47%
Schedule	4	6.78%
Pilot School	4	6.78%
Student Needs	3	5.08%
Data Informed Decisions	3	5.08%
Success	3	5.08%
Communication	2	3.39%
Celebrations	2	3.39%
Diagnosis	2	3.39%
High expectations	1	1.69%
Student Ownership	1	1.69%
New Teacher Support	1	1.69%
Buy In	1	1.69%
Student Growth	1	1.69%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from focus group interview data. One teacher said,

The experiences that stand out the most are those of celebration. Being able to see the students and see their confidence. To see them enjoying being in their classes because they are now successful. It is because they have a whole school that believes in them seeing the kids shine and also the teachers shine as well because we all worked really hard. The kids and the teachers deserve to shine.

A second respondent answered by describing the support for the teacher:

I felt much more supported with the MTSS because if I had a problem with a certain kid I could go to his intervention teacher and say what are you seeing or what is he doing for you. What can I do in the classroom to help? The intervention teacher can say here is what I am doing and it seems to really be working. Try this in the classroom.

A third respondent stated,

Now we are a place that children are getting what they need. We can grow them the way they need to be grown. We have a better understanding of what we are supposed to do, too. Our expectations are clear.

A fourth teacher described a mindset shift:

We sit in team meetings and celebrate when we have a student move from Tier III to Tier II and that has been a good experience. We are trying to get rid of the mindset that team is a fast track to EC. Instead of teachers coming and saying this kid is so low. They define what the kid needs. That conversation has changed.

Table 13

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Administrative Interviews

Theme	Number of Responses	Percentages of Responses
Individualized Staff Development	12	28.57%
Urgency	4	9.52%
Problem-Solving	4	9.52%
Data Informed Decisions	4	9.52%
Core instruction	4	9.52%
Gradual Process	3	7.14%
Progress Monitoring	3	7.14%
Collaboration	2	4.76%
Mindset Shift	1	2.38%
Instruction came first	1	2.38%
Validation of strategies	1	2.38%
Permission to look different	1	2.38%
Schedule	1	2.38%
Professionalism	1	2.38%
Narrow the focus	1	2.38%
Student needs	1	2.38%
Student ownership	1	2.38%
Courage	1	2.38%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from administrative interview data. One administrator said,

I think with all of those pieces the key for us has been small doses. When we first rolled it out we had meetings to provide a huge overview of it. Now put all of that out of your mind and here is what we are going to work on first.

Another respondent stated how an MTSS was implemented at the school:

Rolling it out in small pieces not only from one grade level to the next, but one component to the next. We had to teach them what benchmarks were. Getting them to understand what each piece was, but doing it so they could see one piece

at a time then adding the next component. We would have our benchmarks and then plan our calendar. Let's add our progress monitoring. How is that calendar working for us?

A third administrator stated, "We provide staff development on an as needed basis. I have a plan for coaching, but if we see things then the plan changes. Staff development is given on what is needed." A fourth principal responded, "We have one administrator at each grade level and staff development meetings. Just like a small group of kids that is the best way to implement and change minds." A fifth respondent described the changes in the school:

The big change is these teachers have the capacity to analyze data, but to know what to do and where to go for their professional practice has been elevated. Their planning is different. Their instruction is different. Their level of urgency is different. They come to staff development every week. They are expected to have grade level planning. We provide this during the day because we wanted it to happen.

Research Question 3

Are there identifiable traits within the organization impacting the implementation of an MTSS? This question measured how the elements of school culture impact the implementation of an MTSS. Survey questions 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34 were formatted as Likert scale. Each of these questions asked respondents to reflect on the identifiable traits within the school which impacted the implementation of an MTSS. Table 14 provides the responses to these questions. Question 35 was an open-ended question which allowed respondents to reflect on why the school decided to implement an MTSS. Table 15 provides the themes and

frequencies of those themes found in the responses. Questions 4 and 6 during the focus group interviews asked respondents to reflect on the adult and student behaviors within the school which impact the implementation of an MTSS. Table 16 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the focus group responses. Questions 4 and 6 during the interviews with administration examined the adult and student behaviors within the school which impacted implementation of an MTSS. Table 17 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the administrative interviews.

Table 14

Chi-Square Test Results for Questions 20-34

Questions	SA	A	N	D	SD	Chi-Square
20. Sacrifice individual goals	12	42	15	10	0	p<0.001
21. Enthusiasm and confidence	18	45	13	2	0	p<0.001
22. High standards	29	43	6	1	0	p<0.001
23. Optimistic about future	14	35	19	10	1	p<0.001
24. Challenges assumptions	14	41	18	4	1	p<0.001
25. Offers new ideas	20	47	6	4	1	p<0.001
26. Conducive to innovation	27	40	11	1	0	p<0.001
27. Developmentally oriented	16	49	11	3	0	p<0.001
28. Continuous improvement	25	45	5	2	0	p<0.001
29. Individual consideration	21	46	10	1	0	p<0.001
30. Listen attentively	21	50	6	3	0	p<0.001
31. Proactive	17	45	12	4	1	p<0.001
32. Shared vision	20	47	11	1	0	p<0.001
33. Appreciate change	9	35	20	15	0	p<0.001
34. Incredible amount of work	47	28	3	1	0	p<0.001
35. Provide feedback	20	41	15	2	1	p<0.001

Table 15

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Question 36: Why did your school implement an MTSS?

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Required by administration	15	31.25%
Individualize learning needs	13	27.08%
Student success	9	18.75%
Help all students	7	14.58%
Make a difference	2	4.17%
Reduce EC referrals	1	2.08%
Reflect on core instruction	1	2.08%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from open-ended survey data. One teacher answered Question 36 by answering, “To help drive instruction for individual students and to provide enrichment and intervention groups. To help students succeed in the classroom.” A second respondent described why the school implemented an MTSS: “Our administration at the time was a huge advocate of this system and he encouraged us to adopt this model.” A third teacher stated, “I believe our school wanted to give students and teachers the resources they needed to succeed and grow throughout the school year. Through universal screening and interventions, all needs can be met.” A fourth respondent described being the first to implement RtI: “Our principal chose for our school to be one of the first to implement the RTI program. With staff development and teachers helping teachers, we have learned to use it to better our children.”

Table 16

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Focus Groups

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Collaboration/Teamwork	14	31.82%
Focus on Whole Child	8	18.18%
Student Success	3	6.82%
Targeted Instruction	3	6.82%
Focus on All Students	2	4.55%
Buy In	2	4.55%
Hard Work	2	4.55%
Growth	2	4.55%
Respect	1	2.27%
Change process	1	2.27%
Schedule	1	2.27%
Progress Monitoring	1	2.27%
Shared Ownership	1	2.27%
EC Process	1	2.27%
Celebration	1	2.27%
Hiring	1	2.27%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from focus group interview data. One focus group member said,

When the students begin to grow and succeed they also have confidence. This impacts them socially and emotionally. They feel good about themselves. They feel like they can do it. They want to keep growing. That goes along with the teachers. The more growth and progress they see the more they want the growth. We see this is working and know it can get better and better. We want to continue to grow so I think it has a positive impact with the staff and students.

A second respondent talked about teamwork:

We are a team. As a math teacher all of the kids depend on me and that is a lot of

pressure. I can depend on other people to support me. We make plans together.

We reflect together. Three heads are better than one.

Another teacher stated,

We have never worked harder and wanted so badly for our kids to be successful.

Everybody wants it. When you have that kind of drive it can happen. Self-

fulfilling prophecy with high expectations; everything we do is focused on kids.

A school counselor answered,

Student growth. Having the students actually know their growth. They use words

like I am more fluent. I can decode my words. You know these words are being

used in the classroom and by interventionists. It is not a foreign topic to the

students.

Table 17

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Administrative Interviews

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
High Quality Time	5	17.24%
Buy In	4	13.79%
Nonnegotiable	4	13.79%
Common Goals	2	6.90%
Paperwork	2	6.90%
Hiring	2	6.90%
High Expectations	2	6.90%
School Level Support	2	6.90%
Student Success	1	3.45%
Learn From Mistakes	1	3.45%
Individualized Trainings	1	3.45%
Outside entity	1	3.45%
Core Instruction	1	3.45%
Common Language	1	3.45%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from administrative interview data. One principal described the transformation for the school:

Huge. Huge. The environment was so toxic. It was a miserable place to work. It was all about the adults. It was about the adult needs. I had to do a lot of human resources work. People had lost sight of teaching and learning. It has taken hiring people who believe teaching and learning is at the core of everything we do. Every decision is about teaching and learning. Once people made the mind shift they began to feel empowered. There were key leaders being suppressed and they looked at me like is she going to fix this. Do I have the strength to stand up and do what is right? They sat back and watched to see what I did. These leaders saw that I get it so they began to follow. It took getting the right people for it to be effective. They understood the purpose was student growth and doing what is right for kids.

A second respondent answered,

Staff behaviors have changed: planning, data. Our school day has changed. From 8:30 until 3:00 it is nonstop. We hit the ground running. The day is busy, but it is purposeful work. What we do is purposeful and we know what our goal is. We are all working toward the same thing.

Another administrator stated, “When we first started it was not met with open arms because it was change. It was hard work. We had to prove to ourselves that it really worked before we had total buy in.”

Research Question 4

Are there identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the potential for and the sustainability of an MTSS? This question measured the leadership behaviors which

impacted the potential for and the sustainability of an MTSS? Survey questions 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, and 43 were formatted into Likert scales. Each of these questions asked respondents to reflect on school leadership behaviors which impacted the implementation of an MTSS at their school. Table 18 provides the responses to these questions.

Question 44 was an open-ended question which allowed respondents to reflect on those school leadership beliefs and behaviors which impact the implementation of an MTSS.

Table 19 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the responses.

Questions 5 and 6 during the focus group interviews also examined the respondents' beliefs relative to how school leadership impacts the implementation of an MTSS. Table 20 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the focus group responses. Questions 5 and 6 during the interviews with administration examined each of the school leader's beliefs relative to school leadership and the implementation of an MTSS. Table 21 provides the themes and frequencies of those themes found in the administrative interviews.

Table 18

Chi-Square Test Results for Questions 37-43

Question	SA	A	N	D	SD	Chi-Square
37. Vision	41	31	6	1	0	p<0.001
38. Admiration, respect, trust	38	32	9	0	0	p<0.001
39. Teaching and coaching	23	36	14	5	1	p<0.001
40. Data-informed decisions	53	23	3	0	0	p<0.001
41. Allocation of funds	39	25	14	1	0	p<0.001
42. Safe to be innovative	32	35	10	2	0	p<0.001
43. Supports leadership	36	38	3	2	0	p<0.001

Table 19

*Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Question 44:
How does your school leader support an MTSS in your school?*

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Knowledge of data	15	14.29%
Knowledge of/Believes in MTSS	14	13.33%
Teaming/collaboration	14	13.33%
Individual Support	12	12.38%
Funding/resources	11	10.48%
Problem solving	10	9.52%
Individualized planning	8	7.62%
Diagnosis	6	5.71%
Staff development	5	4.76%
Scheduling	5	4.76%
Empowers others	3	2.86%
Delineates expectations	1	0.95%
Evaluates progress	1	0.95%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from open-ended survey data. One teacher answered Question 44 relative to the principal:

She is extremely knowledgeable about the process and the interventions that will help students grow and succeed. She assists in grouping students, planning intervention groups, and evaluates progress monitoring. In other words, she is in the trenches working side by side with the teacher in our building.

Another teacher described the principal as data-driven:

My school leader supports an MTSS in our school in various ways. We use data to drive our instruction and practices. She encourages us to use data as a means of driving our instruction and interventions. We have a data board where we look at at-risk children going through the higher tiers, and we problem solve

interventions and solutions for those children.

A third teacher stated, “Our school leader supports an MTSS by educating and training staff on how the MTSS works, having a team of leaders who support teachers in understanding and carrying out the MTSS, and providing appropriate funding for interventions.” Another respondent described the support from the administrator:

Our leaders are very supportive. They supply whatever is needed to insure that we are successful in our classrooms. They make sure we have the latest information about our school’s goals, data found about our students, and any information about an MTSS.

Table 20

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Focus Groups

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentages of Responses
Data- Informed	11	15.94%
Coaching	9	13.04%
High Expectations	5	7.25%
Problem-Solving	4	5.80%
Knowledge of Students	4	5.80%
Collaboration/Teamwork	4	5.80%
Enthusiasm/Passion	4	5.80%
Urgency	4	5.80%
Motivational	4	5.80%
Student and Teacher Success	3	4.35%
Communication	2	2.90%
Intervention Groupings	2	2.90%
Organized	2	2.90%
Distributed Leadership	2	2.90%
Supervision	1	1.45%
Resources	1	1.45%
Scheduling	1	1.45%
Student Ownership	1	1.45%
Knowledge of Assessments	1	1.45%
Diagnosis	1	1.45%
Instructional Leader	1	1.45%
Accountability	1	1.45%
Hiring	1	1.45%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from focus group data. One

teacher said,

I think the administration is definitely very involved. I feel like I could go to them and say I am having trouble with this specific student's needs, and they look at the data and help me problem solve it. We figure out what I can do.

Another teacher described the mindset shift: "There is a growth mindset. Those people that use data to inform instruction are those people that have that growth mindset." A third respondent stated, "Our leadership is very data driven. There is not a moment of any day she can't tell you exactly where a child is. You walk in her office, and she has notebook after notebook." Another teacher talked about the urgency:

Our leadership is an urgent leadership. We have an urgent responsibility to make sure we are doing everything; every day, every minute, every second for every child. Leadership is looking at data constantly. If there is something they are seeing in the data, then let's address it right now. Let's jump in and address it right now.

Table 21

Frequency Distribution Table of Themes Resulting from Administrative Interviews

Themes	Number of Responses	Percentages of Responses
Knowledge of/Passion for MTSS	10	23.81%
Nonnegotiable	9	21.43%
Individualized Staff Development	6	14.29%
Change Leader	3	7.14%
Data Informed	3	7.14%
Schedule	2	4.76%
Trust	2	4.76%
Willingness to listen	1	2.38%
Hiring	1	2.38%
Celebrate	1	2.38%
Mindset Shift	1	2.38%
Visited Schools	1	2.38%
Instructional Leaders	1	2.38%
Accountability	1	2.38%

This is further supported and validated by highlights from administrative interview data. One principal said,

If someone became principal here and did not value MTSS would MTSS continue at this school? If a principal came in here and did not value it would they keep on doing it? It scares me would the next leader value MTSS. There are other schools in the district whose leaders did not value MTSS. They don't meet with their staff weekly. They don't sit in their problem-solving team meetings. They don't check progress monitoring. Their data is heart breaking. It all boils down to leadership. It scares me that some principals do not believe that. It has the power to change the students in your building.

A second administrator described passion: "There must be a passion for the

MTSS process and seeing kids grow.” Another respondent stated, “Leadership is the iron horse. I know it works, and we are going to do it until you believe it works.” That same administrator said,

Leadership needs to implement the change model. You have to think of change as a model. You have to think of change technically just like you would anything else. That helps you sustain and helps you weather the naysayers. You have to finesse it. You have to know how much to push and how much to let go. If someone sees a Picasso, then they say we are going to paint like that. That looks really nice. I want to paint like that. When we pick up the paint brush we don't even know where to make the first line. You would want to give up. The change process must be managed. That is really the leadership piece. You have to understand that you are managing change not just a program.

Summary

The results of this study provide insight into the following:

1. What is the impact of an MTSS on school culture?
2. What are the common experiences associated with an MTSS that impact school culture?
3. Are there identifiable traits within the organization impacting the implementation of an MTSS?
4. Are there identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the potential for and the sustainability of an MTSS?

The concluding chapter of this study provides some implications for these findings for schools, school districts, and states implementing an MTSS.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this research was to better understand the impact of implementation of an MTSS on school culture and the leadership behaviors needed to implement and sustain an MTSS. A case study method was chosen to allow for in-depth analysis of the elements of an MTSS within the complexities of a school's culture. There were two areas to be studied during the research. The first area of study was the impact of an MTSS and the experiences, beliefs, and behaviors influencing school culture. The second area of study involved the impact of leadership behaviors needed to implement and sustain the culture of an MTSS. These two areas of study led to the collection of multiple data sets. One data set included the collection of themes discussed during face-to-face interviews and focus groups. The themes discovered were organized into frequency data tables. The second data set included the responses collected during the administration of an online survey. These responses were organized into frequency data tables using the online software, and inferential statistics were used in the form of Chi-Square Tests to determine if there were any possible relationships.

This chapter contains the recommendations of the study, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, discussion, and suggestions for future research. The findings of this study have implications for schools, school districts, and states implementing an MTSS.

The research questions for the study included

1. What is the impact of an MTSS on a school's culture?
2. What are the common experiences associated with an MTSS that impact school culture?

3. Are there identifiable traits within an organization impacting the implementation of an MTSS?
4. Are there identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the potential for and the sustainability of an MTSS?

The findings of this study show there are impact elements between the implementation of an MTSS and a school's culture. The findings show the elements of an MTSS such as instruction, early intervention, academic supports, curriculum, assessments, problem solving, communication, and empowerment impact a school's culture. The data also show there is an impact between those elements of an effective school culture as researched by Marzano (2003) and the implementation of an MTSS. The elements of a school culture studied here include communication, vision, high expectations, culture of change, and leadership (Marzano, 2003). The findings show there is impact of Transformational Leadership on the implementation of an MTSS. Bass and Riggio's (2006) Transformational Leadership included idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

The sample was comprised of faculty members from four elementary schools in North Carolina. A focus group at each school was also interviewed. A total of 24 people participated in the focus groups. School leaders at each school were also interviewed. Eight school leaders were interviewed. There were seven males and 77 females included in the study with the majority of the respondents having either 1 to 3 years of experience or 15 plus years of experience. The majority of the respondents reported having earned either a bachelor's or master's degree.

Research Question 1

What is the impact of an MTSS on a school's culture? This question was

important for research because it provided insight into the impact of an MTSS and a school's culture. There are several conclusions to be drawn from the findings for this question. The impact of an MTSS was broad with an impact on many elements of a school's culture. From the research findings beliefs relative to instruction, early intervention, academic supports, curriculum, assessment, problem solving, and empowerment had a p value less than 0.001 which show more evidence against the null hypothesis. One conclusion is the impact of a series of mindset shifts for which the teachers and administrators surveyed and interviewed said were imperative to the effective implementation of an MTSS.

Naisbitt (2006) defined mindsets as "how we receive information" (p. xv). Naisbitt focused on mindsets which are deliberately developed for a certain purpose. He talked about how mindsets are like stars in our heads. Mindsets keep us on course and can guide us to a destination. The consequences of the mindset shifts associated with an MTSS create a renewed culture in the school. The impact of changes in beliefs on an organization's culture was researched by Connors and Smith (2011). Connors and Smith wrote about a Results Pyramid with three components of organizational culture. The bottom level of the Results Pyramid includes those common experiences within the organization. The second level includes the beliefs of the organization. The third level includes those actions in the organization. The fourth level of the Results Pyramid are the results achieved when the experiences, the beliefs, and the actions align to create an organizational culture. Each of the levels of the Results Pyramid influence the other levels and in turn impact organizational culture. The findings of the study can be used to conclude that if common experiences can be developed to create the change in mindsets needed to implement an MTSS, members of the organizations will change their actions or

behaviors. It can be concluded that when the behaviors of the members of the organization change, the results or achievements change as well.

The most often noted impact was a series of mindset shifts needed to implement an MTSS. The first mindset shift was a shift from being responsible for the students in the teacher's classroom to shared ownership of all of the students. McCook (2006) wrote about the belief "all children are general education students and can receive resources across all programs" (p. 11). McCook's work stated a mindset shift is needed relative to the work of a student support team in schools. He wrote a student support team's focus must be based on keeping a child in the general education program, not placing a child into the exceptional children's program. The focus of the student success team must change to serving all students. The teachers interviewed in the research study described this mindset shift as "all teachers for all students."

The second mindset shift included a belief that all students can and should succeed. This is supported in the research based on how a pattern of success motivates individuals. Feather's (1982) research on the expectations of success and effort arrange success and effort as a positive reinforcement feedback loop. The success and effort loop includes components such as aptitude and persistence. If students have the expectation of success and the student values the success, effort remains high. Dweck (2006) described two mindsets which have an impact on teachers' views of their students. Educators operate from two different mindsets. One mindset involves student learning being fixed or innate. Student learning is predetermined is one mindset. The other mindset involves student learning being one of growth over time. Student learning can be influenced by experiences. From the findings of the research, it can be concluded the culture of an MTSS school has a core value of success for all students. This mindset shift of success

for all students is consistent with the theory behind this research study. When schools meet the needs of all students, the students have increased chances of achieving the highest levels of human development. In reference to Chapter 1, Maslow (1968) wrote about the highest level being one of personal fulfillment, and Alderfer (1972) wrote about the highest level being one of growth. Jung (2006) described the highest level of human development is individuation where the students can live the life they desire.

Before drawing conclusions relative to the next two mindset shifts associated with MTSS, the topic of PLCs needs to be discussed. Dufour and Eaker (1998) wrote about the characteristics of PLCs. One characteristic of a PLC is a shared mission, vision, and values. A collective inquiry is a second characteristic of a PLC. This collective inquiry is defined as a relentless pursuit of new methods and then reflecting on the results from the new methods. A third characteristic of a PLC is collaborative teams with a shared vision. Dufour and Eaker wrote that a school's capacity to learn is a collaborative rather than an individual task. Teachers who learn from one another create collaboration that creates further school improvement. Dufour and Eaker emphasized team learning and team building are two different entities. Team building has a focus on answering routine questions, while team learning requires a group of people working to grow the organization into one which will continuously improve. A fourth characteristic of PLCs is this drive for action. A true PLC develops a trust and courage to try new techniques and strategies. Inaction is not acceptable. A fifth characteristic of a PLC is continuous improvement. Dufour and Eaker wrote about four key questions relative to continuous improvement.

1. What is our fundamental purpose?
2. What do we hope to achieve?

3. What are our strategies for becoming better?
4. What criteria will we use to assess our improvement efforts?

This quest for continuous improvement is reflected in the problem-solving cycle of the MTSS. The problem-solving cycle or feedback loop for the MTSS includes the identification of a problem, hypothesis development, discussion of possible solutions, development and implementation of the action plan, evaluation and revision of the action plan, and reflection on the success of the plan. This entire MTSS problem-solving cycle is based on data-informed decisions.

The last characteristic of a PLC is a focus on results. Data are used to inform and drive decisions for the PLC similar to how data are used to inform and drive decisions in an MTSS. Drucker (1992) said that “Every enterprise has to become a learning institution and a teaching institution. Organizations that build in continuous learning in jobs will dominate the twenty-first century” (p. 108).

The second adult behavior within the school which impacted the implementation of an MTSS was the focus on the whole child. A level of collaboration, teamwork, and communication were established before the implementation of the MTSS; but the implementation of the MTSS made the collaboration, teamwork, and communication more effective and efficient. One interview respondent said it this way, “We were a family before MTSS, but MTSS made us a stronger family.” The schools studied had a focus on the needs of the students, but the implementation of the MTSS made the focus expand to the needs of the whole child and to ensure success for all.

Data-informed decisions were the third major mindset shift found in the research study. The findings show teachers and administrators used data to inform and drive decisions about core instruction, intervention, groupings, and student progress. These

data created an environment where the school was constantly reflecting on the success, or lack thereof, of the students; and the school made adjustments to meet the needs of the students.

A fourth large mindset shift included the importance of teamwork, collaboration, and communication. This mindset shift was important because the schools used the strengths of each staff member to serve the needs of the students. The schools also mentioned the shared ownership of the students reduced the stigma of students getting academic or behavior services. The topic of collaboration and shared ownership was a shift from previous cultural elements which placed the teachers in isolated classrooms or settings without communication between parts of the school. All of these findings from the research study are aligned to the components of a PLC.

Research Question 2

What are the common experiences associated with an MTSS that impact school culture? This question was important for research because it provided insight into the impact of those common experiences associated with an MTSS and a school's culture. These common experiences include instruction, early intervention, academic supports, curriculum, formative and summative assessments, problem solving, communication, and empowerment. There are several conclusions to be drawn from the findings for this question. McCook (2006) wrote about the importance of the universal screening as a part of RtI. He said a school should not look within a child for a learning need until the school can determine if the core curriculum including instruction is appropriate for the vast majority of the students. McCook described the shift of the purpose of the student problem-solving team. The problem-solving team should use data to diagnose the learning problems for students and find research-based interventions to

make sure the students can function in the regular education classroom. The findings show universal screening, interventions, progress monitoring, improved communication, and assessments do impact a school's culture. On the research survey, the impact of interventions was ranked as the most significant cultural change when implementing an MTSS. The implementation of interventions assist in shifting the mindsets needed to implement an MTSS. McCook wrote about the importance of differentiated instruction in the core classroom and the interventions offered to meet the needs of the students. The research respondents provided insight into how the school culture shifted from student proficiency to academic and behavioral success for all students. This is important because success breeds success. Data informed decisions were used with the implementation of an MTSS, and the teachers and administrators believed they should diagnose the academic and behavioral needs of all students. The teachers talked about the increase in teacher efficacy and the increased appreciation of the change process. They felt supported by the collaboration and teamwork that the MTSS had provided. The teachers and administrators emphasized all staff development should be individualized for the teacher, grade level, or intervention. Large groups of staff members in a broad staff development opportunity were not successful. They found that they needed someone at the school level to answer questions immediately. Administrators addressed the need for a consistent presence at the district level to answer their questions. Staff development for implementation of an MTSS should emphasize the vision of an MTSS and be individualized at a school level if the implementation is at a district level, or individualized by teacher or team if the implementation is at the school level. Broad, large staff development opportunities are not as effective as those staff development opportunities at an individualized level. MTSS participants want to know how the

implementation affects each of them.

Research Question 3

Are there identifiable traits within an organization impacting the implementation of an MTSS? This question is important because it provides insight into the impact of a school's culture on the implementation of an MTSS. Those components of an effective school culture provided by the research of Marzano (2003) were used in the development of the data collection instruments. These components include communication, vision, high expectations, culture of change, and leadership. There are several conclusions to be drawn from the findings for this question.

Many of the conclusions from this research are based on the theories of Effective Schools. Lezotte and Snyder (2011) wrote of the characteristics of effective schools which have student success for all students. The Effective Schools research is based on seven correlates including high expectations for success, strong instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, opportunity to learn/time on task, frequent monitoring of student progress, safe and orderly environment, and positive home-school relations.

Teachers reported staff members sacrifice individual goals for the good of the group, and they model enthusiasm and confidence. The survey data also show teachers set high expectations and envision new possibilities for the school. Lezotte and Snyder (2011) wrote about high expectations having two critical elements. Staff beliefs relative to the success of all students in meeting the learning standards are critical to high expectations. The second critical element is relative to the sense of efficacy for the staff. Lezotte and Snyder defined efficacy as "the belief that one can successfully achieve what one is being asked to do" (p. 40). Scribner (1999) found a positive relationship between a teacher's sense of efficacy and student success. The teachers reported talking

optimistically about the future, and they challenge assumptions. New ideas are discussed, and staff members foster an environment conducive to innovation to build on each other's ideas. The teachers are developmentally oriented and are always willing to continuously improve and develop. All of these components in the research survey had a p value less than .001 which show more evidence against the null hypothesis. The respondents show individual consideration by appreciating each other's potential to contribute and provide support and encouragement. Teachers listen attentively to each other's concerns, and they are proactive rather than reactive. All of the research findings imply teacher efficacy created during implementation of an MTSS allows for growth for the staff and the students. This increased level of individual efficacy may create a school-wide efficacy.

Goddard, Logerfo, and Hoy's (2004) research showed schools with higher levels of collective efficacy showed higher levels of achievement. Lezotte and Snyder (2011) included several ways to promote high expectations for success: believe all children can succeed, use data to inform instruction, de-track the curriculum, develop personalized intervention plans, and do not accept failure. The vision for the school is shared by everyone, but staff members appreciate the change process. Lezotte and Snyder wrote about the impact of a clear and focused mission on highly effective schools. He supported a mission statement focusing on the success of all students – with the word *all* being key. All students can and will learn. Jenkins, Louis, Walberg, and Keefe's (1994) research showed there must be a constant focus and effort to become a "learning organization with a commitment to continuous problem-solving and a sense of shared responsibility for improvement" (p. 67). The respondents felt like they accomplished an incredible amount of work. Lezotte and Snyder wrote of one of the correlates of effective

schools as opportunity to learn and time on task. They wrote that in effective schools teachers and students maintain a high percentage of time where students are actively working on learning. They recommended several research-supported strategies when considering increasing the opportunities to learn and time on task. Those include identify the power standards, align the curriculum, offer a rich learning environment to all students, foster effective classroom management among staff, think outside the box, address the opportunity to learn gap before children start kindergarten, address the summer learning gap, improve the quality of teaching not just time, engage students, and differentiate instruction. Staff members were allowed the opportunity to provide feedback on the implementation of an MTSS. The number one reason the schools implemented an MTSS was because of the vision of either the school administrators and/or the district administrators. The adult behaviors within the school which impacted the implementation of an MTSS at the school were collaboration, teamwork, and communication.

The number one response by administrators relative to the behaviors of staff members impacting the implementation of an MTSS is this need for high-quality time for the students. The administrators felt the teachers wanted to provide an environment where they could serve every student, and the MTSS helped with this goal. The buy-in of the staff when implementing the MTSS was a crucial component of the cultural shift for the school. Sergiovanni (1989) identified two approaches to leadership: transactional and transformational. Transactional leaders emphasize rules and procedures where transformational leaders emphasize a common purpose with empowerment and collaboration. The administrators reported that implementation was nonnegotiable, and the staff responded to this vision. Lezotte and Snyder (2011) included in their research

several research-supported strategies to promote strong instructional leadership in a school: articulate a vision, use data, structure a collaborative process, focus on teaching and learning, set high expectations for success, and monitor progress.

Lezotte and Snyder (2011) wrote about how an effective school monitors growth with formative and summative assessment. The results of formative and summative assessment inform and drive the changes needed to ensure all students are learning. Lezotte and Snyder recommended four research-based strategies to promote progress monitoring: institutionalize feedback, adjust instruction, work towards authentic assessments, and use assessments to foster teacher collaboration. Lezotte and Snyder also wrote about the importance of a safe and orderly school environment where students and staff feel physically and emotionally safe. Physical safety includes any threat to the body while emotional safety creates school culture where students and staff feel safe to try something new. This safe and orderly school culture happens when all adults are committed to physical and emotional safety at all times. Lezotte and Snyder provided several research-based strategies to promote a safe and orderly school culture: take a positive approach to disciplinary issues, schedule for student and teacher collaboration, increase the sense of community, look at underlying factors of misbehavior, remember teachers are key, be visible, and know the physical environment matters. The last effective correlate for Effective Schools is positive home-school relations. Henderson and Mapp (2002) found parent involvement increased the likelihood of students earning higher grades, enrolling in more advanced programs, passing their classes, and earning high school credits. This parent involvement is crucial when implementing an MTSS. When improving home-school relations, Lezotte and Snyder had several research-supported strategies: involve guidance staff in creating relationships with parents,

educate staff about struggling families and the challenges they face, partner with the community, offer nonthreatening opportunities for parent involvement, evaluate parent outreach efforts, use multiple and frequent forms of school-parent communication, anticipate that parent involvement may take extraordinary effort, offer learning resources to parents as well as their children, and reach out systematically.

Research Question 4

Are there identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the potential for and the sustainability of an MTSS? This question was important to research the impact of the elements of Transformational Leadership on the implementation of an MTSS.

Transformation Leadership according to Bass and Riggio (2006) includes four fundamental elements. From Chapter 2, the literature review, those elements include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. There are several conclusions which could be drawn from the findings for this question.

One conclusion is the importance of school leadership in the MTSS implementation process. McCook (2006) wrote, “The principal’s active support of the process must be evidenced by vocal support, by resources the principal makes available to the process, and by active participation on the team” (p. 39). He described the principal as the person who sets the course and does not back down. High expectations for all and data-informed decisions are crucial for the principal to model for the school. The four elements of Transformational Leadership were confirmed in the data collected. The teachers felt school leaders have a vision for an MTSS; and the school leaders were admired, respected, and trusted by those they lead. The survey respondents felt their school leaders spend time teaching and coaching the faculty to implement an MTSS.

Knight (2011) wrote about instructional coaching having several components. All coaching begins with partnership principles such as equality, choice, reflection, dialogue, and practicality. The second element of effective coaching is partnering with administrators. This partnership includes a consistent learning target which the principal coaches himself or herself. Knight referred to this as top-down and bottom-up coaching. The principal and the teachers must clarify roles to ensure capacity building, and confidentiality is key. The principal, coaches, and teachers must meet frequently to maintain this partnership with administration. The third element of effective coaching involves effective staff development. The findings in the research study show staff development is considered more effective if it is in small targeted groups with the staff development designed to target the specific needs of the group. Principals and learning leaders should lead the staff development while providing support during the session and after the session. Knight wrote about seven components of effective coaching: enrolling, identifying, explaining/mediating, modeling, observing, exploring, and refining. All of the components of effective coaching are needed when implementing an MTSS.

Before discussion of the findings relative to Transformational Leadership's impact on the implementation of an MTSS, there must be a discussion on the impact of leadership in a PLC. Dufour and Eaker (1998) wrote about the characteristics of a principal of a PLC. Principals of PLCs lead through a shared vision and values rather than through rules and procedures. Principals of PLCs involve faculty members in the school's decision-making processes and empower individuals. Principals in PLCs provide staff with information, training, and parameters they need to make a good decision. Principals of PLCs establish credibility by modeling behavior that is congruent with the vision and values of the school, and they are results-oriented.

Data are being used by the school leaders to inform decision making. The teachers felt school leaders effectively allocate funds to support an MTSS, and the teachers felt safe to try innovative teaching methods. The school leaders were viewed as people who supported leadership in others. The number one way school leaders support an MTSS is the knowledge of data and the knowledge and passion for the MTSS process. The school leaders were viewed as team members and collaborated with the teachers to provide collective and individual support. School leaders maintained high expectations and coached the faculty to meet those high expectations. The teachers described the school leaders as problem solvers and equipped the faculty to become problem solvers too. The number one behavior of a school leader is the knowledge of and the passion (disposition) for an MTSS. For these administrators, an MTSS was going to be implemented. Implementing an MTSS was nonnegotiable. Dufour and Eaker (1998) included 10 guidelines for principals relative to the implementation of a PLC.

1. Attend to the building blocks of a PLC.
2. Communicate the importance of mission, vision, values, and goals on a daily basis.
3. Create collaborative structures with a focus on teaching and learning.
4. Shape the school culture to support a PLC.
5. Foster an approach to curriculum that focuses on learning rather than teaching.
6. Encourage teachers to think of themselves as leaders.
7. Practice enlightened leadership strategies.
8. Establish personal credibility.
9. Be fixated on results.
10. Recognize that continuous improvement requires continuous learning.

Dufour and Eaker (1998) wrote, “change is difficult” (p. 49). The school administrators and/or central office staff who begin the transformation of developing an MTSS need to have an understanding of change theory. Any school administrator initiating cultural change needs to recognize school culture may be a deeply rooted structure, and this cultural change is complex and formidable with courage needed to withstand the many challenges. Fullan (1993) wrote, “Conflict is essential to any successful change effort” (p. 27). School leaders cannot create an MTSS alone. It takes collaboration, courage, and patience. The key is to articulate the urgency needed to make the change but proceed with purpose. School leaders must empower others while making sure the vision of an MTSS is constant.

Limitations

There are multiple limitations to this study. The findings of this study represent only four schools which have successfully implemented an MTSS in North Carolina. These results should not be generalized to other states or professions. The sample size of 84 survey responses, 24 focus group members, and eight school leader interviews are relatively small compared to all of the schools in North Carolina and the United States. The survey questions and interview questions gather information through means of self-reporting and can have validity problems associated with it. Biases may exist. The researcher has experience as a middle school and an elementary school administrator in schools which have implemented an MTSS. The influence of the setting in which a survey is given and perceptions of who may be accessing the results can lead to respondents reporting their perceptions in a manner aligned to expectations. The researcher made a strong effort to provide anonymity of the survey and flexible access to the survey which would allow respondents the opportunity to participate in the survey

during a time of convenience for them.

Discussion

This study contributes knowledge to the field of education because it will assist other schools that may be implementing an MTSS for their students. The research will support these schools because it may provide insight into school cultural elements which have an impact on the implementation model. This study also contributes to the field of educational leadership because it provides insight into the impact of Transformational Leadership when implementing an MTSS. This study has implications for district and state agencies when systems or states are attempting to implement an MTSS on a large scale.

Suggestions for Future Research

The MTSS has many elements such as instruction, early intervention, academic supports, curriculum, formative and summative assessments, problem solving, communication, and empowerment. Any one of these elements could be a topic of study and the impact of the element on school culture. The topic of school culture also has several elements. Those include communication, vision, high expectations, culture of change, and leadership. Any one of these elements could be a topic of study.

Transformational Leadership is comprised of four traits which include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Any one of these elements could be a topic of study relative to the implementation of an MTSS.

The impact of an MTSS at the elementary school, middle school, and high school levels could be a topic of study along with a longitudinal study of the impact of an MTSS on the students through the elementary, middle, and/or high school years. The

implementation at a district or state level could be a topic of study. One of the findings of this study touched on the support that beginning teachers felt when entering a school with a highly functioning MTSS. A future study could consider the impact of an MTSS on beginning teacher induction or the impact of beginning teachers on the implementation of an MTSS. One question to be asked is the impact of scheduling knowledge on the implementation since scheduling and time was found to be an element of impact in this study. Funding and resources were found to be an important element when considering the implementation of an MTSS, so another question to be considered is the impact of Title I funds on the implementation of an MTSS. The hiring practices and processes for principals and teachers when a school or district considers implementing an MTSS could be an important study due to the finding of the relationship between Transformational Leadership and the implementation of an MTSS. In this study, it was found that there needs to be a system and person or team who provides support and answers questions when needed. One question to be studied is what would be best practice for training for implementation of an MTSS. One last suggestion for further study is to replicate this study with more schools to see if the findings are consistent.

Summary

This study provided insight into the impact of an MTSS on school culture and the impact of those elements associated with an MTSS such as instruction, early intervention, academic supports, curriculum, formative and summative assessment, problem solving, communication, and empowerment on the implementation of an MTSS. This study also provided insight into the impact of the elements of an effective school culture such as communication, vision, high expectations, culture of change, and leadership on the implementation of an MTSS. The fourth topic of discussion in this study was the impact

of Transformational Leadership including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration on the implementation of an MTSS.

According to the survey, focus group, and interview data collected, the MTSS process does impact school culture and a school's culture impacts the implementation of an MTSS. Transformational Leadership does impact the implementation of an MTSS. The data provide insight into the specific points of impact for school culture. Major themes in this research include those of success for all students, data-informed decisions, teamwork, collaboration, communication, focus on the whole child, culture of change, teacher efficacy, individualized staff development, using time effectively, and knowledge/passion for the MTSS process.

One of the most important findings for this study includes the element of mindset shifts within the school's culture. There was an important mindset shift from one of isolation to a teamwork/collaborative mindset. The respondents for the study felt this created a much more productive school because it is hard to provide as many services as needed on their own. Teachers felt they were empowered. There was a common language used by all staff members. Another mindset shift included one from academic proficiency to growth of the whole child. A third mindset shift included one from intervention for a few students who were federally protected to support and success for all students. All teachers worked for success of all of the students. This mindset shift decreased the stigma for the students created when they have to leave the classroom to go to get services either from Exceptional Children's teachers or English as a Second Language teachers. There was a shift from *my student* to *our student* which took a significant amount of trust and planning. A fourth mindset shift included a shift away

from a wait-to-fail mentality to an urgency to catch the students before they fail. A process is in place to intervene when the student falls off the train, and the intervention works to get the student back on the train. A fifth mindset shift included the importance of data to inform decisions. An MTSS impacted school culture so that the culture used data for diagnosis and to target instruction in the core for early intervention. Data are used to determine the intervention for the student; and data are used to determine if the intervention is working or changes are needed for the intervention with duration, intensity, or frequency. The key is using data to diagnose to better ensure success of all students. All of these mindset shifts took trust and courage. It required risk and permission to look different than other schools. It required courage to change to meet the needs of all students.

A second major finding of this study includes those actions which impact the implementation of an MTSS and, in turn, impact school culture. One major action found in this study was the revision of the master schedule to better meet the needs of all students. Intervention times were created and common planning times were implemented to ensure collaboration and communication. Planning of meetings was an extremely important element to ensure success of the MTSS as a problem-solving model. Another important element was the hiring process during implementation. This hiring process could be using resources such as district allotments or Title I funds to hire more people to provide the interventions, and it also includes recommending hire of those individuals who have the mindsets needed to be successful and drive an MTSS.

A third major finding of this study includes the individualized professional development offered to faculty members and administrators. The study shows that having an effective, knowledgeable, passionate coach to answer questions when needed

for a small group of trainees was key to MTSS success. This coach does not have to be the school administrator, but can be someone else in the school. The coach teaches others the expectations for students and teachers. The coach teaches others the MTSS language for the district and/or school. The coach teaches others to administer the common assessments and read the data to diagnose. The principal must have a vision for MTSS as a nonnegotiable and provide the resources to implement an MTSS.

A fourth finding is the strengthening of core instruction. Teachers become more effective interventionists in the classroom so students do not struggle or fall off the train as often. Faculty members are coached to be leaders in the classroom, in the grade level, and the school which increases teacher efficacy. Parents need to be informed of the MTSS process so they have a better understanding of the early intervention and tier services provided for their student. School leaders need to be reminded that implementation of an MTSS is a gradual process, and schools should take it slow when implementing the components. Schools may implement each of the elements of an MTSS one at a time or implement elements by grade level. The key is to view all interactions with the students as opportunities to either learn or teach and to implement those elements of an MTSS which fill a student need for the school so school leaders and teachers do not pass up an opportunity.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument: MTSS Perceptions

MTSS Perceptions

Your participation in this survey will assist me with gaining a deeper and richer knowledge of the impact of a MTSS on school culture and the identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the sustainability of a MTSS.

Section One:

For questions 1-4 please choose one response.

1. Gender

- Male
- Female

2. Age

- 22-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 55+

3. How many years have you served the school system?

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10-15
- 15+

4. What is your highest earned degree level?

- Bachelors
- Masters
- Specialist
- Doctorate

Section Two:

For the following items please indicate your viewpoint by circling or briefly describing your viewpoint.

5. My beliefs about instruction have changed with implementation of a MTSS.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. My beliefs about early intervention have changed with implementation of a MTSS.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. My beliefs about academic supports have changed with implementation of a MTSS.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. My beliefs about curriculum have changed with implementation of MTSS.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. My beliefs about formative and summative assessment have changed with implementation of MTSS.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. My beliefs about problem solving have changed with implementation of MTSS.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
11. I believe our school empowers teachers to serve the students.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. How has the implementation of a MTSS changed your school?

Section Three:

13. Universal screening of our students has changed the culture of our school.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
14. Implementation of interventions has changed the culture of our school.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
15. Progress monitoring of students has changed the culture of our school.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
16. Improved communication has changed the culture of our school.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
17. Our school uses formative and summative data to inform our instruction.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
18. Which of the following would you consider to be the most significant cultural change when implementing a MTSS?

Implementing universal screening

(Universal screening is defined as assessments focused on identifying students at risk for academic and/or behavior difficulties.)

Implementing interventions

(Interventions are defined as evidenced-based practices and programs demonstrated to improve academic and behavior performance in core and identified skill areas.)

Implementing progress monitoring

(Progress monitoring is defined as assessments used to determine student's performance, response to intervention, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.)

19. What experiences have you had as your school has implemented a MTSS you feel have changed your beliefs and behaviors?

Section Four:

20. Our staff members sacrifice individual goals for the good of the group.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
21. Staff members model enthusiasm and confidence.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
22. Staff members set high standards and envision exciting new possibilities.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
23. Staff members talk optimistically about the future.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
24. Staff members challenge assumptions.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
25. Staff members feel free to offer new ideas.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
26. Staff members foster an environment conducive to innovation and idea generation and they build on each other's ideas.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
27. Staff members are developmentally oriented.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
28. Staff members are willing to continuously improve and develop.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
29. Staff members show individual consideration by appreciating each other's potential to contribute and by providing support and encouragement.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
30. Staff members listen attentively to each other's concerns.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
31. Staff members are proactive rather than reactive.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
32. Staff members have a shared vision.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

33. Staff members appreciate the change process.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
34. Staff members accomplish an incredible amount of work.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
35. Staff members have an opportunity to provide feedback on the implementation components of a MTSS.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
36. Why did your school implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Section Five:

37. Our school leaders have a vision for a Multi-Tiered System of Support.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
38. Our school leaders are admired, respected, and trusted.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
39. Our school leaders spend time teaching and coaching us.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
40. Our school leaders use data to inform decision-making.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
41. Our school leaders effectively allocate funds to support a Multi-Tiered System of Support.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
42. We feel safe to try innovative teaching methods.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
43. Our school leaders support leadership in others.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
44. How does your school leader support a Multi-Tiered System of Support in your school?

Appendix B
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

The Impact of Transformational Leadership Behaviors on the Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support with Emphasis on Cultural Leadership

Date: _____

Location: _____

Interviewer: Donna J. Heavner dheavner@gardner-webb.edu

Interviewee: _____

Position: _____

Instructions:

Facilitate introductions of focus group members.

Explain the purpose of the study to the interviewee.

Explain the audio recording process during the interview.

Ask each question and take notes during the response.

Ask if the interviewee has any questions.

1. Will you please tell me a little about yourself?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

2. How do you believe the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support changed the adult and student behaviors in the school?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

3. How have experiences such as professional development/training, coaching and support with universal screening, intervention, and progress monitoring changed the school's culture?

Universal screening is defined as assessments focused on identifying students at risk for learning and/or behavior difficulties.

Progress monitoring is defined as assessments used to determine student's academic and/or behavioral progress, response to intervention, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.

Intervention is defined as evidence-based practices and programs demonstrated to improve academic and behavior performance in core or identified skill areas.

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

4. How do you feel the behaviors of staff members impacted the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

5. How did school leadership assist with the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

6. Is there anything else you would like to share to help me understand the impact of the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support on your school's culture?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

Final Notes:

Thank you for your time today. Your assistance in this research is greatly appreciated.

Interview Coding Process

The Impact of Transformational Leadership Behaviors on the Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support with Emphasis on Cultural Leadership

1. Will you please tell me a little about yourself?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

2. How do you believe the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support changed the behaviors in the school's culture?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

3. How have experiences such as professional development/training, coaching and support with universal screening, intervention, and progress monitoring changed the school's culture

Universal screening is defined as assessments focused on identifying students at risk for learning and/or behavior difficulties.

Progress monitoring is defined as assessments used to determine student's academic and/or behavioral progress, response to intervention, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.

Intervention is defined as evidence-based practices and programs demonstrated to improve academic and behavior performance in core or identified skill areas.

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

4. How do you feel the behaviors of staff members impacted the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

5. How did school leadership assist with the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

6. Is there anything else you would like to share to help me understand the impact of the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support on your school's culture?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Appendix C
Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

The Impact of Transformational Leadership Behaviors on the Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support with Emphasis on Cultural Leadership

Date: _____

Location: _____

Focus Group Facilitator: Donna Johnson Heavner dheavner@gardner-webb.edu

Focus Group Members:

- | | | |
|----|-------|----------|
| 1. | _____ | _____ |
| | Name | Position |
| 2. | _____ | _____ |
| | Name | Position |
| 3. | _____ | _____ |
| | Name | Position |
| 4. | _____ | _____ |
| | Name | Position |
| 5. | _____ | _____ |
| | Name | Position |
| 6. | _____ | _____ |
| | Name | Position |
| 7. | _____ | _____ |
| | Name | Position |
| 8. | _____ | _____ |
| | Name | Position |

Instructions:

Facilitate introductions of focus group members.

Explain the purpose of the study to focus group members.

Explain the taping process during the discussion.

Ask each question and ask each focus group member to respond.

Allow for further discussion after the last question.

1. Will you please tell me a little about your school?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

2. What is the impact of a Multi-Tiered System of Support on your school's culture?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

3. What experiences have you had associated with the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

4. What are the adult and student behaviors within the school which have impacted the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support at your school?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

5. What are the school leadership behaviors which have impacted the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

6. Is there anything else you would like to share to help me understand the impact of a Multi-Tiered System of Support on your school's culture?

Please elaborate further.

Themes:

Final Notes:

Thank you for your time today. Your assistance in this research is greatly appreciated.

Focus Group Coding Process

The Impact of Transformational Leadership Behaviors on the Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support with Emphasis on Cultural Leadership

1. Will you please tell me a little about your school?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

2. What is the impact of a Multi-Tiered System of Support on your school's culture?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

3. What experiences have you had associated with the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

4. What are the adult and student behaviors within the school which have impacted the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support at your school?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

5. What are the school leadership behaviors which have impacted the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

6. Is there anything else that you would like to share to help me understand the impact of a Multi-Tiered System of Support on your school's culture?

Themes:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Appendix D
Invitation Letter

Hello,

My name is Donna Heavner, and I am a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University. I am completing research relative to the impact of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) on school culture and the impact of school culture on the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support. You are invited to participate in a research study which will assist with deep understanding related to how the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support impacts school culture.

The survey is a web-based survey using K12Insight.com, and the survey can be accessed by clicking on the link contained in the email from K12Insight.com. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete (44 questions). Please choose to participate in this survey at a time which is convenient for you. You will not be asked for any information which will provide your identity, and your anonymity was considered while designing the survey.

The results of the study will provide valuable information for other schools to effectively implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support and meet the needs of all of their students. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has defined a MTSS as a multi-tiered framework which promotes school improvement through engaging, research-based academic and behavioral practices. NC MTSS employs a systems approach using data-driven problem-solving to maximize growth for all. The vision for MTSS by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction includes every NC Pre K-12 public education system to implement and sustain all components of a Multi-Tiered System of Support to ensure college and career readiness for all students. The components of a MTSS include leadership and shared responsibility, curriculum and instruction, problem-solving and data driven decision making, assessment, collaboration, and sustainability and integration. The mission of NCDPI is to prepare and support LEAs to implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support for total school improvement by providing professional development, coaching and technical assistance, research and evaluation, and communication and visibility which results in college and career readiness for all students. NCDPI believes that MTSS is the most effective and efficient approach to improving school outcomes and student performance thereby ensuring equitable access to a sound basic education.

The research will provide information relative to the impact of a Multi-Tiered System of Support on a school's culture, and the school's culture's impact on the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support. The study will also provide the identifiable leadership behaviors impacting the sustainability of a Multi-Tiered System of Support.

Please accept my sincere appreciation for helping with this research project. If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely Yours,
Donna J. Heavner
Student Researcher, Gardner-Webb University
dheavner@gardner-webb.edu

Appendix E
Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research project titled “The Impact of Transformational Leadership Behaviors on the Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support with Emphasis on Cultural Leadership”. Donna J. Heavner is completing the research for partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. This document will explain the purpose, time requirements, procedures, risks and benefits of this research project. After reading this consent form, feel free to contact Donna J. Heavner with any questions at dheavner@gardner-webb.edu.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this research project is to learn more about the impact of the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support on school culture and the impact of school culture on the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support. This research will be valuable to schools and school districts who are working to implement a Multi-Tiered System of Supports. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has defined a MTSS as a multi-tiered framework which promotes school improvement through engaging, research-based academic and behavioral practices. NC MTSS employs a systems approach using data-driven problem-solving to maximize growth for all. The vision for MTSS by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction includes every NC Pre K-12 public education system to implement and sustain all components of a Multi-Tiered System of Support to ensure college and career readiness for all students. The components of a MTSS include leadership and shared responsibility, curriculum and instruction, problem-solving and data driven decision making, assessment, collaboration, and sustainability and integration. The mission of NCDPI is to prepare and support LEAs to implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support for total school improvement by providing professional development, coaching and technical assistance, research and evaluation, and communication and visibility which results in college and career readiness for all students. NCDPI believes that MTSS is the most effective and efficient approach to improving school outcomes and student performance thereby ensuring equitable access to a sound basic education.

Who the participants?

Faculty members of three North Carolina elementary schools which have implemented a Multi-Tiered System of Support are invited to participate.

How will the data be collected?

Data will be collected by survey and interviews. The survey is completed online using K12Insight.com. The interviews will include face-to-face interviews of administrators and focus groups made up of faculty members in the elementary schools chosen for the research.

How much time will it take to participate?

The survey includes 44 questions total. Questions include Likert Scale questions, open-ended questions, and a rank order question. The survey takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

What will you need to do to participate?

After reading the informed consent letter, participants will use the survey link provided on the email from K12Insight.com. The survey will begin once participants click on the survey link. The survey will direct participants to click submit once the survey is complete.

Are there risks or costs to participate?

Participants are not at risk and there is no cost to participate. Participation is voluntary, and you have the right to not answer any question by leaving the question blank. Participants will complete the survey with complete anonymity using K12Insight.com. Participants are not asked for contact information, and they are asked not to type information which may identify themselves for the open-ended response survey items. Donna Heavner and Dr. Doug Eury, Director of Doctoral Studies, will be the only individuals to see the raw data provided by the participants. You may choose not participate in the survey and/or interviews at any time.

If you have questions at any time, please contact Donna J. Heavner at dheavner@gardner-webb.com.

How do I consent to participate?

Participants demonstrate consent to participate by submitting the survey on K12Insight.com and participating in interviews.

Gardner-Webb University Institutional Review Board approved this research in February 2015.