2018

Did We Get It Right? A Study of Process Fidelity in the Response to Intervention Program

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Did We Get It Right? A Study of Process Fidelity in the Response to Intervention Program

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

Gardner-Webb University
2018

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by LaShanda Wardlow Foust 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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Acknowledgements

First, I'd like to give honor to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, from whom all blessing flow. I would like to dedicate this special piece of work to my wonderful twins, Elena and Elijah, and my mom, Lillian, for allowing me passes for family time and granting me time to spend on this program. A special thank you to my super supportive sister, Tina, and niece, Keosha, who made me take much needed breaks; and to my best friend, Takeeta, and close friend, Mona, who patiently awaited my free time for "girl talk." I would be remiss if I didn't say I couldn't have done it without my wonderful cohort members who've provided countless hours of encouragement (Alison) and trouble-shooting (Ashley) and who have laughed and cried with me during this process. Last, I'd like to thank my wonderful chairperson, Dr. Brown, and committee members, Dr. Putnam and Dr. Holmes, for the countless hours of guidance and support throughout this journey.

If I could do it with EVERYTHING I always have going on in my life, so can every professional who puts his/her mind to it! *BELIEVE~*

Abstract

Did We Get It Right? A Study of Process Fidelity in the Response to Intervention Program. Foust, LaShanda, 2018: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, Response to Intervention/Middle School/Fidelity/Integrity

"For valid disability determination to occur, a diagnostic team needs to be able to determine that a student has received appropriate instruction in the general education classroom" (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006, p. 4.2).

The purpose of the study was to determine whether a middle school Response to Intervention (RTI) program is being implemented with fidelity. The researcher used the RTI Essential Components Worksheet and the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric as the evaluation tools.

The research focused on how effectively the RTI process was implemented at the focus middle school. A qualitative method design was used in the study. Several focus groups and interviews were completed to gather information. In addition, archived data were assembled to evaluate the RTI process. The following research questions were used.

1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?

2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?

3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?

4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?

5. At what level does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model?

The findings were that the middle school implemented all components of the RTI process with adequate fidelity. The researcher's top recommendations include that curriculum materials for all core curriculum areas be research based, there should be evidence based secondary interventions in all content areas and grade levels, and there should be consistent implementation of opportunities on all grade levels for students who exceed benchmarks.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2017) argued, "students who fail in school are at greater risk of poverty, welfare dependency, incarceration, and early death" ("Response to Intervention flourishes," para. 1). Early intervention helps to reduce the risk of student failure. The RTI Action Network (n.d.b) defined intervention as, "The systematic and explicit instruction provided to accelerate growth in an area of identified need" (Intervention section, para. 7). Gersten et al. (2009) defined RTI as, "an early detection, prevention, and support system that identifies struggling students and assists them before they fall behind" (p. 4).

Response to Intervention (RTI) was developed to help deliver necessary interventions to students. "RTI is intended to deliver a wider variety of general education options before the words *special education* are even uttered" (Searle, 2010, Shared roles and responsibilities section, para. 2).

A formal method of identifying students who are not learning in the regular classroom setting needs to be present in all schools. "RTI intentionally cuts across the borders of special and general education and involves school-wide collaboration" (Gersten et al., 2009, p. 7). "We stress that no one screening measure is perfect and that schools need to monitor the progress of students who score slightly above or slightly below any screening cutoff score" (Gersten et al., 2009, p. 7).

According to Carter-Smith (2015), "There is no formal process for the effective and systematic adoption and implementation of RTI, which creates a great deal of variance among programs and outcomes" (para. 21). Because of this variability, it is important to perform an evaluation of RTI programs.

The South Dakota Department of Education (2012) shared that when research-based instruction is of high quality but groups of students (as a class, a grade level, or as a school) are still not performing well, even with universal screening and progress monitoring in place, the fidelity of the school's RTI model should be examined. In addition, the South Dakota Department of Education noted that fidelity verification is the link between instruction and student results. One implication for positive social change is all students will receive a highly effective education; thus, it is imperative to make certain a viable program exists whose effectiveness can be evaluated.

Chapter Organization

In this chapter, the background of special education will be examined; the gap that exists in the literature will be addressed; the need for the study will be supported; the problem will be stated; the purpose of the study will be explained; and the research questions will be presented. Additionally, the hypothesis will be shared; the theoretical framework will be detailed; the research methodology will be described; the terms involved in the study will be defined; the assumptions will be stated; the validity strategies will be detailed; and the district and school populations will be described. The delimitations and limitations will be projected. Last, the significance of the study and a summary of the chapter will be given.

Background

According to Searle (2010), for 30 years, a debate existed about the decisions made to determine services for special education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) allows each state to choose a process to identify students with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Zirkel and Thomas (2010) indicated the following approach options: "(a) permitting or requiring RTI; (b) permitting or prohibiting

evaluation based on a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement; and (c) omitting, permitting, or requiring a third alternative of other research-based procedures" (p. 60). The Reauthorization Act of 2004, published in 2005, focused more on early intervention and prevention instead of its earlier concentration on accountability and compliance (Searle, 2010). "Students with SLD make up the majority of school-age individuals with disabilities" (Fuchs, 2007, p. 1). If some of these students were provided with effective general education, they might be able to learn without the need of special education services (Fuchs, 2007).

Gap Addressed

A concern exists that districts may "use RTI as a way to raise the bar for referring a child into special education" ("Districts Must Ensure," 2008, para. 7). This study will provide information concerning RTI implementation at a middle school.

Need for the Study

One reason this research is needed is because instruction implementation with fidelity signifies appropriate instruction, one of the requirements of IDEA. Kovaleski (n.d.) stated an evaluation team has to prove that instruction was adequate through the use of documentation showing appropriate instruction was delivered in the general education setting. Now that options are available, many states are choosing to implement some form of RTI to help identify students who need to receive services from special education.

Statement of the Problem

Because not every student shows evidence of learning in the regular classroom setting, a concerted focus on the education of all students is needed. "Optimal learning outcomes occur when students' skills and abilities closely match the curriculum and

instruction within the classroom" (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006, p. *i*.2).

Research conducted by Hauerwas, Brown, and Scott (2013) revealed that although many resources are available for the implementation of RTI, there is no definition on a national level as to the specific data a local RTI team must use to determine SLD. Additionally, "there appears to be variability in relation to the RTI process regarding collecting and analyzing the data" (Hauerwas et al., 2013, p. 102).

A gap in current literature exists in the area of the implementation method of RTI. A universal model for RTI does not exist; therefore, implementation fidelity is inconsistent.

Setting

The setting is relevant in that the population of the school is very similar to that of the entire district. Additionally, the middle school in the study is the only school in the district attempting to implement an RTI program.

The middle school that is the focus of this research is situated on 63 acres and is named after the water system that runs adjacent to it. It has earth tones throughout the campus that is surrounded by beautiful topiary. The school is located in the suburbs of a city in upstate South Carolina. The district is comprised of 27 schools: one preschool, 17 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, and one career/technology center. The district employs approximately 2,400 individuals including 1,340 teachers, 105 administrators, and 855 support staff members.

The school has an assistant principal and guidance counselor assigned to each of the three grade levels (6-8) who travels with students as they matriculate through their middle school experience. In addition, there is an academic facilitator who provides professional development opportunities and offers suggestions to teachers around

instruction. Each grade level has 12 teachers and at least one special education teacher who assists regular educators to meet the needs of students. There are also 15 related arts teachers. The school is fortunate in that it has a math intervention specialist and a reading interventionist who assist targeted students each day. There is also one LD/self-contained classroom with one classroom teacher, a one-on-one teacher, and a teacher assistant. In addition, the school has a full-time resource officer who provides an extra level of security for the school and a behavior intervention class instructor who isolates students who choose not to make positive choices. A full-time nurse assists students, staff, and parents to maintain a healthy school environment. The school also has a full-time psychologist on staff who orchestrates testing, assists with individualized plans, and offers suggestions to teachers. Behind the scenes, the registrar and financial secretary make sure the school runs efficiently. The registrar enrolls and withdraws students as needs arise and ensures that student grades are entered accurately and thoroughly in PowerSchool, the student database platform. The financial secretary is responsible for distributing funds from the budget so teachers have what they need to educate students. Additionally, the middle school has a representative from a local family service agency on campus 3 days each week as a valuable family social worker resource.

District and Study Population

On May 23, 2017, there were 972 students in the school's population made up of 525 Caucasian (54%), 312 African-American (32%), 80 Hispanic (8%), 22 Asian (2%), five American Indian (0.5%), and five students classified as Other (0.5%). The school's population almost mirrors that of the district. Of the school's total population, 406 of the students received free lunch and 53 received reduced lunch. There were 203 students who were Gifted and Talented, 77 students were English as a Second Language (ESOL)

students, and 149 identified as exceptional children, with 29 of those having a 504 Plan.

There are approximately 17,400 students in the district's population that is comprised of the following classifications: 54% Caucasian, 35% African-American, 6% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian, 1.5% American Indian, and 2% classified as Other. Approximately 44% of the students receive free lunch, and 8% receive reduced lunch. Approximately 14% of the student population has been identified as having an SLD. This information can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics Table

	School	District
Caucasian	525 (54%)	9,396 (54%)
African-American	312 (32%)	6,090 (35%)
Hispanic	80 (8%)	1,044 (6%)
Asian	22 (2%)	261 (1.5%)
American Indian	5 (0.5%)	261 (1.5%)
Other	5 (0.5%)	348 (2%)
Free Lunch	221 (42%)	7,656 (44%)
Reduced Lunch	49 (5%)	1,392(8%)
Exceptional Children	146 (15%)	2,436 (14%)
Total Student Population	972 (100%)	17,400 (100%)

Study Purpose

The purpose of the study is one of evaluation; to determine whether the RTI program is being implemented with fidelity in this school. Butin (2010) described the program evaluation dissertation as,

> Such a dissertation may examine the particular needs that are (or are not) being met by this program or practice, compare such a program or practice to current "best practices" in the field, and analyze the gap between the current practices and the ideal best practices and available outcomes. (p. 53)

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) noted, “It is a form of dynamic assessment because it’s metric is change in students’ level or rate of learning” (p. 95).

Research Questions

This study is driven by an overall research question: How effectively is the RTI process being implemented at this middle school? To more effectively address this issue, the overall question is broken into the following research questions.

1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?
5. To what extent does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation is one of interpretivism in that the researcher will simply report what is being implemented. Butin (2010) reported, “an interpretivist researcher is, for better or worse, already part of the story about the truth because she is

the one examining it and describing it" (p. 60). In interpretivism, the researcher serves as a social actor who appreciates people's differences; and the focus of the study is on meaning, possibly utilizing multiple methods for the purposes of reflecting different aspects of the research (Dudovskiy, 2017). Fidelity of the RTI process at the site is a main focus as a school-wide goal. It has been presented by the principal at several staff meetings, discussed in emails, and modeled in professional development. It is important for schools to have some type of systematic process in place (Morgan, 2006). Specific data related to the implementation of the RTI process were interpreted through the use of the RTI Essential Components Worksheet, an instrument serving as the conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

The RTI process is the concept being researched. Burns and VanDerHeyden (2006) considered RTI as "the systematic use of data-based decision making to most efficiently allocate resources to enhance learning outcomes for all children" (p. 3). The researcher used the RTI Essential Components Worksheet as a guide to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation process of the RTI program at the middle school. The RTI Essential Components Worksheet specifies the key elements of the RTI process as screening, progress monitoring, multi-level or multi-tier prevention system, and data-based decision-making (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012). A visual representation of these components can be found in Figure 1.

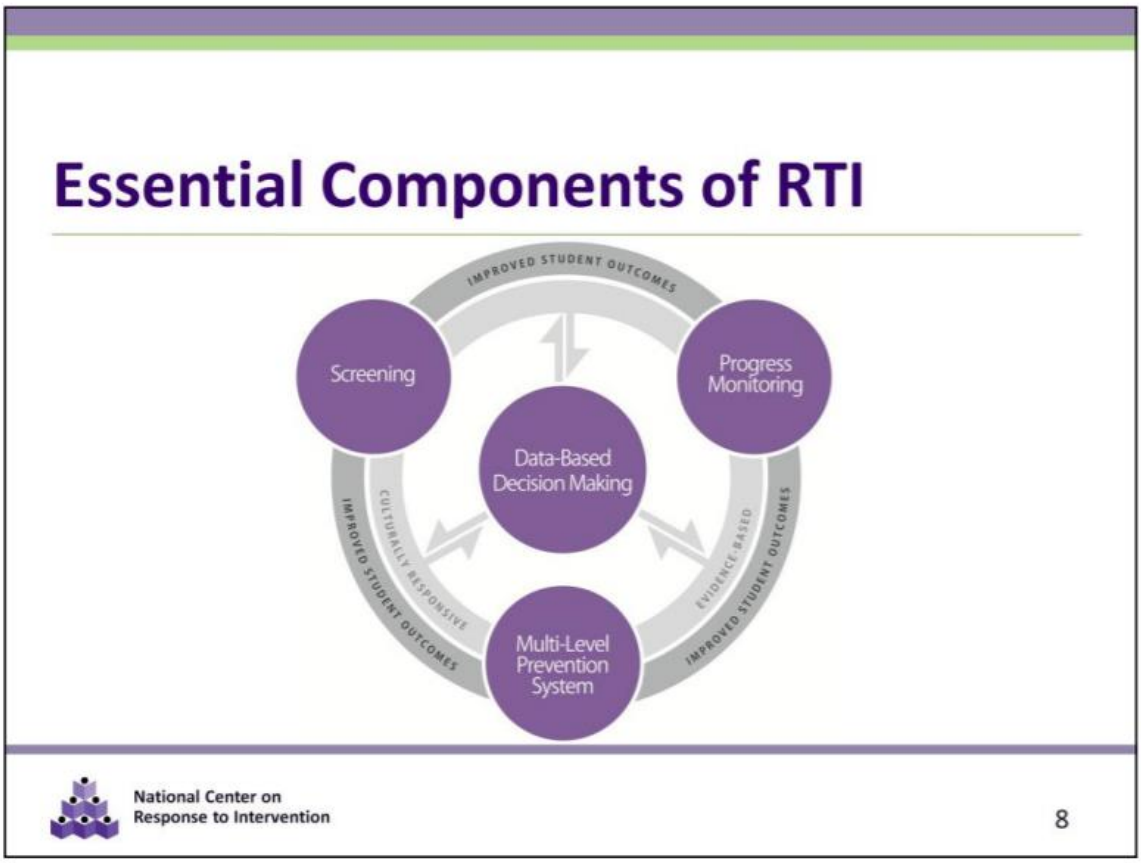

Figure 1. Essential Components Illustration (reprinted from National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012).

The RTI Essential Components Worksheet is organized in several sections that support evaluation including assessments, multilevel instruction, infrastructure and support mechanisms, and fidelity and evaluation (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012). The conceptual framework aligns to the research question: How effectively is the RTI process being implemented at this middle school?

Research Methodology

A qualitative methods design was conducted. Researchers using this method attempt to paint a larger picture emerging from an issue or problem by developing a report that incorporates multiple perspectives by identifying situations and their multiple

factors (Creswell, 2014). What is unknown is how schools go about examining the effects of the teacher instruction variable.

The study design included a principal interview, focus groups, and a collection of archived data related to RTI implementation at the site. The RTI Essential Components Worksheet was used as the evaluation instrument. The design of the evaluation "will address … evaluation questions, and take into consideration the nature of … [the] program, what program participants and staff will agree to, … time constraints, and the resources …. available for evaluation" (Community Tool Box, 2007, In Summary section, para. 3).

The data in the study are the components that are essential pieces of the RTI framework: screening, progress monitoring, multi-level or multi-tier prevention system, and data-based decision-making (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012). The data were analyzed using the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric. According to the Center on Response to Intervention (2014b), they revised the RTI Essential Components Worksheet and the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric originally designed by the National Center on Response to Intervention for individuals to use to monitor the implementation of the RTI program at schools with updates and revisions. There is a clear statement from the Center on Response to Intervention (2014b) that these tools should not be used for monitoring for the purposes of compliance.

Definition of Terms

Fidelity of implementation. "Often called treatment integrity, is the act of monitoring whether all elements of an intervention or plan were implemented as originally intended" (Keller-Margulis, 2012, p. 34).

Progress monitoring. Periodic probes that are similar to screening that occurred

at the beginning of the school year to determine whether students are learning the content being taught to them to determine whether modifications and/or adjustments need to be made for students who appear to be struggling (University of Kansas School of Education, 2016).

Research-based intervention. This involves practices that have been involved in controlled studies that were tested, evaluated, and shown to be effective (Fuchs, 2007).

Universal screening. "Used to understand how each student is performing on critical academic tasks in the core curriculum" (University of Kansas School of Education, 2016, Universal Screening section, para. 1).

Assumptions

One assumption is that teachers have been trained efficiently and effectively. Another assumption is that teachers are instructing all students using research-based strategies. This study was necessary because RTI is fairly new to the district and the successful implementation at this middle school could be used to determine how it should be implemented across the district.

Validity Strategies

The researcher implemented two validity strategies described by Creswell (2014) by conveying the findings using thick and rich description and by spending an enormous amount of time in the site. According to Kovaleski (n.d.), "In essence, the validity of RTI depends on the thorough and effective implementation of the intervention (the I)" (Treatment Fidelity and RtI section, para. 5). This focus was chosen because there is much debate about the data that should be included in RTI implementation evaluation.

Delimitations

A bias exists because the researcher works at the school in which the research is

taking place. She is also an active participant in the program being evaluated. According to Creswell (2014), "The more experience that a researcher has with participants in their setting, the more accurate or valid will be the findings" (p. 202). Although the site is the only school in the district implementing RTI, other schools and districts across the state are anticipating the implementation of an RTI program.

Limitations

"Limitations are potential weaknesses in your study and are out of your control" (Simon, 2011, para. 4). The boundaries that exist in the study are totally dependent upon the participation of the staff and the support of the administration. RTI implementation began in the fall of 2016 at the site. A district-wide training was held during the summer of 2015 to give an overview of the program and to prepare schools for the initial planning stage year. Each of the schools began the planning stage during the 2015-2016 school year and began implementation during the 2016-2017 school year.

Study Significance

"RTI's underlying premise is that schools should not wait until students fall far enough behind to qualify for special education to provide them with the help they need" (Buffum et al., 2017, "Response to Intervention flourishes," para. 2). "Instead, schools should provide targeted and systematic interventions to *all* students as soon as they demonstrate the need" (Buffum et al., 2017, "Response to Intervention flourishes," para. 2). The district office will be interested in the results to determine how other schools could conduct evaluations of their RTI programs. Also, this research will provide more exposure to the instruments available for evaluations of RTI programs, possibly establishing a universal evaluation instrument.

Summary

The process of identifying SLD students has changed over the time. With the support of implementing an RTI program comes the dilemma of evaluating its effectiveness on a national level. Research has been conducted in the area of RTI, but consistency of evaluation is an issue. Burns and VanDerHeyden (2006) argued that researchers agree RTI could have a positive effect on the outcome on student improvement based on a system of procedures and agree more empirical research needs to be completed to facilitate its use in schools (p. 4). Based on the research questions, the following chapter details disability identification; data-based decision-making; a school-wide, multilevel system infrastructure; and support mechanisms. It also examines some of the benefits and challenges of implementation and details the important components of the RTI process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There needs to be a concerted focus on the education of all students, because not all students show evidence of learning in the regular classroom setting. The purpose of the study was to examine the RTI process and RTI implementation fidelity at a particular middle school. One major theme in the literature is the need for RTI programs to be implemented correctly in order for students to benefit. Another major theme in the literature is that if students do not respond to research-based interventions on Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels, the most likely reason for poor academic performance is not likely due to the instructional quality but that students could have a disability (Fuchs, 2007). This study will fill gaps and extend knowledge in the area of RTI effectiveness at the middle school level. Even though treatment integrity is important, historically it has been overlooked in both research and in practice (Kovaleski, n.d.).

Chapter Organization

The literature review contains the researcher's literature search strategy and theoretical foundation. It also explores topics that include special education significance and school-wide multi-level system infrastructure and support mechanisms including Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and RTI. Additionally, the related studies are discussed, and conclusions are drawn.

Literature Search Strategy

The researcher used the ERIC and ResearchGate library databases to search for relevant literature. The search engines used included Google, Proquest, and the university's Bulldog OneSearch. The researcher used those databases to review literature pertaining to RTI programs, RTI implementation and evaluation, and special education

identification. The scope of the literature review spanned the years of 1999-2017 with such sources as journals, presentations, dissertations, and peer-reviewed writings.

Theoretical Foundation

Several theories in previous research have suggested that RTI can identify students who are intentional non-learners. The overall hope is that by using the RTI process, students who receive the preventative interventions in Tier 2 will result in fewer students being incorrectly identified as having a learning disability (Fuchs, 2007). Unfortunately, the RTI process does take longer to execute than the comprehensive evaluation that only involved one step (Fuchs, 2007). Historically, this comprehensive evaluation involved students being identified as having an SLD based on a test that indicated the difference between student IQ and achievement (Fuchs, 2007). The theories in previous research relate to the present study in that by conducting the RTI process evaluation, the researcher will answer the research question and reveal whether the program was executed in the manner in which it was intended to be.

School-wide Multi-level System Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms

There are several programs that schools are utilizing to provide students with preventative interventions. Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), PBIS, and RTI are the three that are most widely used.

SWPBS. Bui, Quirk, and Almazan (2010) defined PBS as, "a systematic, proactive approach for promoting adaptive behaviors and reducing behavior that interfere with meaningful community participation and social relationships" (p. 1). This approach is a blend of applied behavior analysis, perspectives of systems change, the movement of inclusion, and planning of person-centered values (Bui et al., 2010). PBS has three key categories including prevention of problematic behavior, new skills planning for

teaching, and response changes to a person's behavior to promote that person's positive behavior change (Bui et al., 2010).

PBIS. PBIS is a universal prevention strategy that is a noncurricular program aimed at altering the environment of schools through the creation of improved procedures and systems used to promote student and staff positive behavioral change (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo & Leaf, 2008). The model has seven critical features including a PBIS team, a coach to support behaviors, school-wide positively stated behavioral expectations, regular definitions and teaching of the school-wide behavioral expectations, a school-wide student positive behavior reward system, a behavior violation system, and a formal data system (Bradshaw et al., 2008). PBIS benefits students with disabilities by encouraging all educators to share a commitment to education on all students, decreasing the number of students incorrectly identified as needing special education services, and assisting students who need intensive behavior support by enabling collaborative work through the teaming structures (Coffey & Horner, 2012).

RTI. The definition of RTI by Johnson et al. (2006) is "RTI is an assessment and intervention process for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified services using progress monitoring data" (p. *i*.2). RTI focuses on identifying students in the early stages who may experience failure academically so that all students receive learning experiences that are appropriate for them on an individualized basis (Johnson et al., 2006). Greenwood et al. (2011) added, "RTI presumes use of evidence-based practices, universal screening and progress monitoring with decision making, and multiple systems of support" (p. 17).

"RTI represents a progressive intervention approach that identifies students at risk

for learning difficulties, including those who may have an SLD, and provides early intervention with the goal of improving the achievement of all students" (South Dakota Department of Education, 2012, p. 4). The model for RTI is constructed in a manner where students who are not successful in the regular classroom setting receive progressive interventions as needed (Bianco, 2010). There are traditionally three levels of intervention in RTI models, known as tiers. Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) recommended instruction be divided into three tiers in which the first two are conducted with general educators and special educators managing the third. Students are measured along these tiers based on adequate progress; and according to Gersten et al. (2009), meaning students "(1) no longer need some intervention, (2) continue to need some intervention, or (3) need more intensive intervention" (p. 4). At the Tier 1 level, all students receive instruction; Tier 2 students receive additional small group assistance and support, as identified during the screening process; and Tier 3 students are provided with intensive support that usually involves special education services (Gersten et al., 2009).

The RTI process is illustrated in a number of ways. One of the most common ways is designed as a pyramid. The pyramid indicates the types of interventions administered to students and the percentage of students who historically fall into each level. All students fall into Tier 1 of all intervention pyramids. Every student receives interventions within the regular classroom through instruction given by the teachers. Between 80% and 90% of students respond positively and are successful in these interventions. When students are not successful through classroom interventions, they are moved to Tier 2 and receive more specific interventions and support. This group represents between 5% and 10% of students. After additional support is given, up to 5% of students do not respond with success and are moved to Tier 3 to receive very specific

interventions during the school day in a separate classroom or group (Searle, 2010). Figure 2 is an illustration of the pyramid.

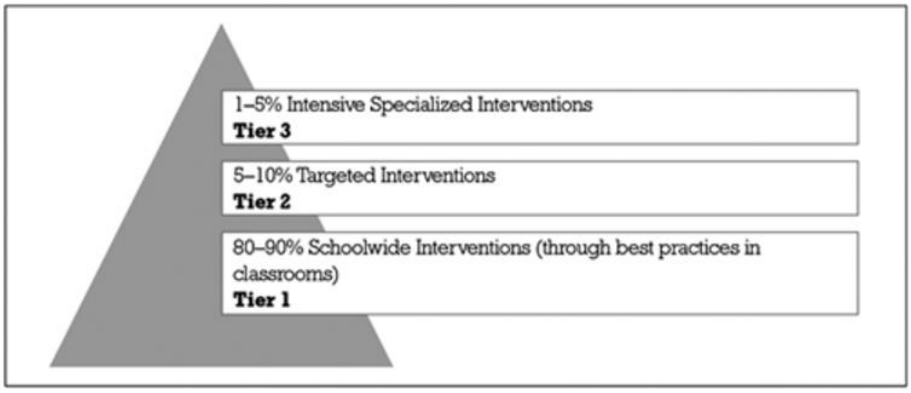

Figure 2. Pyramid of Interventions (Reprinted from Searle, 2010).

Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2012) inverted the traditional pyramid and added two areas of school-wide responsibility. The pyramid was inverted to clearly illustrate that all students receive Tier 1 interventions, some students receive additional interventions, and a few students receive intense interventions. It also specifies which students receive interventions at the specific levels and which adults are responsible for delivering those interventions to the students. Students with behavioral, attendance, and motivational issues receive interventions from teams throughout the school; and those who need support to supplement essential standards and assistance with the English language receive assistance from teachers who work collaboratively. The pictorial diagram can be seen in Figure 3.

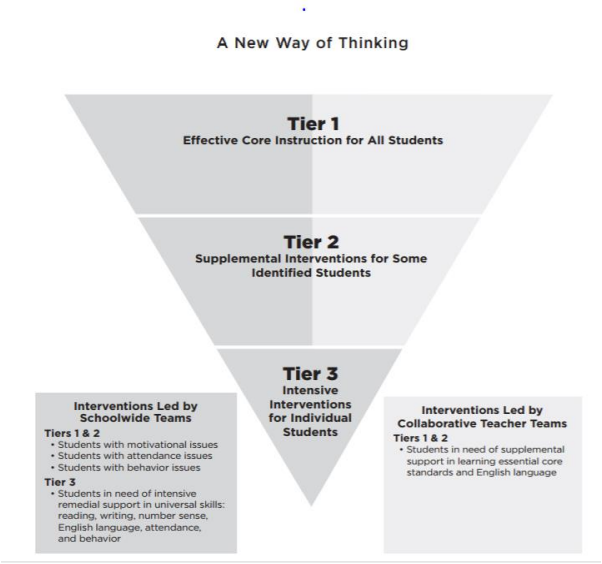

Figure 3. Inverted Pyramid of Interventions (Reprinted from Buffum et al., 2017, p. 11).

Fletcher and Vaughn (2009) received permission from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education to include their three-tier standard protocol model that illustrates behavioral interventions. Students work through the various tiers in the area of behavior just like they do in the area of academics. In addition to academic interventions on a three-tier system, students receive interventions based on their behavior within the tiered system. The percentages of students represented in the academic tiers are mirrored in the behavior tiers. Likewise, all students receive academic and/or behavior interventions in Tier 1. Students who need additional academic and/or behavior interventions are moved to Tier 2. Last, students who need individualized academic and/or behavior interventions are moved to Tier 3. Figure 4 illustrates the academic and behavior three-tier standard model. The RTI pyramid that the school in this study constructed closely resembles this model with the combination of academic and behavioral interventions with the understanding that academic success is sometimes dependent on behavior.

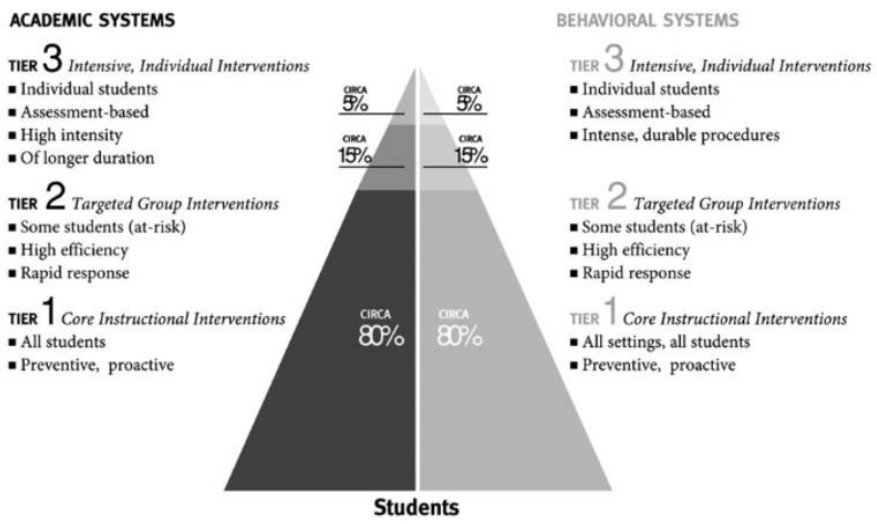

Figure 4. Three-Tier Model for Academic and Behavior Interventions (Reprinted from Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009).

Data-Based Decision-Making

"A response-to-intervention model necessitates using decision-making methods that use graduated increases or decreases in intensity to demonstrate the initial and ongoing need for special services" (Barnett, Daly, Jones, & Lentz, 2004, p. 66). Marsh, Pane, and Hamilton (2006) claimed that in education, data-driven decision-making refers to administrators, principals, and teachers working together in a systematic approach to collect and analyze data of various types, including those in the areas of satisfaction, outcome, process and input, to inform decisions that support the improvement student and school success. A conceptual framework for data-driven decision-making based on Mandinach, Honey, and Light's work (as cited in Marsh et al., 2006) was developed and is illustrated in Figure 5.

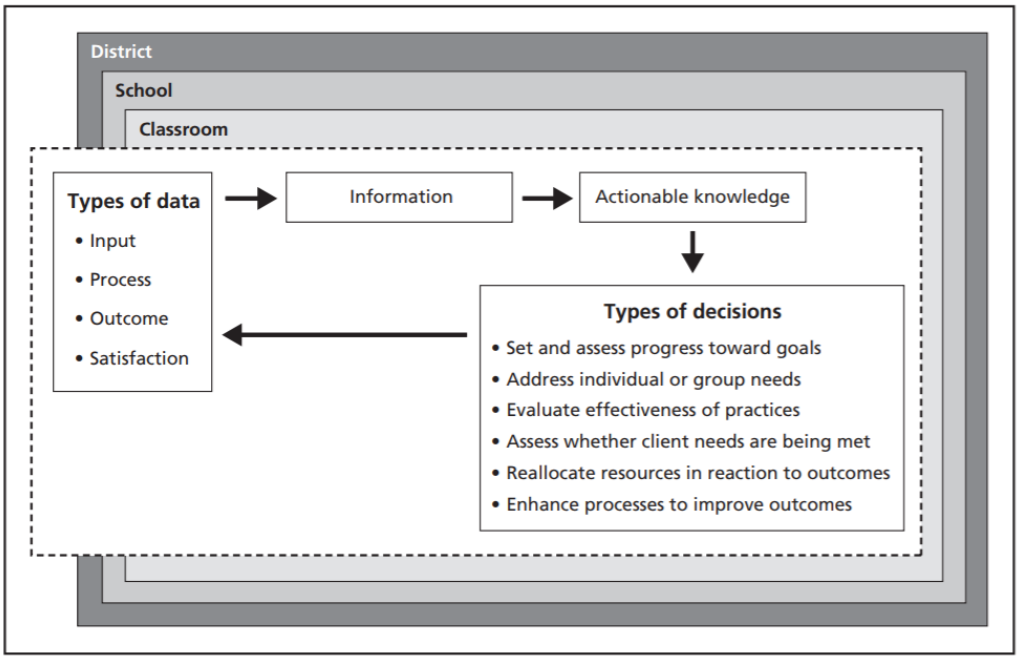

Figure 5. Data-Driven Decision Making Conceptual Framework (Reprinted from Marsh et al., 2006).

RTI Fidelity

"The ultimate aim of a fidelity system is to ensure that both the school process of RTI and classroom instruction at various tiers are implemented and delivered as intended" (Problem Solving & Response to Intervention, 2013, para. 2). The three general levels of RTI are described by the University of Kansas School of Education (2016). Tier 1 level of instruction is found in general education classrooms. Tier 2 is more deliberate, direct, and explicit in how students are taught and how feedback is modeled; and details are provided. Tier 3 is intensive instruction and may bring in a specialist who would have added expertise to weigh in on the challenge.

There are five major areas of fidelity including adherence, duration and exposure, quality of delivery, program specificity, and student responsiveness (Tools for Schools,

2001, p. 7). According to Tools for Schools (2001), adherence means students are aware of the learning objective during instruction and intervention, program materials are being used effectively, and there is a determination as to whether the objective(s) were met or not. Exposure specifies the number of minutes used for instruction and intervention and the number of minutes considered to be optimum (Tools for Schools, 2001). The quality of delivery is determined by whether the teacher is prepared to present the instruction and intervention, whether encouragement and enthusiasm are reflected in interactions between the teacher and the students, if instruction to students is clear and explicit, whether feedback provided to all students is positive and constructive, and whether there is evidence of effective pacing and transitions (Tools for Schools, 2001). Program specification is measured by how well the instructional components, as they were designed, were adhered to by the teacher and whether there is demonstration of content knowledge and intervention strategy (Tools for Schools). Last, Tools for Schools specified student responsiveness as the degree to which students are highly, moderately, or not engaged.

"Direct and frequent assessment of an intervention for fidelity is considered to be best practice" (Bianco, 2010, p. 6). Researchers have approached strengths and weaknesses of the program by evaluating its implementation within school sites. "The introduction of RTI in schools has called attention to treatment integrity because one of the primary tenets of the RTI model is that evidence-based interventions are implemented with integrity" (Kovaleski, n.d., para. 5).

Benefits of Effective Implementation

Brown, Skow, and the IRIS Center (2009) stated,

RTI has many potential benefits, which include:

> Providing instructional intervention early to those who need it
>
> Requiring teachers to rely on assessment data to support instructional decisions
>
> Reducing inappropriate special education referrals and placements
>
> Providing multiple levels of intervention
>
> Increasing the use of research-validate practices in core classroom instruction. (p. iii)
>
> Right now, we most clearly see its promise in regards to how its multilayered structure can be implemented in the early grades to strengthen the intensity and effectiveness of reading instruction for at-risk students, preventing chronic school failure that corrodes children's spirit and diminishes all of us who work on behalf of the public schools. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 98).

A few benefits of RTI for SLD include early intervention and identification, reduced bias in systematic screening, and a link between planning for instruction and assessment for identification (Fuchs, 2007). Another possible benefit is that in early childhood, early literacy and important social-emotional experiences could prevent students from needing services from special education in the areas of behavior disorders, literacy, and language among populations that lack those key experiences (Greenwood et al., 2011). "With an RTI approach, psychologists and specialists focus their time on designing interventions rather than checking for eligibility" (Searle, 2010, para. 21). Some of the literature supports the implementation of RTI and the positive effects as the result of identifying students who have difficulty learning, while others are hesitant to use an RTI program because there is no formal system that should be followed. The primary writings made by Fuchs are instrumental due to the extensive studying in the area of RTI since the beginning of the program. A study that included 42 middle schools in 28 states was

conducted by the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012) and indicated that ensuring instruction in core classes was the most important primary focus of the RTI process's implementation success. In an effort to improve primary instruction, many middle schools engage students in their learning by utilizing similar strategies in every classroom that include reviewing section and lesson objectives, writing daily objectives on the board, past lesson review, and generalizing information to upcoming objectives (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012). Additionally, the research conducted by the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012) revealed that the middle schools stated their goals were "to close the achievement gap, to meet AYP, and to address undesirable and disruptive behaviors" (p. 43).

Operating in a collaborative culture makes new initiatives easier to digest because everyone in the building is committed to daily improvement (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Morgan (2006) stated that paying special attention to specific needs and making sure those needs are satisfied helps to ensure the organization survives.

Professional Development

Professional development is required for the RTI process to be orchestrated effectively and with fidelity (Fuchs, 2007). In theory, the new process has to be completed; but in order for it to be effectively received, there needed to be a balance between theory and practice (Morgan, 2006). Fuchs (2007) organized a table to illustrate the work that must be done to implement the RTI process. It is a whole-school effort. Figure 6 shows responsibilities of stakeholders.

Task	Responsibility
Collecting screening data using existing data or individually administered brief assessments on all students	Teachers & trained aides
Interpreting screening data	Special educators & school psychologists
Ensuring the quality of general education	Curriculum specialists at the school or district level, school psychologists, teachers, & parents
Collecting continuing progress-monitoring data	Teachers & trained aides
Interpreting progress-monitoring data	Special educators & school psychologists
Designing Tier 2 and Beyond programs that incorporate validated intervention protocols	Special educators & school psychologists
Implementing Tier 2 and Beyond programs with fidelity	Trained aides under the supervision of special educators & school psychologists
Conducting the Step 4 evaluation	Special educators & school psychologists

Figure 6. Task Distribution Table (Reprinted from Fuchs, 2007, p. 5).

Challenges of fidelity implementation. Fidelity implementation usually involves changes to school climate and culture (Tools for Schools, 2010). "Many measures associated with the RTI model are best viewed as experimental because their technical adequacy has not yet been established" (Kavale, 2005, p. 599).

A few issues still remain in the area of RTI methods that include whether the production of outcomes that are considered to be strong will result from strong measures and models of intervention, whether there is an availability of enough professionals who are trained, and uncertainty as to when parental involvement and due process should begin (Fuchs, 2007). Emergent and Early Literacy Workshop's work and work from Mashburn (as mentioned in Greenwood et al., 2011) spoke of a challenge in early childhood education: "Lack of universal access to early education and an incomplete system of preschool education in America" (p. 16). Kovaleski (n.d.) noted, "If treatment integrity is not ensured, practitioners are unable to determine if the student's progress is

traceable to the intervention used" (para. 5).

Related Studies

Anderson-Irish (2013) described a study that Milloy conducted in 2003 of a school in Alabama that effectively implemented the RTI model. "In this school, the students identified as mentally retarded declined from 59 percent to 40 percent after the use of the RTI model" (Anderson-Irish, 2013, p. 69). Additionally, after the RTI model was implemented, a few findings were highlighted. A decrease in the number of referrals and additions to programs involving special education for minority students occurred (Anderson-Irish, 2013). Milloy's study also indicated the decline in referrals and special education placement of minority students was significant after teachers were trained to provide intervention and were required to provide documentation of student progress (Anderson-Irish, 2013). Last, those students considered to have an emotional behavior disorder were reduced by 14% (Anderson-Irish, 2013).

Kreider (2009) conducted a study in South Central Pennsylvania and found "a statistically significant decrease in the identification rates of SLD when comparing pre-RTI implementation years to post-RTI implementation years" (p. vii). Kreider's study was conducted from 2001 through 2008 to make sure years before RTI were included in the data to determine whether there was a relationship between student referral rates into special education and the implementation of an RTI program. In the study, the rates of identification in areas of other health impairment and emotional disturbance dropped from the period before RTI as compared to the period after RTI was implemented.

Related studies have included another form of RTI. "Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is an implementation of RTI that has been specifically designed for all students, not just those with disabilities" (University of Kansas School of Education,

2016, Tiered Interventions section, para. 2). MTSS is based on a model of problem-solving that takes environmental factors into consideration and proposes to deliver interventions to support students with behavior and learning problems according to their individual needs as soon as those needs are demonstrated (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2017).

Conclusions

Related studies have developed some definitive conclusions. Fuchs (2007) worked with NRCLD to complete a pair of extensive studies with first graders to determine how RTI helps to prevent and identify SLD in the areas of math and reading. One conclusion is that testing once at the beginning of the school year does not adequately identify children who need Tier 2 and 3 interventions (Fuchs, 2007). Fuchs instead suggested that such beginning-of-the-year tests support identification of students who could benefit from weekly progress monitoring for up to 8 weeks to calculate improvement in Tiers 1 and 2. Another conclusion is that an effective RTI process can serve as a process of identification of students who may need to be referred for special education evaluation. In addition, it has been concluded that teachers who deliver Tiers 2 and 3 instruction need to be thoroughly trained and supervised to ensure students receive desirable benefits (Fuchs, 2007). Small-group instruction has been proven as a research-based method to quantify whether students respond to Tiers 2 and 3 when the definition of adequate response during the process and final performance measurements are determined (Fuchs, 2007). When some students return to Tier 1 after receiving Tier 2 interventions, general education may cause some to fall behind again if continued small-group support is not provided and weekly monitoring is not maintained (Fuchs, 2007).

"Only when Tier 1 interventions fail to close learning gaps do more intensive

services-including English as a Second Language, gifted education, remedial classes, and tutoring-come into play" (Searle, 2010, para. 15). According to Grigorenko (2009), assessment and student response to individualized instruction help educators categorize students within multiple intervention tiers that are represented in RTI models. This study was necessary because there has been little research in the area of RTI to determine whether schools are implementing the program in the manner in which it was intended. Through this fidelity study, schools may choose to investigate how the school can evaluate its RTI program using a particular evaluation tool.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

A qualitative research study methodology was used for this study. The purpose of the process evaluation was to determine the implementation fidelity of the RTI program at a particular middle school. This chapter details the setting of the research as well as the design, the role of the researcher, and methodology. The primary research question was, "How effectively is the RTI process being implemented at this middle school?" This question was broken down into the following.

1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?
5. To what extent does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model?

Site Summary

The middle school in this study is located in the suburbs of upstate South

Carolina. It is home to approximately 1,000 students. It is in its second year of implementation of the RTI program.

Research Design

If the RTI process is implemented in the way in which it was designed, all students should show evidence of learning. A qualitative design was used in the research that includes data from principal and special education teacher interviews, three focus groups, and archived data from the first semester of the 2017-2018 school year. The RTI Essential Components Worksheet (Appendix A) was utilized by the researcher to develop instruments to collect qualitative data from various focus groups and from the principal and special education teacher interviews. In addition, some items from The Principal Interview Questions (Appendix B) were aligned to the research questions by the researcher and were included in the principal interview protocol. Specific items and their alignment to the research questions are discussed within the chapter.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role was to serve as an observer-participant. The researcher observed and documented parts of the RTI Essential Components Worksheet through its completion. As a staff member of the school involved in this research, the researcher was a participant. The researcher has served as a math department co-chairperson, the eighth-grade math Professional Learning Community (PLC) leader, and the 8-1 Team Leader. There were three teams of students in each grade level. Although the researcher was a member of the staff involved in the research, she managed biases by reporting information without influences from her socioeconomic origin, culture, gender, or history within the organization (Creswell, 2014). The researcher employed various strategies to manage bias including neutrality in body language, tone, and dress; consciousness of and

avoidance of biased questions; asking for clarification following unclear answers; ensured equal talk time; logically ordered questions; building trust; and keeping an open mind ("What is Bias," 2017).

One ethical issue the researcher had to counter was disruption at the site. The interviews and focus groups needed to take as little time out of normal routines as possible. The researcher conducted the focus groups during times set aside for PLC or grade-level meetings, when common planning periods took place. This step maximized time in homogeneous groups. Also, during the interviews, the ethical issues of power imbalance and potential participant exploitation were avoided (Creswell, 2014). This was achieved by giving the participants an opportunity to review the data prior to its inclusion in the study. The participants seemed eager to participate when the researcher stressed that the study would include all areas of the RTI process, components in which the school was proficient and those components that could use some improvement.

Research Methods

The researcher utilized the plan and methods outlined in the methods grid found in Table 2. The tools and instruments are detailed. The items used in data collection are listed. Also, the methods of analysis are indicated.

Table 2

Research Methods Table

Research Question	Tools/Instruments	Data collected	Method of Analysis
1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?	Questions from the RTI Essential Components Worksheet	Emails, State Mandates, School Training, PLC Focus Group Questions 1, 2, and 3, Remediation Specialists' Focus Group Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, Principal Component Questions 1, 2, and 3 Archived Data Questions 1-8	RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric Category Measure
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?	RTI Essential Components Worksheet	RTI Pyramid, Team Minutes, PLC Focus Group Question 4, Remediation Specialists' Focus Group Questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 Archived Data Questions 9-15	RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric Category Measure
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?	RTI Essential Components Worksheet Principal Exit Interview Questions	PLC Minutes, Team Minutes, Department Meeting Minutes, Unit Plans, RTI Pyramid, PLC Focus Group Questions 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, Remediation Specialists' Focus Group Questions 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23, Principal Interview Part 1-Question 2 Archived Data Questions 16-26	RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric Category Measure
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?	RTI Essential Components Worksheet Principal Exit Interview Questions	RTI Pyramid, Team Meeting Minutes, Staff Meeting Minutes, District Training, Master Schedule, District Email, PLC Focus Group Questions 10, 11, 12, and 13, Remediation Specialist Questions 24, 25, 26, and 27, Principal Component Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 Principal Interview Questions Part 1-Questions 1, 3, 4, and 5, Part 2-Questions 1, 2, 3, Part 3-Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 Archived Data Questions 27-38	RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric Category Measure
5. To what extent does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model?	RTI Essential Components Worksheet	Principal Component Questions 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16	RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric Category Measure

Data Collection

The researcher used the questions from the RTI Essential Components Worksheet verbatim for the focus groups and the principal and special education teacher interviews. The focus groups and principal and special education teacher interviews took place either after school or during teacher planning time and lasted between 60 minutes and 90 minutes (McNamara, n.d). The interviews and focus groups were recorded through the computer and a portable recording device, then transcribed and coded. The questions for the PLCs can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Professional Learning Communities' Focus Group Questions

Research question	Instrument Items
1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?	What tools does your school use for progress monitoring (probe across content areas)? Did school or district staff consider the evidence from the vendor regarding the validity, reliability, and accuracy of the progress monitoring tool(s) when selecting it/them? Can staff articulate the evidence supporting the rigor of the tool(s)?
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?	To what extent are the screening, progress monitoring, and other assessment data used to inform instruction at all tiers, including the core instruction?
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?	Describe primary-level instruction (core curriculum) materials. What is the research base? When your school selected its core instructional materials, how much attention was paid to the research base? To what extent do teachers in this school use student assessment data and knowledge of student readiness, language, and culture to offer students in the same class different teaching and learning strategies to address student needs? How consistent is this effort among the teaching staff?
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?	To what extent do you believe the teaching staff views the purpose of RTI as primarily to prevent students from having academic and/or behavioral problems? What portion of the teaching staff view RTI as primarily a means for special education identification? Is there a process for monitoring the use of resources? What efforts have been made to ensure that core instruction, secondary-level and intensive intervention, and assessments take into account cultural and linguistic factors?

The questions the researcher used for the remediation specialists' focus group are in Table 4. The table lists the research questions and instrument items.

Table 4

Remediation Specialists' Focus Group Questions

Research question	Instrument items
1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?	How often is the progress of students in secondary level interventions monitored? How often is the progress of students in intensive intervention monitored? Does monitoring occur with sufficient frequency to show a trend in academic progress over time? How closely does administration of the progress monitoring tool(s) follow the developer's guidelines?
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?	Are progress monitoring data used? How is baseline performance established? What goal setting method is used? (e.g., end-of-year benchmarks, rate of improvement, intra-individual framework? Are rates or norms provided by the vendor/developer? What decision rules are used?
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?	What program(s) does your school use for secondary-level intervention? How were these programs selected? Have these programs demonstrated efficacy with the target populations (e.g., has research shown that the interventions positively impact student achievement)? How do instructors of secondary-level interventions ensure that the content they address is well aligned and complements the core instruction for each student? Are the secondary level interventions always led by staff adequately trained to implement the interventions with fidelity? If not, who provides the secondary level intervention and what is their background? Are the secondary interventions always conducted with small groups of students? What is the maximum group size? How are evidence-based interventions intensified or individualized at the intensive level? How are the interventions used at this level developed?

(continued)

Research question	Instrument items
	Who provides intensive intervention? Can you describe their background and level of training in providing databased individualized instruction? Does the group size allow for the interventionist to adjust and individualize instruction to address the needs of each student?
	Describe an example of a student experiencing intensive intervention.
	Are intensive interventions always implemented as supplements to the core curriculum? If not, please explain.
	How do you decide if a student receiving intensive intervention should remain in primary-level instruction?
	How do you ensure meaningful connections between intensive intervention and the general education curriculum (e.g., the Common Core)?
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?	How are parents involved in decision making regarding the participation of their child in secondary-level or intensive intervention?
	How are parents of students at the secondary or intensive level informed of the progress of their children?
	How are teachers of students at the secondary or intensive level informed of their progress in the intervention?
	What process does your school use to ensure teacher collaboration in implementing RTI?

Because of scheduling conflicts, a special education teacher interview was conducted because scheduling this individual with the remediation specialists' focus group was not possible. The researcher included questions from the remediation specialists' focus group that pertained only to the special education teacher during that interview. The table aligning those questions is included in Table 5.

Table 5

Special Education Teacher's Interview Questions

Research question	Instrument items
1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?	How often is the progress of students in intensive intervention monitored? Does monitoring occur with sufficient frequency to show a trend in academic progress over time? How closely does administration of the progress monitoring tool(s) follow the developer's guidelines?
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?	Are progress monitoring data used? How is baseline performance established? What goal setting method is used? (e.g., end-of-year benchmarks, rate of improvement, intra-individual framework? Are rates or norms provided by the vendor/developer? What decision rules are used?
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?	How are evidence-based interventions intensified or individualized at the intensive level? How are the interventions used at this level developed? Who provides intensive intervention? Can you describe their background and level of training in providing databased individualized instruction? Does the group size allow for the interventionist to adjust and individualize instruction to address the needs of each student? Describe an example of a student experiencing intensive intervention. Are intensive interventions always implemented as supplements to the core curriculum? If not, please explain. How do you decide if a student receiving intensive intervention should remain in primary-level instruction? How do you ensure meaningful connections between intensive intervention and the general education curriculum (e.g., the Common Core)?

(continued)

Research question	Instrument items
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?	How are parents involved in decision making regarding the participation of their child in secondary-level or intensive intervention? How are parents of students at the secondary or intensive level informed of the progress of their children? How are teachers of students at the secondary or intensive level informed of their progress in the intervention? What process does your school use to ensure teacher collaboration in implementing RTI?

The researcher used a qualitative design where focus groups and the principal and special education teacher interviews took place while archived data collection and analysis occurred. The instruments adapted by the researcher worked to assign a measurement on the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric used as part of the framework.

According to Butin (2010), "qualitative research deals with stories and words (the 'how' and 'why' questions)" (p. 74). Some of the data collected were archived data interpreted through the use of verbatim questions taken from the RTI Essential Components Worksheet instrument. These questions can be found in Table 6.

Table 6

Archived Data List

Research question	Instrument Items	Data source
1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?	What tools do you use for universal screening (probe across content areas)?	Information from Academic Facilitator
	Does staff understand how the tool is intended to be used?	Email/PLC Minutes
	Can you and other staff provide evidence of the technical adequacy (i.e., reliability, validity, classification accuracy) of the tools?	Information from Academic Facilitator
	Describe the process for conducting screening in your school. To what extent is this process consistently followed?	State Website/Emails
	Are all students screened?	Information from Academic Facilitator
	How many times during the school year are students screened?	Information from Academic Facilitator
	Do you use a well-defined cut score or decision point to identify students at risk?	Information from Academic Facilitator/Counselors
	How do you ensure that administration of screening assessments follows the developer's guidelines?	Information from Academic Facilitator
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?	Describe how decisions are made to move students between tiers.	Staff Meeting Notes
	Who is involved in decision making?	Leadership Team Meeting Minutes/Emails
	What data are used to inform those decisions, and how are they used?	RTI Pyramid
	What criteria and guidelines are used for making decisions?	Leadership Team Meeting Minutes
	Is there a system for collecting and organizing student academic data, screening data, progress monitoring data, and other forms of data? If so, please describe.	Team Meeting Minutes
	Is the system used consistently across school staff?	Team Meeting Minutes

(continued)

Research question	Instrument Items	Data source
	Are instructional decisions made about students tracked in the data system or through another method (including movement between tiers)?	Team Meeting Minutes
3. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?	To what extent are the school and district administrators aware of the RTI framework at your school?	Staff Meeting Minutes
	Has the staff been trained on the RTI framework and essential components?	Staff Meeting Minutes
	How often is refresher or new training provided?	Staff Meeting Minutes
	Is RTI training provided to new teachers?	Staff Meeting Minutes
	What ongoing professional development is made available for those who provide secondary-level and intensive intervention?	Grade Level Meeting Minutes
	Does the schedule reflect additional time beyond the core for secondary level and intensive intervention?	Master Schedule
	Is there time scheduled for teacher collaboration on instruction and interventions?	Master Schedule
	Are all the pertinent teachers and interventionists available for these collaborative meetings?	Master Schedule
	Are there adequate materials, programs, and resources allocated to support interventions, assessments, professional development, staffing?	Team Meeting Minutes
	Do the programs and materials match the needs of the students at each tier?	RTI Pyramid
	Are teachers in your school knowledgeable about the RTI framework?	Staff Meeting Minutes/Team Minutes
	Describe how you communicate with teachers about the school's RTI plan.	Staff Meeting Minutes/Team Minutes

The administrator focus group was planned to include a counselor, an assistant principal, the academic facilitator, and the school psychologist who were asked the same principal interview questions. Those questions can be found in Table 7.

Table 7

Principal Interview/Administrator Focus Group Questions

Research Question	Instrument Question
1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?	How much attention was given to the vendor's evidence regarding the validity, reliability, and accuracy of the tools when selected? Does your school have documentation from the vendor that these tools have been shown to be valid, reliable, and accurate with subgroups in your school? Do you review other information to help verify that the results of the initial screening are accurate before placing a student in secondary-level or intensive intervention? If so, what other types of assessment data do you use?
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?	To what extent do the actions taken and decisions made by district administrators improve the effectiveness of the RTI framework at your school? To what extent do the actions taken and decisions made by school administrators improve the effectiveness of the RTI framework at your school? Does your school have a designated person who oversees and manages RTI implementation? If yes, what percentage of that person's time is devoted to overseeing and managing RTI? How are the demographic and academic data of subgroups represented in your school used to inform the RTI framework? Are parents knowledgeable about the RTI framework in your school? How have you promoted parental involvement in PS/RtI among the staff? Describe how you communicate with parents about RTI and student performance. (continued) Does your school have an RTI team? If so: • Who composes that team? • How often does the team meet? • Are there established processes and protocols that help the team work effectively? What are they? • How does the team communicate and collaborate with other staff?

(continued)

Research Question	Instrument Question
5. To what extent does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model?	Are procedures in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core curriculum? Of secondary-level and intensive intervention? Of screening, progress monitoring, and the decision-making process? If so please describe. Who is involved in monitoring the fidelity of implementation? Does the evidence indicate that instruction, interventions, assessments, and decisions are implemented with fidelity? How is RTI evaluated at your school? • Is a plan in place for evaluation? • Is a process in place for reviewing student-level data for all students and for subgroups of students? • Is a process in place to evaluate implementation fidelity? How are evaluation data used? Are teachers and interventionists involved in giving and receiving feedback on the effectiveness of the programs and materials? Who is involved in evaluating RTI implementation?
Principal Interview Part 1, Number 2	What things facilitated implementation of PS/RTI in your building? What things acted as barriers? What types of activities did you engage in with the District Leadership Team (DLT)? What supports did you receive from the DLT? What types of support from the DLT do you believe is important to implement PS/RtI in your building?

Some documents that were completed and available to staff members were also available to the researcher to use as archived data. The principal published a weekly newsletter sent by email containing some of the archived data information used. All middle schools in the district used the same universal screening tools: Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), South Carolina College- and Career-Ready Assessments (SCREADY), and South Carolina Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SCPASS). The school's academic facilitator was responsible for organizing the administration of

these tests.

Population and Sampling

In order to reduce selection bias, the population of the research included all of the teaching staff, administration (counselors, academic facilitator, and assistant principals), and school psychologist of the middle school. There were 36 core teachers, 15 related arts teachers, five special education teachers, two remediation specialists, one exceptional services assistant, a psychologist, an academic facilitator, three counselors, three assistant principals, and one principal.

Purposeful sampling strategies were used to conduct focus groups based on their RTI experiences. Two team leader participants from each of the three grade levels and two PLC leader participants from the related arts team were asked to participate in the PLC focus group. The Center on Response to Intervention (2014a) instructed the researcher of the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric to interview members of the leadership team to gather information for evaluative purposes. Krueger (2002) suggested the preferred number of participants in focus groups is six to eight people who are recruited carefully. Two members of the exceptional children's team were asked to participate with the two remediation specialists in a focus group. The math remediation specialist, reading remediation specialist, school psychologist, and academic facilitator were all asked to participate because of their specialized positions. A sample of the administration was asked to make up a focus group with at least one counselor and one assistant principal, the academic facilitator, and school psychologist. An interview was conducted with the principal separately. All teachers, administrators, the principal, and the school psychologist met the criterion of being a member of the population because they were all responsible for the education of all students. Representative sampling was

combined because Urdan (2010) suggested, “the researcher purposely selects cases so that they will match the larger population on specific characteristics” (p. 3). See Table 8 for an illustration of the focus group participants involved in the study.

Table 8

Focus Group Participants

Administrators	PLC Leaders	Remediation Specialists
Counselor	8th Grade	Math
Academic Facilitator	8th Grade	Reading
School Psychologist	7th Grade	
	6th Grade	
	6th Grade	

The total number of anticipated participants in the three focus groups was 16. This number was lessened to 11 with conflicts in the school’s master schedule and arising emergencies. The original total represented a focus group consisting of two team leaders from each of the three grade levels and two PLC leaders from the related arts team. It actually consisted of two team leaders from the sixth grade, two from the eighth grade, and one from the seventh grade. After planning for a meeting and setting a date and time, the other seventh-grade team leader could not participate in the focus group because of a schedule conflict. No related arts team members participated, citing lack of involvement with the RTI process. Another focus group was planned to comprise two members from the exceptional children’s department along with the math remediation specialist and the reading remediation specialist. It only included the math and reading remediation specialists because of the conflicts the school’s master schedule presented. The planning periods of the exceptional children teachers and the remediation specialists did not coincide on the master schedule; therefore, the researcher attempted to coordinate a time before and after school, but personal commitments of the teachers would not allow for all

of them to be present at any arranged time. Therefore, an additional interview was added that involved a member of the exceptional children's department. The third focus group was planned to include one counselor, one assistant principal, the academic facilitator, and the school psychologist. It actually contained a counselor, the school psychologist, and the academic facilitator. On the planned day and time of the focus group, a teacher in the school had an emergency that required the assistant principal's attendance.

To maintain confidentiality, participants were identified by their position and the number of years they had served at the school. This information was used for the researcher's information in case additional follow-up information was needed. The information that was disclosed included basic information pertaining to the position of those in the administrator, remediation, and special education interview and the grade level for the PLC leaders for the PLC focus group. The researcher helped respondents feel more secure by informing them that third parties would not have access to their individual opinions (UKEssays, 2015).

The research sample was actually 11 instead of the anticipated 16. The RTI Essential Components Worksheet published by the Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes for Research was used as the data collection instrument to guide the questions asked during the focus groups and principal and special education teacher interviews.

Focus Group and Interview Procedures

Krueger (2002) suggested that the following procedures be followed when conducting a focus group: create a warm and friendly environment, seat the participants in a comfortable arrangement, conduct quick and smooth introductions, include the use of probes and pauses, inform the group of recording during the introduction, and conclude

with three steps. The three steps used by the researcher included a summary question, a final question review to inquire as to any additions, and a thank you conclusion prior to dismissal.

Prior to conducting the focus groups, the researcher had individuals read and sign an informed consent document to agree to participation. All of the focus groups and the principal and special education teacher interviews planned to meet in the large conference room at the oval table. The room was equipped with a coffee maker and snacks. The remediation specialists' focus group actually took place in the reading remediation specialists' classroom due to the limited amount of time they have for planning. Likewise, the special education teacher's interview took place a classroom due to the same circumstances. Specific details about the procedures are outlined in Table 9.

Table 9

Focus Group Protocol Table

Timeline	Researcher's Script
Welcome	"Good Afternoon and thank you for agreeing to join this group."
Topic Introduction	"This group will offer input to help with the evaluation of the RTI program's process at the school."
Guidelines	"Everyone is invited to share their thoughts on each question, both positive and negative". There are no wrong answers. Feel free to talk to one another or add on to another person's response. I will serve as the facilitator of the discussion. This session will be recorded to ensure that your comments are accurately documented. No names will be used in the research, so that confidentiality can be maintained. You do have the right to not answer questions."
Opening Question	"To begin, please state the subject you teach, and the number of years you have taught at the school."
Other Focus Group Questions	The researcher will ask the other questions from the focus group instrument aligned to the particular participating focus group.
Summary Question	"Suppose you had one minute to talk to the superintendent about the RTI program at the school. What would you say?"
Final Question	"Have we missed anything?"
Conclusion	"Thank you for participating. As a reminder, your input will be used for research purposes only and your responses will remain anonymous. I will send each of you an email with a summary of the discussion to review for accuracy."

The principal interview was conducted in the principal's office instead of the conference room office to minimize interruptions. Although the conference room can be reserved, not all staff members check the reservation board prior to entering the conference room. The protocol for the interview is in Table 10.

Table 10

Principal Interview Protocol Table

Timeline	Researcher's Script
Welcome	"Good Afternoon and thank you for agreeing conduct this interview."
Topic Introduction	"This interview will offer input to help with the evaluation of the RTI program's process at the school."
Guidelines	"You are welcome to share their thoughts on each question, both positive and negative". There are no wrong answers. I will facilitate the discussion by asking you several questions. This session will be recorded to ensure that your comments are accurately documented. Your name will not be used in the research, so that confidentiality can be maintained. You do have the right to not answer questions."
Opening Question	"To begin, please state the number of years you have been the principal at the school."
Other Focus Group Questions	The researcher will ask the other questions from the principal interview instrument.
Summary Question	"Suppose you had one minute to talk to the superintendent about the RTI program at the school. What would you say?"
Final Question	"Have we missed anything?"
Conclusion	"Thank you for participating. As a reminder, your input will be used for research purposes only and your responses will remain anonymous. I will send you an email with a summary of the discussion to review for accuracy."

Analysis

The RTI Essential Components Worksheet and the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric are published and research developed. The RTI Essential Components Worksheet, in the essence of its design, answered each of the research questions in its entirety with its rating system. The RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric provides details for the justification of the measures. Both of these instruments

were developed by the Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes for Research. The Principal Interview Questions were developed by the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project; and the school's RTI Pyramid of Interventions were adapted by Dr. Holmes, the school's former academic facilitator. The Pyramid of Interventions can be found in Appendix C.

The Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes for Research did not require permission for use of their instruments and only asked that their work be cited in this research. Creators of the Principal Interview Questions and the school's RTI Pyramid of Interventions used in the study have given permission to the researcher for their use. This evidence is provided in the emails that are included in Appendix D.

The data were analyzed using the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric found in Appendix E. The RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric has the Essential Components of RTI specified by indicators. Each indicator for each component was assigned a quality measure. Those measures were averaged to determine an overall quality measure for each Essential Components, answering each research question. Those areas of the rubric with multiple components had the quality measure determined by the average of the components. See Figure 7 for a visual representation.

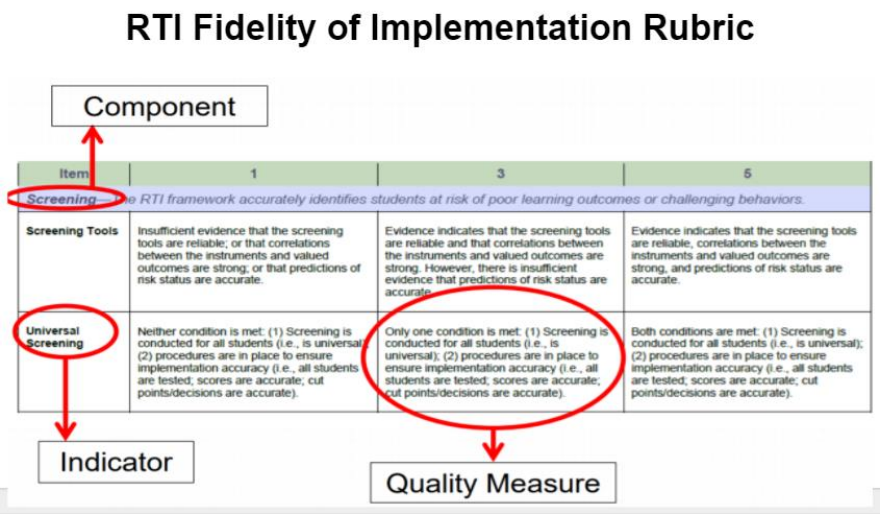

Figure 7. RTI Fidelity of Implemention Rubric Illustration (Reprinted from Waite & Magnuson, 2013).

Scores were assigned to each research question according to the classification on the rubric. The rubric requested the evaluator to assign 1, 3, and 5 as ratings, with being the minimum score. An example of the coding process conducted by the researcher with the first indicator of the first component is shown in Figure 8.

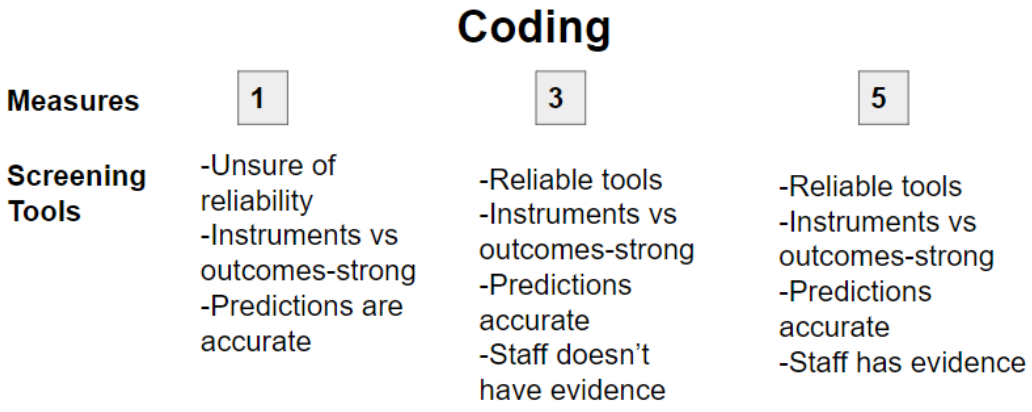

Figure 8. Researcher Coding Process Example.

The researcher used the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric to answer the five

research questions. The researcher sorted the verbatim questions taken from the RTI Essential Components Worksheet in documents that are specific to the differing focus groups.

The data were first cleaned and screened through dictation of the interview and focus group recordings. After double-checking to make sure the data were accurately represented, they were placed in a scale of measurement.

The researcher used the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric to determine a measurement for the level of implementation for the school's RTI program following the focus groups and principal and special education teacher interviews. When there were multiple descriptors for a specific measure and only one area was met, that area received a measurement of 1. When two were met, the measurement was a 3. When all of the conditions were met, the measurement was a 5. This rubric and scoring system were developed based on a study involving 68 schools in Milwaukee following 2 years of RTI implementation by partners of the former National Center on Response to Intervention, the Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, and the Milwaukee Public Schools; and a rubric that is research based for implementation of RTI at the school level was developed ("Measuring," 2016). An illustration of the meaning of the measures is in Figure 9.

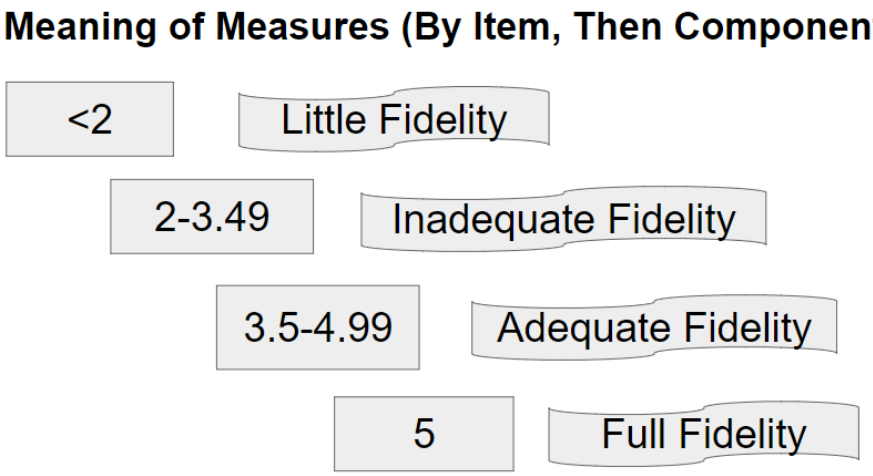

Figure 9. Meaning of Measures (Adapted from "Measuring," 2016).

To answer the first research question, "To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making," the rubric was used to determine the reliability of screening tools, instrument and outcome correlations, and accuracy of risk predictions based on the score (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Universal screening conditions were examined in the areas of universality, accuracy of implementation, and annual screening (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). The researcher examined whether data from screening was used with additional sources to determine student risk (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Additionally, the researcher examined whether rates of improvement were quantified by monthly Tier 2 and weekly Tier 3 progress monitoring in intervals according to levels of intervention, that minimum growth was specified, that end-of-the-year benchmarks were provided, that scores for performance levels were valid and reliable, and that implementation was accurate (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a).

To answer the second research question, "To what extent are data-based decision-

making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned," the researcher determined whether the decision-making process used methods that were validated and were driven by data, had stakeholder involvement, and had established and clear rules for decisions (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). The researcher also determined whether the data system enabled documentation and accessibility of data on the student level, whether there was timeliness with entering data, if there was a possibility to represent data graphically, and if there was a goal-setting and evaluation process (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Last, the Center on Response to Intervention (2014a) suggested that RTI decisions be based on progress-monitoring data that are valid and reliable and reflect progress or improvement towards a final goal and that the criteria are accurately implemented.

The third research question, "To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure," required the researcher to investigate whether there were research-based and standards-based core curriculum materials, even for subgroups (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). It was also suggested by the Center on Response to Intervention (2014a) that the researcher determine whether there was an articulation of learning and teaching across and within the grade levels to ensure students share experiences that were similar no matter to which teacher they were assigned. During the research, the staff should have been able to describe differentiation of instruction for students on grade level or above grade level by most teachers and explain how student data were used by most teachers to identify various needs and address those needs (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Additionally, the researcher determined whether the core

curriculum in math and reading was aligned with state standards (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). The Center on Response to Intervention (2014a) suggested that the school give students who were exceeding benchmarks enrichment opportunities and that the opportunities should have been implemented on all grade levels consistently. The researcher analyzed whether the interventions on secondary level were evidence based on grade levels and in content areas and whether they incorporated skills that were foundational, supported learning objectives, and were aligned with core instruction (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). The researcher determined whether there were standardized interventions, whether staff who led interventions on the secondary level were trained according to the requirements detailed by the developer, if the dosage and size of the groups were optimal for the needs and ages of the students, and whether the interventions complemented instruction in the core classes (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Intensive interventions should have been more intense than those on the secondary level and individualized and led by staff who were well-trained and experienced in offering individualized instruction based on student data, and the group size should have been optimal to the needs and ages of the students (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Last, the researcher made a determination of whether student participation in core instruction and intervention that was intensive was made on a case-by-case basis and according to the needs of students and whether those interventions were appropriate for students and addressed curriculum in the general education classroom (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a).

While conducting the research, the researcher determined whether the staff understood that the purpose of RTI was to provide a framework that should have prevented all students from having problems academically, even those students with

disabilities (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). The researcher also determined whether there was consistency between the actions and decisions by the school and district leaders, if district leaders were supportive of the components that were deemed essential, and whether implementation of RTI was a top priority (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Professional development was examined to determine its level of consistency and whether it was job embedded to improve practice in the areas of instruction, data-based decision-making, and intervention delivery (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). The Center on Response to Intervention (2014a) suggested that school-wide schedules be aligned in an effort to support multiple intervention levels and student needs, extra time be built in to accommodate interventions, and that resources be allocated to support the implementation on RTI. The staff should have been able to articulate information and factors to take into consideration during the adoption of instructional practices, assessment, and programs that were culturally and linguistically relevant (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). To evaluate the communications with parents, the researcher determined if the RTI essential components' description was shared with parents, whether there was the implementation on a mechanism to update parents with progress of students in the secondary and intensive intervention tiers, and if parents were involved in decision-making during the process as it pertained to intensive intervention progress (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). When evaluating the communication with staff, the researcher determined whether the description of the RTI essential components and data-based decision-making process was shared with the staff, whether staff was kept informed through the use of a systemized process, and if teachers worked collaboratively in teams often (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Also, the Center on Response to Intervention (2014a) stated all stakeholders should be

represented on the RTI team to make sure decision-making is guided by clear processes and structures and that time is protected for the team to meet on a regular basis. The researcher examined the areas of failure prevention; spoke with personnel in leadership positions; examined multiple details on the school level including professional development, schedules, resources, responsiveness to interventions, communication with and involvement of parents and all staff; and took information from the RTI teams into consideration (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). All of those conditions had to be considered to answer Research Question 4: To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?

Last, to answer the fifth research question, "At what level does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model," the researcher reviewed the conditions for fidelity and evaluation (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). The researcher investigated whether there were procedures for monitoring implementation fidelity of the core curriculum, secondary, and intensive interventions (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a). Additionally, the researcher decided whether there was a plan for monitoring goals that were both short-term and long-term, whether there was a procedure to review data for all students and subgroups students were placed into to evaluate the RTI framework effectiveness, and if there was a review of implementation data across all components of the framework of RTI for which fidelity and efficiency were monitored (Center on Response to Intervention, 2014a).

Treatment integrity could have been affected by a few variables discussed by Detrich, Gresham, MacMillan, Beebe-Frankenberger, and Bocian (as cited in Kovaleski,

n.d.) that include the children's characteristics, required intervention resources, intervention similarity to current practices in the classroom, treatment complexities, intervention implementation time requirements, required number of staff for intervention implementation, staff implementation motivation, and effectiveness of interventions as they are perceived and actually implemented.

Reliability and Validity

The researcher established credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability (through the use of triangulation), theory, and validation (Vaterlaus & Higginbotham, n.d.). The researcher used different sources of data and examined this evidence to develop comprehensive themes (Creswell, 2014). These sources of data included archived documents, focus groups, a principal interview, and a special education teacher interview. The researcher used member checking to ensure accuracy of the findings by allowing the participants the opportunity to review transcribed data and the section of the report containing the results (Vaterlaus & Higginbotham, n.d.).

Generalizability could have been difficult because groups may not have had the same reaction to the program, behaviors could have changed, and the various sources of services being conducted simultaneously could have altered the effects of the interventions (Community Tool Box, 2007).

Summary

The researcher used a qualitative methods approach to analyze the implementation of the RTI program at the middle school. The design, methodology, and role of researcher were discussed during this chapter. Throughout the methodology portion of the research, the RTI Essential Components Worksheet guided questions for the focus groups and principal interview to gather input from staff members and to

retrieve archived data. The RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric served as the basis for the analysis of the collected data.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine whether the RTI program at a middle school in upstate South Carolina was being implemented with fidelity. The program was introduced to the district during the summer of 2015, the planning stage began during the 2015-2016 school year, and implementation began during the 2016-2017 school year. This study focused on data from the first semester of the 2017-2018 school year. This study may give other schools a guide to use to evaluate the implementation of their sites' RTI program.

Research Questions

This study is driven by an overall research question: How effectively is the RTI process being implemented at this middle school? To more effectively address this issue, the overall question is broken into the following research questions.

1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified

system?

5. To what extent does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model?

Chapter Organization

The details of the findings as a result of data collection and analysis are included in this chapter. The information is organized by the analysis of archived data, the principal and exceptional children's teacher interview responses, and the focus groups' input as they relate to the research questions that are aligned to the five essential components of the RTI process.

Data Extraction

Archived data were extracted from the minutes of the eighth-grade math and language arts content PLCs; the seventh-grade math, social studies, and language arts content PLCs; and the sixth-grade science and language arts content PLCs for the semester. Additionally, minutes from the first and third academic teacher teams on the eighth-grade hallway, the first and second academic teacher teams on seventh-grade hallway, and the first and second academic teacher teams on the sixth-grade hallway (Teams 8-1, 8-3, 7-1, 7-2, 6-1, and 6-2) were examined from the semester. The PLC leaders' focus group included two eighth-grade teachers, one seventh-grade teacher, and two sixth-grade teachers. A principal interview and a special education teacher interview were completed. The administrators' focus group involved one counselor, the instructional facilitator, and the school psychologist. Finally, the math remediation specialist and the reading remediation specialist made up the instructional specialists' focus group.

Assessments

To answer Research Question 1, "To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making," the researcher assigned a quality measure average of 4.3 for the screening component and a quality measure average of 4 for the progress monitoring component. The analyzed data included information from the academic facilitator, PLC minutes, the state's education website, emails, and focus group responses; therefore, the assessment essential component of the RTI process yielded an average overall quality measure of 4.2. Table 11 illustrates these data.

Table 11

Fidelity of Implementation Findings for Research Question 1

Component	Indicator	Quality Measure Score
Screening-The RTI framework accurately identifies students at risk of poor learning outcomes or challenging behaviors.	Screening Tools Universal Screening Data points to verify risk	3 5 5
Progress Monitoring-Ongoing and frequent monitoring of progress quantifies rates of improvement and informs instructional practice and the development of individualized programs. Measures are appropriate for the student's grade and/or skill level.	Progress Monitoring Tools Progress Monitoring Process	3 5
	Overall Average Score	4.2

The indicators within the screening component are screening tools, universal screening, and data points to verify risk. The screening tools indicator was assigned a quality measure of 3. The evidence from the data indicated that the tools used for screening were reliable; there was a strong correlation between the value outcomes and

the instruments; and there was accuracy with the risk status predictions. However, the supporting evidence was unable to be articulated by the staff. All staff members were able to offer information in relation to the tools used to screen students including MAP, SCREADY, and SCPASS assessments. After examining the archived data and speaking with the academic facilitator, the researcher was told,

> Math and [English/Language Arts] ELA teachers are very familiar with MAP assessment data and its implications on instruction and student achievement. [Social Studies] SS and Science teachers understand its importance and use content bands to influence instruction (ex. Probability and statistics, information text). (Personal communication, January 12, 2018)

The universal screening indicator was assigned a quality measure of 5. All the conditions were met for screening all students, implementation accuracy, and the process of screening. The academic facilitator (personal communication, January 12, 2018) also shared, "The district coordinator contacts the instructional coach (IC) to inform her that the MAP window is open. At that time the IC assigns students to assessments. The day of assessment the IC or other proctors administer the test." On the days leading up to MAP testing, the academic facilitator sent emails to the staff with specific information including a script, room assignments for students with testing accommodations, and specific codes for students to log in to the tests. A quality measure of 5 was also assigned to data points to verify risk. Two other data sources were being used with screening data to verify risk decisions for students, the SC READY and SCPASS tests.

> With the adoption of the new SC ELA and math standardized assessment (SC READY), MAP is no longer strictly [in] alignment. Results on MAP are not truly indicative of results on SCREADY. Nevertheless, MAP is still used to guide

> instruction and can be used to determine student growth. (Personal communication, January 12, 2018)

The state mandates the administration of the SC READY assessments in the areas of English language arts and mathematics for third through eighth graders. Additionally, the SCPASS science assessments are administered to fourth, sixth, and eighth graders; and the SCPASS social studies assessments are administered to fifth and seventh graders (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018).

The indicators for the progress monitoring component are progress-monitoring tools and progress-monitoring process. The progress monitoring tools indicator was assigned a quality measure of 3, because it only met three of the four criteria. The rubric indicated that in order to score a quality measure of 3, two or three of the criteria should be met. There were a sufficient number of equally controlled difficulty levels of alternate forms at intervals that are recommended on the different intervention levels, there was a minimum growth specification, and minimums for benchmarks and performance for the end of the year were provided; however, the data indicated that information pertaining to validity and reliability for the performance level score was unavailable from the vendor.

A quality measure of 5 was provided for the progress-monitoring process indicator. Progress monitoring for interventions at the secondary level occurred at least monthly and for intensive intervention at least weekly. In addition, implementation accuracy procedures were in place. The data and information from the staff indicated that the math intervention class did not have a formal program to use but did conduct progress monitoring.

Based on previous research conducted in the development of this rubric, the overall score of 4.2 for the area of assessments indicates adequate fidelity has been

reached. Specific recommendations to improve this score are discussed in Chapter 5.

Data-Based Decision-Making

To answer Research Question 2, "To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned," the researcher assigned an overall average quality measure average of 4.3. The data that were analyzed included PLC meetings, team meetings, staff meetings, and focus group responses. The indicators for the data-based decision-making component are decision-making process, data system, and responsiveness to secondary and intensive levels of intervention. An illustration of these data is in Table 12.

Table 12

Fidelity of Implementation Findings for Research Question 2

Component	Indicator	Quality Measure Score
Data-based decision-making processes are used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification (in accordance with state law).	Decision-Making Process	3
	Data System	5
	Responsiveness to Secondary and Intensive Levels of Intervention	5
	Overall Average Score	4.3

The researcher assigned a quality measure of 3 for the decision-making process indicator. Only two criteria were met for decision-making mechanisms including mechanisms are based on validated methods and they have established, clear, and operationalized decision rules; however, these mechanisms do not involve a broad base of stakeholders. According to the archived data from the team meeting minutes across

grade levels, teachers discussed student concerns during the meetings and documented those on the team minutes form. A copy of this form can be found in Appendix F. The students were usually not involved in the team meetings. The RTI Action Network (n.d.a) stated that stakeholders include "general and special education personnel, support and administrative personnel, families, and students" (Supportive Contexts section, para. 9).

Both the data system and the responsiveness to secondary and intensive levels of intervention indicators received a quality measure of 5. The data system met four criteria including instructional decisions and documentation and accessibility of individual student-level data, timely data entry, graphic representations capability, setting, and evaluating goals process. The district used a learning management system, Canvas, where student academic data were kept. Teachers were also able to input progress monitoring scores to keep all stakeholders informed. MAP screening data were stored in the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) website and could be manipulated and sorted as needed. From PLC and staff meeting minutes, the researcher reviewed conversations and a training on the new online program, Enrich. The program was introduced during the 2017-2018 school year and stored student SCREADY and SCPASS data that can be used to inform instruction. When the researcher asked whether there was a plan in place for evaluation, the response was,

> I think when we talk about the Tiers, we're always Progress Monitoring as we go back and look at that data, I think that would be more of our evaluation versus some official long drawn out process. We're always going back looking at the data we've received and collected before we implement another intervention. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 11, 2018)

The staff frequently utilized the RTI Pyramid to make decisions about the interventions needed for student success. The team of teachers provide information and include data during team meetings to help the RTI team determine movement within the RTI Pyramid.

For the responsiveness to secondary and intensive levels of intervention indicator, the school-based RTI decisions are based on valid and reliable progress-monitoring data that reflect improvement slope or goal progress and accurate implementation decision-making criteria. One of the focus group members (personal communication, January 12, 2018) shared that progress monitoring data are used through reading records:

> And, at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester we use the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment. We also use MAP data for placement and for growth measurement. Baseline performance is established through the district through MAP data. They look at students that have performed below the 35th percentile in the area of reading and language usage. And, that information is sent to us. From there we, I, do an additional screening of students because the intervention I use is leveled. So, I screen to establish groups for instruction. So, out of the students who are below the 35th percentile, there is also additional leveling using the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark.

The progress monitoring tools one of the remediation teachers used offered valid goal progress monitoring. This process helped to provide reliable data for the RTI team to make decisions regarding individual students.

As far as goal-setting method is concerned, one of the remediation specialists (personal communication, January 12, 2018) expressed that they use measurements:

> So, basically wherever the student starts, what we're expecting is growth. When we use our SLOs [Student Learning Objective] and GBEs [Goals-Based

> Evaluation Model], basically it's already set for growth for two levels. For example, when I put in my existing student groups for my GBE and SLO. Let's say a student is starting at instructional level Q. When you put that in, it's already expected that at the end of the semester that student will then be at S, which is two levels. So, that's the expectation. That's what we're looking for any way. That's the goal.

The electronic capabilities of the student learning objectives and goals-based evaluation models helped teachers because it allowed them to set goals for the students and then return to those goals to document whether they were met or whether further goals needed to be set.

> The researcher asked the special education teacher about her progress monitoring: For Math and Language Arts, this year I've been using IXL and I've been using the new reading support we have, the Achieve 3000, and there's another one I used in the 1st nine weeks, now I can't remember. But, those are the two main ones I've been using most of the time. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Many teachers at the school utilized the IXL in the general education classes, and the Achieve 3000 program was used primarily in the special education classes. According to the minutes from each of the three grade-level math PLC meetings, IXL was used to reinforce skills and offer students additional practice opportunities.

> The researcher asked about baseline data at the intensive intervention level: Well, there's some baseline tests that they take at the beginning of both of those programs that sets up where they need to begin. Achieve 3000 is probably even more sophisticated than IXL. It really breaks it down based on their initial

> reading assessment what their needs are and the lesson plans you need to use from there. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

The special education department researched programs they thought would benefit their students. A member of that department wrote a grant that was funded to pay for the school's subscription of Achieve 3000.

Based on previous research conducted in the development of this rubric, the overall score of 4.3 for the area of data-based decision-making indicates adequate fidelity has been reached. Specific recommendations to improve this score are discussed in Chapter 5.

Multilevel Instruction

To answer Research Question 3, "To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure," the researcher assigned a quality measure average of 4 for the primary-level instruction/core curriculum indicator, an average of 4.375 for the secondary-level intervention indicator, and a 4.875 average for the intensive intervention indicator. This yielded an average overall quality measure of 4.42 for the multilevel instruction component. The data that were analyzed included PLC, department, and district department meeting minutes; emails; unit plans; pacing guides; the school's RTI Pyramid; principal newsletters; and focus group responses. Table 13 shows these data.

Table 13

Fidelity of Implementation Findings for Research Question 3

Component	Indicator	Quality Measure Score
Primary-Level Instruction/Core Curriculum (Tier I)	Research-Based Curriculum Materials	2
	Articulation of Teaching and Learning (in and across grade levels)	5
	Differentiated Instruction	5
	Standards-Based	5
	Exceeding Benchmark	3
Secondary-Level Intervention (Tier II)	Evidence-Based Intervention	3
	Complements Core Instruction	5
	Instructional Characteristics	4.5
	Addition to Primary	5
Intensive Intervention—Individualized with a focus on the academic needs of students with disabilities and those significantly below grade level (Tier III)	Data-Based Interventions	5
	Adapted Based on Student Need	5
	Instructional Characteristics	4.5
	Relationship to Primary	5
	Overall Average Score	4.42

The indicators within the primary-level instruction/core curriculum component are research-based curriculum materials, articulation of teaching and learning (in and across grade levels), differentiated instruction, standards based, and exceeding benchmark. The research-based curriculum materials indicator was assigned a quality measure of 2; because according to the data and input, only some of the materials used for curriculum for the target population, including subgroups, are research based. During the PLC focus group, each participant gave input when the researcher asked them to describe primary level core curriculum materials.

> Like the materials we use with the students? In math, we use their computers, probably not as frequently as in the other content areas. But, they do

> predominantly quick checks, or sometimes they'll use remediation videos or some online practice. But, we also use a lot of manipulatives in class like double sided chips and we even use little army men for game pieces and do different activities. We use dice when we're talking about probability, decks of cards. We use a lot of foldables to do some guided notes with them. So those are some of the ones we use in math. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 11, 2018)

After examining the seventh- and eighth-grade math PLCs team meeting minutes and agendas complete in GoogleDocs, it was evident that the math teachers use the 1-to-1 computer initiative to their advantage and give quick checks through Canvas. The eighth-grade math PLCs organized a Resource Page for each unit of study for students to access links to videos and online practice, and the seventh-grade math teachers included links and online practice in the modules of their classes. Another focus group participant (personal communication, January 11, 2018) shared what another subject does:

> In language arts, we use our computers a lot. We rely on Canvas to give them the materials. Like, short stories that we pull from other locations, we use their textbook, which also has an online feature to pull short stories and articles. Their textbook also has a little workbook that comes along with it.

Another focus group participant (personal communication, January 11, 2018) added information about that subject area:

> The textbook also includes tutorials, which are amazing that we use with them to reteach standards, especially if it's one that they should have had before they came to us. They can go back and get some basics through that tutorial. USA Test Prep is another program we use to reinforce standards in class and video

clips.

The researcher reviewed the minutes of the three language arts PLCs, and it was confirmed that eighth-grade language arts students were assigned USA Test Prep assignments on a weekly basis. Another participant (personal communication, January 11, 2018) contributed to the question:

> In science, we use our textbook, which also has the online part of it which is really neat. It has virtual labs. So, if we don't have the materials or we want to enrich them or let them play with it more, we can look and do that online. And we also use the hands-on materials in class when we can.

To end the answers pertaining to the primary level core curriculum materials, a participant contributed, "For our labs, we do a lot of hands on, inquiry-based labs, the interactive textbook, laptops, and support documents. That's where we get most of our stuff from. We build it from there" (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 12, 2018). In addition to the textbook resources, the researcher reviewed the sixth-grade science PLC minutes; the information included continued district-wide Discovery Education science training, an online tool available for teachers.

The articulation of teaching and learning (in and across grade levels), differentiated instruction, and standards-based indicators all received a quality measure of 5. For the articulation of teaching and learning (in and across grade levels), the articulation of teaching and learning objectives exist across grade levels and within grade levels to ensure similar experiences for students regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned. From the PLC minutes, the researcher saw that teachers met at least weekly according to content PLCs to plan units together. All content areas in each grade level were expected to submit a completed unit plan to the instructional facilitator and grade

level administrator prior to teaching each unit. A copy of the PLC unit plan can be found in Appendix G. The key components of the unit plan include the unit title, instructional time frame, dates, link to unit syllabus, anticipated quiz and test dates, topics, teaching strategies, intervention/extension, resources/activities, additional inclusion strategies, data collection, and meeting guide and plan form.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, department chairpersons from all content areas from each school were emailed and invited to meet district-wide to establish essential standards for each course. During the development of essential standards, the content areas were able to have conversations surrounding vertical articulation during the monthly department meetings.

A quality measure of 5 was also given to differentiated instruction. The staff who participated in the focus groups were able to describe differentiation of instruction for most teachers in the school for students above, on, and below grade level; and were able to explain data usage to identify and address student needs for most teachers. One member of the PLC leaders' focus group (personal communication, January 12, 2018) stated,

> I feel like that has been a big push at our school for the past 2 or 3 years, especially. So, is everyone doing it? I don't know. I'm sure some contents and teachers are better at it than others. But, I think that's the major push for the school. I think each year we're trying to get a little bit better at it.

As the researcher inspected the academic team meeting minutes from teams 8-1, 8-3, 7-1, 7-2, 6-1, and 6-2, they indicated that most teachers provided differentiation during enrichment, especially for students who were not performing at a passing rate, according to the school's RTI Pyramid. Another focus group participant (personal communication,

January 12, 2018) shared,

> I would say in math, we probably do it at least twice a week. There are some units that lend themselves a little bit more to be able to it. Kinda depending on timing, and where we're at and what we need to get accomplished in a certain time period, we may use it more or less. But, I would say probably an average of 2 days a week.

The PLC unit plans reviewed by the researcher led to a focus on the addition inclusion strategies section and the intervention/extension section that was consistently completed on the unit plan document. Those sections included resources and activities for the teachers in those PLCs to use when students did not get what was being taught.

For the standards-based indicator that received a quality measure of 5 as well, there was alignment between the core curriculum and state standards. The state adopted the College- and Career-Ready Standards and began implementation during the 2015-2016 school year. Upon reviewing PLC unit plans, the researcher saw evidence that the eighth-grade math and language arts content PLCs; the seventh-grade math, social studies, and language arts content PLCs; and the sixth-grade science and language arts content PLCs aligned their plans to the state standards. Those standards were listed in the PLC unit plans, and the meeting minutes that were reviewed by the researcher indicated plans to follow the school expectation of posting those standards in student-friendly terms in each teacher's class daily.

The exceeding benchmark indicator was assigned a quality measure of 3. From the data and input, enrichment opportunities were provided to students who exceeded benchmarks; but those opportunities were not consistently implemented at all grade levels. Some teachers are better with implementing extension activities than others. One

of the school's goals was to focus more on students who score within the top 10% on the SCReady and SCPASS tests in order for them to experience growth.

The indicators for the secondary-level intervention component are evidence-based intervention, complements core instruction, instructional characteristics, and addition to primary. The evidence-based intervention indicator was assigned a quality measure of 3 because only some of the content area interventions on the secondary level were evidence based. During the focus group, the reading interventionist (personal communication, January 12, 2018) offered, "The district chose Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI).… But, now that we have the Leveled Literacy Intervention LLI, that was something-a district decision for Secondary Intervention. So now, all of the middle schools have the same reading intervention program."

The math interventionist (personal communication, January 12, 2018) added, "I don't know that we are the only math intervention, but I know we don't have a true math intervention program." It was shared during the remediation specialists' focus group and during the principal interview that there is not a district-wide program for math intervention and that it only takes place on the school level.

The complements core instruction indicator received a quality measure of 5 because instructional characteristics and addition to primary indicators both received a quality measure of 5. The core instruction and secondary-level interventions were well aligned and infused foundational skills that supported learning objectives. The math interventionist (personal communication, January 12, 2018) stated, "We use the state standards. So it's aligned with the state standards and what the teachers are teaching in their classroom." The math interventionist attended monthly math department meetings, according to the attendance record from math department meeting minutes the researcher

examined. The meeting minutes indicated a focus was placed on lesson alignment to state standards and pacing guides, with special attention placed on essential standards for remediation specialists.

The reading interventionist (personal communication, January 12, 2018) shared thorough facts in the areas of alignment and infusion:

> Because I'm literacy intervention, honestly the students are below the level of what they would be doing in their current class. But, the literacy targets are the same. For example, even within the program itself. Even, Level Q or Level S. The gradient wheel or the wheel of instruction or the targets are still the same. So the level is just what's least frustrating for the student. So, the skill itself aligns with the expectation in the general ed setting. But, I'm not teaching what the Language Arts teacher is teaching explicitly. Basically I'm building a foundation or kinda bridging the gap between their understanding of what the teacher is doing in the classroom. So, I'm not a language arts teacher. I am reading intervention. So, we're looking at comprehension, vocabulary, to me almost the things that the general ed teacher doesn't have time so to speak, to do. So, that's pretty much it. So I don't have standards. What I have are the targets specific for reading intervention. You know, what does this student need most? I'm also building on those gaps that they have.

The instructional characteristics indicator received a quality measure of 4.5 because there were standard interventions and research-based optimal group sizes and dosages for the students' ages and needs, but only the reading interventionist was trained according to requirements from the developer. The reading interventionist (personal communication, January 12, 2018) contributed to the focus group:

> I can speak for me. This is my area. I do have the educational background and the experience and trained by the district and also trained by Fountas and Pinnell. All of the middle school interventionists went to the Fountas and Pinnell conference in Chicago. So, we directly heard from Fountas and Pinnell-this is how to use our program. This is what our program is. So, we've gone through that and then further with our district and the reading interventionists in our district, we meet monthly. And what the district personnel has done now is also giving us some extra training with reading recovery teachers as well, and then just some other things they do on the elementary level. As far as all the other district interventionists I think one other has a Masters in Reading and Literacy. But, specific to our school, my answer for me for Reading Intervention is yes. For SPED, of course, yes. All of those people are certified to teach special education. For ESOL, I do know that person is ESL certified, so in that area. But, as far as math, I'm not sure.

It was stated, "Math, I have education background and I've taught all levels. I'm working on specifically math stuff not only to help me build those gaps for them, but finding ways to help them. If that makes any sense" (personal communication, January 12, 2018). Based on the school's Pyramid of Interventions the researcher studied, students placed in the remediation specialist classes were those who were struggling learners who had attempted mastery of essential standards in the core instruction classes but failed twice.

For the addition to primary indicator, the core instruction was supplemented by secondary-level interventions. Both of the interventionists agreed that their classes served as supplements to the core content classes.

The indicators for the intensive intervention component are data-based interventions, adapted based on student need, instructional characteristics, and relationship to primary. The data-based interventions and adapted based on student need indicators both received a quality measure of 5 because intensive interventions were based on student data, addressed student needs in several ways, and were more intensive than secondary interventions. During the interview, the special education teacher (personal communication, February 3, 2018) was asked about individualizing instruction and offered the following:

> I would have to consider what strand we're working on, then see what maybe some leadups to that would be and then bump them back to those types of lessons to build back up to what we're really doing. Because I always want to like supplement class, too. Because, I mean, they have deficits for sure and we're working on those. But, I'm trying to close the gap so that they don't feel like they have such deficits in the room every day. Because, you know, the esteem is just so low and I'm trying to let them see things that I know they're gonna see in the room. I'm trying to think of like an example of that. So, like, when we're talking about author's purpose and why an author writes things that they write. Then, we can bump back if they don't understand like to opinions and things like that to help build to the other.

Students were placed in academic support class if the data from their universal screening and/or individualized education plan (IEP) indicated the necessity of addition services. The special education teachers utilized Achieve 3000 as an intensive intervention tool. That tool allowed the teachers to individualize instruction for students at the level and in the area(s) in which they struggled.

The instructional characteristics indicator was given a quality measure of 4.5, because there was individualized intervention and the intensive intervention staff was well trained and the individualized instruction they provided was based on student data; but there was a group where the research-based optimal group sizes and dosages exceeded that suggested for the students' ages and needs. In the area of training, the special education teacher (personal communication, February 3, 2018) shared, "Everybody's Special Education certified and we have a mixture of a couple people having some core subject certifications, as well. But, mostly, across the board, it's Special Education certified." According to the initial principal newsletter and the staffing positions listed on the school's website, there were five special education teachers in the department. One intensive instruction teacher was assigned to each of the three grade levels; one teacher provided intensive instruction to all three grade levels. The other teacher provided instruction to students who received minimum inclusion services.

The Issues in Special Education Caseload (2000) summary examined the small number of studies that have been conducted pertaining to special education class size and concluded, "students with disabilities are likely to demonstrate gains when class size is smaller" (p. 2). "Based on their findings, some researchers have concluded that a class size of five to eight students would be considered 'optimal,' dependent upon the students' specific needs" (Issues in Special Education Caseload, 2000, p. 2).

The researcher asked whether group size was optimal (according to the research) for the age and needs of the students while conducting the special education teacher (personal communication, January 12, 2018) interview:

> I feel like mine does. I don't know that I can say, 'Yes' for everybody. I think some of our intensive groups, [exceptional services] groups are large and across

> grade levels and that's unfortunate. Some of that cross-grade level thing is not too big of a deal, but when you get to be as many students in there at one time it's probably not effective. Her largest from what I can count. I try to keep tabs on it in Powerschool looks to be like about 40 minutes of like 18. Where the schedule is such that eventually it all blends. Like, she may have 15 minutes with 6th graders, then a few 7th grades pop in and eventually 8th graders are in there and then they're all in there for the last 40 or whatever. It's a good bit. It's more than it should be. But, my Academic Support has stayed small all year and I selected those students based on their Reading levels to be in there at one time together. I mean we cover math, too. But, I wanted their Reading levels to be similar because it just makes more sense. And, with our limited time, it makes Reading instruction a lot easier.

What Works Clearinghouse (2018) convened a panel and made suggestions for best practices in the Tier 3 process of the RTI program. The suggestions included a creation of "double dose" (What Works Clearinghouse, 2018, How to carry out this recommendation, para. 4). "Rather than more of the same, a double dose of instruction means a teacher might introduce skills during the first session and then re-teach with added practice during the second" (What Works Clearinghouse, 2018, How to carry out this recommendation para. 3).

The researcher asked for a description of a student experiencing intensive intervention; it was offered,

> So, like regular Academic Support? Usually they're three or more grade levels below in Reading. Typically, LD students are-typically-they're higher in math than they are in Reading. But still the math, you know, all the content areas are a

> struggle. They can't read on grade level. They usually have to have things read to them as part of their accommodations. We usually use, of course we use calculators a lot in math now any way, but they have to use calculators now for basic computation as well. But, many of them-even in Academic Support-you know many of them have a C or better in most of their classes with the accommodations in place. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

According to scheduling, these students were mainstreamed into the regular classrooms. The special education teachers' team taught with the regular education teachers throughout the day. The scheduling was such that all students who received services were divided between two of the four-person core teams on each grade level. There was one special education teacher assigned to each grade level whose schedule allowed for them to provide services in language arts and math classes.

The relationship to primary indicator received a quality measure of 5 because student participation in intensive intervention and core instruction were based on student need and on a case-by-case basis, and the general education curriculum was addressed in intensive interventions appropriately. The researcher asked whether intensive intervention was always implemented as supplements to the core curriculum. The special education teacher (personal communication, February 3, 2018) added,

> Yes. So, all the ones that are in Academic Support, all the interventions we are doing are considered supplementary to the core curriculum. [The exceptional services teacher's] situation would be the only one that is considered to be in place of. In that model even still it's supposed to be still exposure to the core curriculum. But, brought down.

Each academic support teacher focused on the essential standards of each subject area and worked with individual students to achieve mastery. Students were instructed on their current level and were expected to experience growth over time.

The researcher asked the special education teacher about how the decision is made to determine if a student receiving intensive intervention should remain in primary-level instruction:

> We try to use at least three different data collection sources. You know, you can't just go by MAPs for example … So, we have at least three and then supposed to be a gathering of the data collection and then a discussion with the team to decide if it would be appropriate to come out of regular ed for one or both of those periods. So, MAP is one. We've got all the Fountas and Pennell kits that we can do reading level assessments to see what that comes out as because that will give you a grade level equivalent … But, we do have another sort of screening device that we can use called the Brigance. And that will give us grade equivalence and age equivalence. And, we try to collect as much as we can from the regular teacher because that's the telling thing. So work samples and evidence from the regular classroom as well. (personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Pierce and Jackson (2017) concurred that if multiple screening avenues occur, "schools can identify who is at risk, who remains at risk despite instruction or intervention, and who is no longer at risk" (p. 6). With the various forms of assessments that were available for administration at the middle school, the data provided allowed for teachers to determine placement for those students.

In reference to meaningful connections, the special education teacher added,

> Stay in contact with the teachers about what they're seeing, about what the

> student is needing extra intervention with. Open dialogue at this age with the student themselves. What's going on in Canvas. It's just, the more you know about what's going on in the classroom, the more appropriate intervention you can provide. (Personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Based on previous research conducted in the development of this rubric, the overall score of 4.42 for the area of multilevel instruction indicates adequate fidelity has been reached. Specific recommendations to improve this score will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms

To answer Research Question 4, "To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system," the researcher assigned an overall average quality measure of 4.3 The indicators for the infrastructure and support mechanisms include prevention focus, leadership personnel, school-based professional development, schedules, resources, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, communications with and involvement of parents, communication with and involvement of all staff, and RTI teams. The data that were analyzed included team minutes; PLC, grade-level, and staff meeting minutes; the school's RTI pyramid; the school's master schedule; and focus group responses. An illustration of these data is in Table 14.

Table 14

Fidelity of Implementation Findings for Research Question 4

Component	Indicator	Quality Measure Score
Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms—Knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system to meet the established goals.	Prevention Focus	5
	Leadership Personnel	3
	School-Based Professional Development	5
	Schedules	5
	Resources	3
	Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness	3
	Communications with and Involvement of Parents	5
	Communication with and Involvement of All Staff	5
	RTI Teams	5
	Overall Average Score	4.3

A quality measure of 5 was assigned to the prevention focus indicator because the data and input indicated there was an understanding of the RTI framework by all the staff as one that prevents academic problems for all students. One of the members of the PLC focus group (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 11, 2018) volunteered, "I think that's the large push. I think we neglect the higher end of pushing students forward and we focus on the kids who are falling behind." The researcher asked what portion of the teaching staff viewed RTI as primarily a means for special education identification; a member of the PLC focus group (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 11, 2018) added,

> I think there's so many places we go before we get there. I don't think hardly anyone would view it as a way to place them. You've done your Tiers 1-3, tried all of these interventions. You've had other people help. Like, I have students who have gone to our Instructional Specialist and she will work with some during

Enrichment. There are other things that we've tried and kinda exhausted all efforts before testing or suggestion of special ed or that whole process is started.

The school's RTI Pyramid indicated various intervention suggestions as students progress throughout the three tiers. As the researcher reviewed the staff meeting minutes, the media specialist and the instructional facilitator both had a group of students they instructed during the enrichment period every day. Another member of that focus group (personal communication, January 11, 2018) said, "I think a lot of us use the RTI process here, but we don't go into it looking at it as to say this child is under that umbrella."

The leadership personnel indicator was given a quality measure of 3. There appeared to be some inconsistencies between the decisions and actions of the district leaders and the school leaders to the point that the staff described the district office as being somewhat supportive of the RTI framework and its essential components. The focus group participants and those interviewed also voiced that the district-level support for the implementation of the RTI program is not clearly evident. One member of the administrator's focus group (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 11, 2018) stated, when referencing district administrators, "They really don't have much input." It is important to note that the information pertaining to the RTI coordinator offered by the administrators' focus group and from the principal differed in one particular area. It could have been attributed to the fact that the academic facilitator had only served in her role for approximately six months prior to the study and was not aware of all the requirements for the position and/or the subtitles of her position. The principal indicated that the academic facilitator served as the RTI coordinator for the majority of the time. In stark contrast to what the principal stated, the administrators' focus group insisted that the school did not have an RTI coordinator but could use one.

The school-based professional development indicator received a quality measure of 5 because the professional development at the school level appeared to be structured and institutionalized in an effort to involve all teachers in continuous examination, reflection, and improvement of instruction; decision-making that is data based; and intervention delivery. The researcher reviewed the agenda for a staff meeting held at the beginning of the school year where the principal gave a refresher of the RTI pyramid for returning teachers and introduced the RTI program to new staff members. The pyramid was placed in the Canvas course for the staff to review at any time. The team minutes form that each team PLC used for their weekly meetings had a section labeled Conversations about RTI (Student, Interventions, Plan). In this section, the teams were able to identify the student(s) as a struggling learner and identify their grade, as an intentional failed learner and indicate their number of missing assignments, as having behavioral concerns and listing the behavior, and as having attendance issues and indicating the number of missing class sessions; in addition to an area for a list of referred interventions.

The schedules indicator received a quality measure of 5 because school-wide schedules were aligned to support multiple levels of intervention based on student need, and adequate additional time was built in for interventions. The researcher reviewed the master schedule, particularly the schedule for the interventionists and special education teachers who operate on the related arts teachers' schedules. Those students who received secondary and intensive intervention do so as an elective class. Some of the students were serviced during enrichment, the first 45 minutes of the day.

The resources indicator attained a quality measure of 3 due to the input that there was a partial allocation of resources for the implementation of RTI. A few of the

members of the focus groups indicated they needed more resources and additional staffing to meet the needs of their students as it relates to RTI. Those resources included extra personnel, additional classroom materials and manipulatives, and extended time to plan.

A quality measure of 3 was assigned to the cultural and linguistic responsiveness as information and factors were articulated by the staff during the adoption of intervention programs, assessments, and instructional practices that are relevant to linguistics; but many were unsure of the cultural responsiveness. One of the members of the PLC leaders' focus group (personal communication, January 12, 2018) shared,

> Thinking of our ESOL [English to Speakers of Other Languages] population, we have an ESOL teacher who works with that population of students and works with the teachers to modify what needs to be modified to make it more fair for those students. Culturally, I'm not sure. Linguistically, like the actual language, it's different.

Each of the three grade levels has one of the three teams that focus on ESOL. Those students in the program are placed on a team where those teachers are trained by the ESOL teachers; implement specific strategies to help them learn; and write their objectives in student friendly terms that focus on writing, speaking, and reading. Another member of that focus group (personal communication, January 12, 2018) contributed,

> Linguistically, like we work with [the ESOL teacher]. We have ESOL on our team and we have a student who speaks Chinese and students who speak Spanish. So, we have taught them, the students, to be more responsible as far as using Google Translate and making sure they have things that are in their language

> because my Chinese speaking student is unbelievable in math. And so I have to make sure that if there are word problems on their test or quiz, I type them into Google Translate, I copy and put it in a little word document, and print it for her, and she's doing awesome. So that is the only drawback is that she can't read the language. But, when it's in her language she does awesome. But, I agree with [another member of the focus group]. Culture, I don't know. We do ESOL night and they've done some International stuff in the past, but I don't know.

Also, communication with and involvement of parents, communication with and involvement of all staff, and RTI teams all received a quality measure of 5. The RTI essential components were shared with parents, a mechanism was in place to update parents of student progress of those involved in interventions at the secondary and intensive levels, and decision-making as it pertains to student progress of intensive intervention students included parents. The researcher asked the members of the administrators' focus group whether parents are knowledgeable about the RTI framework in the school and was told, "To some extent. Probably as much as teachers are. I imagine they know of the Interventions in our RTI process, but, they probably aren't if they were asked" (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 11, 2018). During parent conferences, teachers share interventions with parents that have been implemented to help the students and their response(s) to those interventions. When the focus group was asked to describe how they communicate with parents about RTI and student performance, one member (personal communication, January 11, 2018) contributed,

> I think anytime they need one of the interventions, there's contact made with the parents. Again, I'm not sure if the conversation is part of our RTI process, they're

> receiving the support. They're receiving the interventions, teachers document those interventions, parents are contacted when needed and made a part of it.
>
> When we get to the point that we have RTI meetings, if we have to put somebody in another level like a Digital Literacy class or a Math in Motion class, parents are contacted, letters are mailed home. So they are involved.

The remediation specialists were asked how about parental involvement in decision-making regarding the participation of their child in secondary-level or intensive intervention:

> For LLI, all parents are sent a letter. So, we have had parents who don't want their students in it. You know who say, "No.". But, for the most part, we have parents who say, "Yes." But, we do have parents who say, "No" or "I thought my child could read," just different things like that. So you communicate with them through the letter. They do get progress reports just like everyone else. This is the first time I've had Enrichment. So, Enrichment time for intervention is a little off because anytime something is happening, I lose instructional time. So the communication for that class period is a little different because they are not where everyone is. So, they started later. All kinds of things. But, in general, the parents do receive a letter initially to decide whether or not they want their child to do it. And surprisingly, some parents say they don't and they also get the progress reports the same way that the general ed teachers do. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 12, 2008)

The members of the focus group also shared that those parents were informed of the progress of their children through progress reports.

The communication with and involvement of all staff indicator received a quality

measure of 5. Staff received descriptive information about the RTI essential components and data-based decision-making; there is a systematic process to relay information to staff; and there was frequent collaboration of teacher teams. The researcher found that the staff was informed of data-based decision-making through the systematic weekly professional development training and team meetings with their grade-level administrators. During several of the weekly professional development trainings, state and local assessment data were shared, and staff was trained on ways to disaggregate the data within the data management website. During the weekly meetings, grade-level administrators shared information from the leadership team meetings and allowed for teachers to offer information about students they share, emphasizing ways to reach all students.

RTI teams received a quality measure of 5. All key stakeholders were a part of the RTI team, decision-making was guided by clear processes and structures, and teams were able to meet regularly because time was scheduled for that purpose. A member of the administrators' focus group (personal communication, January 11, 2018) clarified their understanding of the RTI team by saying, "The RTI team varies by who is interacts with the child, by who's the stakeholder with that child. So, I guess it varies by grade level and team." There was a structure and processes to guide decision-making through the RTI section of the team meeting minutes form that teachers completed weekly. Those minutes were reviewed by administrators, the academic facilitator, and counselors who followed up with support and assistance.

Based on previous research conducted in the development of this rubric, the overall score of 4.3 for the area of infrastructure and support mechanisms indicates adequate fidelity has been reached. Specific recommendations to improve this score are

discussed in Chapter 5.

Fidelity and Evaluation

To answer Research Question 5, "To what extent does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model," the researcher assigned an overall average quality measure of 4.5. The data that were analyzed included focus group responses. The indicators for the fidelity and evaluation component are fidelity and evaluation. An illustration of these data is found in Table 15.

Table 15

Fidelity of Implementation Findings for Research Question 5

Component	Indicator	Quality Measure Score
Fidelity and Evaluation—System for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model.	Fidelity	5
	Evaluation	4
	Overall Average Score	4.5

For the Fidelity indicator, a quality measure of 5 was given. Procedures were designed for fidelity of implementation monitoring of the core curriculum, secondary intervention, and intensive intervention levels. Also, there were procedures for the monitoring of assessment administration and analysis. When the researcher asked the administrators' focus group about whether monitoring procedures were in place, it was said,

> Yep. We do observations, we go to department meetings, I go to PLC, administrators go to PLCs. Counselors meet with PLCs if there's a concern. We'll talk to the teachers and some of those concerns are even addressed in parent conferences. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January

12, 2018)

They shared that meetings are held with remediation specialists monthly to review data. Also,

> Those are discussed in those monthly meetings and our ESOL teacher also meets with the District Specialist on a monthly basis. And we've also had District meetings with people about those students scoring below the 35th percentile and what we're doing with those students. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 5, 2018).

This group shared that everybody is involved in monitoring the fidelity of implementation. When asked whether the evidence indicated that instruction, interventions, assessments, and decisions are implemented with fidelity, the researcher was told by one member, "I think that we're on our way, but the laser focus that we should identify-I think that's still not down packed" (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 12, 2018).

A quality measure of 4 was assigned to evaluation because only two of the four conditions were met. There existed a plan of evaluation for short- and long-term goal monitoring and fidelity, and efficacy monitoring took place for the RTI framework's implementation data; but there was not an evaluation plan for the monitoring of short- and long-term goals. Also, there was not a definitive evaluation of the RTI framework's effectiveness through student data review of all students and subgroups using the essential components. When asked about RTI evaluation, a member of the administrators' focus group shared,

> I think when we talk about the Tiers, we're always Progress Monitoring as we go back and look at that data, I think that would be more of our evaluation versus

> some official long drawn out process. We're always going back looking at the data we've received and collected before we implement another intervention. (Focus Group Participant, personal communication, January 12, 2018)

The researcher was able to review a plan of a student who moved through the tiers. After being identified as being within the lowest 25th percentile on the MAP testing the previous year, the student was placed in math remediation class. Unfortunately, his behavior was a major factor in his academic performance; therefore, he was exited from the math remediation class after having performed at the same level in his core math class and in the math remediation class. He was then placed on a behavior plan to attempt to get the behavior controlled first.

Based on previous research conducted in the development of this rubric, the overall score of 4.5 for the area of fidelity and evaluation indicates adequate fidelity has been reached. Specific recommendations to improve this score are discussed in Chapter 5.

Conclusions

This qualitative study examined the RTI program at a suburban middle school to determine whether the program was implemented with fidelity during the first semester of the 2017-2018 school year. Each of the five RTI essential components received a quality measure of 4 or greater after gathering and analyzing the archived data and input from the principal and special education teacher interviews and focus groups. In the final chapter, the researcher interprets the meaning of the findings and their implications and details limitations. Additionally, recommendations are made and suggestions for further study are included.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine whether a suburban middle school in upstate South Carolina is implementing the RTI process with fidelity. Information was gathered through archived data, a principal interview, and three focus groups. This study was guided by an overall research question: How effectively is the RTI process being implemented at this middle school? To more effectively address this issue, the overall question was broken into the following research questions.

1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?
5. To what extent does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model?

Interpretation of Findings

After gathering and analyzing data for the RTI essential components, the

researcher used the guide developed by the team who conducted the study in Milwaukee in order to draw conclusions about the fidelity of implementation. This guide included cut scores recommended by the National Center on Response to Intervention ("Measuring," 2016). The quality measures for each of the RTI essential components fell in the adequate fidelity scale, between 3.5 and 4.99.

Implications

Based on the fidelity scale, the school appears to be well on its way to full fidelity status with an overall quality measure average of 4.34 after only 1 full year of implementation. With continued support from the district in the areas of fiscal and personnel resources and dedication and hard work from the staff, full fidelity is in reach. Hall and Hord (2015) suggested that a change process takes from 3-5 years to fully implement.

In order to reach full fidelity, a few improvements need to be made, according to the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric. The indicators from the rubric that had scores less than a quality measure of 5 for this middle school have suggestions that, if implemented, would increase the quality measure to a 5. Each component had at least one indicator that could be improved.

For the assessments component and to address Research Question 1, staff needs to be able to articulate the supporting evidence that screening tools are reliable, if correlations exist between the instruments and valued outcomes, and whether predictions can be made in the area of risk status. Additionally, the performance-level score's reliability and validity information needs to be readily available. "Although commercially published assessment systems provide data compilations that make analysis easier, it is important that RTI team members and the staff working directly with

students get the support they need to collect, analyze, and use RTI-related data" (Pierce & Jackson, 2017, p. 6).

For the data-based decision-making component and to address Research Question 2, the decision-making process needs to involve a broad base of stakeholders. Pierce and Jackson (2017) mentioned three key strategies to establish buy-in: including success story sharing, stakeholder roles clarification within RTI, and RTI team creation. With success story sharing, leaders at the district level are able to support schools and parents when they share how data analysis is more targeted (Pierce & Jackson, 2017). Teachers share ways they are able to help students who struggle by learning new strategies (Pierce & Jackson, 2017). Also, parents are able to participate in the educational process when they share ways the RTI framework assists in their children's success (Pierce & Jackson, 2017). Professional development can help with stakeholder roles clarification because members of the staff need to know what their roles consist of, why they were chosen for the roles, how they will be assessed, who is responsible for secondary and intensive interventions, and how future steps will be determined (Pierce & Jackson, 2017). Pierce and Jackson shared the fact that schools that have experienced success with RTI began planning at least 1 year prior to implementation to thoroughly explain upcoming changes to stakeholders. Last, it was suggested by Pierce and Jackson that the RTI consist of several other stakeholders in addition to the principal and other administrators, including

> Major curriculum staff-math, language arts, science, and art teachers;
>
> Staff with intervention expertise, such as school psychologists, speech and language therapists, and coaches;
>
> General education and special education teachers who work with students across all grade levels; and

Support staff (e.g., paraeducators). (p. 4)

For the multilevel instruction component and to address Research Question 3, all core curricular materials should be research based for the target population of learners, including subgroups. Second, teachers need to consistently implement opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks at all grade levels. Also, all secondary-level interventions should be evidence based in content areas and grade levels, where they are available.

For the infrastructure and support mechanisms component and to address Research Question 4, decisions and actions by district leaders should proactively support the essential components of the RTI framework at the school and help make the RTI framework more effective with support for the RTI implementation set as a high priority. According to Pierce and Jackson (2017), "When principals, teachers, and other leaders make RTI a priority, have an articulated goal for improved student learning, and speak clearly about the need for and the promise of RTI for the students, teachers and staff get on board" (p. 2). Effective change involves all stakeholders from the district office to teachers in the classroom. From the focus group discussions and interviews, it was apparent there is buy-in at the school level. The researcher shared the same sentiments as Hall and Hord (2015), "although the 'bottom' may be able to launch and sustain an innovative effort for several years, if higher level decision makers do not engage in ongoing active support, it is more than likely that the change effort will cease" (p. 16). In addition, resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.

Finally, for the fidelity and evaluation component and to address Research Question 5, an evaluation plan needs to be in place to monitor short- and long-term goals.

Pierce and Jackson (2017) shared, “Fidelity of RTI, or the skillful adherence to the model, allows educators to better understand if all essential components of RTI are being used and the degree to which those components were effective or ineffective (p. 9).

The researcher prioritized the areas for improvement based on the areas that would positively affect student achievement for all. Table 16 shows the researcher’s prioritization of the areas for improvement.

Table 16

Prioritization of Areas of Improvement

Rank	Area of Improvement
1	All core curriculum materials should be research-based for the target population of learners.
2	All secondary-level interventions should be evidence-based in content areas and grade levels where they are available.
3	Teachers need to consistently implement opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks at all grade levels.
4	Decisions and actions by district leaders should proactively support the essential components of the RTI framework at the school and help make the RTI framework more effective with support for the RTI implementation set as a high priority.
5	Resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
6	The decision-making process needs to involve a broad base of stakeholders.
7	An evaluation plan needs to be in place to monitor short- and long-term goals.
8	The performance-level score’s reliability and validity information needs to be readily available.
9	Staff needs to be able to articulate the supporting evidence that screening tools are reliable, of correlations between the instruments and valued outcomes, and of predictions of risk status.

The number one area for improvement was all core curriculum materials should

be research based for the target population of learners. The Iris Center (2014) argued that research-based practice means that there are studies that have shown outcomes where students experienced positive effects, there was improvement student or child outcomes as a result of the practice, and/or a number of studies have taken place.

The researcher chose evidence-based, secondary-level interventions as the second priority for the middle school. What Works Clearinghouse (2018) suggested that evidence-based practices should include increased student outcomes, a design that could lead to the inference that the improvement of students is a result of the practice, and that several studies of increased quality have taken place.

There are several benefits for both teachers and students when research-based, secondary-level interventions are used. A few that were listed by The Iris Center (2014) are

> An increased likelihood of positive child or student outcomes
>
> Increased accountability because there are data to back up the selection of a practice or program, which in turn facilitates support from administrators, parents, and others
>
> Less wasted time and fewer wasted resources because educators start off with an effective practice or program and are not forced to find one that works through trial and error
>
> An increased likelihood of being responsive to learners' needs
>
> A greater likelihood of convincing students to try it because there is evidence that it works. (p. 2)

There are three key components for implementing and integrating research-based and evidence-based practices with fidelity: adherence, exposure and duration, and quality

of delivery (The Iris Center, 2014). The programs and practices chosen should be followed in the manner in which they were intended, and every component should be implemented in the correct order (The Iris Center, 2014). The Iris Center (2014) also suggested that the programs and practices should also be implemented based on the recommended session length (number of minutes), duration (number of weeks), and frequency (weekly). Last, the programs and practices should be delivered using good teaching practices (The Iris Center, 2014). If the teachers at the middle school implement evidence-based and research-based, secondary-level interventions, there would be a better chance for all students to experience success in the classroom and on standardized tests.

The third priority area for the researcher was, "students who exceed benchmarks need to have consistent implementation opportunities across all grade levels." The input the researcher received from the focus groups and interviews indicated inconsistencies with providing enrichment opportunities to students who show mastery in content areas. Benjamin S. Bloom began the process of examining mastery learning and "suggested that although students vary widely in their learning rates and modalities, if teachers could provide the necessary time and appropriate learning conditions, nearly all students could reach a high level of achievement" (Guskey, 2010, How Mastery Learning Works section, para. 1). Guskey (2010) added, "Students engaged in enrichment activities gain valuable learning experiences without necessarily moving ahead in the instructional sequence" (Enrichment or Extension Activities section, para. 2) and allow teachers to work with students in Tier 2 without having to introduce new material to students who have exhibited mastery and remediate other students concurrently.

Limitations

Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2011) shared that methodology, budget, and politics are important evaluation limitations. Interestingly enough, the researcher encountered issues attempting to schedule everyone for the planned focus groups.

The original attendees for the administrators' focus group were anticipated to include an assistant principal, a counselor, the instructional facilitator, and the school psychologist. There arose an emergency meeting with another faculty member and the assistant principal who had agreed to participate; therefore, the assistant principal was unable to take part in the administrators' focus group.

Likewise, the PLC leaders' focus group was expected to have two members of each grade level and two members from the related arts team. One of the members of the sixth grade had to back out on the day of the focus group because he was chosen to be the homebound teacher of a student, and the only day their schedules could match for the initial meeting was the afternoon of the focus group. To make matters a little more complicated, the researcher could not get a related arts teacher to volunteer. The few teachers who would usually be willing to help were busy planning concerts and exhibits.

Last, the master schedule did not allow for the special education teachers and the remediation specialists to meet at the same times during the day. Family obligations prevented them from meeting before or after school; therefore, the researcher conducted the focus group with only two remediation specialists. A separate interview was then held with a special education teacher.

Recommendations

During the focus groups, the researcher asked the participants the summary question, "Suppose you had one minute to talk to the superintendent about the RTI

program at the school. What would you say?" The overarching request was for additional resources, a full-time RTI coordinator position, allotment of additional planning time to fully implement individualized interventions in core instruction, and smaller class sizes. The recommendations from the focus group participants are detailed below in Table 17.

Table 17

Recommendations Made by Focus Group Members

Recommendation Number	Recommendation
1	More resources to help with the accountability of intervention implementation. Manpower is an important part of making some of the things happen.
2	Consistent resources to allow tracking of change over time. Flexibility of making the RTI program work within individual schools.
3	An RTI coordinator could be a full-time job. Maybe even have one to share schools. It is important for the interventions to be monitored consistently.
4	Time needs to be allocated to work with students individually.
5	An extra helping hand in the classrooms to help with individualized and small group instruction, especially with science labs.
6	If the school schedule was more fluid on the secondary level like the elementary school schedule, the remediation specialists would be able to serve more students.
7	More manipulatives could be provided to help with individualized learning.
8	It would be helpful to have a district-wide program for use with math intervention.
9	School visits to see how RTI should be implemented with full fidelity.
10	Class sizes need to be minimized.

The recommendations offered by the focus group and interview participants align with the researcher's fourth, fifth and seventh priorities. Recommendations 3, 8, and 10 align with the researcher's Priority 4: Decisions and actions by district leaders should proactively support the essential components of the RTI framework at the school and help make the RTI framework more effective with support for the RTI implementation set as a high priority. Recommendations 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9 align with the researcher's Priority 5: Resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation. Recommendation 2 aligns with the Researcher's Priority 7: An evaluation plan needs to be in place to monitor short- and long-term goals. Table 18 illustrates an alignment of the staff recommendations with the research questions.

Table 18

Recommendations Alignment to Research Questions

Research Question	Recommendation	Researcher Priority
1. To what extent are assessments, especially in the areas of screening, progress monitoring, and supporting assessments, used to inform data-based decision-making?		
2. To what extent are data-based decision-making processes used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification as far as state law is concerned?	Recommendation 9: School visits to see how RTI should be implemented with full fidelity.	Priority 5: Resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
	Recommendation 10: Class sizes need to be minimized.	Priority 4: Decisions and actions by district leaders should proactively support the essential components of the RTI framework at the school, and help make the RTI framework more effective with support for the RTI implementation set as a high priority.
3. To what extent does the RTI framework include a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure?		
4. To what extent are infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to meet the established goals, particularly knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system?	Recommendation 1: More resources to help with the accountability of intervention implementation. Manpower is an important part of making some of the things happen.	Priority 5: Resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
	Recommendation 2: Consistent resources to allow tracking of change over time. Flexibility of making the RTI program work within individual schools.	Priority 7: An evaluation plan needs to be in place to monitor short-and long-term goals.
	Recommendation 3: An RTI coordinator could be a full-time job. Maybe even have one to share schools. It is important for the interventions to be monitored consistently.	Priority 4: Decisions and actions by district leaders should proactively support the essential components of the RTI framework at the school and help make the RTI framework more effective with support for the RTI implementation set as a high priority.

(continued)

Research Question	Recommendation	Researcher Priority
	Recommendation 4: Time needs to be allocated to work with students individually.	Priority 5: Resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
	Recommendation 5: An extra helping hand in the classrooms to help with individualized and small group instruction, especially with science labs.	Priority 5: Resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
	Recommendation 6: If the school schedule was more fluid on the secondary level like the elementary school schedule, the remediation specialists would be able to serve more students.	Priority 5: Resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
	Recommendation 7**:** More manipulatives could be provided to help with individualized learning.	Priority 5: Resources, especially funds and programs, should be adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
	Recommendation 8: It would be helpful to have a district-wide program for use with math intervention.	Priority 4: Decisions and actions by district leaders should proactively support the essential components of the RTI framework at the school and help make the RTI framework more effective with support for the RTI implementation set as a high priority.
5. To what extent does a system exist for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model?		

Suggestions for Further Study

The researcher has two suggestions for further study that will offer a better idea of fidelity of implementation of the RTI program. One suggestion is that an evaluation be conducted after the researcher's prioritized areas of improvement have been approved and incorporated.

Another suggestion is to determine the correlation between fidelity of

implementation and student achievement since the inception of RTI at the middle school. Every intervention used should have a positive impact on students.

Conclusions

Although there is not a widely accepted evaluation tool for RTI implementation, the RTI Essential Components Worksheet served as a valid tool to use to gather data pertaining to RTI implementation. Additionally, the RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric provided a thorough depiction of the RTI program's implementation at the middle school in this study. It gave areas the school appeared to be strong in as well as areas that could be improved upon. Last, these tools took into account the necessity of the district personnel's role in RTI implementation on the school level and the impact it has on implementation success.

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Appendix A

RTI Essential Components Worksheet

Center on
RESPONSE to INTERVENTION
at American Institutes for Research

AIR

RTI Essential Components Worksheet

School: _____ District: _____ Date: _____

Person(s) Interviewed: _____

Interviewer(s): _____

Purpose:

The purpose of this worksheet is to provide a tool for collecting relevant information and for recording a school's rating on various items related to response to intervention (RTI) implementation. Descriptions of ratings for each item are provided on the RTI Essential Components Integrity Rubric (the Rubric).

Information about school-level implementation (Grades K–8) may be collected through interviews with school personnel and through observations and document review. After all of the information has been collected, use your notes and the Rubric to rate the school on each item. The Rubric provides a five-point rating scale and descriptions of practices that would score a 1, 3, or 5. Data collectors may assign the school a rating of 2 or 4 if the information collected suggests the school falls between the rubric descriptions. For example, if the reviewer judges a school to be performing at a level higher than the Rubric describes for a 3 rating but not quite at the level described for a 5, then the reviewer should rate the school as performing at a 4.

Assessments: Screening, progress monitoring, and other supporting assessments are used to inform data-based decision making.			
Item	**Sample Interview Questions**	**Comments/Remarks**	**Ratings**
Screening—*The RTI system accurately identifies students at risk of poor learning outcomes or challenging behaviors.*			
1. Screening Tools	What tools do you use for universal screening (probe across content areas)? How much attention was given to the vendor's evidence regarding the validity, reliability, and accuracy of the tools when selected? Does your school have documentation from the vendor that these tools have been shown to be valid, reliable, and accurate with subgroups in your school? Does staff understand how the tool is intended to be used? Can you or other staff provide evidence of the technical adequacy (i.e., reliability, validity, classification accuracy) of the tools?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification for rating
2. Universal Screening	Describe the process for conducting screening in your school. To what extent is this process consistently followed? Are all students screened? How many times during the school year are students screened? Do you use a well-defined cut score or decision point to identify students at risk? How do you ensure that administration of screening assessments follows the developer's guidelines?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
3. Data Points to Verify Risk	Do you review other information to help verify that the results of the initial screening are accurate before placing a student in secondary-level or intensive intervention? If so, what other types of assessment data do you use?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Progress Monitoring—*Ongoing and frequent monitoring of progress quantifies rates of improvement and informs instructional practice and the development of individualized programs. Measures are appropriate for the student's grade and/or skill level.*			
Item	**Sample Interview Questions**	**Comments/Remarks**	**Ratings**
Progress Monitoring Tools	What tools does your school use for progress monitoring (probe across content areas)? Did school or district staff consider the evidence from the vendor regarding the validity, reliability, and accuracy of the progress monitoring tool(s) when selecting it/them? Does your school have documentation from the vendor that the tool(s) have been shown to be valid, reliable, and accurate with subgroups in your school? Can staff articulate the evidence supporting the rigor of the tool(s)?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Progress Monitoring Process	Describe the process used for monitoring progress. How often is the progress of students in secondary level interventions monitored? How often is the progress of students in intensive intervention monitored? Does monitoring occur with sufficient frequency to show a trend in academic progress over time? How closely does administration of the progress monitoring tool(s) follow the developer's guidelines? To what extent is this process consistently followed?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Data-Based Decision-Making—***Data-based decision-making processes are used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification (in accordance with state law).***			
Item	**Sample Interview Questions**	**Comments/Remarks**	**Ratings**
Decision-Making Process	Describe how decisions are made to move students between tiers. Who is involved in decision making? What data are used to inform those decisions, and how are they used? What criteria and guidelines are used for making decisions? To what extent are the screening, progress monitoring, and other assessment data used to inform instruction at all tiers, including the core instruction?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Data System	Is there a system for collecting and organizing student academic data, screening data, progress monitoring data, and other forms of data? If so, please describe. Is the system used consistently across school staff? Are instructional decisions made about students tracked in the data system or through another method (including movement between tiers)?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Responsiveness to Secondary and Intensive Levels of Intervention	Describe how decisions about responsiveness to secondary-level interventions or intensive intervention are made. ▪ Are progress monitoring data used? ▪ How is baseline performance established? ▪ What goal setting method is used? (e.g., end-of-year benchmarks, rate of improvement, intra-individual framework? Are rates or norms provided by the vendor/developer? ▪ What decision rules are used? Are the criteria implemented accurately and consistently?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Multilevel Instruction*—*The RTI framework includes a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure. Commonly represented by the three-tiered triangle, multilevel instruction also is known as the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).

Item	Sample Interview Questions	Comments/Remarks	Ratings
Primary-Level Instruction/Core Curriculum (Tier I)			
Research-Based Curriculum Materials	Describe primary-level instruction (core curriculum) materials. What is the research base? When your school selected its core instructional materials, how much attention was paid to the research base?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Articulation of Teaching and Learning (in and across grade levels)	Describe the process that supports the articulation of teaching and learning from one grade to another. Describe the process that supports the articulation of teaching and learning among teachers in the same grade. How consistent is the learning experience among students in the same grade and subject with different teachers?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Differentiated Instruction	To what extent do teachers in this school use student assessment data and knowledge of student readiness, language, and culture to offer students in the same class different teaching and learning strategies to address student needs? How consistent is this effort among the teaching staff?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Standards-Based	To what extent is the core curriculum in reading and mathematics aligned to state standards? Are the instructional materials aligned to the standards? Are model or sample lessons and activities that demonstrate effective teaching of the standards available to teachers? Have teachers been trained in the content of the standards and in how to use that content within their lessons? Are teachers utilizing their training and aligning their instruction to these standards?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Exceeding Benchmark	Are programs and activities provided to enrich or augment the curriculum for students exceeding benchmarks? If so, please describe. Are any of these programs and activities available above and beyond the core instruction?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Secondary-Level Intervention **(Tier II)**			
Evidence-Based Intervention	What program(s) does your school use for secondary-level intervention? How were these programs selected? Have these programs demonstrated efficacy with the target populations (e.g., has research shown that the interventions positively impact student achievement)?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Complements Core Instruction	How do instructors of secondary-level interventions ensure that the content they address is well aligned and complements the core instruction for each student?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Instructional Characteristics	Are the secondary level interventions always led by staff adequately trained to implement the interventions with fidelity? If not, who provides the secondary level intervention and what is their background? Are the secondary interventions always conducted with small groups of students? What is the maximum group size?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Addition to Primary	Are secondary-level interventions (i.e., Tier II) always implemented as supplements to the core curriculum? If not, please explain.	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Intensive Intervention—*Individualized with a focus on the academic needs of students with disabilities and those significantly below grade level* **(Tier III)**			
Data-Based Interventions Adapted Based on Student Need	How are evidence-based interventions intensified or individualized at the intensive level? How are the interventions used at this level developed?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Instructional Characteristics	Who provides intensive intervention? Can you describe their background and level of training in providing data-based individualized instruction? Does the group size allow for the interventionist to adjust and individualize instruction to address the needs of each student? Describe an example of a student experiencing intensive intervention.	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Relationship to Primary	Are intensive interventions always implemented as supplements to the core curriculum? If not, please explain. How do you decide if a student receiving intensive intervention should remain in primary-level instruction? How do you ensure meaningful connections between intensive intervention and the general education curriculum (e.g., the Common Core)?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms*—*Knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system to meet the established goals.			
Item	**Sample Interview Questions**	**Comments/Remarks**	**Ratings**
Prevention Focus	To what extent do you believe the teaching staff views the purpose of RTI as primarily to prevent students from having academic and/or behavioral problems? What portion of the teaching staff view RTI as primarily a means for special education identification?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Leadership Personnel	To what extent are the school and district administrators aware of the RTI framework at your school? To what extent do the actions taken and decisions made by district administrators improve the effectiveness of the RTI framework at your school? To what extent do the actions taken and decisions made by school administrators improve the effectiveness of the RTI framework at your school? Does your school have a designated person who oversees and manages RTI implementation? If yes, what percentage of that person's time is devoted to overseeing and managing RTI?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
School-Based Professional Development	Has the staff been trained on the RTI framework and essential components? How often is refresher or new training provided? Is RTI training provided to new teachers? What ongoing professional development is made available for those who provide secondary-level and intensive intervention?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Schedules	Does the schedule reflect additional time beyond the core for secondary-level and intensive intervention? Is there time scheduled for teacher collaboration on instruction and interventions? Are all the pertinent teachers and interventionists available for these collaborative meetings?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Resources	Are there adequate materials, programs, and resources allocated to support interventions, assessments, professional development, staffing? Do the programs and materials match the needs of the students at each tier? Is there a process for monitoring the use of resources?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness	What efforts have been made to ensure that core instruction, secondary-level and intensive intervention, and assessments take into account cultural and linguistic factors? How are the demographic and academic data of subgroups represented in your school used to inform the RTI framework?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Communications With and Involvement of Parents	Are parents knowledgeable about the RTI framework in your school? Describe how you communicate with parents about RTI and student performance. How are parents involved in decision making regarding the participation of their child in secondary-level or intensive intervention? How are parents of students at the secondary or intensive level informed of the progress of their children?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Communication With and Involvement of All Staff	Are teachers in your school knowledgeable about the RTI framework? Describe how you communicate with teachers about the school's RTI plan. How are teachers of students at the secondary or intensive level informed of their progress in the intervention? What process does your school use to ensure teacher collaboration in implementing RTI?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
RTI Teams	Does your school have an RTI team? If so: ▪ Who composes that team? ▪ How often does the team meet? ▪ Are there established processes and protocols that help the team work effectively? What are they? How does the team communicate and collaborate with other staff?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

Fidelity and Evaluation—*System for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model.*			
Item	**Sample Interview Questions**	**Comments/Remarks**	**Ratings**
Fidelity	Are procedures in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core curriculum? Of secondary-level and intensive intervention? Of screening, progress monitoring, and the decision-making process? If so please describe. Who is involved in monitoring the fidelity of implementation? Does the evidence indicate that instruction, interventions, assessments, and decisions are implemented with fidelity?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating
Evaluation	How is RTI evaluated at your school? ▪ Is a plan in place for evaluation? ▪ Is a process in place for reviewing student-level data for all students and for subgroups of students? ▪ Is a process in place to evaluate implementation fidelity? How are evaluation data used? ▪ Are teachers and interventionists involved in giving and receiving feedback on the effectiveness of the programs and materials? Who is involved in evaluating RTI implementation?	Notes Evidence Sources Recommendations	Rating: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Justification of Rating

(Center on Response to Intervention, 2014b)

Appendix B

Principal Interview Questions

Principal Interview Questions

Systems Change - Leadership

1. What did you see as your role in facilitating implementation of PS/RTI in your building?

Potential Prompts for Follow-Up:

- Developing consensus among staff?
- Communication with staff?
- Liaison with SBLT and DBLT?
- Setting vision?
- Participation in meetings?
- Allocation of resources?
- Alignment with other initiatives?

2. What things facilitated implementation of PS/RTI in your building? What things acted as barriers?

Potential Prompts for Follow-Up:

- District policies and procedures?
- State policies and procedures?
- Professional development?
- Data systems?
- Scheduling?
- Time?
- Technology?
- Funding?
- Personnel?
- Support (e.g., coaches, district personnel, Project personnel)?

3. How did you see implementing PS/RTI as supporting your building's mission and goals? In what ways did you see the model as not supporting them?

Potential Prompts for Follow-Up:

- AYP?
- SIP?
- K-12 plan?
- School values and philosophy?
- Other initiatives?

4. What portion of the following was consistently dedicated to PS/RTI issues?

- Staff meetings?
- Grade-level team meetings?
- SIP?
- One on one meetings with staff?

5. What types of activities did you engage in with the District Leadership Team (DLT)? What supports did you receive from the DLT? What types of support from the DLT do you believe is important to implement PS/RTI in your building?

Coaching

1. Describe your relationship with your PS/RTI Coach (i.e., how did you work with him/her to facilitate PS/RTI implementation?).

Potential Prompts for Follow-Up:

- Collaborative planning and problem solving?
- Data analysis and use?
- Regularly scheduled meetings?
- Specific roles and responsibilities assigned/developed?

2. How important was your PS/RTI Coach to implementing the model in your building?

Potential Prompts for Follow-Up:

- In obtaining buy-in from staff?
- In building the skills of staff?
- Ensuring steps of the model were implemented during meetings?

3. In what activities did your coach engage that were critical to helping facilitate implementation? What would you have liked to see your coach do, or do more of, to facilitate implementation?

Potential Prompts for Follow-Up:

- Facilitating problem solving meetings?
- Professional development?
- Data collection, analysis and interpretation?
- Communication?

- Support to personnel engaging in problem solving activities? - Planning and problems solving of implementation issues?

Parent Involvement

1. In what ways have efforts been made to involve parents in your school's implementation of PS/RTI?

Potential Prompts for Follow-Up:

- What specifically has the school done to communicate with all parents about PS/RTI?
- What has the school done to communicate with parents of students who are receiving more intensive interventions?
- What has been done to coordinate with parents whose kids are getting intense interventions?
- How has input been solicited from parents?
- To what extent have parents participated in school initiatives and interventions relating to their children?

2. How have you promoted parental involvement in PS/RTI among the staff?

Potential Prompts for Follow-Up:

- How have you emphasized the importance of parent involvement to staff?
- To what extent have you scheduled time for staff to communicate with parents? - How has professional development for staff focused on parental involvement?

3. To what extent have any of the following methods been used to disseminate information to parents about PS/RtI:

a. Website?
b. Newsletter?
c. SAC?
d. PTA?
e. Hotline?
f. Report cards/progress reports?
g. Parent/teacher conferences?
h. School events?
i. Registration?
j. School to home notes?
k. Other ways?

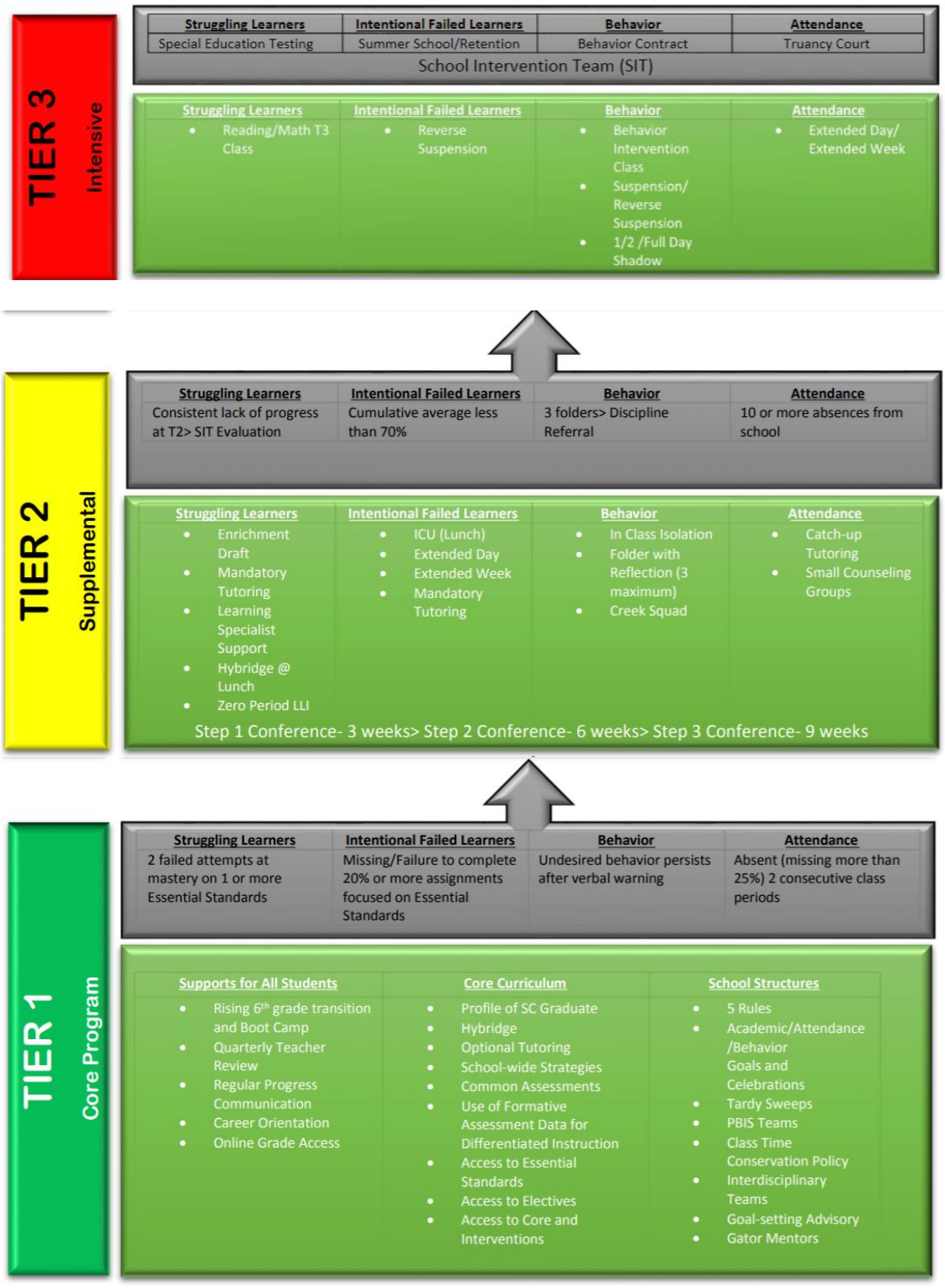
4. Were parents invited to all problem solving meetings where their children were being discussed? Why or why not?

5. If they were invited, how often did parents typically attend problem solving meetings? Why or why not?

(*Problem Solving and Response to Intervention*, n.d.)

Appendix C

Pyramid of Interventions


TIER 3
Intensive
Struggling Learners
Special Education Testing
Intentional Failed Learners
Summer School/Retention
Behavior
Behavior Contract
Attendance
Truancy Court
School Intervention Team (SIT)
Struggling Learners
Reading/Math T3 Class
Intentional Failed Learners
Reverse Suspension
Behavior
Behavior Intervention Class
Suspension/ Reverse Suspension
1/2 /Full Day Shadow
Attendance
Extended Day/ Extended Week
TIER 2
Supplemental
Struggling Learners
Consistent lack of progress at T2> SIT Evaluation
Intentional Failed Learners
Cumulative average less than 70%
Behavior
3 folders> Discipline Referral
Attendance
10 or more absences from school
Struggling Learners
Enrichment Draft
Mandatory Tutoring
Learning Specialist Support
Hybridge @ Lunch
Zero Period LLI
Intentional Failed Learners
ICU (Lunch)
Extended Day
Extended Week
Mandatory Tutoring
Behavior
In Class Isolation
Folder with Reflection (3 maximum)
Creek Squad
Attendance
Catch-up Tutoring
Small Counseling Groups
Step 1 Conference- 3 weeks> Step 2 Conference- 6 weeks> Step 3 Conference- 9 weeks
TIER 1
Core Program
Struggling Learners
2 failed attempts at mastery on 1 or more Essential Standards
Intentional Failed Learners
Missing/Failure to complete 20% or more assignments focused on Essential Standards
Behavior
Undesired behavior persists after verbal warning
Attendance
Absent (missing more than 25%) 2 consecutive class periods
Supports for All Students
Rising 6th grade transition and Boot Camp
Quarterly Teacher Review
Regular Progress Communication
Career Orientation
Online Grade Access
Core Curriculum
Profile of SC Graduate
Hybridge
Optional Tutoring
School-wide Strategies
Common Assessments
Use of Formative Assessment Data for Differentiated Instruction
Access to Essential Standards
Access to Electives
Access to Core and Interventions
School Structures
5 Rules
Academic/Attendance /Behavior Goals and Celebrations
Tardy Sweeps
PBIS Teams
Class Time Conservation Policy
Interdisciplinary Teams
Goal-setting Advisory
Gator Mentors

(Holmes, 2015)

Appendx D

Agency Permission

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- Beliefs on RTI Scale
- Principal Interview Questions

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

Sincerely,

Judi

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A Multi-Tiered System of Supports
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Appendix E

RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric

Center on
RESPONSE to INTERVENTION
at American Institutes for Research

AIR
American Institutes for Research

RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric

The Response to Intervention (RTI) Fidelity Rubric is for use by individuals who are responsible for monitoring school-level fidelity of RTI implementation. The rubric is aligned with the essential components of RTI and the infrastructure that is necessary for successful implementation. It is accompanied by a worksheet with guiding questions and score points for use in an interview with a school's RTI leadership team.

Assessments—*Screening, progress monitoring, and other supporting assessments are used to inform data-based decision making.*			
Measures	**1**	**3**	**5**
Screening—*The RTI framework accurately identifies students at risk of poor learning outcomes or challenging behaviors.*			
Screening Tools	Insufficient evidence that the screening tools are reliable, correlations between the instruments and valued outcomes are strong, and predictions of risk status are accurate.	Evidence indicates that the screening tools are reliable, correlations between the instruments and valued outcomes are strong, and predictions of risk status are accurate, but staff is unable to articulate the supporting evidence.	Evidence indicates that the screening tools are reliable, correlations between the instruments and valued outcomes are strong, and predictions of risk status are accurate, and staff is able to articulate the supporting evidence.
Universal Screening	One or none of the following conditions is met: (1) screening is conducted for all students (i.e., is universal); (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., all students are tested, scores are accurate, cut points/decisions are accurate); and (3) a process to screen all students occurs more than once per year (e.g., fall, winter, spring).	Two of the following conditions are met: (1) screening is conducted for all students (i.e., is universal); (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., all students are tested, scores are accurate, cut points/decisions are accurate); and (3) a process to screen all students occurs more than once per year (e.g., fall, winter, spring).	All of the following conditions are met: (1) screening is conducted for all students (i.e., is universal); (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., all students are tested, scores are accurate, cut points/decisions are accurate); and (3) a process to screen all students occurs more than once per year (e.g., fall, winter, spring).
Data Points to Verify Risk	Screening data are not used or are used alone to verify decisions about whether a student is or is not at risk.	Screening data are used in concert with at least one other data source (e.g., classroom performance, curriculum-based assessment, performance on state assessments, diagnostic assessment data, short-term progress monitoring) to verify decisions about whether a student is or is not at risk.	Screening data are used in concert with at least two other data sources (e.g., classroom performance, performance on state assessments, diagnostic assessment data, short-term progress monitoring) to verify decisions about whether a student is or is not at risk.

Progress Monitoring—*Ongoing and frequent monitoring of progress quantifies rates of improvement and informs instructional practice and the development of individualized programs. Measures are appropriate for the student's grade and/or skill level.*			
Progress-Monitoring Tools	Selected progress-monitoring tools meet no more than one of the following criteria: (1) have sufficient number of alternate forms of equal and controlled difficulty to allow for progress monitoring at recommended intervals based on intervention level; (2) specify minimum acceptable growth; (3) provide benchmarks for minimum acceptable end-of-year performance; and (4) reliability and validity information for the performance-level score is available.	Selected progress-monitoring tools meet two or three of the following criteria: (1) have sufficient number of alternate forms of equal and controlled difficulty to allow for progress monitoring at recommended intervals based on intervention level; (2) specify minimum acceptable growth; (3) provide benchmarks for minimum acceptable end-of-year performance; and (4) reliability and validity information for the performance-level score is available.	Selected progress-monitoring tools meet all of the following criteria: (1) have sufficient number of alternate forms of equal and controlled difficulty to allow for progress monitoring at recommended intervals based on intervention level; (2) specify minimum acceptable growth; (3) provide benchmarks for minimum acceptable end-of-year performance; and (4) reliability and validity information for the performance-level score is available and staff is able to articulate the supporting evidence.
Progress-Monitoring Process	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) progress monitoring occurs at least monthly for students receiving secondary-level intervention and at least weekly for students receiving intensive intervention; and (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently).	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) progress monitoring occurs at least monthly for students receiving secondary-level intervention and at least weekly for students receiving intensive intervention; and (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently).	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) progress monitoring occurs at least monthly for students receiving secondary-level intervention and at least weekly for students receiving intensive intervention; and (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently).

Data-Based Decision Making—*Data-based decision-making processes are used to inform instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification (in accordance with state law).*			
Measures	**1**	**3**	**5**
Decision-Making Process	The mechanism for making decisions about the participation of students in the instruction/ intervention levels meets no more than one of the following criteria: The process (1) is data-driven and based on validated methods; (2) involves a broad base of stakeholders; and (3) is operationalized with clear, established decision rules (e.g., movement between levels or tiers, determination of appropriate instruction or interventions).	The mechanism for making decisions about the participation of students in the instruction/ intervention levels meets two of the following criteria: The process (1) is data-driven and based on validated methods; (2) involves a broad base of stakeholders; and (3) is operationalized with clear, established decision rules (e.g., movement between levels or tiers, determination of appropriate instruction or interventions).	The mechanism for making decisions about the participation of students in the instruction/intervention levels meets all of the following criteria: The process (1) is data-driven and based on validated methods; (2) involves a broad base of stakeholders; and (3) is operationalized with clear, established decision rules (e.g., movement between levels or tiers, determination of appropriate instruction or interventions).
Data System	A data system is in place that meets two or fewer of the following conditions: (1) the system allows users to document and access individual student- level data (including screening and progress-monitoring data) and instructional decisions; (2) data are entered in a timely manner; (3) data can be represented graphically; and (4) there is a process for setting/evaluating goals.	A data system is in place that meets three of the following four conditions: (1) the system allows users to document and access individual student-level data (including screening and progress-monitoring data) and instructional decisions; (2) data are entered in a timely manner; (3) data can be represented graphically; and (4) there is a process for setting/evaluating goals.	A data system is in place that meets all of the following conditions: (1) the system allows users to document and access individual student-level data (including screening and progress-monitoring data) and instructional decisions; (2) data are entered in a timely manner; (3) data can be represented graphically; and (4) there is a process for setting/evaluating goals.
Responsiveness to Secondary and Intensive Levels of Intervention	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) decisions about responsiveness to intervention are based on reliable and valid progress-monitoring data that reflect slope of improvement or progress toward the attainment of a goal at the end of the intervention; and (2) these decision-making criteria are implemented accurately.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) decisions about responsiveness to intervention are based on reliable and valid progress-monitoring data that reflect slope of improvement or progress toward the attainment of a goal at the end of the intervention; and (2) these decision-making criteria are implemented accurately.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) decisions about responsiveness to intervention are based on reliable and valid progress-monitoring data that reflect slope of improvement or progress toward the attainment of a goal at the end of the intervention; and (2) these decision-making criteria are implemented accurately.

Multilevel Instruction—*The RTI framework includes a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure. Commonly represented by the three-tiered triangle, multilevel instruction also is known as the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).*			
Measures	**1**	**3**	**5**
Primary-Level Instruction/Core Curriculum **(Tier I)**			
Research-Based Curriculum Materials	Few core curriculum materials are research based for the target population of learners (including subgroups).	Some core curriculum materials are research based for the target population of learners (including subgroups).	All core curriculum materials are research based for the target population of learners (including subgroups).
Articulation of Teaching and Learning (in and across grade levels)	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) teaching and learning objectives are well articulated from one grade to another; and (2) teaching and learning is well articulated within grade levels so that students have highly similar experiences, regardless of their assigned teacher.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) teaching and learning objectives are well articulated from one grade to another; and (2) teaching and learning is well articulated within grade levels so that students have highly similar experiences, regardless of their assigned teacher.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) teaching and learning objectives are well articulated from one grade to another; and (2) teaching and learning is well articulated within grade levels so that students have highly similar experiences, regardless of their assigned teacher.
Differentiated Instruction	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) interviewed staff can describe how most teachers in the school differentiate instruction for students on, below, or above grade level; and (2) interviewed staff can explain how most teachers in the school use student data to identify and address the needs of students.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) interviewed staff can describe how most teachers in the school differentiate instruction for students on, below, or above grade level; and (2) interviewed staff can explain how most teachers in the school use student data to identify and address the needs of students.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) interviewed staff can describe how most teachers in the school differentiate instruction for students on, below, or above grade level; and (2) interviewed staff can explain how most teachers in the school use data to identify and address the needs of students.
Standards-Based	The core curriculum (reading and mathematics) is not aligned with the Common Core or other state standards.	The core curriculum (reading and mathematics) is partially aligned with the Common Core or other state standards.	The core curriculum (reading and mathematics) is aligned with the Common Core or other state standards.

Exceeding Benchmark	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) the school provides enrichment opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks; and (2) teachers implement those opportunities consistently at all grade levels.	One of the following conditions is met: (1) the school provides enrichment opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks; and (2) teachers implement those opportunities consistently at all grade levels.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) the school provides enrichment opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks; and (2) teachers implement those opportunities consistently at all grade levels.
Secondary-Level Intervention **(Tier II)**			
Evidence-Based Intervention	Secondary-level interventions are not evidence based in content areas and grade levels where they are available.	Some secondary-level interventions are evidence based in content areas and grade levels where they are available.	All secondary-level interventions are evidence based in content areas and grade levels where they are available.
Complements Core Instruction	Secondary-level intervention is poorly aligned with core instruction and incorporates different topics, even though those topics are not foundational skills that support core program learning objectives.	Secondary-level intervention incorporates foundational skills, but these only occasionally align with the learning objectives of core instruction.	Secondary-level intervention is well aligned with core instruction and incorporates foundational skills that support the learning objectives of core instruction.
Instructional Characteristics	One or none of the following conditions is met: (1) interventions are standardized; (2) secondary-level interventions are led by staff trained in the intervention according to developer requirements; and (3) group size and dosage are optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.	Two of the following conditions are met: (1) interventions are standardized; (2) secondary-level interventions are led by staff trained in the intervention according to developer requirements; and (3) group size and dosage are optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.	All three of the following conditions are met: (1) interventions are standardized; (2) secondary-level interventions are led by staff trained in the intervention according to developer requirements; and (3) group size and dosage are optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.
Addition to Primary	Secondary-level interventions replace core instruction.	Secondary-level interventions sometimes supplement core instruction and sometimes replace core instruction.	Secondary-level interventions supplement core instruction.

Intensive Intervention—*Individualized with a focus on the academic needs of students with disabilities and those significantly below grade level* **(Tier III)**			
Data-Based Interventions Adapted Based on Student Need	Intensive interventions are not more intensive (e.g., no increase in duration or frequency, change in interventionist, change in group size, or change in intervention) than secondary interventions.	Intensive interventions are more intensive than secondary interventions based only on preset methods to increase intensity (e.g., sole reliance on increased duration or frequency, change in interventionist, decreased group size, or change in intervention program).	Intensive interventions are more intensive than secondary interventions and are adapted to address individual student needs in a number of ways (e.g., increased duration or frequency, change in interventionist, decreased group size, change in instructional delivery, and change in type of intervention) through an iterative manner based on student data.
Instructional Characteristics	None of the following conditions is met: (1) the intervention is individualized; (2) intensive interventions are led by well-trained staff experienced in individualizing instruction based on student data; and (3) the group size is optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) the intervention is individualized; (2) intensive interventions are led by well-trained staff experienced in individualizing instruction based on student data; and (3) the group size is optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) the intervention is individualized; (2) intensive interventions are led by well-trained staff experienced in individualizing instruction based on student data; and (3) the group size is optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.
Relationship to Primary	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) decisions regarding student participation in both core instruction and intensive intervention are made on a case-by-case basis, according to student need; and (2) intensive interventions are aligned to the specific skill needs of students to help them make progress toward core curriculum standards.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) decisions regarding student participation in both core instruction and intensive intervention are made on a case-by-case basis, according to student need; and (2) intensive interventions address the general education curriculum in an appropriate manner for students.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) decisions regarding student participation in both core instruction and intensive intervention are made on a case-by-case basis, according to student need; and (2) intensive interventions address the general education curriculum in an appropriate manner for students.

Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms—*Knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system to meet the established goals.*			
Measures	**1**	**3**	**5**
Prevention Focus	Staff generally perceives RTI as a program that solely supports the prereferral process for special education.	Some staff understand that RTI is a framework to prevent all students, including students with disabilities, from having academic problems.	All staff understand that RTI is a framework to prevent all students, including students with disabilities, from having academic problems.
Leadership Personnel	Decisions and actions by school and district leaders undermine the effectiveness of the essential components of the RTI framework at the school.	Decisions and actions by school and district leaders are inconsistent and only somewhat supportive of the essential components of the RTI framework at the school; support for RTI implementation is not very evident.	Decisions and actions by school and district leaders proactively support the essential components of the RTI framework at the school, and help make the RTI framework more effective; support for RTI implementation is a high priority.
School-Based Professional Development	The school has no well-defined, school-based professional development mechanism to support continuous improvement of instructional practice, data-based decision making, and delivery of interventions.	Some forms of school-based professional development are available, but most are not consistent or job embedded to ensure continuous improvement in instructional practice, data-based decision making, and delivery of interventions.	School-based professional development is institutionalized and structured so that all teachers continuously examine, reflect upon, and improve instructional practice, data-based decision making, and delivery of interventions.
Schedules	School wide schedules are not aligned to support multiple levels of intervention based on student need; inadequate time is available for interventions.	School wide schedules are partially aligned to support multiple levels of intervention based on student need; some additional time is built in for interventions.	School wide schedules are aligned to support multiple levels of intervention based on student need; adequate additional time is built in for interventions.
Resources	Resources (e.g., funds, programs) are not allocated to support RTI implementation.	Resources (e.g., funds, programs) are partially allocated to support RTI implementation.	Resources (e.g., funds, programs) are adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness	One or none of the following conditions is met: Staff can articulate information and factors that they consider when adopting	Two of the following conditions are met: Staff can articulate information and factors that they consider when adopting	All three of the following conditions are met: Staff can articulate information and factors that they consider when adopting

	culturally and linguistically relevant (1) instructional practices, (2) assessments, and (3) intervention programs.	culturally and linguistically relevant (1) instructional practices, (2) assessments, and (3) intervention programs.	culturally and linguistically relevant (1) instructional practices, (2) assessments, and (3) intervention programs.
Communications With and Involvement of Parents	One or none of the following conditions is met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI is shared with parents; (2) a coherent mechanism is implemented for updating parents on the progress of their child who is receiving secondary or intensive interventions; and (3) parents are involved during decision making regarding the progress of students receiving intensive intervention.	Two of the following conditions are met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI is shared with parents; (2) a coherent mechanism is implemented for updating parents on the progress of their child who is receiving secondary or intensive interventions; and (3) parents are involved during decision making regarding the progress of students receiving intensive intervention.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI is shared with parents; (2) a coherent mechanism is implemented for updating parents on the progress of their child who is receiving secondary or intensive interventions; and (3) parents are informed about decision making regarding the progress of students receiving intensive intervention.
Communication With and Involvement of All Staff	One or none of the following conditions is met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI and data-based decision- making process is shared with staff; (2) a system is in place to keep staff informed; and (3) teacher teams collaborate frequently.	At least two of the following conditions are met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI and data-based decision-making process is shared with staff; (2) a system is in place to keep staff informed; and (3) teacher teams collaborate frequently.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI and data-based decision- making process is shared with staff; (2) a system is in place to keep staff informed; and (3) teacher teams collaborate frequently.
RTI Teams	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) the RTI team is representative of all key stakeholders; (2) structures and clear processes are in place to guide decision making; and (3) time is set aside for the team to meet regularly.	At least two of the following conditions are met: (1) the RTI team is representative of all key stakeholders; (2) structures and clear processes are in place to guide decision making; and (3) time is set aside for the team to meet regularly.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) the RTI team is representative of all key stakeholders; (2) structures and clear processes are in place to guide decision making; and (3) time is set aside for the team to meet regularly.

Fidelity and Evaluation—*System for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model.*			
Measures	**1**	**3**	**5**
Fidelity	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) procedures are in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core curriculum and secondary and intensive interventions; and (2) procedures are in place to monitor the processes of administering and analyzing assessments.	One of the following conditions is met: (1) procedures are in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core curriculum and secondary and intensive interventions; and (2) procedures are in place to monitor the processes of administering and analyzing assessments.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) procedures are in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core curriculum and secondary and intensive interventions; and (2) procedures are in place to monitor the processes of administering and analyzing assessments.
Evaluation	None of the following conditions are met: (1) an evaluation plan is in place to monitor short- and long-term goals; (2) student data are reviewed for all students and subgroups of students across the essential components to evaluate effectiveness of the RTI framework (i.e., core curriculum is effective, interventions are effective, screening process is effective); and (3) implementation data (e.g., walk-throughs) are reviewed to monitor fidelity and efficiency across all components of the RTI framework.	At least one of the following conditions is met: (1) an evaluation plan is in place to monitor short- and long-term goals; (2) student data are reviewed for all students and subgroups of students across the essential components to evaluate effectiveness of the RTI framework (i.e., core curriculum is effective, interventions are effective, screening process is effective); and (3) implementation data (e.g., walk-throughs) are reviewed to monitor fidelity and efficiency across all components of the RTI framework.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) an evaluation plan is in place to monitor short- and long-term goals; (2) student data are reviewed for all students and subgroups of students across the essential components to evaluate effectiveness of the RTI framework (i.e., core curriculum is effective, interventions are effective, screening process is effective); and (3) implementation data (e.g., walk-throughs) are reviewed to monitor fidelity and efficiency across all components of the RTI framework.

(Center on Response to Intervention, 2014b)

Appendix F

Team Minutes Form

Weekly Team Minutes for Team ____
Week of _____

Please submit a copy of the minutes to your grade level assistant principal and counselor on Fridays.

Positive Parent Contacts

Student of the Week

Conversations about RTI (Student, Interventions, Plan)

Student Name	Struggling Learners	Intentional Failed Learners	Behavior	Attendance	Referred Interventions
Billy Bob	Math Grade = 60	Missing 3 assignments	Verbal cues in all core classes	Missed class twice this week w/ early dismissal.	Mandatory Tutoring, ICU

Student Name	Unmastered Learning Target (Content and/or Language)	Questions, Comments, Concerns
Sally Sue	**Content** – I can determine how changing the theme impacts the overall outcome of a story. **Language** – I can use verbal skills to discuss theme from a short story that was read with a partner.	Crystal can identify the theme from the story but has difficulty explaining how changing the theme would impact the outcome of the story.

Conversations about ESE Students

Student Name	Subject(s)	Unmasterd Learning Target	Specific Concerns (ex. not completing work, scoring poorly on assessments)
Jimmy John	Science	I can characterize elements based on their location on the periodic table	Crystal is having difficulty locating the elements on the periodic table because she has not learned their symbols.

Parent Contacts (Academic and Behavior)

Student Name	Reason	Method of Contact

WAAG Discussion

Conversations about Content/Technology

Questions/Concerns/Suggestions for Counselor/Grade Level Administrator

Step 1 Conferences: For any students who have below a 70 at the first progress report period of the 9 weeks

Student Name	Subject(s)	Grade(s)

Step 2 Conferences: For any Step 1 Conference students who have not made appropriate improvements by the 2nd progress report period of the 9 weeks

Student Name	Subject(s)	Grade(s)

Appendix G

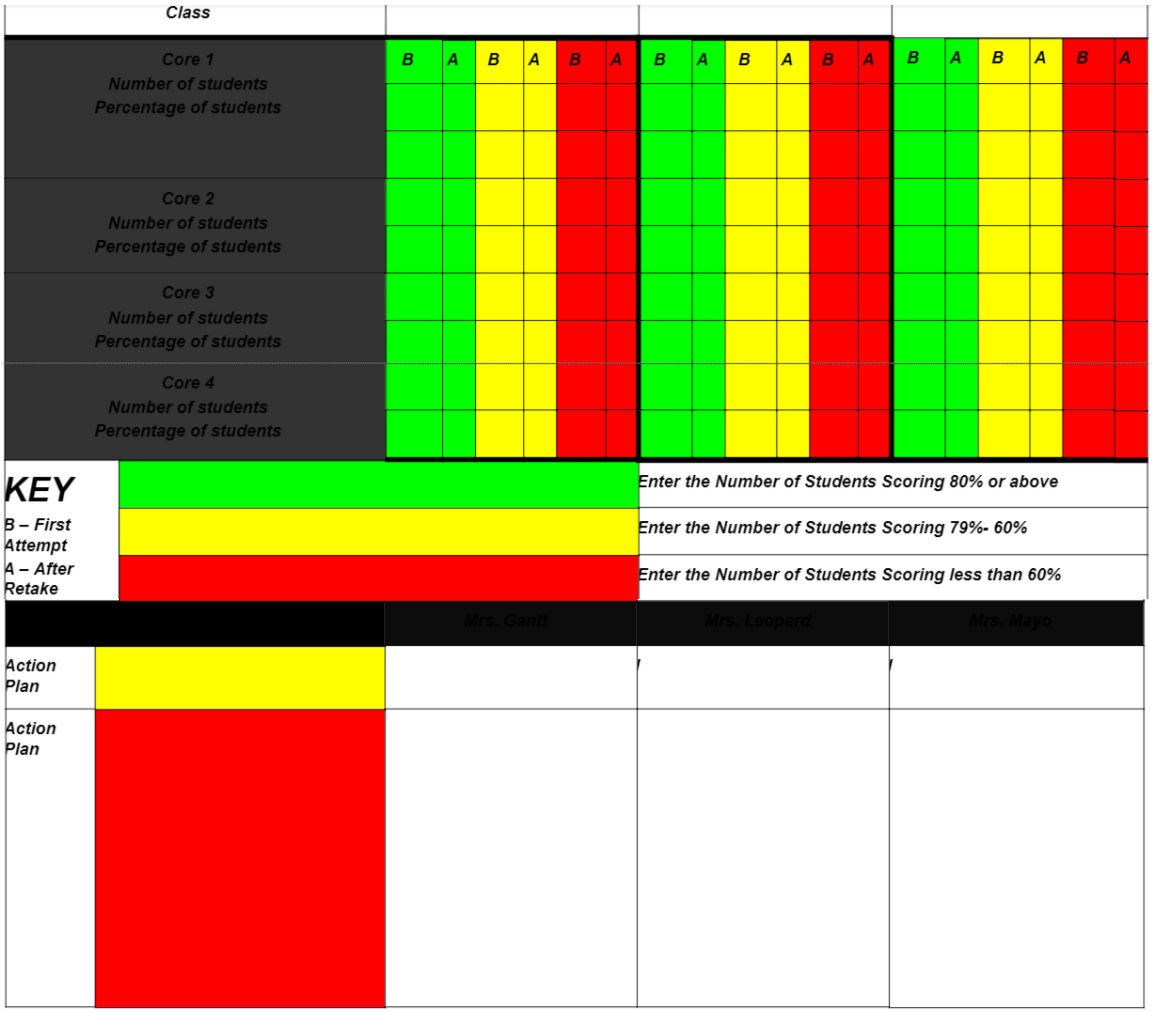
PLC Unit Plan

X Middle School UNIT PLAN	
Unit Overview:	
Quarter One Two Three Four	**Instructional Time Frame: _____ Days** / **Dates:** **Grade Level:**
Unit Title:	
Syllabus:	
Standards: **Essential Questions:** **Learning Intentions:**	
Vocabulary	
Quizzes:	
Test:	

Topic	**Teaching Strategies**	**Intervention/Extension**	**Resources/Activities**

Additional Inclusion Strategies: *(What will we do if they didn't learn it?)*	
Topic	**Strategy**

Data:



Class																		
Core 1 Number of students Percentage of students	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
Core 2 Number of students Percentage of students																		
Core 3 Number of students Percentage of students																		
Core 4 Number of students Percentage of students																		

KEY		
B – First Attempt		Enter the Number of Students Scoring 80% or above
A – After Retake		Enter the Number of Students Scoring 79%- 60%
		Enter the Number of Students Scoring less than 60%

		Mrs. Gantt	Mrs. Leopard	Mrs. Mayo
Action Plan				
Action Plan				