

A Study of the Teacher Perceptions of the BOOST Program:  
A Tier Two Academic Intervention Program at a Middle School

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by

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A Tier Two Academic Intervention Program at a Middle School

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## **Abstract**

Higher achievement scores, skill building, and closing the achievement gap are all anticipated results when providing academic interventions to students. When using Response to Intervention (RtI), a three tiered model where academic interventions are provided systematically to improve student outcomes, teachers would expect academic success from students. However, one middle school is experiencing positive unintended consequences that are lifelong skills students need to succeed. Accountability, self-advocacy and relationship building are all components that have been reported by teachers who are using BOOST, a RtI model created uniquely to fit the needs of a middle school in the Midwest. BOOST stands for Broadening Opportunities to Obtain Superior Thinking; it is a tier two academic intervention program. This qualitative study used focus groups and interviews to gain perceptual data regarding the use of a tier-two academic intervention model.

**Section One:**  
**Introduction to the Dissertation-in-Practice**



## **Background**

The perception of public education in the United States of America is continually under review by citizens and the government at local, state, and federal levels. The political landscape creates even more pressure on the education system as it scrutinizes school accreditation, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010) with threats to resources and funding (Verstegen, 2011). Negative statements such as “the education system is not effectively preparing some adolescents for reading success” create urgency for solutions (Edmonds et al., 2009, p. 263). In a country that provides free, compulsory education, the standards are set high, and schools must scramble to meet expectations or risk losing accreditation or funding (Ravitch, 2016). Public schools in America are working tirelessly to provide the best education possible for students, which includes using innovative techniques and strategies to bolster student achievement to meet state and federal guidelines (Dulaney, 2012).

To understand the pressure public schools are under for high student achievement scores, it is necessary to be aware of the process that has brought the American education system here. The achievement scores have been tied to funding, which has made school officials scramble to continually increase standardized test scores. Ellwood Cubberley’s seminal contribution to education finance theory has helped map out guidelines for the evolution of education finance and the overall movement of education in America (Cubberley, 1919; Verstegen, 2011). Cubberley (1919) mapped out the process of Puritans creating the first schools in America to educate children so they could read the Bible. Through a series of wars and setbacks, the states struggled to find ways to finance public education. By 1642, The Massachusetts Law required compulsory education for

children by holding their parents accountable for attending to the educational needs of their children (Cubberley, 1919).

While President George Washington referenced the need for the government to enlighten citizens with knowledge in his farewell speech in 1796, the Constitution does not mention education (Cubberley, 1919). Eventually the states came up with their own funding for schools.

While funding across the states varies widely, one common theme that has created controversy is the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, which focused on accountability in exchange for federal aid (Verstegen, 2011). At the onset of NCLB, the federal government only covered approximately seven to eight percent of the total cost of education, leaving the rest up to local revenue and state funding (Petersen & West, 2003). While NCLB did not promise an exorbitant amount of money, schools strove to comply and be eligible for the funding it did promise. The accountability culture created by NCLB left schools scrambling to grow all students to be high academic achievers and score well on the mandated standardized tests nationwide (Whalen, 2016).

NCLB created urgency for schools to meet federal guidelines to be able to receive funding. However, by 2011 an estimated 48% of schools nationwide did not meet NCLB requirements and were supposed to receive financial penalties based on their performance (McGuinn, 2015). President Barack Obama took matters into his own hands in 2011, creating a waiver system for schools to avoid accountability measures set forth by NCLB (Simendinger, 2011). President Obama had also introduced a new incentive program in 2008, called Race to the Top (RTT), which rewarded schools with grant incentives if they could meet new reform guidelines. The RTT applications were assessed on five

components: “improving teacher training; evaluation and retention policies; developing better data systems; the adoption of preferred school turnaround strategies; and building stakeholder support for reform” (McGuinn, 2015, pp. 8-9). A variety of strategies have been employed by school districts to bolster student scores and fill in knowledge gaps. One systematic strategy, Response to Intervention (RtI), has become a widely implemented practice. RtI is a student data based system to help identify and target students with missing skills.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The push for academic achievement accountability in schools has revealed that many students are unable to meet grade level expectations set forth by the state standardized assessments. Verstegen (2011) and Peterson and West (2003) identified the pressure new legislation has put on schools and their inability to close the achievement gap. Elementary schools have made gains in bolstering literacy scores, but secondary schools are still looking for ways to help students meet the standards (King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012).

### **Problem of Practice**

Schools across the United States are unable to make headway on closing the achievement gap and helping all students perform at grade level. Sansosti, Noltemeyer, and Goss (2010) and the United States Department of Education (2015) have conducted studies nationwide that suggest many students who fall behind meeting grade level expectations only continue to fall further behind without some sort of intervention.

Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010) labeled the situation in the United States regarding a substantial number of adolescents who struggle with basic reading skills as a “public health crisis” (p. 26).

Clark, et al. (2014) reported a national trend of students scoring at poor performance levels on mathematics achievement tests. Reports such as The Nation’s Report Card: National Assessment of Educational Progress from 2013 show a deficit in mathematical skills nationwide (Bryant, 2014). The root of the problem has been difficult to identify. However, many strategies have been attempted to help close these gaps. One such strategy is Response to Intervention (RtI), a process to provide early academic interventions to underachieving students. Vaughn, Cirino, et al. (2010) found that a multi-year study based in urban middle schools showed that while some models of RtI resulted in a small effect size, other options might be more helpful. More RtI research in secondary schools will help provide a better framework for secondary schools to model their programming after as they work through implementation.

### **Existing Gap in the Literature**

Research has revealed little about implementing RtI in secondary school settings and there is a lack in knowledge of the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the RtI implementation process. A 2015 study of 20,000 students in 13 states by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance reported that first graders who received reading interventions actually did worse than identical peers (Sparks, 2015). However, a national survey performed by Spectrum K12 School Solutions (2011) surveyed 1,306 district administrators and found that 88% of the administrators said their schools were using RtI as an early intervention method.

Therefore, more research must be conducted to determine other perceived benefits and drawbacks for schools who implement RtI. School leaders need access to the bigger picture when considering implementing RtI within their building.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate an RtI model within one middle school setting. The study considered the effectiveness of the program according to the perceptions of teachers utilizing the program. In an attempt to close the achievement gap, Warrensburg Middle School (WMS) created an RtI system to address the academic needs of students. The RtI model is a tertiary academic intervention model. Tier one encompasses general classroom instruction while tier two becomes more strategic. Tier two models address current grade level student deficiencies. Students in tier three are receiving targeted intense interventions to help them advance their remedial skills.

This study outlines the process of the creation of the RtI model WMS is using, as well as evaluates the program for future considerations and possible replications in academic practice. The name of the tier two program that is being implemented at WMS is called BOOST. The acronym stands for Broadening Opportunities to Obtain Superior Thinking (C. Bechtol, personal communication, October 2014). While the goal of the RtI system is to close the achievement gap and provide students instruction and practice on missing skills, there is more to examine regarding the process. Teacher perception must be considered in the process, since the overall school culture and program implementation can threaten fidelity. To help aid in the study of the implementation of BOOST, the KASAB change theory was utilized (Killion, 2008). KASAB stands for Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, Aspiration, Behavior, all which are necessary components to

successfully implement change in an organization. Additionally, while descriptive student achievement statistics may or may not provide justification for the model, the whole picture was considered to evaluate the program.

This study is qualitative in nature and provides rich detail into the perceptions of the teachers using the BOOST RtI model at WMS. However, it would be beneficial to have data regarding standardized testing and academic achievement to see if BOOST is working to achieve higher scores. While testing data could be utilized in future studies regarding this program, it is not available at this time because the school has only had one year of full implementation of this program. There are no comparable data generated at this time, but within two years, more data could be analyzed.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: Which components of the KASAB model have been met in regards to the RtI program, BOOST, used at WMS?

RQ2: How effective do teachers perceive the RtI model being used at WMS to be?

RQ3: What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the RtI model being used at WMS?

### **Conceptual/ Theoretical Framework**

The process of teacher change necessary for the implementation of RtI initiatives takes place amid a myriad of other complex issues that teachers face. Political, cultural, and personal philosophies of teaching and learning interact to influence the way teachers perceive the change. The process of transforming normative classroom practices to address mandates requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for serving at-risk

students. The idea of change is difficult for many people and can be situational. The change theory KASAB (Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, Aspiration, Behavior) model helps identify components of change and provides a framework to adhere to when leaders are driving change in an organization (National Staff Development Council, 2008). In the KASAB model, there are five components of change which must take place in order to successfully create change: knowledge, attitude, skill, aspiration, behavior (Killion, 2008). Change is a learning process. The KASAB model is an adaptation of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model that was created to provide educational leaders with practical theory to guide the implementation of change efforts (Hall & Hord, 2000).

Cognitive psychologists have been working for decades to collect the works of Kolb, Luria, Freire, Vygotsky, Kegan, and others to compile factors that affect the learning process (National Staff Development Council, 2008). Discovering and unpacking the necessary components for learning is useful in many ways. It can help teachers during lesson planning by providing a framework to help teachers create optimal learning environments which foster imperative components for learning. Just as teachers must understand learning theory and cognitive learning processes to help better their effectiveness and craft, leaders must understand andragogy and the KASAB model to help teachers learn and change when necessary.

Educational leaders are responsible for helping create professional development opportunities for teachers to help them grow personally and professionally. Hirsh (2011) stated the importance of the KASAB model in professional development and considering intended outcomes from learning opportunities given to teachers. Districts must be intentional with satisfying the KASAB model components to successfully create change

(National Staff Development Council, 2008). In education, professional change could be as basic as adopting a new lesson plan template or as broad as developing a new educational philosophy. A common change schools see is curriculum programming (Hirsh, 2011). The work of Joyce and Showers (1980) indicated that in-service training without followed support will only yield about a 10% success rate of teachers using new curriculum. Leaders must consider these statistics when developing new building initiatives.

Changing classroom practices does not happen without intent. The KASAB model helps leaders target specific teacher attributes to create lasting change. To successfully create change and implement new practices, teachers must first have the knowledge of the new practice (Hirsh, 2011). School leaders must identify and facilitate conceptual understanding of what RtI is and the way that it works. Next, the teachers must have the right attitude about RtI. Helping a teacher have an open and positive attitude about a new practice can be very difficult. Providing inspirational stories or successes may help teachers value the concept of RtI. The next step involves teaching the teachers the skills necessary to implement RtI. Professional development provides opportunity to share strategies and methodologies to successfully implement RtI. The aspiration piece of the KASAB model is similar to the attitude component, requiring some internal motivation for teachers to want to use their new skills. Finally, the consistent application of the practices becomes a behavior, creating lasting change in instructional practices (National Staff Development Council, 2008). All of the KASAB model components are necessary to successfully create change and the model can be used



as a framework to determine the effectiveness of the changing classroom practices at WMS with regards to RtI.

### **Design of the Study**

Choosing a methodology for a study should be based on how to best answer the proposed research questions (Creswell, 2016). This study seeks to understand perceptions of teachers about the BOOST program, with research questions crafted to identify perceived drawbacks and benefits. Therefore, a qualitative method was chosen to guide this study design. The goal of data analysis in qualitative research is to increase understanding of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process tends to lead to answering the research questions, which is the ultimate purpose of qualitative research.

The research methods utilized are consistent with a qualitative case study design (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This included the overarching design, site description and selection, participant sampling, researcher positioning, methods, and the coding or analysis procedures. Consistent with qualitative research, several primary methods of data collection were employed.

There are a number of methods researchers can utilize to execute a qualitative study. In the current study, the researcher employed several of the suggested methods that are characteristic of effective qualitative studies including focus groups, and interviews (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2016; Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2003). A variety of methods were used to ensure validity (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2016). To enhance the study, archived data were reviewed.

Seven focus groups were convened to discuss experiences and initiate a dialogue among participants and the researchers. The 35 focus group participants engaged in

conversations with the facilitator and with each other, creating a natural flow that provided detailed information and personal narratives (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The questions were triangulated with interview questions to attempt to discover convergence in the data (Yin, 2003).

Teaming is a pillar of middle level learning. Teaming allows one group of teachers to share a group of students so they can more effectively engage in conversations and collaboration to benefit the students. It is common for teams to develop their own identity and operate in autonomous ways that are consistent with the school building and district policies. In Warrensburg Middle School, teams are provided consistent common planning times so that they may function as a unit and collaborate regarding their students. Focus groups were held within teams.

Interviews were also a primary focus of data collection for the study, which is the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, Yin (2003) stated there are six main sources of evidence for case studies, but that “no single source has a complete advantage over all of the others” (p. 105). Therefore, the interviews were synthesized with data gathered from other sources, such as the focus groups. The semi structured interviews allowed flexibility within the interview, but provided a structure guided by a list of questions (Merriam, 2009). The interviews lasted approximately one hour and explored the personal experiences of the participants through conversational style (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). The data collected from the interviews will be used in triangulating the data from the other data obtained from other methods (Yin, 2003).

## **Setting**

The design of a research study is determined by several factors. Most importantly, the researchers must match the research question to the design (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). The setting of this program evaluation was at WMS, a secondary public school building that serves grades 6-8 and has approximately 760 students. There are 61 full time teachers employed in the building, with an additional 12 support staff (J.Elliott, personal communication, May 2017). The leadership structure of the building contains one principal and one assistant principal. The building enjoys a low average free and reduced lunch rate of 32% (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). Historically, the school scores well overall on the Missouri Assessment Program, meeting or exceeding state standards. However, there is always room for improvement. More specific information regarding WMS will be included in Section Two of this study.

## **Participants**

**Focus Groups.** The 35 focus group participants were all teachers from WMS. While all of the teachers participate in the RtI program, not all participated in the focus groups. However, to increase the participation rate, focus groups were held based on grade level teaming. One central concept in middle level learning is teaming. A group of teachers share the same students so that they can easily collaborate about those students and strategies to help them. The teams at Warrensburg Middle School are made up of one English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, one reading teacher, one math teacher, one social studies teacher, and one science teacher.

There are six core grade level teams at WMS. The school serves sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and there are two teams per grade level. Additionally, there are other teachers in the building who teach a variety of applied sciences classes. One focus group contained teachers from the applied sciences teacher pool.

The district utilizes a program to progress monitor math and reading; therefore, those content area teachers have more data available about the progress of their students. The principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach were also involved in the study. More information on each of these groups will be discussed below. Potential participants were contacted via email by the researcher directly. To avoid ethical conflict of interest or possible employment decision issues as outlined by the American Educational Research Association (2011), the principal or other school leaders in the building did not ask for or require participation of the teachers in the study.

The process of implementing RtI into WMS has been a long process, starting three years ago in 2014. In that amount of time, some employee changes have taken place. There are some teachers in the building who have been involved in the evolution of the RtI implementation process at WMS, while other teachers have only been in the building for the first year of building-wide implementation.

**Interviews.** There were three interviews conducted in this study. One interview was conducted with the head principal of WMS. He has been the school leader for 12 years and has been a part of the RtI implementation process since its inception at WMS. The second interview was with the instructional coach who is heavily involved with scheduling, planning, and troubleshooting issues that arise with the RtI model. The final

interview was with the assistant principal, who helps monitor academic achievement at WMS. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

### **Data Analysis**

A variety of methods were used to ensure validity (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2016). Focus groups, interviews, and examination of archived data were utilized to research the RtI program at WMS. The data were analyzed in a variety of ways. The researcher looked for themes in the qualitative data to help identify the perceptions of teachers and administrators on the value of the RtI model being implemented. The interview data were triangulated with focus group questions to attempt to discover convergence in the data (Yin, 2003). Participants were selected based upon the team they belong to and the content area they teach. This constituted a form of purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A basic tenet of qualitative research is the importance of data management. A common method is coding. *Coding* is defined as assigning a designation that fits different pieces of the data so they can be easily retrieved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). While analyzing the data, notes were used that included the researcher's "thoughts, musings, speculations, and hunches" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 200). As recommended by qualitative research experts, the researcher started data analysis as soon as data collection was initiated (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

Seidman (2013) also recommended that qualitative researchers "mark with brackets the passages that are interesting" (p. 120). This process reduces the amount of insignificant data. During bracketing, researchers use their own judgement about what is interesting and what is not. This initial data analysis, as described above, is known as

*open coding* (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). In addition, the researcher utilized a constant comparative method that involves utilizing open and axial coding in a cyclical process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, the researcher tries to determine if the categories, as they emerge, fit within a larger more encompassing category or theme.

The trustworthiness of the qualitative data were high as well, as the researcher made every guarantee possible to limit harm and already had a professional relationship with the participants. Researchers should collect data with minimal influence on the results. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that a researcher will always have some effect, but that it should be considered and minimized when possible. *Member checking* was utilized to increase reliability and validity of the data, and the eventual findings of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study provided valuable data to help drive and improve the RtI model at WMS. Therefore, the participants had personal reasons to participate truthfully in the process. Maintaining confidentiality was a priority to protect the participants as well as comply with the American Educational Research Association (2011) ethical guidelines. Although there is limited confidentiality within a focus group because the researcher cannot force participants to refrain from sharing information after the group, every attempt was made to maintain confidentiality. This is a program study, so the transferability may not be high. However, the findings will help other secondary schools consider the ramifications of implementing this model of RtI, both positive and negative.

### **Limitations, Assumptions, Design Controls**

There are limitations to this study. It is a program study, which makes the information specific to the research site. However, when accessing other literature in conjunction with this program evaluation, pertinent information can be gained for implementing RtI in a secondary setting. Another limitation is that the researcher and participants have been colleagues. While the researcher made every attempt to limit impact on the data, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that the researcher will have some effect. However, the researcher encouraged open and honest responses, as well as maintaining confidentiality in written publications. In accordance with American Educational Research Association (2011) guidelines, participants were not coerced or contacted by a superior in regards to participating in the study.

Assumptions regarding this study center around andragogy and the KASAB change theory. There are assumptions regarding adult learning such as: adults are self-directed learners, their lives are enriched by their experiences, adults possess readiness to learn, and internal motivation is high (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). This study assumed that the process of implementing RtI requires some form of adult learning, where assumptions about andragogy must be met to internalize and practice RtI with fidelity. In the KASAB model, there are five components of change which must take place in order to successfully create change: knowledge, attitude, skill, aspiration, behavior (National Staff Development Council, 2008). This study assumed that all components must be met during the process of preparation and implementation in order for the programming to be successful.

The design controls for the study were based on Creswell's (2013) recommendations. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that the data collection answers the research questions, as participants represented various content areas and experience levels (Creswell, 2013). The researcher made every effort to ensure the study was reliable and completed with ethical fortitude.

Qualitative reliability procedures included checking transcripts for error and cross checking codes (Creswell, 2013). The researcher triangulated data from different sources to build a coherent theme, used member checking for interview responses, and clarified researcher bias by using self-reflection to ensure qualitative validity (Creswell, 2013).

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

The following terms are defined for the purpose of the study:

*Applied Classes*- courses that are usually elective in nature and are skill based (art, music, industrial technology, P.E., family and consumer sciences, etc.).

*BOOST* - The tier-two RtI academic intervention model used by WMS.

*Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)*- the state education department for Missouri.

*English Language Arts (ELA)*- a contemporary name for traditional language arts classes in the United States where English is the primary language utilized such as Communication Arts or Reading class.

*KASAB*- a change theory model adapted from the Concerns-Based Adoption Model which was created to provide educational leaders with practical theory to guide the implementation of change efforts (Hall & Hord, 2000). The acronym stands for Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, Aspiration and Behavior.



*Missouri Assessment Program (MAP)*-the standardized tests given to students in Missouri in math, English language arts, and science. Students in grades 3-8 take the exam every spring.

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*- federal legislation passed in 2002 requiring school districts to meet rigid expectations academically in order to receive federal funding.

*Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)*- a school wide behavior support system to help encourage appropriate behaviors as well as discourage inappropriate behaviors in students.

*Progress monitoring*- assessing students frequently to check progress on achieving academic goals.

*Race to the Top (RTT)*- federal legislation passed by President Obama in 2009 that allowed public schools to apply for competitive grants in exchange for reforms “improving teacher training, evaluation, and retention policies; developing better data systems; the adoption of preferred school turnaround strategies; and building stakeholder support for reform” (McGuinn, 2015, pp. 8-9).

*Response to Intervention (RTI)*- “The practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005, p. 16).

*STAR 360*- An internet based software program to assess a student’s ability in reading and math. The program is used for benchmark screening three times per year and some teachers in the study use it for progress monitoring as well.

## **Significance of the Study**

As schools struggle to meet accountability requirements and ensure high levels of learning for all students, they are looking for ways to meet their needs. This program study helped provide information to not only increase the effectiveness of the RtI system within WMS but also provided valuable information within the broader secondary schools community. Many schools are looking for RtI models to implement within their schools and the findings provided information on the whole picture, benefits and drawbacks of this system.

## **Scholarship**

Research on RtI within secondary schools is insufficient and this study not only provided insight and feedback to improve RtI programming within WMS but also helped fill a gap in literature about the implementation of RtI in secondary settings. In answering the research questions, this study provided a robust qualitative study on the perceptions of teachers implementing RtI.

Schools are utilizing RtI, but do not have enough research to help provide a full picture of the strengths and drawbacks RtI can provide. A national survey of 1,306 district administrators found that 88% of the administrators said their schools were using RtI as an early intervention method (Spectrum K12 School Solutions, 2011). However, research on the effectiveness of RtI in secondary settings is still preliminary and much can be learned through studying existing models (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010; Shinn, 2008; Vaughn, Cirino, Wanzek, Wexler, Fletcher, et al., 2010). Therefore, more research must be conducted to determine other perceived benefits and drawbacks for schools that implement RtI. There is more to the story that needs to be explored. School

leaders need access to the bigger picture when considering implementing RtI within their building.

### **Practice**

With increasing accountability pressure on public schools to perform well on standardized testing, the need for effective classroom practice is increasing. School leaders do not logistically have time to experiment with scheduling and implementation options for RtI, but this study will help provide a framework for options, as well as tangible and intangible benefits, related to implementation.

This program study serves as an evaluation of the current RtI system at WMS and provides recommendations for practice. Through the study, more information was gained on the perceived benefits and drawbacks of using the BOOST model of RtI which will be helpful in guiding school leaders through implementation. Dulaney (2012) conducted a case study on the implementation process of RtI within one middle school, creating valuable information for school leaders to access regarding the process. This study adds more knowledge for implications of practice within secondary buildings, as well as directly provides useful data to the study site, WMS.

### **Summary**

The increasing accountability climate in public education has accelerated a need for schools to find solutions to close achievement gaps. One strategy some schools have implemented is RtI. The multi-tiered intervention system is designed to help students catch up with grade level expectations and standards. A review of the literature revealed that while the effectiveness and implementation process of RtI in elementary schools has been heavily studied, secondary RtI programs have less academic research surrounding

them. This study helped provide information to other practitioners about benefits, drawbacks, and the perceptions of teachers and administrators through the implementation of RtI in a middle school location.

The study used focus groups, interviews, and basic RtI programming data to determine the implementation success through the lense of the KASAB change theory. While the study is a specific program evaluation, the findings will be useful for secondary administrators and teacher leaders considering implementing RtI within their buildings. The scholarly contribution helps fill the gap in literature surrounding secondary RtI implementation.

**Section Two:  
Practitioner Setting for the Study**

## **Introduction**

Public schools across the nation are working to implement Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies within their schools to bolster student learning and achievement scores (Dulaney, 2012). While this study seeks to evaluate a specific RtI program with considerations of perceptions of teachers and administrators, the information gained will also be constructive in larger practitioner contexts. As schools work to implement RtI, providing background on the implementation process at WMS and evaluating the program will provide a framework for schools just beginning to implement RtI.

## **History of the Organization**

### **The City of Warrensburg**

The city of Warrensburg is located in west central Missouri. The area surrounding the town was first settled in 1818 and the first township boundaries were created in 1836 (City of Warrensburg, 2017). The rural town is located approximately 50 miles east of Kansas City, Missouri.

Demographics according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017) are that Warrensburg had a population of 18,838 in 2010, while estimates for 2016 are 20,251. The population is primarily white. The race breakdown in 2010 was as follows: 85.3% white, 7.5% Black or African American, Latino 3.1%, two or more races 3.1%, 2.8% Asian, American Indian 0.5%, and Pacific Islander 0.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Median household income in 2015 was \$40,789, with approximately 25% of the population living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

The community enjoys two unique situations that affect operations. Whiteman Air Force Base is located approximately ten miles from Warrensburg and the University of Central Missouri's (UCM) main campus is in Warrensburg. Whiteman Air Force Base draws military families from across the United States. However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017) data, in 2015 only 1,914 citizens were veterans. However, the transient military population affects schools in the area as their enrollment fluctuates based on Whiteman Air Force Base's operations.

The presence of a higher education institution within the community affects Warrensburg as well. Education is important in Warrensburg, with 92.6% of the population (over 25 years of age) being high school graduates, while 40.7% of that same population hold at least a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Additionally, school enrollments are affected by students and professors relocating to Warrensburg to work or study at UCM.

### **Warrensburg School District**

The Warrensburg School District is a fully accredited public school district which has earned the Distinction in Performance achievement, which means the district has met all of the performance standards set forth by DESE (Warrensburg School District, 2017). The district has one high school, one middle school, four elementary, and an alternative high school which also services students with special needs who require a placement other than a regular school building. The graduation rate in 2016 was 95.54%, which is significantly higher than the 89.04% Missouri average (Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education, 2017).

According to the Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) of Missouri, the 2016 enrollment for the district was 3,261. The free and reduced lunch rate was 38.3% in 2016, which is consistent with trend data from the previous five years (Missouri DESE, 2017). The district race demographics in 2016 were as follows: 80.22% White, 6.23% multiracial, 5.34% Hispanic, 5.18% Black, 1.78% Asian, 0.71% Pacific Islander, and 0.52% American Indian (Missouri DESE, 2017). The demographics are somewhat consistent with the community population demographics.

The school facilities have changed over the years to accommodate the changing population and growth. The newest building was built in 2011, while another building is almost 100 years old (Warrensburg School District, 2017). The school district has a classroom teacher to student ratio of 1:18. The average number of teachers with a Master's Degree or higher is 67.8% which is higher than the Missouri average of 58.7% (Missouri DESE, 2017). This could be because of the access to higher education with UCM located in the community.

### **Warrensburg Middle School (WMS)**

WMS serves grades six through eight in the Warrensburg R-VI School District in Warrensburg, MO. It was built in 1996 and has had one building addition (Warrensburg School District, 2017). There are approximately 760 students in the building and 73 teachers and staff (J. Elliott, personal communication, May 15, 2017). The leadership structure consists of one principal and one assistant principal. However, there is a building leadership team made up of seven teachers and an instructional coach who help make decisions and implement initiatives.



According to Missouri DESE (2017), the student population demographics of WMS are as follows: 77.90% White, 7% Multiracial, and 7.5% Hispanic. The Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian statistics were denoted on the Missouri DESE report to have been too small of a sample size to give an accurate number as indicated in the report (Missouri DESE, 2017). The building demographics are consistent with community and district demographics with the exception of the Black population being decreased.

Teachers work hard to provide quality education for students. The teachers at WMS have an average of 13.7 years teaching experience. District-wide 67.8% of teachers have a Master's degree, but at the middle school 74.3% of the teachers have a Master's degree or higher (Missouri DESE, 2017). The average level of education that teachers at WMS have obtained is impressive and will surely benefit the students. Again, it is likely that teacher access to UCM contributes to the high levels of degree attainment at WMS. Teachers at WMS are seasoned, allowing them years of experiences to guide their teaching. However, this information should also be considered when implementing new initiatives, as many of the teachers have been operating a certain way for a while, possibly making change more difficult. Considering the KASAB change theory model will be important for building leaders at WMS. Meeting the components of KASAB (knowledge, application, skill, aspiration, behavior) will be pertinent in making changes.

The organizational structure of WMS consists of a teaming framework. Each grade level has two teams of core teachers who teach math, reading, English Language Arts (ELA), social studies, and science. The teachers specialize by content area. The students are split into two groups in each grade level, hence the two teams. Teaming

allows teachers to share the same students that allow them to form strong relationships with the students and to collaborate about best practices individualized for each student. In addition to the six core teams, there are two other teams that operate within the school. The exploratory team is made up of music, art, band, and physical education teachers. The student support team consists of a speech pathologist, two counselors, one librarian, one special education process coordinator, as well as others who provide support services to students (J. Elliott, personal communication, May 2017).

Overall, WMS has enjoyed much success, consistently scoring above state average on standardized tests. However, one subgroup of students, special education students, continue to score below state average and do not seem to make gains on their test scores (Missouri DESE, 2017). In addition, there are students who do not qualify for special education, but are low academic achievers (S. Fisher, personal communication, May 2017). The RtI model that WMS has implemented is an attempt to make gains in student learning gaps.

### **The RtI Implementation Process at WMS**

The culture of the school is changing. In the past, the teachers have been very complacent with academic achievement scores. Being good enough to score above average on state standardized tests used to be enough. Now, with a push from administration and the building leadership team, the teachers are working to move all students even further along the academic success continuum. Of course, making changes that involve more teacher work time and no compensation has its roadblocks. Using the RtI system does require more teacher work, as well as student work. However, it is in the best interest of the students to make the changes necessary to go from good to great.

Once WMS realized there was much to be done to create a three tiered academic intervention system, various teachers set out to work on learning more about the process. Teachers from throughout the building went to various workshops, conferences and toured schools. One of the best ways to learn about what works in schools is to see it in action.

One teacher toured a school of similar size approximately 75 miles away. This tour happened in the fall of 2013. The school had been labeled as a model school for Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) and used a three tiered system for behavior and academic support. In the beginning of the process, WMS was only interested in the academic support system but eventually also started to transition to PBIS for behavior structures in the building. However, this study is centered on the process to create an effective RtI program.

During the initial phase of this process, one seventh grade level team asked for permission from the administration to venture out and create a time within their elective classes to work with students who needed academic interventions. Starting in January 2014, the seventh grade team created a schedule within the existing schedule that carved out a thirty minute period on alternating days where students were grouped based on academic achievement scores that were available. Those scores included previous MAP scores, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) scores, and grades (A.Nelson, personal communication, February 14, 2014). The teachers recruited the school resource officer, paraprofessionals, the instructional coach, and the librarian to help with this intervention time. The additional personnel allowed the students to be placed into smaller groups, allowing for more targeted intervention delivery. In the beginning phase, teachers only

worked on literacy skills. The lessons focused on reading comprehension and fluency. The instructional coach and language arts teacher were integral in providing lessons for the other adults to use. Even though teachers at the middle level are content experts, all adults involved were willing to try teaching literacy skills to improve student learning

Through professional development and school tours the school leadership team, comprised of an instructional coach and members from every grade level in the building, began to consider how an academic intervention time could be worked into the existing schedule at WMS. School-wide implementation was a crucial next step to create a systematic model to deliver interventions to students, which is necessary for success (King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012; Sansoti, Noltemeyer, & Goss, 2010). While this process was occurring, the other seventh grade team decided to jump on board and ability group their students as well to provide an academic intervention during their elective block. A common roadblock for secondary schools trying to implement RtI is scheduling (Denton et al., 2011). With students switching classrooms and teachers each 85 minute block and having multiple grade levels involved, locating a common time to provide interventions school-wide is difficult. In fact, even when the other seventh grade team wanted to join in on the trial process, they were still unable to provide an intervention at the same time as the other seventh grade team. The schedules did not match up. However, in August of 2014, the entire seventh grade started providing an intervention during the day.

WMS runs a block schedule with classes meeting every other day. The days are called red and white to organize scheduling. One of the seventh grade teams delivered interventions on white days, while the other team provided interventions on red days. Block scheduling allows for longer class periods, which was helpful for pulling time from

elective courses so students did not miss normal instructional time, which has been detrimental to academic growth (Sparks, 2015). During the fall 2014 semester, all seventh graders received a literacy intervention based on their needs according to MAP data, teacher recommendation, and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). During this time, the two seventh grade teams met periodically to collaborate on lessons and provide feedback on the program. It was difficult to manage. Some of the extra personnel who had been able to help the first time interventions were delivered were no longer able to help, which created larger groups. Additionally, some teachers were becoming worn down with literacy lessons they believed they were not qualified to teach. During one of the collaboration times, the seventh grade teachers suggested the need for a name for the intervention time. The name “BOOST” was chosen after teachers made name suggestions and discussed options. The seventh grade “BOOST” stood for Broadening Opportunities to Obtain Superior Thinking (C. Bechtol, personal communication, October 2014). Some of the teachers liked it because it sounded like teachers were giving students a boost. From that time on, the intervention time became known as BOOST.

BOOST started out as a literacy intervention as many elementary RtI programs do (Dulaney, 2012; Robins & Antrim, 2013). Over time, that changed. The next phase of the program evolution came the next semester. The complexity of middle school scheduling created a barrier to creating a building-wide common intervention time. However to create fluid groups and secure the most personnel possible to help run small groups, a common intervention time was needed. WMS participates in teaming, where students are assigned to a team of teachers and work throughout the year with those teachers. Teaming allows the teachers to get to know their students well in addition to providing

the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues to most effectively help students. There are two teams per grade level. While teaming allows the teachers to get to know their students well, it keeps the students secluded from half of their grade level population. One benefit of having a schoolwide intervention time is that students from different teams who have the same deficit of skills could be grouped together for an intervention. This phase of the RtI process at WMS finally allowed schoolwide grouping. In the spring of 2016, the principal required the whole school to participate in the intervention time. The intervention groups were created based on SRI data and teacher recommendations. The building focused on reading and language arts during this time period.

After the first attempt at school-wide implementation, the principal enlisted feedback from the staff via an electronic survey. The survey was given in March 2016 and provided initial impressions of building-wide RtI from the people who were actually implementing it, the teachers. Based on the survey, changes were made to accommodate teacher concerns and improve the system (J.Elliott, personal communication, May 2017). In the survey, teachers were asked to describe the aspects of BOOST they liked. The survey was sent to all 70 teachers and 36 responded. Comments such as, “time to work on targeted interventions”, “...catching the students during the day”, “getting to do more enriching experiments and labs with students” were submitted as responses (BOOST Survey, March 2016). When asked how BOOST could be improved, some responses were, “...groupings based more on need...drafting students for core classes would be awesome”, “all year consistency”, “add a celebration time”, “identify student

needs earlier to ensure most beneficial placement” (BOOST Survey, March 2016). The survey provided valuable feedback for the administration.

The biggest change that was requested was in how students were put into small groups for interventions. Teachers wanted the autonomy to draft students they needed for interventions rather than place students into semi-permanent groups for six weeks at a time. This new method would allow groups to be fluid, allowing a teacher to work with a student only once or continually, based on need. Another change was the daily schedule. Staff did not want to lose the character education instructional time known as Life 101. In the first phase of building-wide RtI, Life 101 time was jeopardized. This building-wide class period met every day with a small group of students per teacher to allow students to form positive relationships with staff. Life 101 is also a time for celebrations and character education. Middle school students experience social, emotional, and physical changes over their adolescent years and the Life 101 curriculum provided support for those areas. Survey responses indicated that of the 36 participants, 21 teachers wanted to create a separate time for BOOST and still have Life 101 as normal (BOOST Survey, March 2016). Major changes to scheduling needed to occur.

A small group of people worked to create the new building schedule to allow for a common intervention time that did not affect Life 101. The principal, assistant principal, one counselor, the instructional coach, and one teacher worked together to develop a new bell schedule. This would be the first time the bell schedule had changed in twenty years. To create a time where all students could be served at the same time, the intervention time needed to be in the morning. Lunch shifts created a difference in grade level scheduling, so the new time had to be put into the schedule before lunch shifts started.

Additionally, this new common time had to be created, which meant shaving minutes off of class periods. In the end, approximately four minutes per class period were cut out of the schedule to create a new 25 minute intervention period called BOOST. This time period came directly after Life 101 and before third block.

The next obstacle was how to create intervention groups. Teachers wanted to be able to draft students, but that would take an organized system to allow all teachers the chance to draft students no matter their content. The instructional coach visited a neighboring school district that had a draft system in place and created a system similar to the one the neighboring district used. Teachers fill out a Google Form survey when they want to provide an intervention to a student. The form asks for the student name, what day(s) the teacher wants to administer the intervention, the name of the requesting teacher, the subject area the intervention is in, and any other information that would be helpful such as what supplies are needed when the students come to receive the intervention (BOOST Draft Form, 2017).

To allow all teachers the chance to draft students to provide them extra help, a priority schedule was created. It is possible that one student needs support in math and reading, but both teachers cannot have them on the same day. The priority schedule allowed for all teachers to have the chance to work with students, not just literacy teachers. If a student is drafted by two teachers on the same day, then the priority schedule is consulted. The priority schedule is as follows: Monday is math, Tuesday is ELA, Thursday is social studies and science, and Friday is applied sciences (electives, fine arts, etc.). There is no BOOST on Wednesday because the district has early release every Wednesday to allow for teacher collaboration. This new drafting system allowed



teachers to easily request students who needed interventions and it was timely. A teacher might see on a Monday that a student is struggling with a concept and they could potentially draft the student for Thursday. The draft reports are run on Wednesday afternoon for the Thursday and Friday BOOST times and again on Friday to organize the Monday and Tuesday BOOST schedule. The instructional coach in the building is in charge of compiling the data from the draft system and distributing it to the school via email.

One component that cannot be overlooked is professional development. In the fall of 2016, the new draft system was started. Before the school year began, the instructional coach spent time during a professional development workshop training the staff on the concept of RtI. Content discussed included the tiered intervention RtI model, practical application of interventions within normal instruction, and a tutorial in using the draft system. As a successful KASAB model requires, teachers must have the knowledge regarding RtI in order to begin the change process. This professional development helped educate the WMS staff on the basics of RtI and the application model the school would be transitioning to. The 2016-2017 school year was the first year of full implementation.

Soliciting feedback is an important component of program growth. In the early spring of 2017, the principal of WMS asked teachers to provide feedback on positives and opportunities for improvement in all areas of school operations. The survey was left open ended to allow teachers the chance to write whatever they wanted because the principal wanted honest feedback. An overwhelming positive listed was BOOST. No teacher put BOOST as an opportunity to improve, but almost all included it in the positives section. This feedback allowed the principal to solidify the schedule changes

made the year before were good choices. After six months of implementation, teachers really liked BOOST. However, as any program, it will continue to evolve as new considerations arise.

### **Organizational Analysis**

The organization functions primarily within Bolman and Deal's (2013) human resource frame. The leader works to empower team members by encouraging input from staff and allowing decision making power within the building leadership team. The human resource frame effects implications for research in this setting because there is a human element included in the variables. Teachers will be implementing strategies to attempt to increase standardized test scores and overall better academic achievement. Bolman and Deal (2013) stated, "Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives" (p. 45). Therefore, the leadership at WMS must work to create shared visions and work with staff to build consensus and common goals. "Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 45).

The organization operates with a variety of workers involved. The following work at WMS: one head principal, one assistant principal, one instructional coach, two counselors, one social worker, teachers, paraprofessionals, administrative assistants, librarians, technology aides, custodians and lunchroom supervisors. Mintzberg (1989) developed the "five components of organizational structure [which] are strategic apex, middle management, operating core, techno structure, and support staff" (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Mintzberg, 1989). Organizations that have strengthened the five components of organizational structure are then able to adjust the structures. Teachers make up the

operating core of WMS. They must not be overlooked in considerations regarding change in the building. Implementing RTI required a change in instructional practice, which can be met with anxiety and/or resistance from teachers. Through the lense of the KASAB change theory, working with the operating core through professional development and encouragement is a necessity for positive change.

Schools are notorious for branding. Shirts, coffee cups, pens, stationery, bumper stickers and more are proudly displayed all over school campuses. School pride helps drive the culture of the building as well as the way the public views the school. Bolman and Deal (2013) said “the symbolic frame focuses on how humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live. Meaning, belief, and faith are its central concerns. Meaning is not given to us; we create it” (p. 244). Leaders must help create school culture by setting expectations, modeling, and fostering a climate conducive to their cultural goal. The symbolic frame helps explain not only why teachers become strong advocates for their schools but also why change can be difficult. Teachers may think: we have always done it this way and it works...why change it? Using change theory and tenets of andragogy can help leaders navigate creating successful change in schools.

Schools can be highly political. With the use of public tax money for funding and the community’s youth education at stake, citizens tend to become highly motivated to be involved in the education decision making process. Stakeholders feel entitled to make decisions since the school is publicly funded. Bolman and Deal (2013) continued the discussion of power through the lens of the political frame. The political frame of Bolman and Deal (2013) defined “the idea of power, [as] a concept that is central in

political thinking” (p. 183). Leaders must look upon the decisions that are made through the political frame of power, conflict, and coalition. “You need friends and allies to get things done” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 214), is a statement to keep in mind when considering making changes in a school. The friendships and allies that are developed will help to build the political power base that is necessary to bring about change.

In discussions about morality and politics, Bolman and Deal (2013) developed a strategy to align people to a single point of view. The 4-step process sets forth the need to explain the vision of the change, explain the understanding of the fear of change, identify everyone’s part in the problem, and describe what the plan is. Schools must use this process to help bring teachers and community members on board with changes. WMS does an excellent job communicating with parents via daily emails, monthly newsletters, and frequent social media postings. Constant communication between families and the school creates the opportunity for frequent positive interaction and makes it easier to create allies in the process.

### **Leadership Analysis**

When applying behavioral approach leadership concepts to the organization, the leadership behaviors fall mostly within the “Middle of the Road Management, (5.5)” grid of Jake and Mouton’s Managerial Grid (Northouse, 2016, p. 76). The leadership style describes leaders who “have an intermediate concern for the task and an intermediate concern for the people who do the task” (Northouse, 2016, p. 76). The principal is concerned with teachers and staff, as well as with running the school smoothly.

Middle of the road managers compromise. They find a balance between the people involved and the task. According to Northouse (2016), middle of the road

managers avoid conflict when possible, but do push for moderate levels of production. The principal has been very supportive of implementing RtI within the school, but has been very careful not to upset teachers by requiring fast implementation. The process has been slow, but the rewards are great. The genuine concern for finding an effective strategy to move students towards academic success is present.

Leadership requires a distinct understanding of power. Levi (2014) described power as “the ability to change the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others” (p. 159). Many teachers at WMS did not originally want to change their classroom practices to incorporate RtI. However, over time, the principal and leadership team worked to create motivation in the staff towards implementation. Kotter (2012) stated leadership that is working to create major change must first establish a sense of urgency. WMS administrators and the leadership team presented information to the staff about the need for change over the course of the first three years of initial implementation. Additionally, a survey was given to assess the teacher’s understanding of BOOST and the ideas that they may have for change after the first semester of building-wide implementation (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Levi, 2014; Kotter, 2012).

School initiatives take careful planning, reflection, and leadership to make them successful. The administration has done well moving away from the more coercive and legitimate power structures and utilizing the steps of bringing adversaries together by the following strategy: “(1) tell(ing) them your vision, (2) state(ing) your best understandings of their position, (3) identify(ing) your contribution to the problem, and (4) tell(ing) them what you plan to do without making demands” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 219). The

principal has worked with teachers to create a shared vision that includes an underlying theme that insists teachers do whatever it takes to help students learn.

### **Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting**

Education is a people business. The people involved in working with students on academic strategies can inspire them and help them gain knowledge, or be uncommitted to the cause and not put forth their best effort. The fidelity of the implementation must be considered. For teachers to implement the strategies with fidelity they must feel empowered and have their needs met (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The leadership and organization structure could easily affect the research in this situation.

The leadership style of middle of the road manager fits well with the research. The leader balances taking care of his staff while encouraging them to work hard to get the task finished. Inspiration is necessary in this research setting, as well as job satisfaction. The teachers must feel well taken care of if they are expected to go above and beyond normal curriculum standards to help students fill gaps in their knowledge and raise their reading scores.

### **Summary**

The implementation process of the RtI program at WMS has been long. Over the course of three years, new phases were implemented to gradually increase teacher responsibility and buy-in. The organizational structure of the organization required the bulk of the workforce, the teachers, to carry much of the load when implementing interventions. The principal's leadership style complimented the gradual approach to implementation, easing teachers into the initiative. After much planning and work, the

program is being fully implemented and the leader is ready for feedback to improve the operation.

**Section Three:  
Scholarly Review for the Study**



## **Introduction**

Student achievement is at the heart of our education system. Teaching and learning are measured tirelessly by school officials all across America and standardized test scores are tied to schools' names in the public eye. In the chaotic world of school finance, standardized tests have become a way to measure school effectiveness and be a basis for the funding formula. In an effort to try to meet the needs of students and simultaneously raise test scores, many schools have embarked on using a system called Response to Intervention (RtI) to target students with missing skills and intervene early in the learning process to allow for maximum student growth (Pedrotty Bryant, 2014). This study evaluated the implementation of an RtI model in a middle school while considering the perceptions of teachers and other school employees involved in the process.

RtI was originally created to work as a tiered intervention system in elementary schools. The focus was literacy, a basis for many other skills students need to master. While research shows mixed results with the implementation of RtI, many of the strategies employed within the system are effective at raising achievement scores and closing students' knowledge gaps (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Many researchers have spent time studying the implementation processes at elementary schools (Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Pedrotty Bryant, 2014), scheduling concerns (Denton et al., 2011), instructional strategies (Pedrotty Bryant, 2014) and other considerations that might affect the fidelity of implementation (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Many elementary schools have had success with using the RtI structure and, consequently, secondary schools have begun adapting the RtI process to their own student and teacher needs. However, secondary schools have unique structural issues that create problems when implementing RtI. The whole

implementation process looks different than it does within elementary schools.

Researchers are just starting to document and study secondary school RtI implementation and not enough is known about what creates an effective RtI system in secondary schools or what other benefits may come to the school from implementing RtI.

The problem of practice is that as the movement for student achievement continues to pressure schools, we still know very little about implementing RtI in secondary school settings and there is a lack in knowledge of the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the RtI implementation process. A 2015 study of 20,000 students in 13 states by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance reported that first graders who received reading interventions actually did worse than identical peers (Sparks, 2015). However, a national survey performed by Spectrum K12 School Solutions (2011) surveyed 1,306 district administrators and found that 88% of the administrators said their schools were using RtI as an early intervention method. Therefore, more research must be done to determine other perceived benefits and drawbacks for schools who implement RtI. There is more to the story that needs to be explored. School leaders need access to the bigger picture when considering implementing RtI within their building.

There is a great deal of research regarding RtI at the elementary level. There is a gap in the literature when considering successful implementation of RtI in secondary school, as well as possible unintended positive and negative consequences and the perceptions of those involved. While some components of elementary RtI systems can be helpful in guiding the implementation of secondary RtI, other roadblocks must be considered and carefully evaluated when trying to develop an RtI program to meet the

unique needs of secondary schools and, in this specific study, middle level learners. This research will help to fill that gap with knowledge based on one middle school's journey implementing RtI.

One component that cannot be overlooked in the structuring process of building an RtI model in a school is teacher buy-in and school climate. Creating and implementing a program successfully requires fidelity in the process. Teachers must be invested in the work they are doing for the program to work. This study seeks to evaluate a program within a middle school. Neglecting to consider teacher buy-in and school climate would be like trying to put together a puzzle without all of the pieces.

Several topics will be considered in this review of literature. The first topic that will lay the foundation for this study is the background information regarding the nationwide push for academic achievement and standardized testing. Federal and state legislation have created a sense of urgency for schools to rise to the top. Another area of literature that must be analyzed is the information surrounding the original intent and implementation of RtI. An additional component that impacts the implementation of any school program is teacher buy-in and overall school climate. Therefore, one pillar of this literature review will examine change theory within schools; just as Clark, et al. (2014) used change theory to evaluate impact on curriculum development, it should be considered when implementing new programming in schools.

The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of an RtI model within one middle school setting. The study considered the effectiveness of the program according to the perceptions of teachers and administrators utilizing the program. In an

attempt to close the achievement gap, Warrensburg Middle School (WMS) created an RtI system to address the academic needs of students.

This study outlined the process of the creation of the RtI model WMS is using, as well as evaluated the program for future considerations and possible replications in academic practice. While the goal of the RtI system is to close the achievement gap and provide students instruction and practice on missing skills, there is more to the story. Teacher perception must be considered in the process, and overall school culture and program implementation can threaten fidelity. Additionally, while descriptive student achievement statistics alone may or may not provide justification for the model, the whole picture was considered to evaluate the program.

## **Movement for Student Achievement**

### **Legislation**

**Early federal laws.** To understand public schools' current drive for increasing student achievement scores, it is necessary to know the process. Ellwood Cubberley's seminal contribution to education finance theory has helped create guidelines for the evolution of education finance (Verstegen, 2011). Cubberley (1919) recounted the process by which schools were started in America, claiming the Protestant Revolt in Europe brought the necessity of literacy to all children so they could be well versed in the Gospels as a means to personal salvation. The Massachusetts Law of 1642, established by the Puritans, created the first compulsory education law in America (Cubberley, 1919). While the Puritan church created optional schools for children, the Massachusetts Law of 1642 required the town officials to check on parents from time to time to make sure they were tending to the educational needs of their children. The law represents the first time

that a legislative body representing the state required literacy for all children (Cubberley, 1919). By 1965, a federal compensatory education law was enacted (Peterson & West, 2003).

Education is not included in the Constitution of the United States of America. Post war debt following the Revolutionary War forced many schools to close and the states overlooked the costly job of providing education to our citizens (Cubberley, 1919). The absence of education in the Constitution set the stage for its policies to be included in the enumerated powers held by the states. President George Washington referenced the need for the government to enlighten citizens with knowledge in his farewell speech in 1796. Starting in 1802, Congress gave one section of land to each township in order to maintain schools (Cubberely, 1919). This was the beginning of federal funds being allocated to public education. Over time, each state took its own path to create an education system to be funded with the collection of taxes.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB).** The more recent legislation that helped catapult school accountability is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2002. Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly (2004) described NCLB as “the most sweeping reform of U.S. federal education policy since the 1960s” (p.1). This law created very specific requirements schools must adhere to or receive corrective action. Schools must have a rigorous standardized test and students must continue to make progress via student achievement, attendance, and graduation rates (Potter & Stefkovich, 2009). Schools must disaggregate student scores on standardized tests by race, class, disability, and language and must continue to work toward closing achievement gaps in those areas (Skrla et al., 2004).

It is estimated that NCLB “increased the federal share of the country’s total school funding by barely one percentage point” (Peterson & West, 2003, p. 1). At the time of NCLB, the federal government only covered approximately seven to eight percent of the total cost of education, leaving the rest up to local revenue and state funding (Petersen & West, 2003). Potter and Stefkovich (2009) suggested many schools’ “fear of sanctions that come from failing to meet AYP [adequate yearly progress] drives schools to focus on raising test scores of low achievers” (p. 40).

**Race to the Top (RTT).** NCLB created an urgency for schools to meet federal guidelines to be able to receive funding. However, by 2011, an estimated 48% of schools nationwide did not meet NCLB requirements and were supposed to receive financial penalties based on their performance (McGuinn, 2015). In 2011, President Barack Obama created a waiver system for schools to avoid accountability measures set forth by NCLB (Simendinger, 2011). President Obama had also introduced a new incentive program in 2008 called Race to the Top (RTT), which rewarded schools with grant incentives if they could meet new reform guidelines. The RTT applications were assessed on four components: “improving teacher training, evaluation, and retention policies; developing better data systems; the adoption of preferred school turnaround strategies; and building stakeholder support for reform” (McGuinn, 2015, pp. 8-9). RtI is a student data based system to help identify and target students with missing skills. Therefore, RTT increased schools’ enthusiasm to implement RtI.

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).** NCLB shifted much of the decision making and resource allocation away from the states and allowed the federal government more power in public education. However, after NCLB’s provisions expanded testing

requirements and accountability measures that tended to punish too many public schools who could not meet the adequate yearly progress (AYP), it was clear that something needed to change (El Moussaoui, 2017). Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) differed from its NCLB predecessor in that it shifts decision making power back to the states (El Moussaoui, 2017). However, there are still accountability measures that will hold schools accountable for closing the achievement gap (Agoratus, 2016). According to Agoratus (2016), ESSA requires:

Accountability is required in reading, math, science, graduation rates, and one indicator of school quality or child success determined by the state. This includes standardized assessments requiring 95% participation rates, except for up to 1% of all students who have significant cognitive disabilities and will take alternate assessments. (pg. 2)

While NCLB has gone away, other accountability measures continue to push schools to close achievement gaps and to work to increase scores.

## **Response to Intervention (RtI)**

### **The Origination and Purpose**

RtI was created as a solution to help close the gap in achievement scores but has grown to be a federally approved way to identify students for special education.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2005) defined RtI as:

the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in

instruction or goals and applying child response data to important educational decisions. (p.16)

RtI emerged to address early literacy deficits in primary elementary schools (Duffy, 2007). The lack of basic reading skills in adolescents within our nation has prompted Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010) to call the issue a “public health crisis” (p. 26). Schools work to provide the best education possible for students with limited budgets and time constraints. With the NCLB Act of 2002 pressuring schools to make student achievement gains, RtI emerged as a systematic option to target and work with students to increase their knowledge and overall achievement scores. However, as suggested by Sparks (2015), there is a clear gap between RtI research and practice. More must be done to continue the research on RtI to create clear effective models and understand all implications surrounding it.

**RTI as an intervention to raise test scores.** Maximizing student achievement has always been at the heart of RtI. Used primarily as an elementary literacy model in the beginning, RtI has grown to encompass all content areas and has become prevalent in secondary schools as well. A national survey performed by Spectrum K12 School Solutions (2011) surveyed 1,306 district administrators and found that 88% of the administrators said their schools were using RtI as an early intervention method.

The systematic identification of student deficits allows educators to identify students who need extra help before standardized state testing takes place. With the increased accountability measures placed upon schools, it has become important to target students who are missing grade level skills that will be tested on standardized tests and provide interventions to close learning gaps (Sparks, 2015). Hopefully, through RtI



implementation, the achievement gap will close and students will gain knowledge and skills.

Students across America struggle to achieve on grade level. According to Swanson (2006), a significant number of children demonstrate poor mathematics achievement. State standardized test include mathematics content, which has highlighted the need for math interventions. Allsopp and Hoppey (2011) stated the need for RtI to help bolster academic scores and help American students better achieve in mathematics. However, it is not just math where students struggle. As previously stated, literacy was the original target of RtI (Duffy, 2007). Closing knowledge gaps and raising test scores were the original intention of RtI, but over time, another use has arisen for RtI.

**RtI as a component of Special Education.** RtI has evolved into a component of the special education arena with its use as a mechanism to identify students for special education services. Many districts are moving away from the discrepancy model, where students meet criteria for special education when there is a large enough discrepancy between the student's I.Q. and achievement level. This model assumes that something is wrong with the individual child (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). The use of RtI to qualify students for special education operates on the premise that there is something wrong with the instruction the child is receiving and that there is a better fit available with individualized instruction (Batsche, 2006). Therefore, RtI can be used as a screening tool to determine if a student would benefit from special education.

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) authorized funding for RtI instruction (Robins & Antrim, 2013). While RtI is now an allowable expense for special education funding, not all districts use it as their qualifying method for special education.

However, IDEA states that the use of the discrepancy formula is not the sole method to identify a student with disabilities but that student data demonstrating a child's response to an intervention is now equally allowed (Stecker, 2007). By 2011, 43 states allowed either the discrepancy model or the use of RtI to qualify special education students, while only seven states required the use of RtI to identify special education (Printy & Williams, 2014).

An effective RtI system can actually help reduce the number of students who qualify for special education, increase the number of students achieving at grade level standards and reduce rates of disengagement (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008). While RtI can be used to identify students for special education, it also helps schools build a common framework of academic interventions and provide quality instruction to all students. Through the tiered system, some students are able to make academic progress without needing a change in instructional programming as provided in an Individual Education Plan (IEP) through special education. Students' needs may be met through regular education differentiation and tiered interventions, resulting in the student not qualifying for special education.

### **Framework of Use for RtI**

While implementation varies from district to district, one salient characteristic of RtI is the multi-tiered delivery system based on analysis of data gathered from student assessments (Denton et al., 2011). The tertiary system involves systematic support to help all students achieve. Tier one models are typically considered normal everyday instruction that all students receive. At this level, all students take an assessment to determine if they are meeting state standards appropriate for their grade level. In general,

students who are lacking skills and concepts as indicated by a building-wide assessment are moved to tier two. Tier two instruction is usually given in small groups and is targeted at the specific skills that students are missing. At tier two, progress monitoring is utilized to determine student growth and evaluate instructional practices. Students who do not progress within tier two are moved on to an intensive intervention labeled as tier three. Carefully planned, intense instruction takes place with students one-on-one or in a small group basis. Students in tier three are often extensively behind on grade level skills.

### **Elementary**

The emergence of RtI is associated with early literacy in response to a large nationwide reading deficit (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010). Through the nationwide elementary push to close achievement gaps a systematic tiered intervention system was born. Since RtI began in primary and elementary schools, there is more research available about elementary RtI programming to help practitioners in planning for their own implementation.

**Structure and scheduling.** In primary and elementary schools, students typically stay within one classroom most of the day, with the exception of specials classes such as physical education, art, and music. Since students are with one teacher most of the time, the scheduling process is easier to craft than that of a secondary school. Additionally, students do not earn credits toward graduation in elementary school, which allows students to be pulled out of regular classroom instruction without affecting the student's promotion to the next grade. However, there may be other issues with pulling students out of regular instruction for RtI.

The pull out method of RtI revolves around students with deficits being removed from normal regular education instruction time to receive a targeted intensive intervention. However, studies suggest that this method is not effective as students are missing quality instruction in the classroom and could fall further behind (Sparks, 2015). This means that schools must find a better method to serve students with missing skills and provide an intervention in addition to the regular instruction.

Creating a building-wide or class-wide instruction time will guarantee that students are not missing regular instruction. A 2015 study of 20,000 students in 13 states by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance reported that first graders who received reading interventions actually did worse than identical peers (Sparks, 2015). This alarming statistic prompted more research to look at possible implementation failure or overall effectiveness. The findings found that many students were being pulled from regular classes and missing out on grade level instruction. Therefore, in some instances, as gaps were closed through interventions, more gaps were created from missing grade level curriculum (Shanahan, 2015).

**Essential components.** The common components that are suggested for effective RtI within an elementary school are similar to that of a secondary school, which are described later in this section. However, given the emergence of RtI was within elementary, more research is available on the effectiveness of RtI in elementary versus secondary. In studies such as that of Denton et al. (2011) and Crawford (2014), commonalities in RtI frameworks include multi- tiered systems, quality assessment practices, and progress monitoring.

**Considerations for administration.** While scheduling and logistics is always a consideration when making programming changes, there are other factors to consider as well. In fact, in the previously mentioned 2015 study of 20,000 students (Sparks, 2015) first graders who received tier 2 interventions in reading actually performed 11% lower on average on the second benchmark test of the year than their non-intervention peers. However, in the second and third grade, there were no significant benefits or negative effects from receiving interventions (Shanahan, 2015; Sparks, 2015,). Additionally, Denton et al. (2011) found that in a first grade reading tier two intervention group, there were no significant differences in response rates between students receiving a more intensive intervention versus those receiving less. In fact, when considering covariates such as demographics and instructional variables, there were no significant differences (Denton et al., 2011). Therefore, administrators need to consider if there are other possible benefits to implementing RtI such as teacher and parent perceptions or other unintended consequences for using RtI. There may be other benefits to RtI in addition or in lieu of the academic benefits; this study will work to identify those.

### **Secondary RtI**

Schools across the nation are working to meet state and federal guidelines. Utilizing RtI is one way to help fill the achievement gap some students are experiencing. While some secondary schools are diving into RtI, it has been significantly less studied than the RtI process in elementary schools. The National Center on Response to Intervention (2013) stated there is a need for empirical studies on RtI in secondary schools since currently there is only preliminary knowledge on the effectiveness of RtI within secondary schools.

The National Center on Response to Intervention (2013) conducted a study with 42 demographically diverse schools in the United States. The study was strictly qualitative but gave preliminary descriptive information on how RtI is currently being utilized in secondary buildings across the nation. While a larger sample size would have been beneficial for a quantitative study, the information gained from the qualitative study is helpful in organizing information regarding the process, scheduling issues, and the overall school acceptance of utilizing RtI in a secondary setting (The National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013). Dulaney (2012) also provides insights into one middle school case study, while focusing on the process of gaining stakeholders, providing professional development for teachers, and many other concepts to be detailed later in this review.

As RtI is relatively new in the secondary setting, issues within implementation are beginning to be identified. Johnson and Smith (2008) have identified barriers to RtI within middle schools, including limited evidence-based interventions and a lack of differentiated instruction in the regular education classroom. The lack of evidence surrounding the benefits of RtI in the secondary setting have left the question of whether the common elementary conceptualization of RtI is even relevant in secondary schools or if a whole new model is needed. This study should help provide information on this topic.

**Known essential components.** There are some specific characteristics and components that have been identified in creating a successful RtI system. There are four essential components in creating a successful RtI system: screening, progress monitoring, a multi-level instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure, and data based decision making for instruction with movement within the multi-level system

(Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013).

Those components were found across the United States in 42 middle schools that were found to have self-proclaimed successful RtI programs (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013).

In the RtI process, screening is the quick, efficient assessment that schools can give students to assess if they are meeting state standard benchmark levels. Screening usually takes place two or three times a year and is administered to every student in the building. The students who do not meet state standards should then be tested more in depth to determine where deficits lie (Dulaney, 2012; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013). The screening process is imperative to first identify students who are struggling to meet state standards. The state standardized tests required under federal law are not administered until the end of the academic year, making them useless in determining what academic areas students are missing in the current school year. Therefore, schools must implement screening.

The next essential component identified by the National Center on Response to Intervention (2011) is progress monitoring. This step is designed to assess students more often than screening to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions being used. The National Center on Response to Intervention (2013) stated that progress monitoring can help quantify student rates of improvement, determine effective instructional practices and assess student performance over time. Canter, Klotz, and Cowan (2008) agreed this stage requires assessing students' skills and evaluating the instructional practices being used to intervene with the students.

Multi-level instructional and behavioral systems are also an essential component. While RtI was originally formulated to address academic deficits, it can also be used to help address behavioral issues, which will not be addressed in this study. However, the multi-tiered system in academic RtI systems is necessary to provide targeted interventions to students (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). The idea of the multi-tiered system is that all students receive quality instruction in tier one, those who do not meet standards in the screening process are addressed in tier two, and those students who still continue to struggle are given intense interventions in tier three. (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). The systematic approach creates a safety net to ensure that all students are learning and not slipping through the academic cracks.

**Structure and Scheduling.** The unique scheduling systems in secondary schools creates an additional challenge to providing an appropriate tiered academic system to help keep students on track. Students move from classroom to classroom periodically throughout the day and teachers have contact with many more students each day than most elementary teachers. The specialized class schedules allow for students to be in classrooms with experts in the content area, but makes it difficult to keep track of student performance overall. Students are only with a specialized content teacher for a small period of time each day and then transition to another content area specialist. Sansoti, Telzrow, and Noltemeyer (2010) identified scheduling complexities at the secondary level with consideration for students earning credit toward graduation as a barrier in implementing RtI within a secondary school. Creating a tracking system to identify students who need additional support is one component that becomes difficult because of the nature of secondary scheduling (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013).



Additionally, King, Lemons, and Hill (2012) evaluated considerations regarding the different types of scheduling possible in secondary schools and which one is most compatible for RtI. Schools can use a traditional or a block schedule which have various benefits and drawbacks on instructional practices (Jenkins, Queen, & Algozzine, 2002). In a traditional schedule, students attend a set of 6-8 one hour long classes on a consistent basis. In contrast, block scheduling usually includes 100 minute instructional blocks where students alternate classes every other day. However, according to King, Lemons, and Hill (2012), there is not enough evidence at this time to conclude which schedule is most conducive for effectively implementing RtI.

**Considerations for administration.** School leaders have an important role in developing and implementing RtI within their school systems. There are significant costs to purchasing universal screening tools as well as providing professional development to help teachers implement RtI with fidelity. King, Lemons, and Hill (2012) outlined numerous points of interests for administrators in the article *Response to Intervention in Secondary Schools: Considerations for Administrators*. Administrators must include personnel considerations, financial costs of assessments, scheduling conflicts, and streamlining the school mission into the programming implementation of RtI (King, et al., 2012). Multi-faceted approaches can be utilized for RtI with considerations of best fit for a building, including technology opportunities (Marino & Beecher, 2010).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The process of change necessary for the implementation of RtI initiatives takes place amid a myriad of other complex issues that teachers face. Political, cultural, and personal philosophies of teaching and learning interact to influence the way teachers

perceive the change. The process of transforming normative classroom practices to address mandates requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for serving at-risk students. Clarke, et al. (2014) reported on the role that change theory has on curriculum development. The idea of change is difficult for many people and can be situational. The change theory KASAB model helps identify components of change and provides a framework to adhere to when leaders are driving change in an organization (National Staff Development Council, 2008). In the KASAB model, there are five components of change which must take place in order to successfully create change: knowledge, attitude, skill, aspiration, and behavior. Change is a learning process. The KASAB model is an adaptation of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model which was created to provide educational leaders with practical theory to guide the implementation of change efforts (Hall & Hord, 2000).

Changing classroom practices does not happen without intent. The KASAB model helps leaders target specific teacher attributes to create lasting change. In order to successfully create change and implement new practices, teachers must first have the knowledge of the new practice. School leaders must identify and facilitate conceptual understanding of what RtI is and the way it works. Next, the teachers must have the right attitude about RtI. Helping a teacher have an open and positive attitude about a new practice can be very difficult. Providing inspirational stories of success may help the teacher value the concept of RtI. The next step involves teaching the teacher the skills that are necessary to implement RtI. Professional development provides opportunity to share strategies and methodologies to successfully implement RtI. The aspiration piece of the KASAB model is similar to the attitude component, requiring some internal

motivation for the teacher to want to use their new skills. Finally, the consistent application of practice becomes repeated behavior, creating lasting change in instructional practices. All of the KASAB model components are necessary to successfully create change and the model can be used as a framework to determine the effectiveness of changing classroom practices at WMS with regards to RtI.

### **Teacher Buy-in/ Culture**

Successful program implementation in any organization requires consideration of those who will actually be doing the work. In education, leaders must work to consider teachers in the process of change. As outlined in the KASAB change theory previously, the following attributes make up some of the components necessary for successful change: the knowledge of the change, a positive attitude toward the change, and the aspiration to complete the change (National Staff Development Council, 2008). When considering implementing RtI programming, there will be changes involved on building-wide and classroom levels. Therefore, teacher buy-in and overall school culture must be carefully managed and cultivated to ensure RtI initiative success.

### **Teacher Buy-in**

Adult learning theory implies that adults are slow to change and want to know why they are being asked to make the change (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). If changes are being made to programming in a school, teachers will want to be informed; they will want to know why the change is necessary. As schools work to meet the needs of students through the implementation of RtI, it is paramount to include the teachers in the process to gain trust and buy-in. Assumptions about andragogy imply that adults are self-directed learners, their lives are enriched by their experiences, adults possess readiness to

learn, and internal motivation is high (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The teachers will implement the day to day actions of RtI and they can make or break the process. They are also instrumental in the effectiveness of the overall program. The best planned RtI model can fall apart without fidelity of implementation by the teachers.

One pillar of this literature review must consider adult learning and change theory and the impact it can have on the implementation fidelity of RtI. According to educational consultant Todd Whitaker, “It is people not programs” who create success in schools (Whitaker, 2012, p.9). This quote embodies the idea that no matter how good the educational program, curriculum, or activity is, it is the teachers implementing it that make all the difference.

Nonaka (1991) stated the importance of an organization justifying new concepts in the knowledge creation process. Therefore, the teachers need to have an active role in the creation of the RtI creation and implementation process at their school. Lambert (2003) stated:

involving teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members in skillful ways promotes collective commitment to learning for all students.

Launching such a shared vision and visionary journey into school improvement unites us as travelers on the journey toward school improvement that is challenging and deeply satisfying, and which leads to remarkable results for all learners. (p. 45)

Teachers, as other adults, want to be involved in the processes and decision making that affect them. School leaders must take into consideration the powerful role that teachers play when considering implementing RtI or any educational initiative.

## **Building a Positive Culture**

School culture is best described by Deal and Kennedy (1982) as “the way we do things around here” (p. 4). Culture includes the assumptions people have regarding the way an organization operates on a daily basis and it also encompasses the mission and vision of the organization. Schools maintain their own unique culture just as other organizations have their own. Leaders must work to shape positive cultures through personal conversation, public relations, and their actions. “Cultures do not lead; leaders lead” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 31). Therefore, school administrators must work to build a positive culture within their schools.

Mission and vision are two common ways that schools align their principles and collective commitments. “Culture represents the unwritten mission of the school- it tells students and staff why they are here” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 30). In the process of creating school mission and visions, teachers should be included, as previously discussed regarding adult learning theory. Building a foundation of trust and collaboration within an organization is vital in creating a learning culture (Gill, 2010).

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) discussed the importance of building culture intentionally in schools. One culture building activity could include asking teachers to consider who owns academic success in the schools. Is it teachers? Is it the students? There must be ownership in the process of doing whatever it takes to help students better achieve and all teachers need to be on board to help bring about change (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Schein (1992) stated that change takes anywhere from 5-15 years if basic assumptions are really going to be changed barring the destruction and rebuilding

of the entire organization. Leaders must keep in mind that change is slow and they should keep the faith that their visionary course is on track.

In regards to RtI, schools must have a culture of willingness to help students succeed no matter the adult inconvenience. Implementing an RtI framework involves much work from teachers. They have to be vested in the process or they may not implement the program with fidelity. As stated earlier, a systematic tiered approach is necessary when implementing RtI. The school culture must foster the belief that all students can learn through differentiated instruction in order for RtI to work. Elder and Paul (2012) called sociocentric thinking the idea that group norms and beliefs are internalized by individuals in groups to the point that their actions align with group identity without question. This thinking could be detrimental, but it can also be refreshing when framed positively. In a school where teachers believe all students can learn, the teachers do what is necessary to help them achieve. It becomes ingrained in the culture. RtI is work; therefore, it must become a part of the culture to be sustained.

### **Summary**

With legislation heightening the movement for student achievement in the United States public school system, schools are making changes to meet federal and state guidelines. NCLB catapulted the sense of urgency in schools to close achievement gaps, threatening funding. In response, instructional strategies and new approaches were created to assist schools in identifying students with learning deficits. The RtI framework became a commonly implemented system in elementary schools to help target specific skills and raise achievement scores. Over time, secondary schools began to adopt RtI but there are challenges to converting the system into secondary programming and

significantly less research regarding the best practices within secondary RtI (Sansoti, Telzrow, & Noltemeyer (2010).

There are several essential components that have been identified in creating a successful RtI system. Schools implementing RtI need a multi-tiered system, quality assessment practices, and progress monitoring tools. Scheduling is also a consideration, noting that the pull-out method has proven ineffective in elementary literacy interventions. Therefore, RtI must be provided in addition to normal grade level instruction rather than as a replacement (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008; Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

Change is difficult and implementing RtI as part of the everyday operation in schools can be challenging. Using the KASAB theory of change (National Staff Development Council, 2008), it is necessary to consider the attitude and aspirations of the teachers involved in the change process to obtain implementation with fidelity. Teacher buy-in and culture play an important role in the process of making a change in schools; it is no different when considering RtI implementation. Assumptions of andragogy must be considered when working toward new programming. There is much to be learned surrounding RtI within secondary schools.

**Section Four:  
Contribution to Practice**



The following PowerPoint and executive summary was created as a presentation for the Warrensburg Middle School administration and the Warrensburg Board of Education. The PowerPoint highlights the design and purpose of the study as well as the findings. The executive summary serves as literature to support the presentation and provide a take away piece for those interested. The presentation would be most impactful for the Warrensburg Middle School administration so they can continue to improve implementation of programming. Additionally, the presentation will provide the Board of Education information on academic interventions being provided in the district.

# A Study of the Teacher Perceptions of the BOOST Program: A Tier Two Academic Intervention Program at a Middle School



HOLLY JENNINGS

Doctoral student  
This study was part of a dissertation  
The topic seemed timely given our academic climate

## Statement of the Problem

\*The push for academic achievement accountability in schools has revealed that many students are unable to meet grade level expectations set forth by the state standardized assessments.

\*Sansosti, Noltemeyer, and Goss (2010) and the United States Department of Education (2015) have conducted studies nationwide that suggest many students who fall behind meeting grade level expectations only continue to fall further behind without *some sort of intervention*.

Education research is vast.

It is continuing to evolve over time.

Accountability culture is not new; but has been refreshed with ESSA

## Purpose Statement

- The purpose of this research was to study an RtI model within one middle school setting. The study considered the effectiveness of the program according to the perceptions of teachers utilizing the program.
- In an attempt to close the achievement gap, Warrensburg Middle School (WMS) created an RtI system to address the academic needs of students.

This study provided feedback to the site.

The research is plentiful on elementary RtI, but case studies in secondary are emerging.

## Existing Gap

- We still know very little about implementing RtI in secondary school settings and there is a lack in knowledge of the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the RtI implementation process.
- Research Questions were created specifically to help fill this gap and provide feedback to WMS regarding the implementation, benefits, and drawbacks of BOOST.

There are many differences between elementary and secondary RtI.  
Scheduling is a barrier  
Building wide is necessary

## Terms



- *Applied Classes*- courses that are usually elective in nature and are skill based (art, music, industrial technology, P.E., family and consumer sciences, etc.).
- *English Language Arts (ELA)*- a contemporary name for traditional language arts classes in the United States where English is the primary language utilized such as Communication Arts or Reading class.
- *KASAB*- a change theory model adapted from the Concerns-Based Adoption Model which was created to provide educational leaders with practical theory to guide the implementation of change efforts (Hall & Hord, 2000). The acronym stands for Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, Aspiration and Behavior.

## Terms



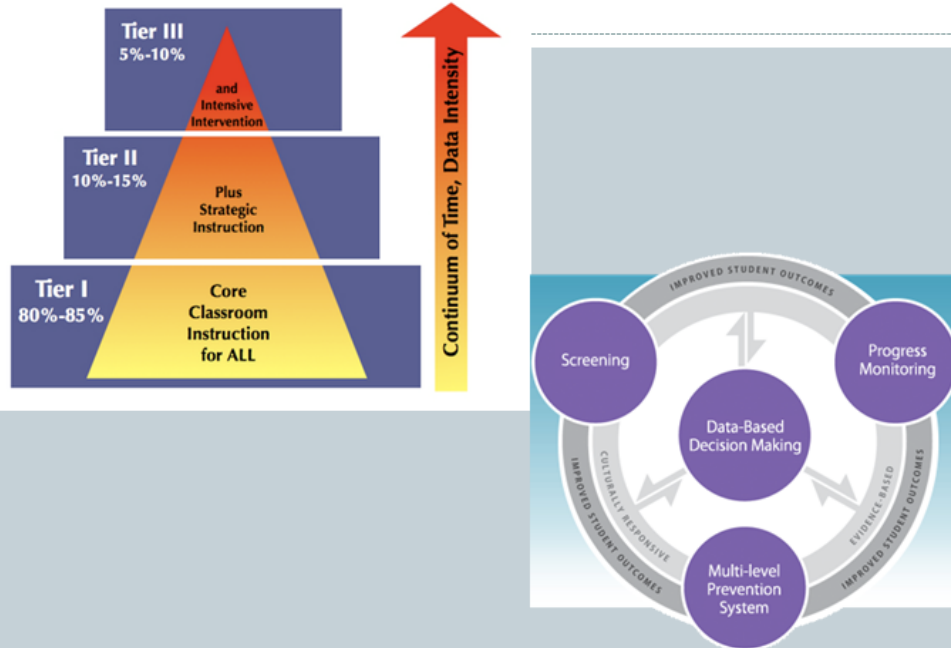
- *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*- federal legislation passed in 2002 requiring school districts to meet rigid expectations academically in order to receive federal funding.
- *Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)*- a school wide behavior support system to help encourage appropriate behaviors as well as discourage inappropriate behaviors in students.
- *Progress monitoring*- assessing students frequently to check progress on achieving academic goals.
- *Response to Intervention (RTI)*- “The practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005, p. 16).

## Research Questions

- RQ1: Which components of the KASAB model have been met in regards to the RtI program, BOOST, used at WMS?
- RQ2: How effective do teachers perceive the RtI model being used at WMS to be?
- RQ3: What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of the RtI model being used at WMS?



## What is Response to Intervention (RtI)?



Notice the student percentages- these are consistent with the study  
Formative assessments provide data to help the teacher know who needs help.  
RTI provides data to help teachers adjust instruction to meet the needs of students.

## Conceptual Framework

- KASAB (Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, Aspiration, Behavior) model helps identify components of change and provides a framework to adhere to when leaders are driving change in an organization (National Staff Development Council, 2008).
- The KASAB model is an adaptation of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model that was created to provide educational leaders with practical theory to guide the implementation of change efforts (Hall & Hord, 2000).

This model was introduced to me through a professional presentation on a school initiative that required a big change for the patrons, students and teachers.

## Design of the Study

- 7 Focus Groups with a total of 35 participants

\*6 core teams (2 per grade level) and 1 applied sciences team(who teach 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade)

Content areas represented:

- \*English Language Arts (6 participants)
- \*Reading (6 participants)
- \*Math (6 participants)
- \* Social Studies ( 5 participants)
- \*Science (5 participants)
- \*Applied Sciences (5 participants)
- \*Special Education (2 participants)

(Encouraged dialog, intentional questioning, 1 hour in length )

\*Focus groups were based on teams (pillar of middle level learning)

\*First year in the building (5 participants, but these were spread out over the other focus groups and are already included within their content area)

## Design of the Study

- 3 Interviews with administration/ instructional coach (Conversational, intentional questioning, 1 hour)

\*Principal

\*Assistant Principal

\*Instructional Coach

Instructional coach helps run the day to day operations of BOOST

## Population

- Purposeful sampling based on role, content area, years experience in the building
- All were from Warrensburg Middle School
- All have implemented the model of RtI Warrensburg Middle School is currently using (BOOST)
- The participation rate was excellent

The participation rate= 33/35 who were asked to come plus 2 special education teachers who asked to participate on their own.

**RQ1: Which components of the KASAB model have been met in regards to the RtI program, BOOST, used at WMS?**

- To effectively implement BOOST with fidelity, actions must occur (**Knowledge and Skill components are lacking.**)
- Attitude, Aspirations, and Behavior are continually met
- More professional development on RtI is needed building wide (many teachers have NO RtI training)
- 2 core teams did not understand the fundamental purpose of BOOST...more knowledge and skills to implement skill based interventions is needed

2 areas are not met.  
Basic professional development is needed.  
These can be easily addressed.

**RQ2: How effective do teachers perceive the RtI model being used at WMS to be?**

\*Grade are heavily positively impacted (reteaching and reassessment are working)

\*Achievement in class is higher (BOOST allows time to close gaps in learning so mastery of concepts is higher)

***“We have a chance to make sure that they are meeting the learning targets” through BOOST. – 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher***

\*Intangible benefit: student confidence in their skills

\*Positive relationships with students who struggle

\*Administrators receive feedback from teachers that BOOST is worthwhile and working effectively

### RQ3: What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of the RTI model being used at WMS?

- What do teachers perceive as benefits of BOOST?

\*Accountability of students

\*Participation is high

\*Student advocacy

\*Small group or one-on-one instruction

\*Building relationships

\*More accessible to students (many students cannot stay after school)

\*Applied sciences feel accepted and important

\*Teachers can work with their own students in this intervention model

*“...since we do BOOST from the beginning of the year, it helps build relationships with the students who struggle in our subject matter.”*

*-22 year veteran teacher*



## Findings: Perceived Benefits



*“I think that there is a greater awareness now that if they (students) don’t understand (then) they are the ones who are saying they need to come see you.”*

*-6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher*

*“If a student is missing a specific skill, you have the opportunity to fill them in.”*

*-8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher*

*“They increase their knowledge base to where they don’t fail. They can gain confidence through BOOST.”*

*-6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher*

*“Some kids can’t stay after school and get support”.*

*-7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher*

**RQ3: What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of the RtI model being used at WMS?**



- What drawbacks are there to using BOOST?

\*Too many students in the room

\*Timing of the “draft report” (teachers want more time to grade before putting in their drafts)

\*More time needed (add five minutes from Life 101)

\*Students who are not “drafted” are not challenged

## Teacher Recommendations



- Community awareness (website, email to parents)

*An 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher stated that he “wants parents to know that BOOST is not a time for your child to just work on homework. I think the kids know what BOOST is, but the parents do not.”*

- Draft report timing change (run it on Sunday evening or Monday morning)

*“We just don’t have a chance to put things in (to the draft system). It comes at 3:00 and we haven’t had time to grade anything yet.”*

*-7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher*

- Possible Trump Day Schedule changes (Move Math later in the week, ELA and Reading want separate days, some want applied sciences to lose their day)
- More time shaved from Life 101 and added to BOOST
- Possible switch with Life 101 time (BOOST first)
- Provide a possible enrichment option during BOOST for students who are not falling behind

## Implications



- Administrators may need to require BOOST as an agenda item during team meetings
- Test scores, grades, and BOOST participation data should be collected to compare them for future research
- Administrators can use this data when working with teachers to hold teachers accountable (if students are failing and teachers are not “drafting” them)
- BOOST should be growing teacher’s craft and helping them adjust their tier 1 instruction

## Conclusions



- BOOST is doing great things at WMS.
- Teachers and students believe it is worthwhile and effective.

*“I don’t see BOOST going away. I don’t know how it can. To me, it is vital to get those silent kids, those invisible kids to be accountable.”*

*-6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher*

## Discussion



- Room for improvement

### **Easy fixes:**

- \*Add five minutes from Life 101 to BOOST
- \*Swap Life 101 with BOOST in the schedule
- \*Run the BOOST report on Sunday evening or Monday morning
- \*Move math to a different trump day
- \*Send an email to all parents regarding the purpose of BOOST and add it to the school website for community awareness
- \*Have a plan to help teachers reduce student numbers in the classroom during BOOST

### **Resource allocation improvements:**

- \*Provide building wide training on RtI
- \*Consider possible software to allow more ease of entering drafts from teachers

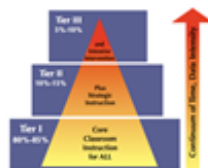
## Self-advocacy, Accountability, and Relationships: The Byproducts of BOOST, a Tier Two Academic Intervention in a Middle School

*"I don't see BOOST going away. I don't know how it can. To me, it is vital to get those silent kids, those invisible kids to be accountable." - 6th grade teacher*

Holly Jennings

Spring 2018

### A Study of the Teacher Perceptions of the BOOST Program: A Tier Two Academic Intervention at a Middle School



Response to Intervention (RtI) is a systematic way to address student's academic needs. BOOST is a tier two intervention.

#### Research Questions:

**RQ1:** Which components of the KASAB model have been met in regards to the RtI program, BOOST, used at WMS?

**RQ2:** How effective do teachers perceive the RtI model being used at WMS to be?

**RQ3:** What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of the RtI model being used at WMS?

#### Teacher Perceived Drawbacks of the Model:

\*Not enough time to work with students

\*Too many students in their classroom during BOOST

\*Drafting report schedule deadline does not allow time for weekend grading

#### Methods:

\*Qualitative Study

\*7 Focus Groups (6 core team groups and 1 applied science group)

\*35 focus group participants

\*3 Interviews (Principal, Assistant Principal, and Instructional Coach)

#### Conceptual Framework:

KASAB (Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, Aspiration, Behavior) model helps identify components of change and provides a framework to adhere to when leaders are driving change in an organization (National Staff Development Council, 2008).

#### BOOST Model Overview:

Students who need tier two academic interventions are identified by their teachers through classroom performance and assessment screenings. Teachers are able to draft students building wide each week to provide 25 minutes of academic interventions within the school day. All content areas are allowed to draft students. There is a trump day schedule which allows math, ELA/reading, science/social studies, and applied sciences the chance to have priority over other content areas on certain days of the week. Teachers typically use BOOST for re-teaching, re-assessing, and skill building.

#### Literature Review:

Schools must have a rigorous standardized test and students must continue to make progress via student achievement, attendance, and graduation rates (Potter & Stefkovich, 2009). Schools need strategies to help increase student growth. Schools nationwide are using RtI (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2013). Johnson and Smith (2008) have identified barriers to RtI within middle schools, including limited evidence-based interventions and a lack of differentiated instruction in the regular education classroom.



#### Perceived Benefits:

- STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY
- STUDENT ADVOCACY
- SMALL GROUP AND INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION
- BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS
- CONVENIENT
- TIME SAVER FOR TEACHERS
- PARTICIPATION RATE IS VERY HIGH

#### Perceived Effectiveness:

- GRADES ARE HEAVILY POSITIVELY IMPACTED
- ACHIEVEMENT ON CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS ARE BETTER
- MASTERY OF CONCEPTS IS HIGHER
- POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STRUGGLING STUDENTS
- STUDENT CONFIDENCE IN SKILLS

## Self-advocacy, Accountability, and Relationships: The Byproducts of BOOST, a Tier Two Academic Intervention in a Middle School



*"They increase their knowledge base to where they don't fail. They can gain confidence through BOOST."*  
-6<sup>th</sup> grade social teacher



### Research Questions Answered:

**RQ1:** Knowledge and Skill components are lacking. Teachers need more training to gain valuable skills to deliver research based academic interventions as well as understand the systematic flow of RtI. Attitude, Aspirations, and Behavior components are continually met.

**RQ2:** The perceived effectiveness of BOOST is very positive. Teachers see better grades and classroom achievement from using BOOST. Additionally, they perceive increased student self-confidence in their academic ability. Relationships between students and teachers are also positively affected.

**RQ3:** The perceived teacher benefits of BOOST are: accountability, student advocacy, small group or one-on-one instruction, building relationships, convenience, culture builder within the staff. The perceived drawbacks are: too many students in the room during BOOST, more time needed for instruction, and the timing of the draft report deadline.

### Recommendations for Implementation:

- \*Increase community awareness regarding BOOST
- \*Provide RtI professional development for teachers
- \*Transfer five minutes from Life 101 to BOOST
- \*Conduct BOOST first and then Life 101
- \*Reorganize the trump day schedule (switch math and social studies/ science to account for weekend grading)
- \*Move the draft report deadline to Sunday evening.
- \*Look for solutions to decrease student numbers during BOOST

*"...since we do BOOST from the beginning of the year, it helps build relationships with the students who struggle in our subject matter."*

-22 year veteran

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**Section Five:  
Contribution to Scholarship**

## **Self-advocacy, Accountability, and Relationships: The byproducts of BOOST, a Tier Two Academic Intervention in a Middle School.**

Higher achievement scores, skill building, and closing the achievement gap are all anticipated results when providing academic interventions to students. When using Response to Intervention (RtI), a three tiered model where academic interventions are provided systematically to improve student outcomes, teachers would expect academic success from students (Dulaney, 2012). However, one middle school is experiencing positive unintended consequences that are lifelong skills students need to succeed. Accountability, self- advocacy and relationship building are all components that have been reported by teachers who are using BOOST, an RtI model created uniquely to fit the needs of a middle school in the Midwest. BOOST stands for Broadening Opportunities to Obtain Superior Thinking; it is a tier two academic intervention program.

The perception of public education in the United States of America is continually under review by citizens and the government at local, state, and federal levels. The political landscape creates even more pressure on the education system as it scrutinizes school accreditation, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010) with threats to resources and funding (Verstegen, 2011). Negative statements such as “the education system is not effectively preparing some adolescents for reading success” create urgency for solutions (Edmonds et al., 2009, p. 263). In a country that provides free, compulsory education, the standards are set high, and schools must scramble to meet expectations or risk losing accreditation or funding (Ravitch, 2016). Public schools in America are working tirelessly to provide the best education possible for students, which includes using innovative techniques and strategies to bolster

student achievement to meet state and federal guidelines (Dulaney, 2012). With the introduction of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, the accountability culture continues as accountability measures were included in the law (Agoratus, 2016).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The push for academic achievement accountability in schools has revealed that many students are unable to meet grade level expectations set forth by the state standardized assessments. Verstegen (2011) and Peterson and West (2003) identified the pressure new legislation has put on schools and their inability to close the achievement gap. Elementary schools have made gains in bolstering literacy scores, but secondary schools are still looking for ways to help students meet the standards (King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate an RtI model within one middle school setting. The study considered the effectiveness of the program according to the perceptions of teachers utilizing the program. In an attempt to close the achievement gap, WMS created an RtI system to address the academic needs of students. The school houses grades sixth, seventh, and eighth and serves approximately 760 students. It is located in the Midwest in a town with a population of approximately 18,000 people.

### **Literature Review**

Response to Intervention (RtI) was originally created to work as a tiered intervention system in elementary schools (Duffy, 2007). The focus was literacy, a basis for many other skills students need to master. While research shows mixed results with the implementation of RtI, many of the strategies employed within the system are

effective at raising achievement scores and closing students' knowledge gaps. Many researchers have spent time studying the implementation processes at elementary schools (Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Pedrotty Bryant, 2014), scheduling concerns (Denton et al., 2011), instructional strategies (Pedrotty Bryant, 2014) and other considerations that might affect the fidelity of implementation (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Many elementary schools have had success with using the RtI structure. Consequently, secondary schools have begun adapting the RtI process to their own student and teacher needs.

However, secondary schools have unique structural issues that create problems when implementing RtI (Sansoti, Telzrow, & Noltemeyer, 2010). The whole implementation process looks different than it does within elementary schools.

Researchers have begun to document and study secondary school RtI implementation, but not enough is known about what creates an effective RtI system in secondary schools or what other benefits may come to the school from implementing RtI (King, et al., 2012).

The movement for student achievement continues to pressure schools, we still know very little about implementing RtI in secondary school settings and there is a lack in knowledge of the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the RtI implementation process. A 2015 study of 20,000 students in 13 states by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance reported that first graders who received reading interventions actually did worse than identical peers (Sparks, 2015). However, a national survey performed by Spectrum K12 School Solutions (2011) surveyed 1,306 district administrators and found that 88% of the administrators said their schools were using RtI as an early intervention method. Therefore, more research must be done to determine other perceived benefits and drawbacks for schools who implement

RtI. There is more to the story that needs to be explored. School leaders need access to the bigger picture when considering implementing RtI within their building.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The process of teacher change necessary for the implementation of RtI initiatives takes place amid a myriad of other complex issues that teachers face. Political, cultural, and personal philosophies of teaching and learning interact to influence the way teachers perceive the change. The process of transforming normative classroom practices to address mandates requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for serving at-risk students. The idea of change is difficult for many people and can be situational. The change theory KASAB (Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, Aspiration, Behavior) model helps identify components of change and provides a framework to adhere to when leaders are driving change in an organization (National Staff Development Council, 2008). In the KASAB model, there are five components of change which must take place in order to successfully create change: knowledge, attitude, skill, aspiration, behavior (Killion, 2008). Change is a learning process. The KASAB model is an adaptation of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model that was created to provide educational leaders with practical theory to guide the implementation of change efforts (Hall & Hord, 2000). Hirsh (2011) stated the importance of the KASAB model in professional development and considering intended outcomes from learning opportunities given to teachers. Districts must be intentional with satisfying the KASAB model components to successfully create change (National Staff Development Council, 2008).

## **Research Questions**

This article will explore the answers to the following research questions:

How effective do teachers perceive the RtI model being used at WMS to be? What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the RtI model being used at WMS?

## **Design and Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

The research methods utilized are consistent with a qualitative case study design (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This included the overarching design, site description and selection, participant sampling, researcher positioning, methods, and the coding and analysis procedures. Consistent with qualitative research, several primary methods of data collection were employed.

There are a number of methods researchers can utilize to execute a qualitative study. In the current study, the researcher employed several of the suggested methods that are characteristic of effective qualitative studies, using focus groups, and interviews (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2016; Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2003). A variety of methods were used to ensure validity (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2016). To enhance the study, archived data were reviewed.

Focus groups were convened to discuss experiences and initiate a dialogue among participants and the researcher. The participants engaged in conversations with the facilitator and with each other, creating a natural flow that provided detailed information and personal narratives (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The questions were triangulated with interview questions to attempt to discover convergence in the data (Yin, 2003).

Teaming is a pillar of middle level learning. Teaming allows one group of teachers to share a group of students so they can more effectively engage in conversations and collaboration to benefit the students. It is common for teams to develop their own identity and operate in autonomous ways that are consistent with the school building and district policies. At WMS, teams are provided consistent common planning times so they may function as a unit and collaborate regarding their students. Focus groups were held within teams.

Interviews were also a primary focus of data collection for the study, which is the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, Yin (2003) stated there are six main sources of evidence for case studies, but that “no single source has a complete advantage over all of the others” (p. 105). Therefore, the interviews were synthesized with data gathered from other sources, such as the focus groups. The semi structured interviews allowed flexibility within the interview, but provided a structure guided by a list of questions (Merriam, 2009). The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour and explored the personal experiences of the participants through conversational style (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). The data collected from the interviews were used in triangulating the data from the other data obtained from other methods (Yin, 2003).

### **Participants**

**Focus groups.** The focus group participants were all teachers from WMS. While all of the teachers participate in the RtI program, not all participated in the focus groups. Focus groups were held based on grade level teaming. One central concept in middle level learning is teaming. A group of teachers share the same students so they can easily

collaborate about those students and strategies to help them. The teams at WMS are made up of one English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, one reading teacher, one math teacher, one social studies teacher, and one science teacher.

There are six core grade level teams at WMS. The school serves sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and there are two teams per grade level. Additionally, there are other teachers in the building who teach a variety of applied sciences classes. One focus group contained teachers from the applied sciences teacher pool. There were 35 teachers involved in the focus groups. To avoid ethical conflict of interest outlined by the American Educational Research Association (2011), the principal or other school leaders in the building did not ask for or require participation of the teachers in the study.

**Interviews.** The principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach were all interviewed face-to-face at WMS. These three comprise the administrative team at WMS and they are responsible for the oversight of BOOST.

### **The BOOST Model**

The BOOST Model is an RtI model hybrid that was created to meet the academic needs of students at WMS. Although the process to implementation was lengthy, for the purpose of this article it is best to focus on the practice itself. The model allows for maximum flexibility when creating intervention groups as teachers can draft students during the BOOST intervention time for a variety of reasons and are able to change intervention groups twice a week. Teachers use their professional judgment as well as any assessment data from formative assessments, progress monitoring tools or any other data that they have access to when determining which students need additional help.



BOOST is a building-wide twenty-five minute period that starts at 9:30 in the morning on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Wednesdays are traditionally early release days for teacher collaboration. Therefore, with the shortened schedule, there is no BOOST on Wednesdays.

Teachers wanted to be able to “draft” students and choose their intervention groups based on skill deficit, but that takes an organized system to allow all teachers the chance to draft students no matter their content. To draft students teachers fill out a Google Form survey when they want to provide an intervention to a student. The form asks for the student name, what day(s) the teacher wants to administer the intervention, the name of the requesting teacher, the subject area the intervention is in, and any other information that would be helpful such as what supplies are needed when the students comes to receive the intervention.

To allow all teachers the chance to draft students to provide them extra help, a priority schedule was created. In practice, WMS calls this priority schedule the Trump Day Schedule. It is possible that one student needs support in math and reading, but both teachers cannot have them on the same day. The priority schedule allows for all teachers to have the chance to work with students, not just literacy teachers. If a student is drafted by two teachers on the same day, then the priority schedule is consulted. The priority schedule is as follows: Monday is math, Tuesday is ELA, Thursday is social studies and science, and Friday is applied sciences (electives, fine arts, etc.). There is no BOOST on Wednesday because the district has early release every Wednesday to allow for teacher collaboration. This new drafting system allowed teachers to easily request students who needed interventions and it was timely. A teacher might see on a Monday that a student is

struggling with a concept and they could potentially draft the student for Thursday. The draft reports are run on Wednesday afternoon for the Thursday and Friday BOOST times and again on Friday to organize the Monday and Tuesday BOOST schedule. The instructional coach in the building is in charge of compiling the data from the draft system and distributing it to all teachers via email.

Students attend a class called Life 101 every day. It is similar to a homeroom concept, where students work to form meaningful relationships with their teacher and peers. They also follow a character education curriculum in Life 101. Every teacher has a Life 101 class, so the rosters usually run from 14-18 students in each class. Students attend Life 101 starting at 9:00 and then at 9:30, students transition to their intervention groups. If they are not drafted for an intervention group that day, students stay in their Life 101 class and read silently. Therefore, students who are not provided an intervention are able to read for 25 minutes to practice literacy skills. However, when a teacher drafts students for an intervention group, it is possible that they will have many of their Life 101 students as well as their intervention group in the same classroom. Many teams have worked out a schedule so when content areas have trump days, they can send their Life 101 to a fellow teacher who is not providing interventions on that day. Although there is a Trump Day Schedule, teachers can draft students every day and provide interventions daily if they choose.

## Findings

### What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the RtI model being used at WMS?

#### Benefits

The researcher found several benefits of the BOOST program to be: convenience, the organization of the draft system, participation, small group and one-on-one time, and a time saver for teachers.

**Accessibility.** Many students are not able to stay after school because of transportation. All seven focus groups reported that they are able to catch students during the day that they would not have been able to work with after school due to lack of transportation. The accessibility to students is overwhelmingly positive. One seventh grade teacher stated, “Some kids can’t stay after school and get support.” Another teacher mentioned that some students do not have a quiet place to work at home or they live in chaos. This time allows them a chance to work with support.

**Draft system.** All seven focus groups referenced the drafting system as a positive but with the caveat that it could continually be improved. Every focus group commented in some capacity that it was easy to use. One sixth grade teacher stated, “I like the draft. I like being able to look at the sheet and see if I need to send people or not. It works.”

**Participation.** Teachers reported many students are being BOOSTED. Not only are they drafting students, but they see how many students are being drafted from their Life 101 classes. Additionally, teachers have access to the draft report for all grades and are able to see how many students are being pulled in each day. While the draft report is not completely accurate because some teachers are calling in students without formally

drafting them through the system, the overall numbers are high. A sixth grade teacher said, “The numbers are great! Sometimes it is 40 kids a day and sometimes it is up to 60” when referring to the number of sixth grade students who are BOOSTED each day. As a reference, there are about 240 students in sixth grade.

**Small group and one-on-one.** Another consistent positive theme throughout all seven focus groups were the opportunities to work in small groups or one-on-one. One sixth grade teacher said that she is “catching students quicker” with BOOST. The individualized instruction time allows for targeted work. Teachers report not having to remediate class time because they can catch students up in small groups or one-on-one. A sixth grade teacher spoke of the need for one-on-one instruction when she said BOOST time is used “different for every student.”

When considering small group work, teachers were able to classify students by missing skill or deficit and group them together for instruction. A sixth grade teacher stated that he will draft students and “about a third need re-teaching, a third need to work on late work and a third need absent work.” He praised the flexibility that he has within small groups to modify instruction based on student need. Others echoed the same sentiment, with all seven focus groups mentioning the positive impact of one-on-one and small group work in BOOST.

**Time saver.** Overall, teachers appreciated the time saved after school from having a time built into the day to work with struggling students. One seventh grade teacher said that “I don’t have to stay after school. So, it is a timesaver.” Another teacher discussed that time was saved during class because she did not have to remediate

instruction for a minority group in class; she could address their needs via BOOST instead of holding the whole class back.

### **Drawbacks**

The teachers at WMS perceive the drawbacks of the RtI model being used to include: too many students in the room during BOOST, the timing of the draft report, the length of BOOST, and the time consumption during the draft input process.

**Too many kids in the room.** An emerging theme when asking teachers about their frustrations with BOOST is the number of students they have in their room while trying to provide academic interventions to students. Teachers have their normal Life 101 class in their room every day during BOOST. While some students may be drafted out of the teacher's classroom, many are not. So, as teachers have students come into work with them, they have another 15 or so students to manage. All seven focus groups reported that during BOOST they have their students who are not being provided an intervention read or work on homework. The original intention and proposal for BOOST required teachers to have their non-BOOSTED students to sustain silent read. However, an overwhelming majority of teachers interviewed reported that their students did not always read quietly. Teachers reported allowing students to work on homework usually kept them quieter.

**Timing of running the draft report.** One drawback theme that also emerged was the cut-off time that teachers must have their draft submissions in by to have their selections reported on the building-wide report that is sent out Friday and Wednesday afternoon. While a centralized drafting system provides organization and a systematic process, it does take planning and foresight to work well. Teachers must submit their

draft requests for Monday and Tuesday by Friday at 3:00 P.M. To have students drafted for Thursday and Friday, a teacher must input them by 3:00 P.M. on Wednesday. Math teachers, specifically, wanted more time to grade over the weekend before putting in their draft requests. One reason they requested this is because the math trump day is on Tuesday, meaning they must request those students by Friday at 3:00. One seventh grade teacher stated, “We just don’t have a chance to put things in (to the draft system). It comes at 3:00 and we haven’t had time to grade anything yet.” However, there are more than just math teachers who would like the extra time. There was a seventh grade team that was particularly adamant, as well, about needing extra time to put in their draft requests. One ELA teacher stated that she needed more time to group students so that she could effectively provide small groups interventions.

**More time needed for BOOST.** One thing that resonated through all seven focus groups was the need for more time. By the time teachers have students in their classroom and ready to learn, they only have approximately twenty minutes to work with them. The students are supposed to transition to BOOST at the signal of music playing on the intercom at 9:30. However, teachers said that many students take too long to get to their BOOST classroom or come unprepared and need additional time to get supplies. More time would be welcomed by all of the teachers who participated in the study.

**Time consumption to draft students.** Submitting the draft takes some time because each student must be input separately. The Google Form used to draft students requires that teachers submit an individual form for every student. One sixth grade teacher repeatedly asked if there were a way to capture multiple names in each form. This could be explored by the administration to see if there is a possible solution to this issue.

**Undecided issue.** A consideration that must be noted in this section is the trump day schedule. While one team was extremely unhappy with the combination of ELA and reading sharing a trump day, the other teams were not disappointed. There were two core teams who did not see the value in allowing the applied science classes to have a trump day. However, the applied sciences team was very grateful for the opportunity to be treated with the same fidelity as other content areas.

### **How effective do teachers perceive the RtI model being used at WMS to be?**

Teachers reported seeing overwhelmingly positive result from students who participate in BOOST. Teachers perceive BOOST to be effective, as grades and classroom assessment achievement have increased when students participate in BOOST. Intangible benefits reported included: student advocacy, accountability, relationships, and building student confidence.

**Grades.** Perceptually, teachers are seeing a large benefit to student grades from BOOST. When questioned about grades, all seven focus groups stated they do see an improvement in the grades of students they BOOST. Specifically, one social studies teacher discussed the importance of immediate feedback and re-grading when a student retakes a test. “If a little girl fails her quiz and comes in during BOOST, we practice three of our questions before she is re-assessed. So, she’ll go from a F to a B pretty quickly.”

Grades are impacted by assessment scores, projects, and class work. A social studies teacher said, “They are practicing more, so they are getting better.” One of the major activities that teachers were doing in BOOST was re-assessing when students did not do well. Therefore, student grades were immediately positively affected in that capacity.

**Achievement in class.** While grades should be an indicator of success in a classroom, one way to determine understanding is through mastery of standards or learning targets. One sixth grade teacher stated, “We have a chance to make sure that they are meeting the learning targets” through BOOST. This type of response indicates that teachers have goals of filling knowledge gaps, not just raising grades. Teachers at WMS are working to hold students accountable for school work by drafting them for BOOST to provide extra time and support so that important concepts can be mastered.

Generally, teachers perceived that students who were participating in BOOST were achieving greater than if they would not have participated in BOOST. All seven focus groups perceived that students had better achievement in class when participating in BOOST. “Well, I think scores are certainly higher” stated a seventh grade teacher. “Some students would not take the time to come in after school; you would have to force them. With BOOST, we don’t give kids a chance to slip through the cracks.”

**Student advocacy.** One theme that emerged that was not anticipated was student self-advocacy. All seven focus groups, comprising 35 teachers, discussed how students are now asking to be BOOSTED. Students recognize their deficiencies and are not afraid to ask for help. A sixth grade teacher stated, “I think that there is a greater awareness now that if they (students) don’t understand (then) they are the ones who are saying they need to come see you.” Another teacher called it, “student advocacy”. Teachers do feel that this RtI model has increased student advocacy and allowed students to start asking for help in a less pressurized fashion.

**Accountability.** With the time built into the day, teachers are able to access students almost daily (with the exception of early release days). This has created a



climate where students must be accountable for their work and their progress because teachers can easily draft them to help reteach or reassess. All seven teams were pleased with the built in time during the day to help catch students up. A sixth grade social studies teacher reported that after a classroom formative assessment, a student said, “Hey! I did good on my last quiz, so you don’t have to BOOST me.” According to this teacher, the student’s ownership in his learning had increased because he knew if he did not learn the material he would still be held accountable for learning it later.

**Relationships.** An unintended consequence of BOOST is the building of positive student and teacher relationships. This benefit was not an original intention of creating BOOST at WMS; however, it is a significant finding. In the six core team focus groups, relationships were discussed as a benefit. One idea that was continually discussed was that taking the time to BOOST students was a way of showing that you care about their education and their grades. One 22 year veteran teacher stated that, “...since we do BOOST from the beginning of the year, it helps build relationships with the students who struggle in our subject matter.”

**Confidence.** Teachers reported that students gained confidence in their abilities by participating in BOOST. One sixth grade teacher stated, “They increase their knowledge base to where they don’t fail. They can gain confidence through BOOST.” Math teachers, specifically, echoed this sentiment. Math problems can take perseverance and confidence. Some students easily give up when they are not successful right away. The one-on-one time with teachers allows students to feel successful and gain confidence about their skill set. Teachers are using this time to build academic skills in students and the success they are enjoying begets confidence.

## **Conclusion**

Schools are searching for ways to increase achievement scores and fill knowledge gaps. As schools work to better the education process for students, many different approaches are possible. WMS has created and implemented a Tier Two academic intervention that teachers report to not only increase grades and classroom achievement but bolster student advocacy, accountability, relationships, and confidence.

While this study is perceptual in nature, the data provide clear evidence that teachers are seeing benefits beyond tangible academic performance from students at WMS who are participating in BOOST. The overall benefits should be considered when any practitioner is looking into implementing a program. There can be unintended outcomes when trying new things, but BOOST has provided a refreshing set of consequences that were not planned.

Change in any organization can be slow. Using the KASAB theory as a conceptual framework for this study allowed the researcher to consider depth of implementation of the program. Since two of the KASAB components were found to be lacking, it suggests that more training is necessary to increase fidelity within the program. As needed training occurs and the teachers obtain more skills to assist in delivering academic interventions, the positive consequences may continue to intensify.

Future considerations for research include adding data from standardized assessments and other norm referenced tests to see if there is a correlation between participating in BOOST and increasing achievement scores. While the perceptual data are clear; longitudinal data could provide additional data for supporting the programs use. At

present time, no longitudinal data are available, as BOOST has only been implemented for one full year.

School leaders are tasked with continually improving their school. As schools continue to meet the changing needs of students, principals do their best to stay ahead of changes. Learning about successful programming in other schools allows school leaders the opportunity to gain knowledge about possible programs that could benefit their students. This study was intended to provide information to leaders of middle level grades to offer feedback on this specific model of Tier Two interventions and provide the perceptual outcomes. Nevertheless, as education continues to evolve, teachers will continue to meet the needs of students.

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**Section Six:  
Reflection**

## **Reflection**

Working through doctoral coursework and a dissertation has been a learning journey. I am coming out on the other side a changed practitioner, scholar and thinker. I see changes in myself that have been shaped through the curriculum, class discussions, research, and relationships that encompassed this degree. Additionally, the personal and collegial relationships formed have made this process even more impactful.

## **Change as an Educational Leader**

The dissertation process has influenced my practice as an educational leader in many ways. From start to finish, there have been learning moments that have shaped my new leadership skills and practice. I am very thankful to have worked on a topic that is so dear to my heart and is timely and pertinent as an educational leader. I have welcomed the chance to engage in research regarding academic interventions as it is an essential component of bettering our schools.

One way that I have been influenced is through researching best practices in academic intervention programming. Writing the scholarly review forced me to take a hard look at practices throughout our nation and to compare them with what we are offering in our schools. While researching articles and previous studies, I learned so much about the Response to Intervention (RtI) model and the components that schools are using to better support their students. This knowledge has allowed me to better serve my school and my students. I am now more versed in what intervention programs have created evidence of success and am able to work through the process within my own building. The study I conducted involved a middle school, which is different from my



current position as a high school assistant principal. However, there are some similarities and relatable material that is helpful when working with high school students as well.

One way that I have evolved as an educational leader through this education process is from learning the value of listening to staff. Through conducting focus groups and interviews one theme that emerged was the craving that staff had for being able to provide feedback to improve programming. As a principal, we make decisions for our students and staff and think we know what is best. However, teachers are working directly with our students and need the chance to voice their concerns and feedback. They are a resource that we cannot overlook. Teachers in this study were very invested in the academic intervention process at their school. They want to be heard. They want to make changes that will better the programming and the way that they can reach students. I have really taken this information to heart. I have made it a point to purposefully seek out teachers for feedback and to allow them the chance to help lead change.

Leaders cannot overlook the value of teachers' opinions and I am trying to make it a point to seek it out. An example of this would be a recent situation I had with administering a perception survey to students. Every year for the last seven years it has been conducted the same way. Teachers are responsible for having their academy students take the survey. After speaking with a few teachers regarding their insight (since they are the ones who actually have the students take the survey) I made some changes to the process. I changed up the electronic platform so it was accessible on personal devices. I also took some advice regarding scheduling of the survey. After the survey, I asked teachers again for feedback. I have already made some preliminary plans to continue making changes next year.

One thing I learned from conducting focus groups and interviews was that teachers want help from their principal when it comes to community awareness of programming. They want parents to be informed of processes and policies and want to feel supported. I am doing my best to help bridge the gap between community and our school.

### **Change as a Scholar**

The dissertation process has influenced me as a scholar as I have become more comfortable in research and evaluating data. The curriculum and coursework for the degree provided instruction to help me better my research and writing skills. Through my personal research growth I have become a better scholar overall.

My research skills have increased through the process of earning my doctorate in education. The required course readings have increased my academic literacy level and I feel more confident about my ability to wade through journal articles and analyze the validity of studies. This has directly affected my life as an educational leader because I use these skills as a practitioner. I am able to research and obtain articles for use with my staff. Additionally, I understand the layout of articles and am able to comprehend research terms that I did not know previously.

The dissertation writing process has also bolstered my ability to engage in collegial conversations. There is always room for growth and improvement in our education system and being able to research and discuss timely concepts is an important skill as a leader. I will continue to grow in my educational journey through continued practice. However, earning my doctoral degree has allowed me an opportunity for growth that is unparalleled.

## **Appendix**

## **Results**

To better understand the findings from this study, the raw data will be reported in this results section. From the raw data, themes were generated and analyzed. The researcher reached saturation as many of the focus groups answered in very similar ways. The themes generated helped to answer the research questions, which are answered at the end of this section.

### **Focus Groups**

There were seven focus groups held in this study. The number of research participants in each group was different, but there was a total number of 35 participants in focus groups. In the building there are six core academic teams, each one with a reading, ELA, math, science, and social studies teacher. While the researcher's goal was to have a focus group with each core team, not all teachers participated. However, each content area was well represented. Additionally, there were two special education teachers that joined in with their respective grade level teams, which was a valuable perspective. A seventh focus group was held with a team of five teachers who represented applied science courses and electives. Their perspective was equally as important as the core area teachers to help gain a robust perspective of the entire picture of the implementation of BOOST at WMS. The participation rate was excellent as 35 teachers were invited to participate and 33 of those did. Two of the invitees did not participate, but two additional teachers chose to attend the focus group without invitation. They were welcomed to the group. Below are a list of some of the questions used in the focus groups along with some of the responses and analyzation. Some questions will be combined into the same finding.

### **In your own words what is the purpose of BOOST?**

Each focus group started off with a basic question; the researcher asked teachers to explain the purpose of BOOST in their own words. This simple question revealed that while many teachers were aware of the original intention of BOOST, some teachers were more concerned with the practical application. The original intention of BOOST when it was created was to serve as a tier two intervention time that was built in during the day. The RtI model is a three tiered system, with the second tier allowing teachers to work on missing skills from current grade level concepts. All seven focus groups stated that BOOST time is an intervention time, but only five of the seven groups reported that they specifically work on “skills”. For example, one ELA teacher stated that “If a student is missing a specific skill, you have the opportunity to fill them in”. Another teacher from a different group specifically stated that “BOOST is a tier two intervention”. However, when the focus groups were discussing the purpose, there were teachers who viewed it more as a homework time. One teacher said the purpose of BOOST was a “study hall”. While five teams verbalized the idea that BOOST was skill based, it is concerning that two teams were not able to identify the time as a tier two intervention where missing skills are the focus. However, it is possible that they just did not verbalize this.

The practical application of BOOST is consistent across the board with all seven groups with teachers working in small groups or one-on-one to provide extra support to students. While two teachers believed this time could be used for homework, most of them were interested in using it to reteach, reassess and catch up students from absences. One eighth grade teacher reported, “I use it mostly for re-teaching”. As discussed in the

literature review, the purpose of a tier two intervention time should be to re-teach missing skills or concepts. Overall, most teachers at WMS are using the time in that capacity.

### **What activities do you utilize during BOOST?**

To provide clear findings on the actual implementation of BOOST, the researcher asked teachers about the activities used. The activities should serve as evidence of implementation with fidelity. While five teams reported BOOST as a time to work on missing skills, all seven groups had at least one teacher who said they worked with students who were behind in some fashion. Every group also added that the small group setting was beneficial and they were able to work one-on one when needed. One science teacher stated, “If I have a kid miss a lab day and I can catch them on the right rotation, then I can usually at least do part of it during BOOST”. All of the teachers who participated expressed their use of BOOST for catching students up who missed days in class.

While most teachers were working on concepts from current assignments in class, there were at least two who tried to help with specific skill sets through their activities during BOOST. For example, there was a social studies teacher who talked about drafting students for BOOST who were missing geography skills as apparent through class assessments. He would not have them redo specific items from those assessments, but rather create a whole new activity that focused on building up the geography skills that students were lacking.

An ELA teacher discussed taking poorly written essays and grouping them by error. Then, she drafted those students in as small groups and worked with them on the skills they were missing. She reported this method to be effective at closing the gap in

student learning by targeting a specific deficit. Another ELA teacher discussed her need to create new enrichment material to supplement her classroom instruction for students who needed extra help. She wanted to provide a novel experience for those students who were BOOSTED, not just repeat the same lesson at a slower pace. One thing that stood out as the researcher talked to teams, is that one team in particular was very focused on skills acquisition versus just homework completion. The social studies teacher and one of the previously mentioned ELA teachers are on the same team and as the focus group unfolded, it was apparent that this particular team was functioning exceptionally collaboratively in comparison to other teams. However, that will be addressed later.

**What professional development have you had regarding BOOST or RtI?**

One question that was used to determine the level of implementation and the overall change process at WMS was to learn about the professional development offered to staff regarding RtI and BOOST. This was alarming. There were teams who had only one person who believed they have had RtI training. In fact, there was not a single team who said they all have had training in the last three years. This is concerning to the overall change process as indicated in the KASAB change theory, as program knowledge is needed to move towards using RtI effectively. While no one has received RtI training recently, everyone said they have had instruction on how to use BOOST.

There are three teachers who came to WMS after working in another district for years. At that district, the administration had provided four solid years of professional development through the Regional Professional Development Committee (RPDC) with the emphasis on RtI. Those three teachers are all on different teams at WMS. However,

all of them recognized their level of understanding regarding RtI was heavily influenced by their experiences in another district.

There were six teachers who said that they had some training at a conference more than five years ago. However, they were unable to determine the name or location of the conference. Nevertheless, the overall analysis is that the teachers need more professional development specifically on the RtI system. One team had three out of five teachers who responded they have never had any training. One laughed and said, “I am just glad I know what RtI stands for!”

When considering BOOST professional development specifically, it is entirely a different story. Every single teacher has had some sort of training on the model of RtI that WMS is implementing. That is the only way that it is being used effectively. Every team reported that when the building transitioned to the BOOST model in 2016, the instructional coach provided a workshop during a faculty meeting to explain the role and purpose of BOOST and how to utilize the draft system. Handouts were also provided. One ELA teacher referenced her confusion in the beginning of the process and how she asked for additional guidance from the instructional coach. The teacher stated, “The instructional coach came down to talk to me one-on-one about my specific concerns.” She said she felt prepared to implement BOOST after that personal conversation.

New teachers to the building in the fall of 2017 went through a building induction process prior to the other staff returning to school in August. Every new teacher that participated in the focus group said that during the induction process before school started, they were taught about BOOST from the instructional coach and the principal during a meeting. None of the new teachers had RtI training recently, but one said she



had previously been an elementary teacher in the same district and had gone through training about four years prior to the focus group.

### **What is going well with BOOST?**

Teachers answers varied widely when asked about the successes of BOOST. Themes overwhelmingly developed as these data were collected. One resounding positive was that the whole building was working together to make BOOST happen. One eighth grade teacher said, “Teacher and student buy-in is high”. Another said, “Everyone is using it”.

**Student advocacy.** One theme that emerged that was not on the researcher’s radar, was student self-advocacy. Every single team discussed how students are now asking to be BOOSTED. Students recognize their deficiencies and are not afraid to ask for help. A sixth grade teacher stated, “I think that there is a greater awareness now that if they (students) don’t understand (then) they are the ones who are saying they need to come see you.” Another teacher called it, “student advocacy”. Teachers do feel that this RtI model has increased student advocacy and allowed students to start asking for help in a less pressurized fashion. An additional theme that relates to student advocacy is that BOOST does not have a stigma. Everyone is working during BOOST time, so no one feels targeted. As one sixth grade math teacher said, “BOOST is for everyone. Not just the students who are traditionally low achieving.” Another teacher said that in the beginning of building wide implementation, students thought BOOST was a punishment. Now, they see it as a chance to improve.

**Draft system.** All seven focus groups referenced the drafting system as a positive but also as something that could continually be improved. One teacher in particular

voiced her distaste with the way data are entered into the Google Form for the drafting system. She said that she hates entering a form for “every stinking kid.” She was frustrated that each student had to be entered separately and wanted a way to speed it up. However, every team commented in some way that it was easy to use. One sixth grade teacher stated, “I like the draft. I like being able to look at the sheet and see if I need to send people or not. It works”.

**Participation.** Teachers reported many students are being BOOSTED. Not only are they drafting students, but they see how many students are being drafted from their Life 101 classes. Additionally, teachers have access to the draft report for all grades and are able to see how many students are being pulled in each day. While the draft report is not completely accurate because some teachers are calling in students without formally drafting them through the system, the overall numbers are high. A sixth grade science teacher said, “The numbers are great! Sometimes it is 40 kids a day and sometimes it is up to 60” when referring to the number of sixth grade students who are BOOSTED each day. As a reference, there are approximately 240 students in sixth grade.

**Accountability.** With the time built into the day, teachers are able to access students almost daily (with the exception of early release days). This has created a climate where students must be accountable for their work and their progress because teachers can easily draft them to help reteach or reassess. All seven teams were pleased with the built in time during the day to help catch students up. A sixth grade social studies teacher reported that after a classroom formative assessment, a student said, “Hey! I did good on my last quiz, so you don’t have to BOOST me.” According to this

teacher, the students' ownership in their learning had increased because they knew if they did not learn the material they would still be held accountable for learning it.

Additionally, two teachers specifically talked about the use of BOOST time to hold students accountable for classroom work. Students who waste time in class and do not complete work can be drafted to show the teacher that they possess the skills necessary to complete the work. If the students do not, then they may be drafted again for re-teaching.

**Small group and one-on-one.** Another consistent theme throughout all seven teams was the opportunity to work in small groups or one-on-one. One social studies teacher said that she is “catching students quicker” with BOOST. The individualized instruction time allows for targeted work. Teachers report not having to remediate during class time because they can catch students up in small groups or one-on-one. A sixth grade teacher spoke of the need for one-on-one instruction when she said BOOST time is used “different for every student.”

When considering small group work, teachers were able to classify students by missing skill or deficit and group them together for instruction. A social studies teacher stated that he will draft students and “about a third need re-teaching, a third need to work on late work and a third need absent work.” He praised the flexibility he has within small groups to modify instruction based on student need. Others echoed the same sentiment, with all seven groups mentioning the positive impact of one-on-one and small group work in BOOST.

**Convenience.** Many students are not able to stay after school because of transportation. All seven teams reported that they are able to catch students during the

day that they would not have been able to work with after school due to lack of transportation. The accessibility to students is overwhelmingly positive. One seventh grade social studies teacher stated, “Some kids can’t stay after school and get support.” Another teacher mentioned that some students do not have a quiet place to work at home or they live in chaos. This time allows them a chance to work with support.

### **Benefits**

**Grades.** Perceptually, teachers are seeing a large benefit to student grades from BOOST. When questioned about grades, all seven teams stated they do see an improvement in the grades of students they BOOST. Specifically, one social studies teacher discussed the importance of immediate feedback and re-grading when a student retakes a test. “If a little girl fails her quiz and comes in during BOOST, we practice three or four questions before she is re-assessed. So, she’ll go from a F to a B pretty quickly.”

Grades are impacted by assessment scores, projects, and class work. One social studies teacher said, “They are practicing more, so they are getting better.” One of the major activities that teachers were doing in BOOST was re-assessing when students did not do well. Therefore, student grades were immediately positively effected in that capacity. In addition, at least one teacher in every focus group said they have students work on missing work during BOOST. Missing work can be work that students chose not to do or were not able to do based on a lack of skill. In order for teachers to know if students understand a concept, a student has to do that work. One eighth grade teacher stated, “BOOST eliminates whether or not students have missing assignments because they do not know how to do it or because they don’t want to do it”. BOOST is removing the obstacles for students by providing a time within the day for support to complete

work if they do not know how. Therefore, students are finishing more assignments, which affect their grade in a positive way.

**Relationships.** An unintended consequence of BOOST is the building of student and teacher relationships. This benefit was not an original intention of creating BOOST at WMS; however, it is a significant finding. In the six core team focus groups, relationships were discussed as a benefit. One idea that was continually discussed was that taking the time to BOOST students was a way of showing that you care about their education and their grades. One 22 year veteran teacher stated, "...since we do BOOST from the beginning of the year, it helps build relationships with the students who struggle in our subject matter."

Additionally, the one-on-one time with students allows for a less stressful situation for struggling students and allows the teacher to make connections with the student. An eighth grade ELA teacher said the small group or one-on-one time, "...makes it more comfortable for them right off from the start to start asking questions whenever they are hitting a roadblock with their learning." The only team that did not bring up relationships was the applied sciences team. While it is possible they experience similar benefits, they did not report relationships as a benefit.

**Time Saver.** Overall, teachers appreciated the time saved after school from having a time built into the day to work with struggling students. One seventh grade teacher said, "I don't have to stay after school. So, it is a timesaver." Another teacher discussed that time was saved during class because she did not have to remediate instruction for a minority group in class; she could address their needs via BOOST instead of holding the whole class back.

However, there was one sixth grade team that said they did not feel as though BOOST saved them any time. They reported still having a large amount of students stay after school for tutoring. But, they did report there are students who cannot stay for after school tutoring that need help and are accessible during BOOST.

Additionally, this same team was the most dissatisfied with the drafting system, reporting that it took too long to input student names. There is a drop down menu that is utilized to pick the student's name in the Google Form. Each grade has their own form so each drop down menu has about 240 names to scroll through. The names are in alphabetical order for organizational purposes. During this discussion, the researcher asked if the participants had tried typing in the first letter of the entry to shortcut the drop down menu. They had not. Two days after the focus group, the researcher was contacted by the teacher who was most dissatisfied with the draft and was notified that the shortcut was a "life saver".

**Achievement in class.** While grades should be an indicator of success in a classroom, one way to determine understanding is through mastery of standards or learning targets. One sixth grade science teacher stated, "We have a chance to make sure that they are meeting the learning targets" through BOOST. This type of response indicates that teachers have goals of filling knowledge gaps, not just raising grades. Teachers at WMS are working to hold students accountable for school work by drafting them for BOOST to provide extra time and support so that important concepts can be mastered.

Generally, teachers perceived that students who were participating in BOOST were achieving greater than if they would not have participated in BOOST. "Well, I think

scores are certainly higher” stated a seventh grade social studies teacher. “Some students would not take the time to come in after school; you would have to force them. With BOOST, we don’t give kids a chance to slip through the cracks.”

**Confidence.** Teachers reported that students gained confidence in their abilities by participating in BOOST. One sixth grade social studies teacher stated, “They increase their knowledge base to where they don’t fail. They can gain confidence through BOOST.” Math teachers, specifically, echoed this sentiment. Math problems can take perseverance and confidence. Some students easily give up when they are not successful right away. The one-on-one time with teachers allows students to feel successful and gain confidence about their skill set. Teachers are using this time to build academic skills in students and the success they are enjoying begets confidence.

### **Drawbacks**

**Too many kids in the room.** An emerging theme when asking teachers about their frustrations with BOOST is the number of students they have in their room while trying to provide academic interventions to students. Teachers have their normal Life 101 class in their room every day during BOOST. While some students may be drafted out of the teacher’s classroom, many are not. So, as teachers have students come in to work with them, they have another 15 or so students to manage. All seven teams reported that during BOOST they have their students who are not being provided an intervention read or work on homework. The original intention and proposal for BOOST required teachers to have their non-BOOSTED students sustain silent read. However, an overwhelming majority of teachers interviewed reported that their students did not always read quietly but allowing them to work on homework usually kept them quieter.

There were some teachers who offered their teammates the option to send students to their room on their trump day. This means that when a content area had a priority day, their teammate would take their Life 101 students to read so that the teacher who was providing interventions could have more space and fewer students to manage. Both eighth grade core teams said they already use this practice but not as regularly as they could.

Five of the six core teams have a teacher who does not have a permanent Life 101 roster because they have students work on homework completion during Life 101. These students who participate in homework room are supposed to be different than those who need re-teaching in BOOST. Students who are assigned to the homework room typically are able to do their work, but are choosing not to. They possess the ability, but maybe not the organization, or follow through to complete work. BOOST is for students who need additional instruction. The homework Life 101 teacher usually has significantly fewer students in their room during Life 101 and BOOST and could potentially help offset some of their teammates' students who need to read during BOOST. There is only one core team that does not have a homework Life 101 teacher and they stated they chose that setup. However, they wish they could retract that request. They feel they made a mistake asking to opt out of having a teacher be their team homework Life 101 teacher. They erroneously thought they would have less students per Life 101 roster but in the end, they did not because the administration restructured some things.

**Timing of running the draft report.** One drawback theme that also emerged was the cut-off time that teachers must have their draft submissions in by to have their selections reported on the building-wide report that is sent out Friday and Wednesday



afternoon. While a centralized drafting system provides organization and a systematic process, it does take planning and foresight to work well. Teachers must submit their draft requests for Monday and Tuesday by Friday at 3:00 P.M. To have students drafted for Thursday and Friday, a teacher must input them by 3:00 P.M. on Wednesday. Math teachers, specifically, wanted more time to grade over the weekend before putting in their draft requests. One reason they requested this is because the math trump day is on Tuesday, meaning that they must request those students by Friday at 3:00. One seventh grade math teacher stated, “We just don’t have a chance to put things in (to the draft system). It comes at 3:00 and we haven’t had time to grade anything yet.” However, there are more than just math teachers who would like the extra time. There was a seventh grade team that was particularly adamant as well about needing extra time to put in their draft requests. One ELA teacher stated that she needed more time to group students so that she could effectively provide small group interventions.

One teacher recommendation to remedy this situation was to move the cut off time to the evening or even the early morning the day the draft report comes out. A sixth grade social studies teacher said, “If someone ran the report at 6:30 A.M. then you could have all night to grade. A lot of times, I take things home to grade in the evening.” This early morning change would create an inconvenience for the instructional coach who runs the draft report and distributes the report to the teachers. However, the benefit to the teachers and the students would probably be worth the inconvenience.

**More time needed for BOOST.** One thing that resonated through all seven focus groups was the need for more time. By the time teachers have students in their classroom and ready to learn, they only have around twenty minutes to work with them. The

students are supposed to transition to BOOST at the signal of music playing on the intercom at 9:30 A.M. However, teachers said that many students take too long to get to their BOOST classroom or come unprepared and need additional time to get supplies. More time would be welcomed by all of the teachers who participated in the study. When this topic came up in conversation, no one voiced their concern over adding more time. When the BOOST time was created, about four minutes were shaved off of each class period. Therefore, teachers do not want to give up any more instructional time but would agree to shaving time off of Life 101, which is character education time.

The sixth grade teams had an interesting difference in their use of Life 101 time. One sixth grade team said that while they would opt for more time during BOOST, they would only want to add about three minutes to BOOST from Life 101. On the other hand, the other sixth grade team reported that they commonly cut into Life 101 time on their own accord and do not wait for the music at 9:30 to transition to BOOST. While the teachers have the best interest of the students in mind, this type of autonomy on scheduling is not really conducive to building-wide, systematic implementation.

### **Perceived Teacher Recommendations**

**Community awareness.** A theme that emerged from the focus groups was the lack of community awareness of BOOST. Teachers referenced that when they talk to parents regarding BOOST, many parents are confused about what it is. The instructional coach did verify that there is a piece about BOOST in the handbook that is sent home to every parent in the beginning of the year. However, that handbook is tedious and many parents do not read it in its entirety. One eighth grade math teacher stated that she would really like the administration to draft a letter home to parents explaining the purpose and

general practices of BOOST. A reading teacher stated that he “wants parents to know that BOOST is not a time for your child to just work on homework. I think the kids know what BOOST is, but the parents do not.” Additionally, an ELA teacher recommended adding information about BOOST to the school website. Overall, the teachers would like some holistic information shared out to parents by the administration.

**Draft system.** One of the most overwhelming responses to the prompt “How can BOOST be improved?” was to make changes to the draft system. More specifically, they wanted to change the timing of when teachers must have students drafted for them to be on the building wide report. Every single team appreciated the system and recognized the organization that it created so that BOOST can be run building-wide. However, the most popular recommendation was to move the BOOST draft to Sunday evening or early morning Monday. Three teachers recommended running the report daily, but many others were concerned that this would be difficult to keep up with. Teachers would have to put in draftees every day and would have to check the report every day as well to see if they needed to send their students to another teacher during BOOST. Additionally, one sixth grade teacher recognized that when the draft report is generated in the afternoon, it allows teachers who will have a substitute the next day to leave notes for the substitute so that students are sent to the correct classroom. It seems that simply changing when the instructional coach sets the deadline for BOOST would benefit teachers and appease many of them.

As previously mentioned, submitting the draft takes some time because each student must be input separately. The Google Form used to draft students requires that teachers submit an individual form for every student. One sixth grade science teacher

repeatedly asked if there was a way to capture multiple names in each form. This could be explored by the administration to see if there is a possible solution to this issue.

**Trump day schedule.** A pretty brash conversation over the trump day schedule ensued in one core team focus group. While three core teams stated concern with the trump day schedule, one team was livid about it. They believed that the schedule was unjust and did not provide the proportional amount of time for content areas that they perceived as a priority. Specifically, ELA and reading share a trump day, which is on Tuesday. So, if a student is missing a skill in ELA and reading, they would only be able to attend one of those support sessions because the day is shared. It is possible that on another day, if the student is not drafted elsewhere, the student could then go to the other teacher's room. This seventh grade team felt strongly that ELA and reading were two different content areas and deserved their own trump day. Their solution was to remove the Friday trump day from applied science courses. This argument was echoed gently by an eighth grade team as well. However, the eighth grade team was much less adamant about it.

On the opposite side of this argument are the applied science teachers who are referred to as Encore teachers. They are incredibly thankful for the time provided to them to assist students in their skill deficiencies. For example, the band teacher uses the time to work independently with struggling musicians. There are approximately forty students in each band class and it is impossible to provide one-on-one assistance during class. The music teacher pulls in choir students who are struggling with a part for a performance and can assess the problems quickly and provide feedback and instruction to correct the

problem. The encore teachers feel valued because they are given a day where they can trump core areas.

### **How are teams collaborating about BOOST?**

With teaming as a pillar of middle level instruction, considering how teams collaborate about BOOST is important. Each core team has a common plan period which allows them to have time to meet every day, if needed. Administrative expectations are that teams formally meet at least once a week. The applied science teachers do not have a common plan time, so they do not meet very often. In fact, they do not share students as a core team does, so that changes the dynamic of the typical teaming process. Typical team agendas consistently included topics such as student behavior, upcoming events, parent contacts, committee reports, and other miscellaneous student issues as they arise. BOOST was not a consistent collaboration topic throughout all teams.

Four of the six core teams reported that they collaborate about BOOST. One seventh grade team and one eighth grade team do not collaborate about BOOST. The teams that reported collaborating about BOOST all talk about which students need to be where during BOOST time. Teachers reported making concessions for their peers when they lobbied to have a student on a day that was not their trump day. Teams are working together to utilize the trump day schedule in conjunction with prioritizing student needs. One team was very organized and created a spreadsheet in addition to the draft report to help keep all of them on track with what students were missing and how they could intervene so the student could be successful. This same seventh grade team was also very upset that ELA and reading had the same trump day.

## **Interviews with Administration**

The interviews with the principal, assistant principal and instructional coach were meant to provide additional information and help discover convergence of data (Yin, 2003). The data were coded separately from the focus groups as the participants in the focus groups were all teachers and the interviews were all administrators. While the study focused on teacher perceptions, the feedback from administrators was helpful in validating the data from focus groups.

### **Purpose**

One common theme from the administration interviews was the purpose of BOOST was consistently meant to address the skill deficits students possess. The tier two intervention time is supposed to be used on current concepts. BOOST is not meant to be a study hall. The expectation for teachers during BOOST is to be providing academic interventions when needed and facilitating silent reading if not.

### **Support**

The administrators see themselves as a support for BOOST. They believe that by creating this time for BOOST in the schedule, they are benefitting teachers and the students. All three of the administrators see BOOST as a chance for teachers to intervene without spending extra time after school. The principal stated, “The extra time is definitely important. Teachers can work with them during the day and not stay after school.” One role of the leadership in a school building is to help build a culture of positivity. The principal has been active in pursuing ways to eliminate obligations for teachers so their load is lightened. Additionally, the principal sees his role as clearly administrative. He makes decisions and helps enforce the procedures when teachers need

support. One eighth grade teacher corroborated this by reporting, “Our principal has been really supportive and talked to those kids who we figure out are just avoiding going to BOOST.” While the administrators are not working directly with students during BOOST, they are supporting the teachers when possible.

### **Lack of Training**

Another consistent theme that resonates through not only the teachers but the administrators is the lack of professional development and training regarding RtI. This is concerning. The principal stated it has been at least four years since he has learned about RtI, the assistant principal does not have any formal training, and the instructional coach stated that she “does not have much training in it.” The instructional coach is new in this position and is currently signed up to attend trainings this year. However, it is clear that more formal training for teachers and administrators is needed.

### **Research Questions Answered**

#### **RQ1: Which components of the KASAB model have been met in regards to the RtI program, BOOST, used at WMS?**

The KASAB change theory was used as a guiding conceptual framework because implementing the BOOST model has been a change process culturally and structurally for WMS. In the KASAB model, there are five components of change which must take place in order to successfully create change: knowledge, attitude, skill, aspiration, behavior (Killion, 2008). The data collected in this study exposed a lack of evidence in the knowledge and skill components of the KASAB theory. The other components of the KASAB theory have been met to help ease the change process at WMS.

## **Knowledge**

One focus group question that was used to determine the level of implementation and the overall change process at WMS was to learn about the professional development offered to staff regarding RtI and BOOST. This was alarming. There were teams who had only one person who believed that they have had RtI training. In fact, there was not a single team who said they have had training in the last three years. This is concerning to the overall change process as indicated in the KASAB change theory as the knowledge needed to move towards using RtI effectively. While no one has received RtI training recently, everyone said that they have had instruction on how to use BOOST.

## **Attitude**

Teachers want to BOOST students. They possess the right attitude to successfully implement this change in practice. Statements such as “BOOST allows me to work with students, to empower them, challenge them, and help them one-on-one” were repeated throughout all seven focus groups. BOOST is well accepted. One powerful statement from a sixth grade science teacher was, “I don’t see BOOST going away. I don’t know how it can. To me, it is vital to get those silent kids, those invisible kids to be accountable.”

## **Skill**

Teachers must possess the skills to provide skill based interventions during BOOST to use it effectively. All seven focus groups stated that BOOST time is an intervention time, but only five of the seven groups reported that they specifically work on “skills”. For example, one eighth grade teacher stated, “If a student is missing a specific skill, you have the opportunity to fill them in.” Another teacher from a different



group specifically stated that “BOOST is a tier two intervention.” The fact that teachers could state that BOOST is a tier two intervention lead the researcher to believe that most teams had at least one person on the team who understood the RtI concept. However, when the focus groups were discussing the purpose, there were teachers who viewed it more as a homework time. One teacher said the purpose of BOOST was a “study hall”. While five teams verbalized the idea that BOOST was skill based, it is concerning that two teams were not able to identify the time as a tier two intervention where missing skills are the focus.

### **Aspiration**

Teachers are meeting the aspiration component of the KASAB theory because they see value in it. Teachers reported benefits such as better grades and classroom assessment achievement as well as student advocacy, accountability, relationships and building student confidence. These themes are discussed more in-depth later in this section.

### **Behavior**

When applying the KASAB theory to this study, the behavior component represents that teachers are repeatedly utilizing BOOST to the point where it is a repeated behavior. There is no doubt that teachers are utilizing BOOST. While targeted professional development could sharpen their skills, they are taking the time to draft students and work with them. One sixth grade teacher said, “The numbers are great! Sometimes it is 40 kids a day and sometimes it is up to 60” when referring to the number of sixth grade students who are BOOSTED each day. As a reference, there are about 240

students in sixth grade. Out of the 35 participants, there were only two who said they have not used BOOST this year to provide academic interventions to students.

**RQ2: How effective do teachers perceive the RtI model being used at WMS to be?**

Teachers reported seeing overwhelmingly positive results from students who participate in BOOST. Teachers perceive BOOST to be effective because grades and classroom assessment achievement have increased when students participate in BOOST. Intangible benefits reported included: student advocacy, accountability, relationships and building student confidence.

**Grades.** Perceptually, teachers are seeing a large benefit to student grades from BOOST. When questioned about grades, all seven teams stated that they do see an improvement in the grades of students that they BOOST. Specifically, one social studies teacher discussed that importance of immediate feedback and re-grading when a student retakes a test. “If a little girl fails her quiz and comes in during BOOST, we practice three or four questions before she is re-assessed. So, she’ll go from a F to a B pretty quickly.”

Grades are impacted by assessment scores, projects, and class work. One social studies teacher said, “They are practicing more, so they are getting better.” One of the major activities that teachers reported doing in BOOST was re-assessing when students did not do well. Therefore, student grades were typically immediately positively affected in that capacity.

**Achievement in class.** While grades should be an indicator of success in a classroom, one way to determine understanding is through mastery of standards or learning targets. One sixth grade science teacher stated that, “We have a chance to make sure that they are meeting the learning targets” through BOOST. This type of response

indicates that teachers have goals of filling knowledge gaps, not just raising grades.

Teachers at WMS are working to hold students accountable for school work by drafting them for BOOST to provide extra time and support so that important concepts can be mastered.

Generally, teachers perceived that students who were participating in BOOST were achieving greater than if they would not have participated in BOOST. “Well, I think scores are certainly higher” stated a seventh grade social studies teacher. “Some students would not take the time to come in after school; you would have to force them. With BOOST, we don’t give kids a chance to slip through the cracks.”

**Student advocacy.** One unexpected theme that emerged was student self-advocacy. All seven teams discussed how students are now asking to be BOOSTED. Students recognize their deficiencies and are not afraid to ask for help. A sixth grade science teacher stated, “I think that there is a greater awareness now that if they (students) don’t understand (then) they are the ones who are saying they need to come see you.” Another teacher called it, “student advocacy”. Teachers do feel this RtI model has increased student advocacy and allowed students to start asking for help in a less pressurized fashion.

**Accountability.** With the time built into the day, teachers are able to access students almost daily (with the exception of early release days). This has created a climate where students must be accountable for their work and their progress because teachers can easily draft them to help reteach or reassess. All seven teams were pleased with the built in time during the day to help catch students up. A sixth grade social studies teacher reported that after a classroom formative assessment, a student said,

“Hey! I did good on my last quiz, so you don’t have to BOOST me.” According to this teacher, the students’ ownership in their learning had increased because they knew if they did not learn the material they would still be held accountable for learning it later.

**Relationships.** An unintended consequence of BOOST is the building of student and teacher relationships. This benefit was not an original intention of creating BOOST at WMS; however, it is a significant finding. In the six core team focus groups, relationships were discussed as a benefit. One idea that was continually discussed was that taking the time to BOOST students was a way of showing that you care about their education and their grades. One 22 year veteran math teacher stated, “...since we do BOOST from the beginning of the year, it helps build relationships with the students who struggle in our subject matter.”

**Confidence.** Teachers reported that students gained confidence in their abilities by participating in BOOST. One sixth grade social studies teacher stated, “They increase their knowledge base to where they don’t fail. They can gain confidence through BOOST.” Math teachers, specifically, echoed this sentiment. Math problems take perseverance and confidence. Some students easily give up when they are not successful right away. The one-on-one time with teachers allows students to feel successful and gain confidence about their skill set. Teachers are using this time to build academic skills in students and the success they are enjoying begets confidence.

**RQ3: What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the RtI model being used at WMS?**

**Benefits**

The teachers at WMS perceive the benefits of the RtI model being used to include: convenience, the organization of the draft system, participation, small group and one-on-one time, and a time saver for teachers. These positive benefits have helped bolster the teacher buy-in of BOOST.

**Convenience.** Many students are not able to stay after school because of transportation. All seven teams reported that they are able to catch students during the day that they would not have been able to work with after school due to lack of transportation. The accessibility to students is overwhelmingly positive. One seventh grade social studies teacher stated, “Some kids can’t stay after school and get support”. Another teacher mentioned that some students do not have a quiet place to work at home or they live in chaos. This time allows them a chance to work with support.

**Draft system.** All seven teams referenced the drafting system as a positive but also as something that could continually be improved. Every team commented in some way that it was easy to use. One sixth grade teacher stated, “I like the draft. I like being able to look at the sheet and see if I need to send people or not. It works”.

**Participation.** Teachers reported many students are being BOOSTED. Not only are they drafting students, but they see how many students are being drafted from their Life 101 classes. Additionally, teachers have access to the draft report for all grades and are able to see how many students are being pulled in each day. While the draft report is not completely accurate because some teachers are calling in students without formally

drafting them through the system, the overall numbers are high. A sixth grade science teacher said, “The numbers are great! Sometimes it is 40 kids a day and sometimes it is up to 60” when referring to the number of sixth grade students who are BOOSTED each day. As a reference, there are about 240 students in sixth grade.

**Small group and one-on-one.** Another consistent theme throughout all seven teams were the opportunities to work in small groups or one-on-one. One sixth grade social studies teacher said that she is “catching students quicker” with BOOST. The individualized instruction time allows for targeted work. Teachers report not having to remediate during class time because they can catch students up in small groups or one-on-one. A sixth grade teacher spoke of the need for one-on-one instruction when she said BOOST time is used “different for every student.”

When considering small group work, teachers were able to classify students by missing skill or deficit and group them together for instruction. A sixth grade social studies teacher stated that he will draft students and “about a third need re-teaching, a third need to work on late work and a third need absent work.” He praised the flexibility that he has within small groups to modify instruction based on student need. Others echoed the same sentiment, with all seven groups mentioning the positive impact of one-on-one and small group work in BOOST.

**Time saver.** Overall, teachers appreciated the time saved after school from having a time built into the day to work with struggling students. One seventh grade teacher said, “I don’t have to stay after school. So, it is a timesaver.” Another teacher discussed that time was saved during class because she did not have to remediate

instruction for a minority group in class; she could address their needs via BOOST instead of holding the whole class back.

### **Drawbacks**

The teachers at WMS perceive the drawbacks of the RtI model being used to include too many students in the room during BOOST, the timing of the draft report, the length of BOOST, and the time consumption during the draft input process. The drawbacks have created opportunity for improvement when considering future implementation.

**Too many kids in the room.** An emerging theme when asking teachers about their frustrations with BOOST is the number of students they have in their room while trying to provide academic interventions to students. Teachers have their normal Life 101 class in their room every day during BOOST. While some students may be drafted out of the teacher's classroom, many are not. So, as teachers have students come into work with them, they have another 15 or so students to manage. All seven teams reported that during BOOST they have their students who are not being provided an intervention read or work on homework. The original intention and proposal for BOOST required teachers to have their non-BOOSTED students sustain silent read. However, an overwhelming majority of teachers interviewed reported that their students did not always read quietly, but allowing them to work on homework usually kept them quieter.

**Timing of running the "draft report".** One drawback theme that also emerged was the cut-off time that teachers must have their draft submissions in by to have their selections reported on the building-wide report that is sent out Friday and Wednesday afternoon. While a centralized drafting system provides organization and a systematic

process, it does take planning and foresight to work well. Teachers must submit their draft requests for Monday and Tuesday by Friday at 3:00 P.M. To have students drafted for Thursday and Friday, a teacher must input them by 3:00 P.M. on Wednesday. Math teachers, specifically, wanted more time to grade over the weekend before putting in their draft requests. One reason they requested this is because the math trump day is on Tuesday, meaning that they must request those students by Friday at 3:00. One seventh grade math teacher stated, “We just don’t have a chance to put things in (to the draft system). It comes at 3:00 and we haven’t had time to grade anything yet.” However, there are more than just math teachers who would like the extra time. There was a seventh grade team that was particularly adamant, as well, about needing extra time to put in their draft requests. One ELA teacher stated that she needed more time to group students so that she could effectively provide small groups interventions.

**More time needed for BOOST.** One thing that resonated through all seven focus groups was the need for more time. By the time teachers have students in their classroom and ready to learn, they only have approximately twenty minutes to work with them. The students are supposed to transition to BOOST at the signal of music playing on the intercom at 9:30 A.M. However, teachers said that many students take too long to get to their BOOST classroom or come unprepared and need additional time to get supplies. More time would be welcomed by all of the teachers who participated in the study.

**Time consumption to draft students.** Submitting the draft takes some time because each student must be input separately. The Google Form used to draft students requires that teachers submit an individual form for every student. One sixth grade science teacher repeatedly asked if there was a way to capture multiple names in each



form. This could be explored by the administration to see if there is a possible solution to this issue.

**Undecided issue.** A consideration that must be noted in this section is the trump day schedule. While one team was extremely unhappy with the combination of ELA and reading sharing a trump day, the other teams were not disappointed. There were two core teams who did not see the value in allowing the applied science classes to have a trump day. However, the applied sciences team was very grateful for the opportunity to be treated with the same fidelity as other content areas.

### **Summary**

This study helped provide more data regarding the benefits and drawbacks of the RtI model being used at WMS. The data collected allowed the researcher to find emerging themes to answer the research questions. The research in this study provides a foundation for practitioners to consider when planning and implementing RtI models in their own schools. While there were perceived drawbacks with the model, the perceived benefits were substantial. Instructional programming at WMS is constantly evolving and this study will help provide feedback to WMS to continue to improve their model.

## **Informed Consent for Interviews**

A Study of the Teacher Perceptions of the BOOST program, a Tier 2 Academic Intervention Program at a Middle School.

Consent to participate in an interview:

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research study.

Identification of Researchers: This research is being done by Holly Jennings. I am a doctoral student with the University of Missouri. The advisor for the project is Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. You may reach her with questions at [hutchinson@ucmo.edu](mailto:hutchinson@ucmo.edu) or 816-405-9306.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to gain more information about the implementation and teacher perceptions of BOOST at WMS.

Request for Participation: It is up to you whether you would like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply not answer them. All data collected will remain confidential through reporting.

Description of Research Method: This study involves participating in an interview about your experiences with BOOST. The interview will last less than one hour and will be audio-recorded.

Privacy: All of the information I collect will be confidential. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used to report the data. Information will be held confidential by the researcher.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Explanation of Benefits: You will benefit from participating in this study by getting first hand experience in research and possibly helping to shape the future implementation of BOOST.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Holly Jennings at [hjennings@warrensburgr6.org](mailto:hjennings@warrensburgr6.org). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585.

By attending the interview you are indicating your choice to be in this study. If you do not wish to participate, please do not attend the interview.

## **Informed Consent for Focus Groups**

A Study of the Teacher Perceptions of the BOOST program, a Tier 2 Academic Intervention Program at a Middle School

Consent to participate in a focus group:

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research study.

Identification of Researchers: This research is being done by Holly Jennings. I am a doctoral student with the University of Missouri. The advisor for the project is Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. You may reach her with questions at [hutchinson@ucmo.edu](mailto:hutchinson@ucmo.edu) or 816-405-9306.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to gain more information about the implementation and teacher perceptions of BOOST at WMS.

Request for Participation: It is up to you whether you would like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply not answer them. All data collected will remain confidential through reporting.

Description of Research Method: This study involves participating in a focus group about your experiences with BOOST. The focus group will last less than ninety minutes and will be audio-recorded. The other members of the focus group will be your colleagues who teach the same subject.

Privacy: All of the information I collect will be confidential. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the other focus group members. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the information released from other focus group members. However, information will be confidential with the researcher and every attempt will be made to ensure the other participants maintain confidentiality as well.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Explanation of Benefits: You will benefit from participating in this study by getting first hand experience in research and possibly helping to shape the future implementation of BOOST.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Holly Jennings at [hjennings@warrensburgr6.org](mailto:hjennings@warrensburgr6.org). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585.

By attending the focus group you are indicating your choice to be in this study. If you do not wish to participate, please do not attend the focus group.

**Focus Group Protocol (Math, Science, ELA, Social Studies, Applied Classes)**

What content area do you teach?

In your own words, what is the purpose of BOOST?

What professional development have you had in RtI?

What is RtI?

What is going well with BOOST?

What are some frustrations you have with BOOST?

What are some recommendations you have regarding BOOST?

How do you use BOOST?

What are some activities you have students do during BOOST when you draft them?

What about students in your Life 101?

If you were here when we took away the 10 minute read in order to create BOOST, what were your initial thoughts? Now how do you feel about the trade off?

What makes BOOST successful?

How much do you think other teachers are using BOOST?

Explain how you see students growth through BOOST (if you do)

How is BOOST helping students better achieve?

This school enjoys traditionally high standardized test scores. Why do you think that is?

How does BOOST help you as a teacher?

How often do you draft students?

Tell me about the online drafting system. How can that be improved?

What are your goals for your students? How can you help them reach them?

## **Interview Protocol**

What was your role in the creation of BOOST at WMS?

What training have you received on RtI?

What training have you provided to your staff on RtI or BOOST?

How do new teachers find out about BOOST?

What are some student benefits you have seen from using BOOST?

What are some teacher benefits you have seen from implementing BOOST?

Describe the culture of the building.

How has the community responded to the implementation of BOOST?

Describe your role in the day to day implementation of BOOST

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## VITA

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