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INTERVENTIONS FOR SUCCESS: PERCEPTIONS ON RTI

by  
Renee Marie Johnson

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
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Approved by

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## ABSTRACT

Renee Marie Johnson  
INTERVENTIONS FOR SUCCESS: PERCEPTIONS ON RTI  
2005/2006  
Dr. Tanya Santangelo  
Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities

Current research strongly supports using response to intervention (RTI) to increase the academic achievement of all students, including those who experience academic difficulty in the general education classroom. The purpose of this study was to extend our understanding of RTI implementation. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted with multiple school professionals at “Granby Elementary School” to document their experiences and perceptions related to referral procedures and early intervention services. The results of this study indicate that students at Granby Elementary are supported by some of the core features of an RTI approach. The key themes which emerged from the data are that all students benefit from high-quality classroom environments, research-based instructional approaches, universal screening, and continuous progress monitoring, but some students still require more intense interventions to be successful. Based on those findings, it is recommended that multiple levels of increasingly intense interventions with progress monitoring be implemented with integrity to support student success.

## Acknowledgements

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## Chapter I: Introduction

During the past fifty years, schools have attempted to address the needs of diverse learners in the public schools. Overarching national concerns related to low student achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics have driven major changes in federal laws (Heward, 1996). *Historically, one law dictated how academic support was to be provided to students in general education classrooms and a separate law dictated how academic support was to be provided to students in special education classrooms. However, recent legislative reauthorizations have created a situation where support is no longer contingent upon whether or not a student has a disability (Kovaleski, 2002). In response, schools are designing and utilizing support systems that allow all students to become proficient readers, writers, and problem solvers. One specific model that effectively accomplishes this goal is called response to intervention (RTI).*

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study is to explore (and ultimately improve) the process used to address the needs of students who are experiencing academic difficulties in general education classroom. Specifically, this study will present multiple perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of current building-level intervention practices and illuminate potential improvements to better support individual students.

### *Need*

Recent changes in federal legislation allow school districts increased flexibility in creating systems to support student success (Kovaleski, 2002). These changes are related to the intervention options provided to students based on their academic need. However, the current regulations guiding implementation services in New Jersey were adopted in April 2001 (N.J.A. 6:26) and do not address the recommendations of recent research and legislation. This study is

needed to strengthen the understanding of students' and staff member's needs before developing new systems that respond to the new legislation.

### *Value*

This study will be useful to understand how school professionals perceive the intervention services available to students *struggling in the general education classroom at their school*. In light of recent changes in legislation, these perceptions can be used to create an effective intervention model to better meets the needs of all students.

### *Significance*

Recent reform efforts have often focused on external school improvements and efforts. However, internal school reform is often the more effective model (Kovaleski, 2002). Current research indicates strong support for using response to intervention to increase the academic achievement of all students (Kovaleski, 2002). This study adds to the existing literature by providing meaningful perspectives from staff members who interact in a variety of ways with students who are considered at-risk for academic failure. More importantly, the findings from this study will help inform district efforts to change intervention services so they comply with current legislation. This is an important study given the need to support the success of all students.

### *Overview of the Study*

*Description.* This study will present multiple perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of current building-level intervention practices and will illuminate potential improvements to better support individual students. This study will strengthen the understanding of unique building level needs among staff members before developing new systems that



respond to recent federal legislation and improve the interventions available to all students in order to support academic success.

*Methodology.* This qualitative study utilized a series of one-on-one purposeful interviews with the building Instructional Support Teacher, a second grade general education teacher, a special education teacher, and the building Elementary Student Support Teacher. All interviews conducted for this study followed a semi-structured format using an interview protocol (Cresswell, 2005). This format allowed participants to voice their own perspectives, without being influenced by the views of the interviewer. The interview questions were developed based on the themes which emerged through the review of the literature and based on the researcher's personal understanding of the school setting and procedures.

*Guiding research questions.* The following research questions guided data collection and analysis.

1. What process is used to support students not making expected progress in the general education setting?
2. What specific interventions and service delivery options are available to students considered at-risk for academic failure?
3. What are school professionals' beliefs and expectations related to the intervention and referral process?
4. What does the literature suggest to be "best practice" intervention models?
5. What are the legislative influences on intervention services?

#### *Operational Definitions*

The following terms have a specialized definition within the context of this study:

*Intervention.* Those programs, services and actions taken to identify and offer help to a student at-risk for learning, behavior or health difficulties (NJAC 6A: 16-1.3).

*Pre-referral intervention.* “A teacher’s modification of instruction or classroom management to better accommodate difficult-to teach pupils without disabilities” (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990, p.131).

*Referral for evaluation.* Those programs and services offered to a student or his or her family in order to make a positive determination regarding a student’s need for services which extend beyond the general school program (NJAC 6A: 16-1).

*Response to intervention.* A multi-tiered approach to instructional service delivery (Kovaleski, 2003). Although there are multiple RTI models, most are predicated on a three-tiered system of increasingly intense interventions.

*Treatment integrity.* “The extent to which an intervention was implemented and conducted as planned” (Telzrow & Beebe, 2002, p. 510).

### *Overview of the Paper*

In this chapter, an overview of the framework for this study was provided. Specifically, the purpose, need, and significance of this study were presented. The guiding research questions were listed and definitions of relevant terms were given. In Chapter Two, the literature relating to prefererral intervention is reviewed and a description of the RTI approach is provided. In Chapter Three, the study’s methodology is explained. In Chapter Four, the data from the study is analyzed and interpreted. In Chapter Five the findings of this study are summarized, the themes that emerged are discussed, and the implications for practice and future research are described. Finally, limitations of this study are reviewed.

## Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to multi-level interventions for students struggling in the general education classroom. First, a rationale for multi-level interventions is provided. This includes a review of litigation and legislation designed to increase educational opportunities for all students. Next, some of the unexpectedly negative outcomes that resulted from landmark legislation are reviewed. Following that, an overview of how mandates of recent legislative reauthorizations are attempting to address these trends is presented. Finally, the response to intervention model is outlined.

References for this review were accessed using several different methods. Initially, broad searches were conducted using ERIC and PschINFO databases with the descriptors: intervention, pre-referral-intervention, instructional, response to intervention, early intervention, and instructional support teams. Next, hand searches were conducted with the most relevant professional journals. Specifically, this included examining issues published within the last five years of: *Annals of Dyslexia*, *Educational Leadership*, *Exceptional Children*, *The Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, *Perspectives*, *Reading Teacher*, and *Reading Research*. The reference list from each article retrieved was also used to obtain additional research.

### *Contextual Background*

Over the past fifty years, the United States has slowly changed its philosophy and laws concerning a child's right to equal educational opportunities. Prior to the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision in 1954, school attendance was believed to be a privilege that was granted based on local school district decisions. However, the court ruled that that the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed equal protection under the law, including the right to equal

educational opportunities (Schugurensky, 2002). Following the court's decision, political and community advocacy ballooned. Through litigation and legislation over the next forty years, school districts assumed responsibility for educating all students, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or disability status. Two pieces of landmark legislation, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act are frequently cited as having the most significant impact on educational opportunities and experiences (Heward, 1996).

*Elementary and Secondary Education Act.* The Brown vs. Board of Education ruling demanded that minority children be taught in the same schools as White children. However, almost immediately, it was apparent that equal access was not synonymous with equal educational opportunity because achievement among students from low-income backgrounds was not commensurate with that of wealthy White students (Schugurensky, 2002). In response, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965 to address the special needs of students experiencing academic underachievement. Specifically, the law allocated additional funding (Title I) to schools with high concentrations of students from low-income households and included broad provisions to address the needs of students who were experiencing academic difficulty in the general education classrooms (Schugurensky, 2002). Because many of the students from low-income backgrounds were also minorities, this legislation indirectly targeted improvement among minority students. Results from the early intervention programs designed in response to the mandates of the ESEA demonstrated that providing extra support within the general education classroom could successfully promote academic achievement among some students (Haring, McCormick, & Haring, 1994). However,

a lack of unilateral improvement also proved that some students required support and services above and beyond the interventions used at that time.

Although the ESEA went through multiple reauthorizations between 1965 and 2001, the overarching goal to improve educational opportunities for students in the general education classroom remained consistent. The most recent reauthorization of the ESEA occurred in 2001, and was titled The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Its title and mantra reflected the nation's growing intolerance of underachievement among American students. The No Child Left Behind Act extended the ESEA's content and performance standards by requiring states to increase student testing, collect and disseminate assessment data for subgroups of students, ensure there is a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, and guarantee that students from all socioeconomic backgrounds meet academic proficiency standards by the 2014-2015 school year (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). The overarching theme of NCLB is that all students can achieve adequate proficiency if effective teachers provide quality instruction using research-based strategies. The underlying principle is that school districts are accountable for ensuring that all students achieve academically.

Prior to the passage of NCLB, mandates and provisions of the ESEA only pertained to students who did not qualify to receive special education services. However, the educational improvement goals and requirements of NCLB extend to all students, including those with disabilities.

*The Education for All Handicapped Children Act.* Where as the ESEA is the federal law that historically governed the education of students without disabilities, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) is the law that was passed in 1975 to specifically ensure students with disabilities had equal access to a public education. Before 1970, schools in the

United States educated only one out of every five children with disabilities and many states actually had laws that prevented students who were deaf, blind, or mentally retarded from attending school (Haring, McCormick, Haring, 1994). However, Public Law 94-142, provided children with disabilities the right to free and appropriate public education (FAPE), an individualized education program (IEP), due process, and instructional services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Public Law 94-142 was reauthorized multiple times, (and also experienced a name change to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] in 1990), but the goal of increasing educational opportunities for students with disabilities remained consistent.

In 1977, reauthorization amendments included a definition of learning disabilities. To qualify for special education services under this category, a severe discrepancy between a student's achievement and intellectual ability in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, and mathematics reasoning needed to be established (United States Office of Education, 1977). Comparing a student's scores on an intelligence test and an achievement test using a discrepancy formula became the most common method of determining the presence of a learning disability. Students who met this criteria, were then deemed eligible to receive special education services. However, the process and criteria used to identify learning disabilities led to many less desirable outcomes. These included rapid increases in special education referral and placement rates, an overrepresentation of minority students and English Language Learners, delayed or denied special education services, and concerns about assessment procedures.

### *Concerns with Learning Disabilities*

*Increases in special education referral and placement rates.* Following the adoption of the federal definition for a learning disability, there was an alarming increase in the number of students who were found eligible to receive special education services under this category. Consequently, many raised concerns about the seemingly uninhibited process between referral and classification. In one study, for example, 90% of students who were referred, were formally tested. Of the students tested, 73% were found eligible to receive special education services (Ysseldyke, 2001). The corresponding migration of students from general education classrooms to special education classrooms for at least part of the school day caused advocates of children to worry about this growing educational segregation.

*Overrepresentation.* Concerns also emerged about increasing classification rates among students from minority backgrounds and students who were English Language Learners. According to the 2000 Annual Report on the Implementation of the IDEA, African American students were 2.9 times as likely as Caucasian students to be labeled as having mental retardation and 1.3 times as likely to be labeled as having a learning disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In both cases, assessment procedures are often cited as causing this overrepresentation because these students often do not have language skills that allow them to adequately demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Roseberry-McKibbin, 1995).

*Delays in special education services.* Aggregated data suggests that most students are not classified as having a learning disability until they reach the fourth grade (Kovaleski, 2002). This is not because students in kindergarten through third grade are not experiencing academic difficulty. Rather, they have not fallen far enough behind to meet the criteria using the discrepancy formula. Consequently, many students experience multiple years of difficulty

before they are eligible for special education services. This phenomenon is frequently termed, “wait to fail” (Scrugs & Mastropieri, 2002).

*Denial of special education services.* Another concern which has been raised in relation to the federal criteria for a learning disability involves the denial of special education services to students who do not meet the discrepancy requirements. This population has been shown to experience academic difficulties which are nearly indistinguishable from those students who are, eventually, classified (Cohen, 2003). However, the similarity in their intelligence and achievement test scores leave them “left behind” because they are prohibited from receiving support associated with special education. Often these children receive no interventions or supports and demonstrate consistently low academic achievement.

*Concerns with assessment procedures.* As was previously described, significant concerns have been raised about the assessment procedures used to determine the presence of a learning disability. Similarly, concerns were also raised about students with disabilities being excluded from the standardized assessments used to determine academic progress among students without disabilities (National Council on Disabilities, 2004). As a result of advocacy efforts by researchers, educators, and parents, the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA mandated that students with disabilities have meaningful access to the general education curriculum, be included in accountability reform efforts, and benefit improved instructional practices. The preamble to the reauthorization also included the recommendation that prior to referral for special education, students experiencing difficulty in the general education classroom should be provided with some level of assistance (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997). In other words, rather than just following previous practices which were associated with the “wait to fail” approach and the denial of support to students who never met the discrepancy criteria, providing



early intervention services to all students became an overarching goal. School districts responded to this request, in part, by increasing the use of pre-referral interventions (Carter & Sugai, 1989).

### *Prereferral Intervention*

Prereferral intervention has been described as “a teacher’s modification of instruction or classroom management to better accommodate difficult-to teach pupils without disabilities” (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990, p.131). Prior to the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, some schools were already encouraging a team of staff members to collaborate with teachers to assist students who were experiencing difficulties in the classroom. The focus of these teams was to provide general education teachers with strategies to address increasingly diverse student needs, not explicitly to reduce special education referral rates (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989). Although prereferral intervention teams have been referred to by a variety of names (e.g., Pupil Assistance Committees, Instructional Support Teams, and Teacher Assistance Committees), they share many fundamental similarities in their mission and format.

Typically, the prereferral process begins when a teacher or parent expresses concerns about a student’s academic or behavioral performance. Frequently, prereferral intervention teams follow stage-based problem solving process to address the needs of referred students (Allen & Graden, 2002). This approach is used to help identify and define a problem, design strategies to remedy the problem, and then evaluate student outcomes after an intervention is implemented. If the recommended strategies effectively address the referral concerns, than subsequent referral for special education eligibility is not necessary. Conversely, if the student continues to struggle, the team may decide to refer him or her for assessments to determine if special education services are appropriate.

### *Research on Prereferral Intervention Teams*

During the last 25 years, there has been an increase in the use of school-based prereferral intervention teams (Allen & Graden, 2002). In 2003, Buck, Cook, Polloway, and Smith-Thomas found that the majority of states either required or recommended a prereferral process be used. While research has demonstrated that prereferral intervention teams can be beneficial, it has also been shown that success is strongly correlated with high levels of treatment integrity, or “the extent to which an intervention was implemented and conducted as planned” (Telzrow & Beebe, 2002, p. 510).

Many researchers have reported that teachers believe the prereferral process is important and is one way to effectively address students’ needs (Kovaleski, 2002; Safran & Safran, 1996). Actual outcomes are less definitive, however, because there is little information about the actual processes and interventions used by teams and/or teachers (Nelson et al., 1991). For example, Naquin and Alder (2002) found that although teachers reported they followed an intervention plan, observation data revealed this was true only 4% of the time. This tendency towards a “halo” effect (over-reporting student achievement) may occur because teams want to give the appearance of success (Safran & Safran, 1996). Also, many of the studies in the 1980’s did not address the extent to which participants implemented the interventions with integrity or to the extent they followed a team’s implementation plan (Nelson, et al., 1991). Without this information, it is difficult to conclude that any positive outcomes are the result of the intervention.

### *Expanding Prereferral Interventions*

Although prereferral procedures have been credited with successfully addressing the academic and behavioral difficulties of some students, many experts called for modifications and

expansion in the practices being used. For example, in his testimony before the Subcommittee on Education Reform, Kovaleski (2002) described the success of in-class support to general education teachers. Specifically, he noted, “there is a large group of students who can learn if supported interventions are delivered before pervasive learning problems and learned helplessness develop” (Kovaleski, 2002). Similarly, when Reid Lyon was Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, he argued that 74% of the children entering first grade who are at-risk for reading failure will continue to have reading problems into adulthood. If provided with focused and intensive interventions, however, the percentage of children reading below the basic level in the fourth grade can be reduced to six percent or less (Lyon, 2003).

#### *Response To Intervention*

In response to the call for increased intervention services, President George W. Bush convened the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education in 2001. This group, as well as those who participated in the 2001 Learning Disabilities Summit, recommended the development of an intervention-oriented approach to support all students who are at-risk for experiencing academic difficulty and concurrently provide data that helps determine whether academic difficulties are the result of a learning disability (Moore-Brown, Montgomery, Bielinski, Shubin, 2005). The model, known as response to intervention or responsiveness to intervention (RTI), focuses on identifying and addressing students’ difficulties as soon as they emerge. It also incorporates the use of data to make intervention plan recommendations and modifications. Thus, RTI can be utilized as an alternative to the use of the ability-achievement discrepancy to identify the presence of a learning disability (Learning Disabilities Roundtable, 2002).

*Legislative support for RTI.* Both NCLB and IDEA 2004 support intervention models that focus on instruction and early intervention to facilitate success. The No Child Left Behind Act mandates the use of scientifically-based practices and interventions to promote academic achievement among all students, irrespective of whether they qualify for special education services. The passage of this legislation marked the first time in U.S. history that students with disabilities were required to be included in each state's accountability system (Carnine, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act also encourages schools to offer extra assistance before considering eligibility for special education services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 also supports the use of RTI because school districts can now allocate up to 15% of their Part B funding to provide early intervention services to students (IDEA, 2004). Additionally, the criteria for determining the presence of a learning disability has been expanded to incorporate a student's response to interventions.

*Multi-tiered approach.* The response to intervention model is often described as a multi-tiered approach to instructional service delivery (Kovaleski, 2002). Although there are multiple RTI models, most are predicated on a three-tiered system of increasingly intense interventions. Tier One represents general education classroom intervention. Tier Two generally involves a secondary intervention for students who fail to respond to earlier interventions. Tier Three may include be special education assessment or another level of intervention before special education assessment (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005).

In Tier One, some form of curriculum-based assessment is utilized with all students in the general education classroom on a frequent and consistent basis. The corresponding data allows the teacher to monitor students' academic progress. When the data suggest a student is not meeting the expected benchmarks, the teacher is expected to immediately address the difficulties

with appropriate classroom-based interventions. These might include strategies suggested by the Pupil Assistance Committee to differentiate instruction. If the student continues to experience academic difficulty, then Tier Two interventions are considered (Kovaleski, 2003).

Typically, Tier Two interventions are predicated on the assumption that a student is unable to meet grade-level standards without support beyond that which can be provided by his or her general education teacher. Although a variety of strategies are utilized in Tier Two, they typically involve daily instruction being provided by a school professional other than the classroom teacher. This support is frequently offered in a small group setting with instruction that provides high response rates, immediate feedback, and sequential mastery of topics (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). If Tier Two interventions are successful, then the student goes back to receiving instruction in the general education classroom, and his or her progress is monitored along with the other students. If the interventions are not successful, then either additional Tier Two, or Tier Three interventions are warranted.

If a student reaches Tier Three, he or she may receive more intense interventions, or be referred for special education services (Kovaleski, 2003). This process may involve additional assessment, and, combined with the data documenting a lack of response to intervention, the student may be classified as having a learning disability. Specifically, he or she would be considered “dually discrepant;” non-responsive to intervention and demonstrating a discrepancy between intelligence and achievement.

### *Summary*

Schools are faced with complex challenges, including many “difficult to teach” students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989, p.260). Many schools are using prereferral intervention teams to address the needs of students at-risk for academic failure in the general education classroom. These

teams often provide support on a consultative basis to help teachers develop strategies to differentiate instruction in the general education classroom. Some students, however, require a higher level of intervention to support their success (Kovaleski, 2003). Research indicates that an approach that provides multiple levels of increasingly intense intervention, called response to intervention, can help promote achievement. *Because there is only limited research available about the concept of RTI, this study will significantly contribute to the existing literature. Specifically, it will offer understandings about how teachers who interact in a variety of ways with students who are considered at-risk for academic failure view the strengths and weaknesses of current building-level intervention practices. It will also illuminate potential improvements that can be implemented to better support individual students.*

## Chapter III: Methodology

### *Introduction*

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study. First, the guiding research questions for this study are presented. Next, the selected site and participants are described and an overview of the relevant referral and intervention practices used at the selected school is offered. Finally, potential researcher biases that impacted this study are discussed.

### *Guiding Research Questions*

The following research questions guided data collection and analysis.

1. What does the literature suggest to be the “best practice” intervention model?
2. What are the legislative influences on intervention services?
3. What process is used to support students not making expected progress in the general education setting?
4. What specific interventions and service delivery options are available to students considered at-risk for academic failure?
5. What are school professionals’ beliefs and expectations related to the intervention and referral process?

### *Research Strategy*

This qualitative study utilized a series of one-on-one purposeful interviews. All interviews conducted for this study followed a semi-structured format using an interview protocol (Cresswell, 2005). This format provided participants the opportunity to voice their own perspectives, without being influenced by the views of the interviewer. The interview questions

were developed based on the themes which emerged through the review of the literature and based on the researcher's personal understanding of the school setting and procedures. Appendix A contains a copy of the interview questions. Follow-up dialogue related to each question occurred, based on the information offered by each interviewee. Before all interviews began, the purpose of the interview was reviewed and informed consent was obtained. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

### *Data Analysis*

Notes were taken during each interview to highlight key points made by each interviewee. After each interview, the notes were reviewed and categorized to identify recurrent information and emerging themes. Specific efforts were made to look for evidence which did not support the researcher's personal expectations. Ultimately, data were integrated and summarized to derive findings.

### *Selected School*

This study was conducted in an elementary school (given the pseudoname Granby Elementary), which is part of a large suburban district located just outside a major city in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The district school system is comprised of 19 schools, which serve approximately 12,000 students. Granby has 399 students in grades K-5. Maximum class size in grades K-3 is 20 students and the maximum in grades 4-5 is 24 students.

Full time professional staff at Granby Elementary includes one building administrator, one Instructional Support Teacher (IST), nineteen general education teachers, and two special education teachers. Part-time professional staff members at Granby include: one guidance counselor, the Elementary Student Support Teacher, and one math coach. The Child Study



Team is shared between three schools, with the Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant serving as the building case manager.

The school for this study was selected out of convenience because it was the researcher's place of employment. However, it was an ideal location for this study because, despite significant efforts to encourage student success, *limited intervention services were available to students who experienced difficulty meeting grade level expectations within the general education classroom.* Specifically, efforts were made in this district to encourage student success by supporting the general education teachers through the use of an Instructional Support Teacher (IST), periodic assessments, and a multidisciplinary team.

The Instructional Support Teacher's main job was to consult with the general education teachers to help them provide better instruction to all students. A secondary function of the IST was to organize grade-level screenings and assessments as a means of monitoring student progress and identifying students considered at-risk for academic failure. All students in Kindergarten were periodically screened for phonemic awareness and students in 1-5 were periodically assessed for reading, writing, and problem solving. In Kindergarten, the Instructional Support Teacher administered the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)* to students in the fall and spring. In first and second grade, general education teachers administered the *Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)* each marking period to track each student's independent reading level. Teachers in first through fifth grade also administered a district-created *District Literacy Assessment (DLA)*, which required students to silently read a story and respond to written open-ended response questions.

By state law, Granby was also required to use prereferral interventions. The term used to describe the prereferral process is Intervention and Referral Services. The state policy directs

these services through the mandated organization of multidisciplinary team called a Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). Members of this team may include the following individuals: Principal, Guidance Counselor, Instructional Support Specialist, Teachers, Child Study Team members, School Nurse, or others having knowledge about the student.

If a student in the general education classroom is not meeting *grade-level expectations*, the PAC helps teachers determine what resources and modifications are needed to promote success. The majority of interventions suggested by the PAC team focus on behavior management procedures and instructional modifications to the general education curriculum. Examples of behavior management procedures include preferential seating, behavior monitoring charts, and visual and verbal cueing and prompting. Examples of instructional modifications include increased small group instruction and frequent checking for understanding. If the PAC team determined that classroom-based interventions were not successful, then a student might receive additional support from the Elementary Student Support Teacher (ESST).

#### *Selected Participants*

Maximal variation sampling was utilized with this study (Cresswell, 2005). This approach ensured that data represented multiple perspectives from individuals who provide instruction and intervention services to students experiencing difficulty in general education classrooms. Specifically, staff members purposefully selected included the building IST, a second grade general education teacher, a special education teacher, and the building ESST.

*Ms. Plata.* The Instructional Support Teacher, Ms. Plata, provides full-time consultative services to teachers at Granby to help them develop their teaching strategies. She also organizes the grade-level screenings and assessments to monitor student progress. Ms. Plata has thirty-

three years of teaching experience that includes teaching each grade from K-6 and providing support as a Reading Specialist.

*Ms. Meyers.* Ms. Meyers is a second grade teacher with seven years of teaching experience, all in second grade except for one year teaching grade one. Ms. Meyers' classroom has always included students with a wide range of abilities, including those considered at-risk for academic failure and those eligible to receive special education services.

*Ms. Jones.* Ms. Jones is one of the buildings two full-time special education teachers. She currently spends half of her day co-teaching in a fifth-grade inclusion classroom and the remaining part of the day providing support to students in the Resource Room. Ms. Jones has five years experience teaching in middle school and elementary school inclusion and resource settings.

*Ms. Smith.* Ms. Smith works two days each week as the building ESST at Granby. Her main role in this job is to provide intervention services to students considered to be at-risk for academic failure. Her experience includes teaching grade three as a general education teacher for one year, and teaching small groups of students with disabilities for the past five years.

#### *Potential Researcher Biases*

Throughout this study, potential researcher biases were considered and mitigated. The greatest potential for bias with this study related to my position as a special education teacher at Granby Elementary. I had a vested interest in seeing that the findings of this research will be used to improve access to interventions for students who are considered to be at-risk for academic failure. On one hand, my motivation and understanding of the selected school were beneficial because they facilitated access to interviewees. They also allowed me to have an intimate understanding of Granby's past and current practices related to intervention services.

However, my familiarity and expectations also potentially biased interpretations of data. To reduce the chance this happened, an interview protocol was used and direct quotations were included in chapter four to support the conclusions that were drawn. During the interviews, I did not offer any personal opinions and I made a concerted effort to provide neutral encouragers to the interviewees, *irrespective of whether their responses suggested support for the use of comprehensive intervention services*. Additionally, member checks were used to ensure that the themes and findings being drawn from this study were consistent with the interviewees' perspectives.

## Chapter IV: Results

This chapter describes the results of this qualitative study. First the interview protocol questions for this study are presented. Next, the findings from the interviews are presented and summarized.

### *Interview Protocol Questions*

Based on the themes that emerged through the review of the literature and on the researcher's personal understanding of the school setting and procedures, five interview questions were utilized for this study.

- 1.) Based on your experiences, what do you believe are the strengths and challenges of how we provide support to students at-risk for academic failure?  
  
Based on your experiences, how do you believe that we can improve/modify the support we provide our students? How would you make these improvements?
- 2.) If someone were to ask you, "What is Response To Intervention?" how would you describe the process?
- 3.) How might we use our current resources to effectively implement RTI?
- 4.) What factors do you believe are required for RTI to be effective?
- 5.) Can you describe how you see RTI next year and in five years?

### *Findings*

*Question One. Based on your experiences, what do you believe are the strengths and challenges of how we provide support to students at-risk for academic failure?*

Responses for perceived strengths and challenges were recorded separately. Four primary areas of strength reported by interviewees included: (a) the continuing education of staff

at Granby Elementary, (b) positive general education practices, (c) systematic assessment procedures, and (d) interventions for student at-risk for academic failure.

### *Strengths*

*Continuing education.* All four staff members interviewed considered the dedication of the staff at Granby to be beneficial for students at-risk for academic failure. Ms. Smith considered the professional staff to be highly educated, experienced, and dedicated to continuing professional development. Although continuing professional development is mandated by the state, all of the teachers exceed the requirement for 100 hours every five years. Activities that Granby staff participate in range from voluntary school-level book discussion groups to graduate courses leading to advanced degrees and certification. Ms. Meyers feels that this professional development has built a strong knowledge base at the school that benefits all students. Ms. Plata further encourages this professional development in her role as the building Instructional Support Specialist. She dedicates a portion of her spending budget to regularly purchase materials for the staff professional library. Books are available to the entire staff in an effort to keep them all abreast of research-based strategies that are considered “best practice” for students in reading, writing, and problem solving. In her position as the building Elementary Student Support Teacher, Ms. Smith reported that she regularly refers to this library to look for new ideas for her intervention groups. She often passes effective ideas on to her students’ general education teachers.

*General education practices.* Several practices in the general education setting were reported as benefiting at-risk students. These included small class sizes, guided-reading groups, inclusion classes, and the use of para-professionals. Ms. Meyers provided a historical reference to the reduction of general education class sizes. Six years ago, in an effort to provide a solid

education to all students, caps were created to limit the size of each K-3 classroom to 20 and 4-5 grade classrooms to 25. Ms. Meyers felt that these lower class sizes allowed for more differentiated instruction, especially in the area of reading. At the same time that class sizes were reduced, guiding reading became part of the district curriculum, with the intention of teaching at each student's instructional level.

Another practice that was reported to provide more individualized instruction is the in-class support model of inclusion. At Granby Elementary, two classrooms include a full-time general education teacher with in-class support provided three hours a day by a teacher trained in elementary and special education. As an inclusion teacher, Ms. Jones feels that all of the students benefit from the reduced teacher-student ratio, various curricular modifications and adaptations, and differentiated instruction opportunities present in her classroom.

Para-professionals were also considered beneficial for students at-risk for academic failure. The district requires that para-professionals have the equivalent of an Associate's degree, but at Granby, many classroom "aides" bring additional experience in the form of undergraduate degrees and parenting. Ms. Meyers noted that this additional adult in the room increases students' time on task because he or she can assist in redirecting off task behaviors, repeating and clarifying directions, and helping students with their assignments. At Granby, an added benefit is that many of these staff members are also members of the local community. Ms. Meyers reported that they often take on the role of liaison between community and school. This provides an enhanced sense of community that scaffolds at-risk students, and helps them feel that school is an extension of home.

*Assessment procedures.* All four interviewees believed that Granby Elementary excelled in their use of systematic assessment to identify students at-risk for academic failure. Ms. Plata

and Ms. Smith are both involved with administering the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment to students in the primary grades, beginning in Kindergarten. They both believed DIBELS is an effective tool for measuring students' development of phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding, and automaticity and fluency with the code.

In her second grade classroom, Ms. Meyers administers the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) at the beginning of the year and at the end of every marking period to assess each student's individual decoding and comprehension skills. She then uses this information to drive whole-class instruction and organize guiding reading groups. All teachers in grades one and two are required to assess and report the assessment results for each student.

In her fifth grade inclusion class, Ms. Jones administers a district-created literacy assessment, named the District Literacy Assessment (DLA). This assessment is designed to measure a student's ability to silently read a grade-level passage and respond in writing to a wide range of open-ended comprehension questions. All teachers in grades 1-5 administer and report the scores of each student's assessment. In addition to the DIBELS and DRA in the primary grades and the DLA for grades 1-5, Ms. Jones added that all teachers in grades K-5 must assess and report the scores of each student's understanding of mathematical thinking and problem solving on quarterly math assessments.

Each of the interviewees strongly felt that these periodic assessments and the manner in which individual student progress is measured and monitored was very effective for identifying Granby students who were at-risk for academic failure.

*Interventions.* Ms. Plata explained that six years ago, the district attempted to strengthen instruction in the regular education classroom. Specifically, when class sizes were reduced and



more teachers were hired. However, two positions were removed. One position Ms. Plata herself held, as the building Reading Specialist. At that time she provided small group and one-on-one instruction to students needing additional support in reading. Another full time position was dedicated to providing support in mathematics. Six years ago, these two positions were eliminated and two new positions were created. Ms. Plata moved from the position of Reading Specialist to the newly created position of ISS, whose main job functions were to provide consultative guidance to general education teachers and to organize the grade-level assessments in the building. The second new position was that of the ESST, whose main job was to provide interventions to students at-risk for academic failure. This second position provided two days per week of coverage. Newly hired Ms. Smith took this second position. The intervention provided to students by Ms. Smith was considered extremely important to each of the interviewees.

In an effort to provide interventions to students who scored at the “severe risk” level on DIBELS, Ms. Plata applied for and won a grant that purchased materials for the “Words Their Way” program. Although Ms. Plata is not supposed to deliver intervention, according to her job description, she pleaded with the principal to allow her to pilot this intervention with Ms. Smith. Together they provide thirty minutes of instruction, five days a week to groups of first graders at-risk for academic failure. All four interviewees believed this to be important work, crucial to the success of students.

Finally, Ms. Plata responded that another method of supporting students in the building was through the use of volunteers. The principal’s wife, who is a retired first grade teacher volunteer tutors at the school during the week. Additionally, practicum students and a few parents have been recruited to provide one-on-one tutoring to students who are struggling. Ms.

Plata mentioned that although most of the parents at Granby were active with their children, some students received little to no academic support at home. These tutors, she added, are able to help make up for some of that lost time.

### *Challenges*

Perceived challenges related to how support is provided to students at-risk for academic failure related to three main problems: (a) the difficulty of providing effective interventions in the general education classroom, (b) the ineffectiveness of the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) to provide assistance to the pupil, and (c) the limited availability of pull-out intervention services.

*General education classroom interventions.* Ms. Jones and Ms. Meyers agreed that it is very difficult to provide effective interventions in the general education classroom. In her second grade classroom, Ms. Meyers reported difficulty in the area of math and reading. Math is taught to the whole group using a program that is supposed to be accessible to all of the students, but when a student is struggling with basic concepts, they become completely lost. Because there is not enough time to help them catch up, they get further and further behind. Ms. Meyers also described problems teaching some students during guided reading. Most of the students tend to fall into a predictable reading level, and are able to be grouped with a few other students in the class. But, some of Ms. Meyers' students demonstrated such unique needs they did not fit with any other reading group, which makes it very difficult to group students and meet with each group throughout the week.

Ms. Smith indicated that after second grade, guided reading groups were not often used in the general education classroom. After third grade, there is no testing required for guided reading levels and the majority of reading instruction in third through fifth grade becomes

focused on whole group instruction of comprehension rather than decoding strategies. Students who are not on this reading level often experience great difficulty if they are not able to decode grade-level books.

Ms. Jones agreed that although a wide variety of strategies, modifications, and accommodations were integrated into her fifth grade inclusion class, it was difficult to provide interventions for two main reasons. The first reason is that the curriculum is so demanding and the curriculum mapping moves at such a rapid pace, it is difficult to keep up. Students end up being exposed to concepts, rather than understanding them. In this process, kids can get lost in the shuffle because of all the content that must be covered. During writing, she continued, the fifth grade curriculum is focused on crafting techniques. But if a student did not know how to write a paragraph, she explained, it's very difficult to stop to teach that skill because he or she would miss something else. The second reason it is difficult to provide effective interventions in the fifth grade inclusion class was because students do not want to look different in front of their peers. They often do not want to be singled out as the one or two students who receive special instruction in the back of the room. She noted that when students are pulled to the side for individual instruction, they feel isolated and embarrassed. In the end, students often learn coping skills rather than remediation strategies. Consequently, students often do not receive remediation, but rather they learn compensatory skills.

*Pupil Assistance Committee.* A second concern about how support is provided to students at-risk for academic failure relates to the fact that the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) does not provide direct assistance to students. Ms. Smith believes that PAC provides strategies rather than intervention to students at-risk for academic failure. Ms. Meyers reflected that members of the PAC team often ask what is being done differently for the at-risk student, but rarely offer

suggestions beyond what is already being done. Ms. Plata agreed, responding that due to the number of seasoned teachers in the building, teachers are often already doing what the PAC team would suggest. Consequently, the needs of students discussed by the PAC team are often beyond what can be effectively addressed in the meeting. Ms. Jones added that strategies that are written down on the PAC plan rarely contain measurable goals, and are not consistently assessed. Thus, there is little or no data to evaluate their efficacy.

*Limited availability of interventions.* All four interviewees strongly agreed that the limited availability of interventions outside of the classroom significantly impedes the ability to meet the needs of Granby's at-risk learners. Ms. Smith is only in the building two days per week to provide interventions for every student in the building who is at-risk for academic failure in reading, writing, or mathematics. This limited availability has lowered the effectiveness of interventions in many ways. First, the criteria required to receive interventions has been raised, so that only students who demonstrate the greatest risk of academic failure on district testing are served. Many students who are at "moderate" risk are denied intervention services. Second, the conditions required to replicate research-based practices are often compromised because of the lack of personnel. Many intervention programs, for example, are based on three to five sessions a week. Ms. Smith is only able to provide two sessions per week, based on her schedule. Third, students who do receive interventions are often pulled out of their general education class when that class is in the middle of the subject the student is already receiving extra support. Students are supposed to be receiving interventions in addition to their general education lessons, not in place of them, but because Ms. Smith is only at Granby two days each week, this policy is frequently compromised.

*Question Number Two. Based on your experiences, how do you believe that we can improve or modify the support we provide our students? How would you make these improvements?*

All four staff members believed that in order to improve the support provided to students, at Granby, there needs to be an increase in the amount of time students at-risk for academic failure spend in small group instruction. However, each provided different suggestions as to how this might be accomplished. Ms. Meyers and Ms. Smith both suggested that this might be done in or out of the classroom, but also believed that the additional instruction needed to be delivered by someone other than the general education teacher. Ms. Meyers felt that students who are struggling need more focus on their area of weakness and need interventions that are above and beyond those which can be offered in the general education classroom. She felt that is unrealistic to expect general education teachers to provide interventions that are intense enough to truly help some of her students.

Ms. Smith felt that it would be ideal to have a staff member trained in research-based interventions available for each grade level to assist students who are struggling academically. Ms. Plata felt that staff members needed full training in research-based interventions, rather than one member in the building receiving limited training and then attempting to teach to the rest of the staff. She felt that if staff members were fully trained, they would be better prepared to deliver interventions effectively and incorporate them into the general education instruction. Ms. Jones suggested curricular flexibility as a means of providing additional instruction for students who are struggling. For example, using guided reading at the upper elementary level as a means of providing more individualized instruction.

Ms. Meyers and Ms. Jones agreed that if students were struggling in reading, writing, or mathematics, they needed additional instructional time. Ms. Meyers believed that students should be allowed to miss Spanish (or another special) in order to be available to participate in an intervention group. She felt that it would be better for a student to miss Spanish than to miss their core instructional lesson in the general education classroom if there was limited time available for interventions.

*Question Number Three. If someone were to ask you, "What is Response To Intervention?" how would you describe the process?*

All four staff members articulated a conceptual understanding that RTI must have something to do with a response to an intervention. However, none of the interviewees were familiar with the multi-tiered approach that is recommended in the literature. Ms. Meyers replied that she could make an educated guess that it has something to do with responding to intervention, but admitted that she had not heard of the acronym. Ms. Smith and Ms. Jones acknowledged that it probably had something to do with assessment after an intervention, in order to monitor how a student has progressed, but neither had ever heard of RTI. Ms. Plata responded similarly, noting that once a student is provided an intervention their needs to be a response that puts the student on a positive trajectory and if this did not happen then something else needed to be provided. All four interviews were very curious to learn about the RTI approach and how current laws allow for its use.

*Question Number Four. How might we use our current resources to effectively implement RTI?*

After the concept of RTI was explained to interviewees, they all responded that Granby Elementary was currently following some of the elements of the RTI approach, but felt that until

more money and staff are available, only minor improvements could be made to the existing processes. Ms. Meyers responded that although staff members at Granby do implement some interventions, more staff would be needed to actually follow the RTI approach. Ms. Smith added that allowing students to miss Spanish or specials might also allow for this time. Ms. Jones recommended that more students could receive room-based interventions if there was more flexibility with the curriculum. She believed that there are too many subjects in grades four and five and that the pace was too fast for many students to learn the concepts. She suggested, for example, that the upper grades eliminate separate curriculums for science and social studies and instead integrate these lessons into the reading and writing instruction.

*Question Number Five. What factors do you believe are required for RTI to be effective?*

All four interviewees felt that RTI would only be effective if the district administration, the building administration, and the staff supported its implementation. Ms. Plata described Granby's current state of change, where the district is in-between superintendents and the current Director of Special Services will be leaving at the end of the year. An interim superintendent is currently leading the district while the superintendent search is being conducted. The search for a new Director of Special Services has just begun. Ms. Jones described the nine million dollar debt that the district is attempting to manage. There are rumors of massive cuts in staff, which will increase class sizes past the caps that have been held for the past six years. In short, there is a great deal of fear and uncertainty for the future. In order for a new approach to be successful in the district, the new superintendent would need to give it his or her stamp of approval and support it with funding.

Ms. Smith replied that in order for RTI to be effective, four main factors must be addressed at Granby Elementary. First, students who are at-risk for academic failure must have

intervention options at the school. This would require cut-off scores to be raised to a level that all those students who demonstrate need on assessments will get interventions. Second, there must be staff available to deliver these interventions. Third, the interventions must include periodic assessment to monitor student outcomes. If an intervention is not working, something else must be tried. Finally, interventions must be implemented with integrity to be considered research-based.

*Question Number Six. Can you describe how you see RTI next year and in five years?*

Due to the volatile state of the district, interviewees felt that much of the future lay in the hands of the yet to be hired superintendent and Director of Special Services. The consensus among interviewees was that the district had the potential to effectively utilize RTI because the basic structure for the approach was already in place. Without any further guidance from the administration, however, they strongly believed this approach would not be developed. This belief is based in part on the district's current budgetary constraints, as well as the district trend in assuming the general education teacher can address the needs of at-risk students with simple changes in instructional strategies or small curriculum modifications, rather than more intense interventions. Ms. Jones also expressed concern that the district will attempt to label the current intervention and resource system as RTI, naming the classroom-based strategies utilized in the general education classroom as Tier One interventions, but not offering Tier Two options. Without the needed interventions, students at-risk for academic failure will continue to struggle.

### *Summary*

The results of this study indicate that effective teachers support students at Granby Elementary and general education practices, but that students who are at-risk for academic failure need additional intervention services. Specifically, interviewees believed that students



were supported by teachers who continue their education, engage in positive practices in the general education classroom, administer systematic assessment, and provide interventions for students at-risk for academic failure in the general education classroom. Results of this study also indicate that it is difficult for teachers to provide effective interventions in the general education classroom, that the Pupil Assistance Committee does not offer enough assistance to students, and there is limited access to small group instruction for struggling students. All four staff members believed that in order to improve the support at Granby, students need additional small group instruction. They believed that this might be done in or out of the classroom, but should be delivered by someone other than the general education teacher. Although interviewees were not familiar with RTI and multi-tiered interventions, after the model was explained, they recognized that the school already followed many of its core components. They also believed students at-risk for academic failure would benefit from enhanced implementation, which would require additional funding for additional Tier Two intervention services. If this level of intervention is not provided to students identified as at-risk for academic failure, the interviewees all believe that this group of students will not succeed.

## Chapter V: Summary

The literature related to prereferral intervention consistently supports the use of preventive approaches to promote the academic success of all students, especially those who are “difficult to teach” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989). Many schools are using prereferral intervention teams to address the needs of students at-risk for academic failure in the general education classroom. These teams often provide support on a consultative basis to help teachers develop strategies to differentiate instruction in the general education classroom. Some students, however, require a higher level of intervention to be successful (Kovaleski, 2003). The results of this study are consistent with previous research which supports the use of RTI and multi-tiered interventions to promote student success.

### *Summary of Interview Data*

The results of this study indicate that students at Granby Elementary are supported by many of the core features of an RTI approach. Participants indicated that students benefit from high-quality classroom environments, research-based instructional approaches, universal screening, and continuous progress monitoring. Interviewees reported that students receive high quality instruction in the general education setting by school professionals who are considered to be highly educated, experienced, and dedicated to the achievement of their students. Interviewees also reported that research-based instructional strategies are incorporated in the general education classrooms because staff members actively expand their professional repertoires by participating in professional development opportunities and utilizing a professional library. Interviewees also noted that practices such as small class sizes and differentiated reading instruction benefited student success.

Another feature of the RTI approach which was described as being used at Granby is the use of systematic assessment to identify students at-risk for academic failure. Kindergarteners are screened throughout the year with Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and all first through fifth grade students are administered periodic reading, writing, and mathematics assessments. Through these practices, school professionals can readily identify those students who are not meeting grade-level expectations.

However, the results of this study also indicate that students at Granby Elementary are not supported by some of the core features of an RTI approach. These features are research-based interventions, progress monitoring during interventions, and fidelity measures. When students at Granby are identified as being at-risk for academic failure, there are few options for teachers and students. Although a PAC is available for student referral, interviewees noted that due to the highly educated, experienced, and dedicated staff, the strategies recommended during a PAC meeting were often already being utilized. With such a strong and demanding curriculum in place, there is little extra time for general education teachers to implement classroom-based interventions with integrity. All four interviewees indicated that there are limited interventions available for students outside of the classroom. There is one staff member in the building two days each week assigned to providing support to students at-risk for academic failure. Study participants also responded that monitoring of student progress and fidelity during interventions is limited to anecdotal notation.

### *Personal Reflections*

While most students at Granby learn to read, write, and problem solve without the need for intervention, my personal experiences have led me to be concerned with the number of Granby students who are identified as being at-risk for academic failure, but do not receive

adequate intervention services. These experiences have led me to research ways to improve the process we use address the needs of students who are experiencing academic difficulties in the general education classroom. I agree with the key themes expressed by the interviewees and support their recommendations. It is easy to interpret Granby's overall positive results on statewide assessments as an indicator that everything possible is being done at the school to support student success. However, there are students at this successful school who are struggling to learn without adequate assistance. It is frustrating to watch a student struggle, especially after multiple district screenings and assessments identify the need for intensive interventions.

Some students remain in a holding pattern for months while the PAC team recommends strategies that were already being used. A few are fortunate enough to receive limited interventions from the ESST, but many more never have this opportunity because of the teacher's limited availability. As students progress through the primary grades, some are found eligible to receive special education services, but others who do not meet the discrepancy criteria do not receive additional service. Instead, they are left to fend for themselves in classrooms where they are not be able to independently read the grade level text materials.

### *Recommendations*

Based on my comprehensive review of the literature, the findings of the qualitative study, and my personal insights and experiences, the following recommendations are offered. The response to intervention (RTI) model is often described as a multi-tiered approach to instructional service delivery (Kovaleski, 2002). Although there are multiple RTI models, most incorporate a three-tiered system of increasingly intense interventions. Tier One represents general education classroom intervention. Tier Two generally involves a secondary intervention for students who fail to respond to earlier interventions. Tier Three may include be special

education assessment or another level of intervention before special education assessment (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005).

The results of this study indicate that Granby Elementary successfully implements Tier One and Tier Three interventions, leaving the focus for recommendations on Tier Two interventions. Typically, Tier Two interventions are predicated on the assumption that a student is unable to meet grade-level standards without support beyond that which can be provided by his or her general education teacher. Although a variety of strategies are utilized in Tier Two, they typically involve intensive daily instruction provided by a school professional other than the classroom teacher. This support is frequently offered in a small group setting with systematic instruction that provides high response rates, immediate feedback, and sequential mastery of topics (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). If Tier Two interventions are successful, then the student goes back to receiving all instruction in the general education classroom, and his or her progress is monitored along with the other students. If the interventions are not successful, then either additional Tier Two, or Tier Three interventions are warranted.

Specifically, Granby Elementary needs to offer increased Tier Two interventions to students at-risk for academic failure. One recommendation is to increase the number of days that the current intervention teacher is available at Granby, preferably to full-time status. Another recommendation is to blur the line between special education and regular education by allowing the special education teachers to work with students who have not been officially classified as having a disability. This might be offered by changing the three hour in-class support model currently being used at Granby to one hour in each classroom at that grade level. Finally, it is critical to allow teachers enough curricular flexibility to focus on literacy and mathematics.

### *Limitations*

Although this study yielded some very clear themes that are supported by existing research, there are a few limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, as described in chapter Three, the researcher potentially has a biased perspective because of her role at the school. Second, although multiple perspectives at Granby were represented, it was not an all-inclusive sample. Finally, the experiences at one school need to be taken within context of that unique setting.

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*Appendix*

*Interview Protocol Questions*

- 1.) Based on your experiences, what do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of how we provide support to students at-risk for academic failure?  
*Probe for information related to: how effective are the interventions suggested during PAC, the availability of services in the building for students needing out of classroom interventions and the use of curriculum-based measurements to determine need*
- 2.) Based on your experiences, how do you believe that we can improve/modify the support we provide our students? How would you make these improvements?
- 3.) If someone were to ask you, “What is Response To Intervention?” how would you describe the process?  
*Probe for information related to: non-categorical use of additional layers of interventions provided in and outside of the classroom*  
*Note: If participant is not familiar with RTI, provide brief description*
- 4.) How might we use our current resources to effectively implement RTI?
- 5.) What factors do you believe are required for RTI to be effective?
- 6.) Can you describe how you see RTI next year and in five years?

