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Closing the Gap Between Teacher Perception and Response to Intervention (RTI) Student Achievement

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The University of Southern Mississippi
CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN TEACHER PERCEPTION AND RESPONSE
TO INTERVENTION (RTI) STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

by

Melissa A. Hyatt Bouchér

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2011

ABSTRACT

CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN TEACHER PERCEPTION AND RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

by Melissa A. Hyatt Bouchér

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Many communities rely on public schools to educate and properly train students who become the future members of society. So with educational groundwork constantly changing, districts are charged with excelling in various areas like Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Quality of Distribution Index (QDI). One area within that concern focuses on student behavior prevention programs by improving student achievement and increasing state test scores. Educational leaders reexamine teacher qualifications, rigor and relevance in classroom instruction, class size reduction, and providing effective professional development sessions aligning in accordance to each school's vision and goals.

The purpose of this study was to examine student achievement through state test scores and whether there was a correlation to Response to Intervention (RTI). The researcher investigated the many aspects to RTI and compared them to their districts' state test scores for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011. In addition to RTI, questions were asked regarding important teacher qualities to making the intervention successful and if RTI decreased their dropout rate.

Qualitative data collected for the research of this study were referenced state scores from the Mississippi State Department of Education and compared to participating respondents' perceptions of his or her behavior prevention

program. All data was then keyed into SPSS to analyze whether or not a relationship existed between the two focus areas.

The results of the study determined that there was no significant difference in any of the school district who utilizes RTI when compared to student achievement through state test scores despite the high percentage of RTI Specialists' perceptions.

The University of Southern Mississippi

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A Dissertation
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dropout rates are on the rise and continue to decline until educational goals are revised; therefore, it is necessary to examine the laws that were purposely designed and set forth. The forefathers of our nation purposely designed and set forth laws to protect our nation's students from failure. NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) were enacted to tackle the dropout rate by re-directing the focus of responsibility to the educators and delegators of our nation.

Some preventative methods are in place which identify and separate the services for the Learning Disabled (LD) along with other categories, such as Emotionally Disturbed (ED), other Health Impairment (ADD/ADHD), Visual Impairment (VI), Orthopedic Impairment (OI), Mental Retardation (MR), and Autism (Asperger's) within Special Education. Today's classrooms have evolved from those of the past, which were designed with all students being taught at the same pace and level, using the same style of instruction and being expected to achieve the same success without any regard to learning or medical conditions. However, today's classrooms are now structured to be ability grouped and have also been redesigned to be somewhat balanced with all learning levels within one room formation. These additional responsibilities and demands that have been placed upon teachers create an increasing burden upon schools. With NCLB (2001), the focus has been on meeting students' needs to master skills and achieve proficient and/or advanced levels for state testing regardless of IEP status or any outside factors uncontrollable by teachers.

Once students are properly identified and assessed, they are put on one of three types of a graduation tracks: a High School Diploma, Certificate of Completion, or a Special Education diploma. For example, school districts have found that with different types of diplomas, more students are salvaged by taking Vocational and Technical classes and are put into the work force instead of dropping out or being governmentally supported. Once school districts assist students in learning a job skill or trade, they have a greater chance of survival within the community. Alternative methods of graduation are a wave of the future and by showing support to the committed school leaders, more students are likely to succeed with many options for their future.

All businesses and vital stakeholders should share in the responsibility of the community to support the school systems and provide these students ample job opportunities. A prime example is in the state of New York where an implemented program entitled B.O.C.E.S. (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) provides “quality, innovative services for students, schools and community through achievement of shared goals in a focused cooperative manner to meet the challenges of the future” (NYS Equity & Excellence in Public Education, 2009, p.1). The success of this program has been proven with the incorporation into school districts state wide.

The researcher sought to determine if the perception of implementing Response to Interventions (RTI) factors into the schools creating an increase of student test scores on state testing. This study surveyed District RTI Coordinators in selected school districts of high risk and non-high risk students

using RTI as one method to increasing student's state test scores. By surveying these key stakeholders in the educational setting, this researcher sought to obtain data which educators can continue to use for implementation of RTI if the results are favorable. With the increase of students dropping out of school, more and more school districts are scrambling to find answers to this dilemma. The escalating drop-out epidemic is causing our government millions of wasted educational funds that could be better put to use by redirecting them to instructional programs with alternatives for these high risk students. This study attempts to discover information to provide leaders of our educational system with the necessary tools and guidelines to support what *No Child Left Behind* (2001) and *Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act* (2004) were designed to accomplish and to help improve student success by increasing RTI implementation into the earlier stages of the educational arena.

As *No Child Left Behind* (2001) is being revamped, attempts are made to determine reasons why students are dropping out of school at alarming rates (Nick Anderson, 2010). In the past, not enough attempts have been made to keep students within the school setting, so now school districts are challenged with the task of discovering alternative practices while increasing student state test scores. One such alternative is to increase the focus on preparing students for college by encouraging college preparatory classes at the high school level. Another might be early interventions in the elementary levels. The argument might be that with the implementation of RTI at the middle school level, student test scores increased with each continued year. It is vital to determine

alternatives to increasing student's state test scores and what factors influence students within the educational realm. With an increase of educational support and requirements for student success, it also stands to reason that the community support and parental involvement must increase as well.

Once such program committed to community support is Skills to Empower People Socially (S.T.E.P.S.) in Irving, Texas, which involves the lives of the at-risk students within the leaders of the community. The goal is to match a student with an adult mentor to assist in academic studies and guidance with a support system in trying to keep students in the classroom. The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) report offers suggestive methods to keeping the truancy rate down by offering such programs of collaboration and implementation in order to keep kids in the classroom each and every day (Cloud & Duttweiler, 2006).

The *No Child Left Behind Act*, signed into law January 2002, aims to make sure that all children achieve academic proficiency and gain the educational skills necessary to succeed later in life. The act intends for all students to graduate within four years of starting high school. This report builds upon a series of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports on high school dropout and completion rates that began in 1988" (Child Trends, 2005, p.1). As the NCES has previously stated, dropout rates are in a predicament and continue to be an eye-sore unless school districts and their communities ban together to overcome this nation-wide dilemma our country faces.

One facet is based upon the continuous influx of the Spanish-speaking population. Hispanic males hold the highest rate of dropouts. Since most do not focus on attending school, they come to the U.S. to find work, to support their needs, and make a better life for their families. It is the trends like these school districts, especially in the South, must address by encouraging school-aged male-immigrants to return to school to improve upon a trade for job security and to maintain that better life they are in search of. Schools do this by offering a partnership with local construction companies to train students while attending instructional classes to better ensure that their success results in long-term benefits. These long-term effects only reinforce the roles of all stakeholders into making the success of its students. Once they have completed the program by graduating, the possibility of obtaining a permanent job with benefits and long-term investments from the company only benefits everyone involved.

With this type of collaboration with any or all local businesses, the dropout rates are going to decrease drastically each year the program is implemented (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004). By understanding statistics, one may learn more from the Civic Enterprise (2006) study. Students stated that their highest area of concern was the lack of support from their teachers and administration before, and even after, they dropped out of school. The study continues to expose the disturbing accounts of what schools could have provided in order to rescue both dropouts, as well as at-risk students from leaving the school system. A possible resolution may be to realign accountability in both directions, as many firmly believe that NCLB was designed to protect past, present, and future

students from the risk of dropping out, and IDEA accounts the differences in student's learning abilities by providing services in order to improve implementation and effectiveness of evaluations. One such service is to implement RTI into the school setting before the students are in jeopardy of becoming another statistic.

Statement of the Problem

Addressing the focus of this study of RTI perceptions with intentions of increasing student state test scores weighs heavily on educational agendas throughout our nation. As the numbers of dropouts' increases, many departments of education are charged with creating and mandating positive interventional programs. More and more students are identified and labeled into categories based upon educational laws, plans-of-action are implemented with goals, and assessments are made to determine if the target met the expected outcome. Regardless of which academic and positive behavioral plan school districts intend on implementing, the effects cannot be measured accurately if these several key factors are not accurately and properly executed. As funds are being allocated within budgets, advocates for decreasing the dropout rate continually needs to be assessed. Another consideration would be to begin preventative methods at the early stages of the educational system. Implementation of beneficial programs, such as RTI in the academic progress of a student's early discipline behavior, may predict an impact to the dropout rate by increasing student achievement in graduation.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses are as follows:

H₁: There was a statistically significant difference in MCT2 scores in Language Arts when using RTI as a preventative method to increase student achievement.

H₂: There was not a statistical significant difference in MCT2 scores in Language Arts when using RTI as a preventative method to increase student achievement.

Research Question

Many additional questions arose throughout the extent of this study; however, the objective of the research focused on the following questions:

Q¹: What impact does the utilization of RTI have as a preventative method in student achievement?

Q²: Is there a relationship between Response to Intervention (RTI) and students' MCT2 test scores?

Q³: Does research show that the increase of students' state test scores is correlated to the implementation of RTI process in a student's academic and behavioral history?

Q⁴: Is there a relationship between the higher percentage of a student's goals being met in the RTI process and the increase in student state test scores who are in the RTI process than those who did not receive RTI interventions?

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study sought to determine, what if any, effects Response to Intervention (RTI) has on being one of many factors that increases student achievement. The researcher gathered data and examined if school districts of high risk and non-high risk students were using RTI as a preventative method aimed at increasing student state test scores as another means to decreasing the dropout rate. By surveying the 158 school districts in the state of Mississippi, the RTI Coordinator and/or Response to Intervention (RTI) Specialists, the researcher attempted to obtain a direct relationship between increases in student state test scores with the RTI frequency if the perception is directly related to a higher percentage of RTI student's meeting their goals.

The educational system constantly evolves in order to meet and accommodate the educational needs' of students. These changes call to address as they directly affect the rate at which students' dropout or become further at-risk. In the coming decades, more and more medical diagnoses only serves to intensify the situation needed for properly identifying those who qualify or need intervention. This research attempted to heighten an awareness of alternate methods from which to choose from when changes are implemented. New research is an essential core in discovering innovative techniques to challenge students and keep them in school until they graduate. The results may possibly reshape and form new policies dedicated to student success while preventing educational leaders from failing without the abundance of steps taken to meeting in their efforts to increase student achievement.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are definitions located throughout this dissertation and are fundamental to the foundation of the research and study (NCRTI, 2010).

Accommodations – Changes that allow a person with a disability to participate fully in an activity. Examples include, extended time, different test format, and alterations to a classroom.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – Each State, district, and school, if it receives Title I funds, must make “adequate yearly progress” towards that goal; Each State must define its own AYP using its: own standards, definition of “proficiency,” technically rigorous assessments, and data based on those assessments; States may use a two- or three-year averaging formula to determine AYP; must be made for each category: major racial and ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.

At-risk – students whose fall below the mastery level of academic growth and development.

Differentiated Instruction (DI) – classroom instruction tailored to individual student’s academic needs.

Education Reform Act (ERA) – an implementation of the current public school accreditation model and accountability system.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – implemented accountability into education to increase achievement of poverty stricken and special needs students.

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) – a law that protects the privacy of student's academic records

Formative Assessment – a diagnostic assessment that teachers use to diagnose mastery of appropriate grade-level skills.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) – The original legislation was written in 1975 guaranteeing students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education and the right to be educated with their non-disabled peers. Congress reauthorizes this federal law. The most recent revision occurred in 2004.

Intensive Intervention – implementation of rigorous interventions when less intensive interventions are unsuccessful

Learning Disability (LD) – The legal description for a learning disability that meets the criteria described in IDEA 2004 regarding critical areas of proficiency, benchmarks of achievement and progress, quality of instruction and intervention, processes for monitoring progress, and more.

Mississippi Curriculum Test 2 (MCT2) – The MCT2 consists of customized criterion-referenced reading/language arts and mathematics assessments that are fully aligned with the 2006 *Mississippi Language Arts Framework Revised* and the 2007 *Mississippi Mathematics Framework Revised*. These assessments allow Mississippi to be in compliance with the

requirements of the federal legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The assessments are administered to students in grades 3 through 8, including special education students whose Individual Education Plan (IEP) specify instructional goals that are aligned with the *2006 Mississippi Language Arts Framework Revised* and the *2007 Mississippi Mathematics Framework Revised* for the aforementioned grades. The results of these assessments will be used in the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System, specifically the Achievement, Growth, and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Models. The results will also provide information that will be used for the purpose of improving instruction and accelerating student achievement.

NAEP – acronym for National Assessment of Educational Progress

NCES – acronym for National Center for Education Statistics

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – Federal legislation signed into law in January of 2002 which mandates state governments to establish procedures to measure student academic achievement and growth and address levels of proficiency where applicable.

Norm-Referenced Assessment – compares student performance to that of their peer.

Primary Level of Intervention – is entitled Tier I which all students receive.

Problem-Solving Approach within RTI – the 4 stages of an individual intervention are: identifying the problem, analysis of the problem, implementing the plan of action, and assessment of student's success.

Progress Monitoring – assessment of a students' academic performance based upon improvement and responsiveness to instruction, and effectiveness of instruction.

Response to Intervention (RTI) – an alternative method of academic intervention designed to identify and provide early, effective assistance to children with academic/behavioral struggles.

RTI Success – student goals meeting an 85% mastery level

Scaffolding – is an instructional technique to which a teacher breaks down an activity into smaller, more manageable tasks with the goal to complete the activity as much as possible without assistance.

Secondary Level of Intervention – Tier II where Tier I is unsuccessful and students require a greater need for more intense academic/behavioral support.

Standard Protocol Intervention – one intervention for all students with similar academic and/or behavioral needs.

Student State Test Scores – comparable state scores Grades 3 – 8 from the Mississippi Department of Education website that is available to the public to assess if the school district has met state educational goals; there are four different levels that are assigned a point level for each: Minimal – 0 points, Basic – 1 point, Proficient – 2 points, and Advanced – 3 points.

Summative Assessment – an evaluation assessing the effectiveness of the intervention's desired effect.

Tertiary Level of Intervention – all students are first considered Tier I; Tiers II & III are not sufficient and require an enhanced intervention than regular education students, but falls under special education.

Tiered Instruction – three level of instructional interventions based on preventative methods to modify behavioral/academic obstacles.

Universal Screening – the first stage to identify students who may be at risk for failure to learn appropriate grade-level academics

Delimitations

This research study had a limited population from which the information was obtained. The study collaborated with the RTI Coordinator and/or RTI Specialist in the 158 school districts in the state of Mississippi. The delimitations in this study were selecting only the school districts implementing RTI because any districts not executing RTI are not directly related to the research findings that RTI has a direct effect on increasing student state test scores. Other limitations may exist outside the realms of this study, but are beyond the scope of the focus in implicating the strong influence RTI may or may not have on the dropout rate and student graduation.

Assumptions

It is the researcher's assumption that through literature and direct collaboration with the RTI Coordinator and/or RTI Specialist, the results would show a direct link to the increase of student state test scores with the higher percentage of student's RTI goals being met. This research could possibly provide schools and districts the information necessary to achieve a higher

quality of commitment to their students and the community. Educational leaders can create or revise programs already in place to better serve the academic needs of their students.

Justification

The researcher hoped to discover if there the relationship between the increase in student's goals being met in the RTI process would also decrease the numbers of at-risk students likely to dropout which might provide results of higher graduation rates, more employable students, less dropouts within the criminal system, a decrease in repeated offenders, less people dependent on the government for public assistance, a greater support system for school districts to highly educate students employing to the local businesses within communities, and not be known as the state with the greatest number of negative connotations. Although, Response to Intervention (RTI) is quite new and can be very effective, such programs must properly train the teachers and administration involved to accurately assess the effectiveness of these beneficial programs. In addition to meeting the academic needs of students, these programs may also meet the demands of school districts by providing professional development. Other such programs are being implemented in school districts as alternate methods in lieu of graduation.

Probing the depths of RTI's, this research perhaps allow an in-depth look in making more informed decisions about the implementation of vocational programs, many of such programs already exist. The Board of Cooperative Educational Services (B.O.C.E.S.), in New York, for example, allows students to

attend classes geared toward alternate occupations. These innovative programs can provide experienced insight as to specific fields the community demands. It does not serve a school district to train students in skills not conducive to their region; A community partnership that builds and fosters relationships with families and school districts supports academic needs. Research states that to be most effective, one would need to increase student achievement. This study attempted to find possibilities of this achievement. It is this researcher's belief that all key stakeholders are entrusted to stand behind the education of students and a personal commitment to the community. These results could be presented to the School Board and/or to the Director of Student Services. The researcher's goal was to create a plan of action focusing on implementation of classes that meets the needs and academic education for all students according to No Child Left Behind (2001) and IDEA (2004) as they were designated to serve our nation's children.

Summary

History plays a very significant role, and always has, in the future success of education. The mistakes from the past must be addressed and re-evaluated with the highest level of advocacy. The past cannot be erased, but in a different capacity emerge as a new role for the next generation. The task passes on with each presidential term in office to do what is necessary for the improvement of our students. The researcher's goal investigated connections to implementation of RTI within a student's academic school year and if behavioral modification strengthens student's state test scores and/or from the risk of dropping out. The

literature identified factors that prove beneficial to students and their educational goals. The mistakes of our past cannot be afforded to continue without the modifications for the future. Although the numerous factors related to student achievement can vary in any direction, the ultimate responsibility lies heavily to investigate and examine the institutions of public education and utilize data in order to best serve the educational needs of the students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher reviews literature that focuses on factors that influence the implementation of RTI and the effects on the dropout rate for at-risk students. With the vast amount of submissions on how to fix the problems within education, more and more research becomes readily available and continues to grow in length and in a wide variety of topics. In light of new information, the realm of Special Education grows as well with the increase of students identified with learning and or emotional disabilities. With an increase in number of students individualized, accountability gears up to a better focus for student success that can be achieved based upon specific educational needs.

Theoretical Framework

According to the What Works Clearinghouse on Dropout Prevention (2008), there are six recommendations for reducing the dropout rates. The first recommendation advises schools and districts to utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out. Recommendations two, three, and four suggest targeting students who are the most at risk of dropping out by intensively intervening in their academic, social, and personal lives. Recommendations five and six suggest comprehensive, school wide reform strategies aimed at increasing engagement of all students in school.

Compulsory History and Laws

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 begins the multi-faceted path to which each President revisits the purpose of educational programs within their term in office. As the heads of our nation changed, so did the legalities from congress. In response to the Clinton Administration's Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA), the Bush Administration created the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that states "all children will be proficient in reading and mathematics by the 2013–2014 school year." Succeeding, President Obama announced on July 24, as part of his contribution to the educational arena, with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, a \$4.35 billion U.S.D.E. program dollars incentive for K-12 grade schools. Schools are mandated by the government to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and other children by adopting a proven successful, research-based program to combat the greater than ever statistical count of the nation's dropout rate on record.

This chapter focuses on the collection of specific literature to the researcher's study on the effects of one such program, Response to Intervention (RTI) on the dropout rate to increasing student graduation. Numerous interventions and positive behavior plans are available, but are not taken advantage of for whatever justification. Many school districts find that with the current budget cuts, more and more schools are being asked to do more with less. Budgets are focused on salary of effective superintendents, successful administrators, highly qualified teachers, guidance counselors, paraprofessionals

in the psychology department, school nurses, and are very limited in the funds for teacher retentions, professional development, school safety, resources, and incentives let alone the time dedicating to execute these research based programs within the realms of the school setting. The downside results in having to step aside as students helplessly continue to dropout despite the constant efforts the educational system faces while looking from the bottom up.

The primary area of interest is the alarming rate at which students are dropping out of school. No Child Left Behind (2001) was designed to protect students and make educators accountable for the deficiency of dropouts. The governmental strong stand in battling the dropout rates as seen across our nation is more predominant now than ever within the educational system. Each presidential term allocates the government to authorize funding directly related to specific educational goals. Funds are available for states that qualify and adhere to the strict standards. The task placed upon states delegates the improvement of basic programs that are directed by Local Educational Agencies (LEA) and other instructional institutions. Despite numerous plans of action the government attempts at controlling education, the vast research clearly houses an amount of endless information year after year and the staggering trend is not diminishing. This misdiagnosis has placed an undue burden upon our government and creating a hindrance to federal, state, and local government, on our local businesses, and within our communities (Almeida, Steinberg, & Jobs for the Future, Boston, MA, 2001). Therefore, a devised plan would determine a solution by incorporating more non-traditional programs or the more flexible

stringent in curriculum in order to save what the future holds as the next leaders for generations.

As in the United States Supreme Court case of *Pierce vs. Society of Sisters* (268 U.S. 510 1925), rendered the verdict to an alternate method of instruction into the hands of religion. Then in 1925, Labor Laws mandated that all children ranging in age as young as from 5-7 to 16-18 years-old attend an educational environment. This governmental control was an attempt to keep a local textile mill from hiring school-aged children for cheap labor. Leading to the 1925 court case, *Meyer v Nebraska* reiterated that certain studies are essential and should be taught regardless to where the education took place; to which the government enacted state Compulsory Laws. All but one state (Colorado) joined with Massachusetts leading the way in 1852 and ending with Alaska in 1929. The government leaves the specific details to the extent of enforcement and fines to the individual states. Mississippi's state Compulsory Law states that all children ages of 6–17 years-old must be enrolled and daily attend in a school setting. With the acceptance of these laws, governmental funding is provided to school districts with strict rules and guidelines. Once again, the government controls the educational systems with a tight fist.

The National Dropout Prevention Program monitors 400–500 model dropout prevention programs for schools (Smink, 2007) that gear towards decreasing the dropout rate with preventative programs such as *Race to the Top* and *High School Reform*. Funds are stipulated to those schools that “support state and local efforts to reform high schools and improve the educational

outcomes of students. (US Department of Education, 2010) Qualified states should align with these six target areas of: Great Teachers and Leaders, State Success Factors, Standards and Assessments, General Selection Criteria, Turning Around the Lowest- Achieving Schools, and Data Systems Supporting Instruction. Each section is designated a maximum amount of points and collectively total 483 points, with an additional 15 points being awarded for STEM Education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) totaling 500 points. The top-ranking states in points were awarded funds based upon the federal population of children per that state.

Former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch, for example, commented that empirical evidence "shows clearly that choice, competition and accountability as education reform levers are not working" (Ravitch, 2006, p.1). With the focus on improving schools and student achievements, many states do not meet the cut, drop out of the running, withdraw, or all of the above. The downside to this is that there is a limit as to how many schools can participate, and only a few will be chosen. Disadvantages are the schools and students who do not make the cut have to find alternate funds in which to make do with existing at-risk and dropout programs. However, those schools that do not choose to participate do not receive those educational funds, but some still manage to show growth and increase student achievement with the implementation of structural modification programs (Exceed RTI, 2007-2009), thus factoring into how the numbers of dropouts and at-risk students grows each academic school year.

Dropout Factors

Before 2001, the government's guardianship was non-existent and so many compulsory students dropped out, were lost to prisons, became products of the welfare system, remain unemployed, and struggled to survive. According to Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, and Palma (2009), the study found that one out of every ten high school dropouts were males that ended up in the prison system once or sometimes repeatedly (90%) throughout their life. In 2006- 2007, nearly 93% of the nation's men and women dropouts were incarcerated within jails, prisons, and/or juvenile detention centers.

In remarks to a 2006 Chicago conference on high school dropout problems in Illinois, then State Senate President Emil Jones noted that "Dropping out of high school was an apprenticeship for prison." Regardless of race, incarceration rates were highest among male high school dropouts. (Sum, et al. 2009) With the prison setting consisting of males, black males ranked highest; with Indian males in 2nd place; Hispanic males in 3rd; and Asian/white males coming in last. In comparison to the female counterparts, American Indian ranked first; blacks ranked a close 2nd; 3rd Hispanic females; white females in 4th; and Asian females ranking last. With blatant racial discrepancies in the population of incarcerated youth, among the estimated 862,300 young adults' ages 18 to 29 who were incarcerated at midyear 2008, 41 percent (354,600) were black. When looking at the sex comparison, men are more likely to be imprisoned 17:1 according to Child Trends Data Banks (2010).

In employment history, dropouts made a little over \$8,000 a year while their counterparts were making an average of a little more than \$15,000 for graduating seniors (MTG, 2006). High school dropouts are likely to stay on public assistance longer than those with at least a high school degree. (Western, 2007) Dropouts are equipped with the minimal skills and technology experience in the workplace than their counter parts resulting in loss of job opportunities and gainful employment. Some dropouts quickly return to earn their GED less than the 10 years that they would have originally graduated. Dropouts affect the poverty data and increase governmental support with their minimal education and low-functioning skills. This type of poverty survival forces dropouts to rely on the government for support.

Some return to the academic realm to earn their GED while others either return to crime, in search of governmental assistance, or apply to low-paying, minimum wage jobs where there is little chance for growth, pay raise, insurance, or retirement plan. As stated by the Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle the Dropout Crisis report (2009), that if half of the dropouts were to return to school and earn their GED, they could generate an additional \$45 million in revenue alone. Another stated that on average that high school dropouts cost taxpayers \$300,000 in lower tax revenues, higher cash and in-kind transfer costs in comparison to their graduate peers (Sum, et al., 2009).

At-Risk Students

Another area of concern is the lack of support for at-risk students that are still within the educational system. Students have the constant belief that the

teachers are not there to educate them nor do they foster any type of relationships with their students. School districts instantly require their teachers to begin building a relationship with the vast number of students in order to foster a safe, inviting, and learning environment conducive to the highest in standards.

The time quickly is spent sorting through last year's data on each student to identify the individual needs for each and every student in conjunction with trying to get each student going with this year's mastery of skills. A drawback to this is that many times students are held in connection to this label, that they are sometimes not given the chance to redeem past history. Teachers will sometimes devote less time to helping the children when they come to their classroom with strikes already against them. Teachers are resentful with the burden the problem students that all of their time and energy is spent on behavioral plans, IEP's, TST's, BTAT, etc. instead of the focus being on the students who want to learn and who care about their education. It cannot be overlooked that if these students were not ignored, but given an opportunity to challenge themselves with guidance and supervision, they will grow academically as well as intrinsically.

When school districts restrict teacher's input when it comes to students, the result is more defensive rather than aggressive. When time is limited in the classroom, instruction needs to be effective as well as productive to meeting the educational standards set forth by state department of education. When assessing students who are qualify for at-risk, school districts should be

concerned with identifying characteristics that will connect mastery of grade level skills in conjunction with nurturing and shaping our students academic success.

According to the Civic Enterprise (2006) study, students stated that their highest area of their concern was the lack of support from their teachers and administration before and even after they dropped out of school. The study continues to expose the disturbing accounts of what schools could have provided in order to salvage both dropout, as well as at-risk, students from leaving the school system. The resolution would be to realign accountability in both directions. Many firmly believe that NCLB was designed to protect past, present, and future students from the risk of dropping out. With the greater demands on accountability, teachers are heavenly burdened with being charged to do more than just instruct anymore. The accountability begins with school districts hiring only highly qualified to specific subject area in addition to years of experience, degrees held, test scores, and availability (NCLB, 2001). Many school districts are hiring business degree applicants with emergency endorsements in anticipation that their frame of experience will be incorporated into the success of the classroom, through student achievement, higher test scores, and growth met for accreditation.

With Obama's ARRA of 2009, parents are opting to pull their children out of the public setting and placing them into a more academically-gearred environment. With Bush's authorization, education vouchers were available to any and all school-aged children in attempts to tighten the accountability reigns on school districts. Despite feverish agreements, complications arose as to

funds per student ratio. Many school budgets were placed into a predicament of not having enough resources to keep what staff they have, incentives to retain new teachers, update teacher qualifications, pays retirement benefits, etc. Federal funds were allocated parents that option to make that choice.

More and more charter schools are introduced as a means to focus on student learning and academic achievement, and taking away from the behavioral problems. Unfortunately, this lack of knowledge and experience is the cause to behavior modifications and assessments based on academic, social, emotional, and classroom environment by teachers. If students are properly identified prior to the next school year, then upon entering the new school year, a plan of action is all ready to begin for that particular student. Instead of wasting so much time going through the process as the beginning of each school year, valuable time could be used in a more effective and productive manner. One such adaptation is to implement a response to intervention with behavioral modifications.

With the influx of student identification for learning or emotional disabilities, wider assessments of individualized educational needs are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of in compliance with the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for students. The IEP contracts an educational goal for each student to understand the student's disability and how their disability affects their learning. An assessment must be made by a teacher, Special Education representative, or a related service provider to identify the student's learning disability. Once student's needs are

identified, an obtainable and successful goal can be achieved in the least restrictive environment (LRE) available for the student.

One alternative classroom setting is Charter schools. These innovative classrooms are considered public schools in that they are still mandated to fulfill state requirements under NCLB of 2001. However, Policy and Program Studies Service on the Evaluation of Charter School Program of 2004 clearly states they are afforded the flexibility (freedom from many policies and regulations affecting traditional public schools) and autonomy (control over decisions) is central to this educational reform. With Minnesota leading the way with the first state charter school law in 1991, today there are more than 2,500 charter schools nationwide. Charter schools can be found within 39 states and in the District of Columbia all to which are contributing to the academic growth needed to be a successful student.

Charter schools are initiated by parents, teachers, or outside organizations, in order to provide choice and innovation to public schools, but are under constant supervision of state departments of education. As an option for parents to enroll their child, such programs receive private funds in addition to state and/or federal funds just like in the public school setting. Charter schools are more likely to serve minority and low-income students than traditional public schools, but less likely to serve student in special education (PPSS, 2004).

Another positive result of being less stringent on regulations and policies, charters are more likely to hire more non-traditional teachers than what public schools must hire in order to meet the state's requirements. Their non-

governmental resources can attract alternate teachers from other schools or fields with non-educational backgrounds. With less stringent rules and regulations for teachers comes the perception of job satisfaction; and with job satisfaction comes the perception of superior quality instruction; with the perception of an advanced growth in student test scores and academic achievement. With less parental support of public schools results forces parents to opt out and send their child to a different school setting. Parents have the natural instinct and desire for their children to get a better education and to do whatever it takes to get it.

Enrollments within charter schools are on the rise and school compositions are at various levels of socio-economic status with more minority enrollment than white students. It is the types of programs taught through charter schools that concentrate on different learning styles for classroom based, work or community based learning, internet or satellite instruction, distance learning, home-based instruction, and independent learning. This can be accomplished with direct instruction, block scheduling, inter-disciplining teaching, hands-on-learning, community-based projects, subject-specific to job employment, looping, with smaller class size in order to alternate the traditional classroom setting of instruction. Charter schools are funded mostly through public entities, facility loans, and per-pupil allotment from local school districts, but are privately run. Because of the public funding, they are less likely to tolerate the discipline issues typically found in the public school setting. However, higher proportions of students that are enrolled are eligible for free and

reduced lunches and low-performing students. (PPSS, 2004) Parents, teachers, and students are more focused on getting an education and without the hassles of unsafe conditions normally found in the realms of behavioral situations. Conversely, charter schools can and lose their funding if they do not meet NCLB's performance requirements. Eighty-five percent of charter schools are closely monitored in the areas of special education services to address any IEP or LEP discrepancies.

Advocates for charter schools derived from the government "squishing" creativity within the classroom instruction with restricted guidelines as to what to teach and when to teach it within the academic school year. Each year, budgets are cut with less and less funding providing making available for fun projects and field trips to really gain academic experience. Charter schools are encouraged and supported to take these educational field trips to promote a greater learning experience in addition to the autonomy the classroom instruction is privy to. Opponents against claim that studies show no academic growth and do not meet the state's requirements. Teacher's qualifications are not the traditional routes and only amplify the difficulties students face from the beginning. Their individual needs are not being met if they are teaching with instructors who are not highly qualified to subject areas for state testing.

Accountability

School accountability is to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with conjunction to student achievement and increase in test scores. According to *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* it is designed to achieve an ambitious goal:

All children will be proficient in reading and mathematics by the 2013–14 school years. A key strategy for achieving this goal is accountability. *NCLB* holds schools and districts accountable for their students' mastery of state academic content standards, as measured by state tests, including students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and students receiving special education services. *NCLB* accountability rests on several key premises: that clear definitions and targets for desired academic outcomes and English language proficiency will provide both incentives for and indicators of improvement; that identification of districts and schools not meeting their improvement targets will help focus assistance and interventions in places where they are most needed; that widely available information about student performance will enable parents, educators and other stakeholders to make informed decisions about how best to serve their students or children; and that targeted assistance will stimulate school and district improvement.

The question is how each individual state meets the required state accountability. At the end of each FY, status is reported as one of the seven performance levels. Assessments of schools are measured on both achievement and growth models: Star District/School, High Performing, Successful, Academic Watch, At Risk of Failing, Low Performing, and Failing. Each Mississippi Statewide Accountability System notes: State has defined three levels of student achievement: *basic*, *proficient* and *advanced*. Student achievement levels of *proficient* and *advanced* determine how well students are mastering the materials in the State's academic content standards; and the *basic*

level of achievement provides complete information about the progress of lower-achieving students toward mastering the *proficient*, and *advanced* levels.

If schools fail to meet AYP, they fall into one of the six levels of improvement: 1st year–Reported; 2nd year–Improvement (1st year); 3rd year–Improvement (2nd year); 4th year–Corrective Plan; 5th year–Restructuring Plan; 6th year–Restructuring. In order to be removed with one of these labels, schools must meet AYP for two consecutive years in the specific area that prompted the improvement plan. Schools must inform parents the option to opt for alternate school choice, if preferred. This places a lot of pressure on school districts to achieve greatness with less in the areas of student achievement and academic excellence. One method many schools are putting in action are programs based on behavioral modifications and positive behavior plans. These initiatives individualize student specific goals to achieve to levels of mastery like peers. It is routines like these that schools implement to overcome loss of AYP.

Learning Styles

In order to meet RTI specifications as part of Tier III, classroom observations must be first evaluated to determine if classroom instruction is geared using the instructional delivery of the state curriculum to meet benchmarks & objectives, learning styles of individual student's needs, and antecedents to behavioral and academic difficulties. Teachers begin with an assessment in discovering what methods work best for their students as a part to fostering relationships with students. Students will be more likely to succeed more if the instruction is tailored according to each of their learning styles. There

are three types of learning styles, each of which reflect the student's individual needs and can amplify their performance if used to identify with their own identifying ways of learning best.

Visual learners are ones who learn by seeing what they are doing. They learn best with diagrams, videos, overhead projectors, Promethean Boards, flip charts, and handouts. These types of tools aid visual learners to achieve a high student engagement in their learning. Auditory learners are students who learn by listening to instructions through either tape recording or taping their own voices. Ear phones work best for this type of learner as it focuses on their learning style while others can focus on their work to complete a task. Kinesthetic learners are students who learn by touching, feeling, and physically doing what it is they are attempting. They learn best by doing rather than a lectured-styled classroom instruction on how to do things.

These different learning styles are designed with the individual needs for a successful approach to learning instruction within the classroom. If more teachers can adjust their teaching styles accordingly by tailoring the instruction, a more conducive learning environment will take place. These changes are vital to keeping students actively involved in their success as well as growing into best practices and effective learning instruction. With Mississippi holding 64% Free/Reduced Price for lunches, school districts are battling to keep students nourished with brain food while growing brain power (Miles to Go MS, 2006). School districts cannot afford to lose any more students for whatever reason. Teachers must create innovative ways to keep students actively involved and

one such way is to tailor the instruction curriculum to their individualistic needs or through differentiated instruction.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction (DI) focuses on whom we teach, where we teach, and how we teach. Its primary goal is ensuring that teachers focus on processes and procedures that ensure effective learning for varied individuals (Tomlinson and McTighe, 2006). Tomlinson and McTighe hit the mark with their comments that if classroom instruction is not geared to the ESL students, the low socio-economic students, LD students, struggling readers, advance learners, etc. then they are not receiving quality, individualized instruction by a highly qualified teacher on a daily basis while in a classroom environment.

Response to Interventions

Response to Intervention (RTI), also known as Rtl, is a measurement based upon different identification models. Teachers work with the school district RTI Specialist, Academic Strategist, or Teacher Support Team (TST) to detect Learning Disabilities (LD) in students. Once an LD is determined, a plan of action is put in place for the student. From a validity viewpoint, the major question is whether different approaches to measurement identify a unique group of children identifiable as LD who represent the construct of unexpected underachievement, the key component of most conceptualizations of LD (Lyon et al., 2001). According to Case, et al., (2003), three of the most frequently cited problems with intelligence tests and the discrepancy formula are (a) failure to identify children early enough to provide effective intervention services, (b) failure

to find meaningful differences between children with reading achievement discrepancies and non-discrepant poor readers, and (c) lack of instructional implications from intelligence test protocols.

The criticisms of current school-identification methods bring to the forefront the need for alternative approaches. The purpose of this investigation was to examine the validity of an alternative to IQ-achievement discrepancies in identifying reading disabilities in at-risk, early elementary school children. Specifically, we examined a method that relied on children's responsiveness to general education interventions. We compared children who responded differentially to this instruction on individual difference and contextual measures. Further, we conducted qualitative analyses of child, teacher, and instructional data to enhance the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

In non-compliance to only using one form of assessment, schools constantly battle with revisions in order to link indicators of IQ tests, behavior, social, or environmental assessments with accurate methods for specific interventions. The concept idea of RTI protects the idea that without validity, there is no reliability. A school cannot meet AYP if there are no interventions set in place for students who are keeping the rating level from succeeding to the next level. Plans are put into place with methods of interventions that must also be kept in balance, as the dilemma remains: How do you get those students who received Minimal or Basic on state testing into the Proficient or Advanced levels while maintaining those already there? Other indicators are the teacher's style of teaching matching the student's needs, classroom environment, knowledge

and/or experience in subject area, resources, special education support, effective interventions, and the student's willingness to make the necessary changes for themselves in addition to parental support. All stakeholders must become one in the task for all interventions to work for any child regardless of the in-depth of the method to make the necessary change.

Early Educational Interventions

As a dominant focus has been on at-risk and dropouts, many school districts are preparing for the future with a greater focus on a proactive stand and begin the accountability at the elementary level; Emphasizing strategic ways at the lower levels to promote positive behaviors and expectation standards (Coleman, Buysse, & Neitzel, 2006). School Districts are carrying out these positive expectations by implementing various behavior modification programs such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Response to Interventions (RTI or Rtl), Teacher Support Team (TST), Leaps (Positive Behavior Program-researched based), and Behavior Support Team (BST) programs.

Early interventions are practical and quickly assessed by either RTI Specialists, teachers, parents, school counselors, or other key stakeholders based upon formal and informal assessments. In order to identify academic and/or behavioral issues, assessing can begin at the end of the previous school year for next year, early in each school year or if there is a new student to a district. Once a student's individual weakness is identified, a plan of action is set to monitor the student's success by the Specialist and classroom teacher,

alerting to any modifications needed during the process, and finally analyzing the rate of growth and attainment of targeted goals. RTI systems mandate that teachers and schools must show systematic, consistent, comprehensive applications of evidence-based practice in academics in more comprehensive and quantifiable ways (Case, Speece, & Molloy, 2003). Along with behavior modifications, the school environment plays a vital role to the success of such programs. Therein connects the mandate of highly qualified teacher's certification.

Secondary Educational Interventions

Another area of concern is how and where the process begins to clean up the school structures. One ground-breaking school system in Wisconsin entitled F.A.S.T. (Families and Schools Together) focuses on at-risk students and their families. This foundation consists of an 8-week program where parents, students, educators, and community leaders get together to build relationships between one another with support and preventive means of drug prevention. It is highly well-known that almost all dropouts or at-risk students turn to the life of crime as the closer they get to quitting school. Programs such as these are techniques to temporary bandage the situation. School leaders must immediately address the concerns and redirect their attention on preventive methods from Kindergarten through the 12th grade. One manner is differentiated instruction and it should be based upon the academic needs for each particular school and school district. All of this can be accomplished if there is motivation applicable. The US Department of Education implements a program entitled,

Race to the Top, (ARRA, 2009) designed as an incentive to hiring effective teachers based upon performance, as well as many other indicators. (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009) Mississippi is leading the way with a dropout prevention program entitled “On the Bus” which focuses on creating specific means to keeping students in the school system. Their creative methods inspire students to doing what it takes with a strong commitment and conviction as the driving force behind getting students to graduate.

Pioneering the way, more schools are focusing on college prep classes to better prepare their students for a higher level of education. An additional method of prevention programs surges into colleges as well. Such high school programs like Hopkins School in New Haven, CT, where their program envisions their pre-collegiate students into what the lies ahead of them by visiting colleges in order for the students to see where their all of their hard work and dedication will take them. Tours of campuses demonstrate the anticipation of college life, the procedures of obtaining any and all financial assistance needed, and a three-month long course in applying to colleges and filling out financial aid forms for scholarships. Students learn to foresee what their futures can be like if they just continue the dedication and willingness to striving to get the education provided to them.

Another anticipated program has been very successful in broadening the educational horizons of future graduates with the dramatic decline of dropouts and the impressive number of seniors reexamining higher education and committing themselves to the perspective outcome (Amundsen et al., 2008). In

order to make productive changes, all educators are charged with generating innovative and proactive techniques meet the needs of their students and the community. Students on the secondary level are trained in alternate classes. Vocational instruction provides hands-on learning experience so that upon completion of the class, they are equipped with the necessary skills to compete in that field.

More and more secondary schools are taking the proactive road by offering credit recovery classes for those at-risk students not passing a class, but are close to graduation. This alternate route allows students to maintain necessary skills with an intense goal to graduate. In 2001, one such school is Biloxi High School, in Biloxi, MS. This blue-ribbon high school is one of many southern-coastal school districts leading the way in offering credit recovery classes (BPS 2002). All have taken the challenge with great pride in doing what it takes to educating our students and making them productive members of the community.

Dropout prevention at the elementary level poses a greater dilemma. Teachers and administrators state that their greatest concerns are the lack of volunteers and time to which is needed to make beneficial changes happen. With the incline of memberships in the local PTO/PTA Programs, there is less parental support within the school setting. In Pew Partnership of Civic Change (2003), a study conducted and found that 93% of the educators polled stated that there is a lack in literacy volunteers to coach people on how to learn to read, 75% of educators declared that there were not enough volunteers to help in

classrooms, and 60% of teachers campaign for volunteers for their time to locate donations of books and supplies needed for their students.

Many school districts enlist the communities support by incorporating various programs for all grades. While the secondary benefits from work studies/experience and apprenticeship, elementary schools have Career Discovery Days. Community leaders come into the classroom to discuss the basics of their job, the importance of their job, and what the students need to accomplish while in school if they, too, want to have a job in this field. Programs such as 2nd Cup of Coffee (Biloxi Public Schools, 2008) allows school educators and administrators to share coffee with parents, care-takers of school-aged children, community leaders and to discuss up-coming events or ideas to better serve the school. This type of program opens doors for awareness on things happening within the schools. It is the positive approach of such programs that should be networked across the state lines in support to all schools. School districts can meet the needs of their community by surveying and listening to their concerns.

Another such program committed to community support is in Irving, Texas. Skills to Empower People Socially (S.T.E.P.S.) involve the lives of the at-risk students within the leaders of the community. The goal is to match a student with an adult mentor to assist in academic studies and guidance with a support system in trying to keep students in the classroom. The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC, 2008) report offers suggestive methods to keeping the truancy rate down by offering such programs of collaboration and

implementation to keeping kids in the classroom each and every day (Cloud & Duttweiler, 2006).

Vocational Programs

Vocational classes are design as an alternative to a regular track to graduation certification. It prepares students with manual activities that are related to a specific job or trade. They provide vital social and informational services that are needed to succeed in place of the traditional diploma where students work with outside organizations to prepare for the work place.

S.T.E.P.S. (2003) development programs are broken into three major categories: job readiness, career exploration, and career exposure. Instructors train students with writing résumés, practicing filling out job applications, making first impressions, learning an effective handshake, speaking clearly, importance of punctuality, job interviews, follow-ups, etc. prior to students' job searching. Business leaders visit the classroom setting and familiarize students with different areas of employment and permit students to gain valuable knowledge into specific job skills that interest them. Then, students are temporarily employed using the specific job related skills with internships, job shadowing, on-going support/mentorships, and apprenticeships in conjunction with local businesses. Business owners actively take part in training students with hopes to employ students if not then, in the near future.

This functional practice keeps student from dropping out by providing job skills and making productive members to the community. School instructors follow up with employers and monitor each student's progress in addition to

future opportunities available. Students are assessed at the beginning of the session and are grouped according to personal preferences. Each student is given a grade for specific areas within their job description. But if the work arrangement does not work out, students have the option to switch to another career with some type of grade arrangement with the instructor. These types of programs can be effective if there is enough school, school district, and local business support in accordance with keeping kids in school.

Prevention Programs

Schools are constantly challenged with how to decrease the dropout rate and reduce the number of at-risk students. Many different key factors are vital to the success of student achievement. One manner schools adopt is credit recovery programs.

According to the Principal's Partnership (2006), the challenge of dealing with at-risk and dropout students continues to perplex schools. One approach adopted by many schools is credit recovery programs, alternative programs allowing students to recover course credits from classes they have missed or failed. There are numerous programs and approaches, and information about them is readily available online, but there was little research into credit recovery programs, their impact, or characteristics that make them effective. The most common, systematic data collected was from computer teaching system companies, who market their programs to credit recovery programs. Such data focused on number of credits recovered, and to a much lesser extent on other variables that might be informative to credit recovery programs, such as

attendance rates, dropout rate, graduation rate, college matriculation rate, engagement, or attitude toward school. Credit Recovery programs were scheduled a variety of ways: during the school day, after school, twilight schools (evenings), or during the summer. Some programs met at schools within the district and others have their own locations, such as in shopping centers. Some only accept students in the 11th or 12th grade and others had programs for middle school students, high school students, and over aged students. Computer learning systems and Web-based online systems for delivering curriculum or augmenting direct teacher instruction were common. A few used only onsite during regular program hours and others could be accessed anywhere/anytime. Some credit recovery programs only grant credit for regular courses or curriculum modules, while others grant credit for community service, life and work experience, travel study, passing exams, or correspondence.

Some programs offer only one approach while others offer multiple options. Superintendents face the difficult task of obtaining what right program meets district needs in accommodating students if they all show expertise.

Products of the Environment

Teacher's roles within the classroom have been distorted from teaching to parenting, mediating, policing, nursing, supporting, counseling, role modeling, and advocating for their students. The students of today's classrooms are vastly diverse due to the changes in the family household structure. This is due to the structure of today's household manifestation. The composition of the traditional household includes mostly teenage, single women ages ranging from 16 to 24

years-old. According to 2006 and 2007 American Community Surveys statistics, these heads-of-household comprises the 13.5% of the 18.6 million mothers and are categorized as being 38% of dropout female population. Many Americans live below the poverty line resulting in more and more students dropping out of school because our academic system has not only failed these members of society, but has also assisted in continuing the never-ending cycle of future dropouts (Cuomo, 1990) . Single parents, having little education, are working two or more jobs to support daily survival. Once society has negatively labeled these single-parents, they are less likely to receive job opportunities in comparison to their graduating counterparts. A growing number of single parents have no support system while trying to raise two or more school-aged children. This task alone is burdensome for schools as well. Parents heavily rely on the school system to support their educational needs; by educating their children in preparing them for graduation and equipping them with the necessary work skills. Parents strive to achieve more for their children.

According to Goldsmith and Wang (1999), these parents have no more, at best, than a high school education and to compete with the next generation of graduates entering the workforce heightens for a harder selection in obtaining a steady job. Young high school dropouts were nearly nine times as likely to have become single mothers as their counterparts with bachelor degrees (Sum et al., 2004). In the work place to compete for jobs with peers having a diploma and/or some higher levels of college, sets single parents up for failure and in a losing battle. With nowhere else to turn, these dropouts fall prey to the same work

conditions that their parents themselves are in by not having job stability, flexible hours, medical/vision/pharmacy insurance, or retirement options in 401 K plans. They work in substandard working conditions with no support from the owner. Owner's know that there is always another to take their place. Dropouts are quick to realize how important their education really is to be able to go toe-to-toe with the job market.

The dilemma is that the educational system that is supposed to be meticulously monitoring each of their student's tailored education. This is greatly increases the already overwhelming demands placed upon the educators of the traditional classrooms by being held responsible for the growing amount of students getting lost within the system. The concern is with the expanding number of students who are falling into this category and are now falling into subcategories which leads to additional subcategories and so forth. The education for these students is officially required to be met and not overlooked as to be someone else's problems.

However, not all of the blame ought to be placed upon the school setting, but in the supportive hands of the parental guardians (Ash, 2007). It is not easy to raise a child in such a low socio-economy when parents are faced with so many additional burdens of the single, one-income households. Society has been conceived to be solo supporters to a community by paying it forward, but it is hard to do so when the system has failed so many of its students making it hard to be valuable members (Lawton, 1994).

Many students simply follow what they have been subjected to by pointing the finger at their parents, family life, and their environment (Allen, Almeida, Steinberg, & Jobs for the Future, Boston, MA, 2004). Various dropouts do not fall far from their environment, but schools, parents, community leaders, local businesses all need to take an active role in changing the system. When all key stakeholders play their roles in cooperation with NCLB (2001), success follows for all who take charge and commit to their success. As stated previously, success cannot begin if the one person who wants it the most is not the person who needs it the most – the student. Society has tried in numerous ways to incorporate different ways to get the public involved in the school's day-to-day business by opening board meetings to the public, having Open House nights for parents to come into the school setting to experience what their student is involved with while at school. Many innovative schools make additional accommodations with parent workshops, grandparent/guardian support groups, nights devoted to subject area activities more than just once in a school year, but once a term.

Schools are not getting on board with technology in offering internet access to student's grades online, viewing school lunch accounts, reading teacher's classroom websites to be informed of what is going on within the classrooms. Schools are perplexed with implementing new methods to keeping students in the classroom and not becoming undue burdens to society. But when parents are dropouts themselves, their offspring tend to follow in their footsteps. Nearly 37% of all dropouts live in poor or near poor families. Given the

limited earnings potential of many young high school dropouts, comparatively few of them have the economic resources to form independent households, including young mothers. Many young dropouts remain living at home with their parents or other relatives in families with limited annual incomes (Sum, et al., 2004).

In 2006–2007, the nation’s young high school dropouts were nearly four times as likely as their peers with a bachelor’s degree to be living in a family with an annual money income below 125% of the poverty line according to the American Community Surveys. Many of these families were dependent on cash income transfers and in-kind benefits from federal and state government to support them (Sum, et al., 2004).

Summary

By demanding society and educational leaders to ensure that this cycle stops by banding together to create a team in helping the at-risk students from falling through the cracks and earn what they are entitled to - a free education (Ash, 2007). It is with this collaboration that preventive methods to these problems can start to mend and heal all those that the system has already lost to the poorly organized educational system from the past by altering their futures (Almeida, Nellhaus, & Massachusetts State Dept. of Education, Quincy. Bureau of Research, Planning, & Evaluation, 1992). Bush’s NCLB was specifically designed to immediately put into place regulations, guideline, objectives, and frameworks so that the government can now support states by requiring their teachers to be highly qualified with professional development and the educational settings to have the best facilities that the allowable funds can provide. By

following the benchmarks, objectives, and framework requirements ensures that all students graduating through the educational process conveys academic achievement.

Although there are numerous reports and studies disputing who is to blame, bottom line is that students continue to dropout unless school districts take heed and commit to stopping it now. Superintendents along with all educators must listen and address the concerns by implementing additional vocational classes that benefit the neighborhood into a growing and blossoming community. It is unrealistic to say that this can be done overnight and it is unfair to think that despite fostering great relationships between schools, students, and the community that everyone would remain in the proximate area. However, any and all attempts should be made to focus on the preventative methods to maintain daily attendance counts. If not increase it, but also to strictly enforce it as it directly relates to the education of children.

In response to greater demands of accountability, school districts are implementing the option in reducing the reading requirements on the elementary level. Students are only required to attend a remedial reading class when they achieve a Minimal or Basic on their state curriculum test. Furthermore, parents have a further option to still request that their child be removed from that class. This only compounds the foundation of a world that literacy is on the incline and rapidly declining. School districts are choosing to take out reading classes specific to reading skills and restructuring it into Language classes to meet these demands. With the National Literacy rate stating that 20% of all high school

seniors graduate on a functional level of illiteracy, it would seem that educational leaders redirect their methods to restructuring to achieve better test scores. Even according to the national research, the finger is pointed at school systems across the country due to their lack of properly educating students albeit with the significant funding. Society has taken the absentee role in supporting the idea that reading is the very foundation to all other subjects. Students who are not exposed to reading, on any level, at home are at a disadvantage to their peers. So once again, teachers and the school setting are charged with the responsibility to increase test scores in the Language and Reading sections. Mistakes are repeatedly made in changes are not made little by little, but all at once.

Administrators and Superintendents should affirm their support and belief in their staff, students, parents, and community members by demonstrating academic commitment with opening a revolving door of school/community support system. School districts can provide parents with refresher courses in their child's instructional setting. Teachers can assist parents with homework by having an open line of communication each school year. The additional provision of at-home support can lead to additional volunteers. This goal to networking allows parents and teachers to support one another and foster relationships. One such event can be found yearly at North Bay Elementary in Biloxi, Mississippi. This beneficial program, which is held at all Biloxi Public Schools, heightens support and encourages relationships with parents of the community. Schools incorporate subject areas designed with the evening's

activities. Many volunteered local business member volunteers or educational leaders can read along with parents and students. Beneficial options that foster involvement, these subject areas nights can also work for all grade levels with games and labs that focus on the events in the classroom. Teachers having professional websites are another alternate method in bridging the gap. Even if parents do not have computer access at home, they can go to their public library and access the websites containing student/parent homework support. These are direct links to classroom presentations or how-to videos in completing a subject-area problem, contact information, office schedule, before or after-school tutoring, etc.

In addition to the teacher websites, schools should maintain a school website with direct links to teachers e-mail, administration e-mail, lunch menus, school policy and handbook for future reference, curriculum and program studies offered, etc. Also, sending out a monthly informational flyer to student's parents allows a positive and proactive approach to keeping parents involved in the education process. Another incentive could be offering a coupon on the website for a free ice-cream in the cafeteria if the student and their parent attend a community/parent event. These alternate methods of making changes blossoms into a healthier school environment.

These are just some alternate ways to improve academic and community relationships at the early stages of the preventative process. These results scaffold into salvaging what we can to the betterment of producing productive members of society.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This empirical study sought to determine whether or not there were relationships between the increase of student state test scores and perceptions of RTI success among 158 school districts of elementary, middle, and high schools within the State of Mississippi. The focus validated the RTI Coordinator and/or RTI Specialist perception of RTI success in student achievement based upon MCT2 scores from 2010 and 2011. The effectiveness of school districts alleged to using RTI as a researched approach to increase student state test scores, may possibly uncover additional benefits that presents further research. Another emphasis concentrated on gathered data, measured direct influences of the RTI program components to determine if teachers received proper training, how long was the training, and evaluations of the RTI program to its competence in achieving an increase of student state test scores based upon MCT2 test results and high perception of the RTI process. These variables collectively pertain to the success of the RTI program and its design as an alternate method to basic classroom instruction.

Another aspect confirmed the effectiveness of school districts alleged to use RTI to increase student achievement based on the comparison of District MCT2 Language Arts scores 2010 and 2011. Those students who are RTI participants in the 7th grade for the 2009–2010 school year and the 8th graders for the 2010–2011 school year within the same school; an added concentration to

gather data could possibly measure any direct influences of the RTI program components. The researcher gathered data from RTI Coordinators, RTI Specialists, and/or other significant persons of interest within each of the 158 school districts in the state of Mississippi using RTI as a preventative alternative. Some of the information addressed possible variables. The survey inquired if school districts implement RTI within their schools, if teachers have received proper training, how long was the training, how many days was the training held, who directed the training, was there additional support offered for further assistance post-training, any additional professional development offered, and perceptions of the RTI program as to its competence in achieving an increase of students' scores from MCT2 2010 to 2011. These variables collectively pertain to reaching the most success of the RTI program and its implemented design to increase students' MCT2 state test scores and perceptions within the 158 school districts in the state of Mississippi.

In the previous chapter, the challenge was to propose an epigrammatic overview of related literature in relation to the variables coupled within the perceptions of the RTI process and the increase of students' MCT2 test scores from the 2010 and 2011 school year. A decrease in students' MCT 2 test scores can be greatly influenced by numerous outside factors, but ultimately, focuses on the effect that RTI perceptions might have on an increase in students' MCT2 test scores due to the RTI within a behavioral plan. In making an attempt to limit restrictions on these unknown variables, additional information is anticipated to be discovered.

Presented in chapter three of this study, participants were identified, sent a summary of IRB approval, the promise to protect the confidentiality of data collected, and procedures and instrumentation to the collection of data that was analyzed. Conclusions and recommendations based upon this statistical analysis formally addressed in the final chapter of this study.

Research Design

The compilation of data began after receiving Internal Review Board (IRB) approval (See Appendix A). The researcher mailed out a letter through the U. S. Postal Service to each of the 158 school district's RTI Coordinator/Specialist providing details of the survey (APPENDIX C Pages 1–4), the 32-question survey on bright neon-green paper (as a way to remind them to complete and return), a bright neon-pink slip of paper with details of the due date, and to return the completed surveys in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. The surveys were completed by a RTI Coordinator/Specialist, Administrator, TST Chair, Counselor, or Teacher of the 158 school districts in the state of Mississippi. The return rate was low, and so a second letter went out to the school districts who did not respond. In the end, only 51 useable surveys were returned (one had no school identification and two were from high schools who only subject area test), thus only providing a 32% rate of return.

The independent variables of this study were students' MCT2 scores pre-intervention in the RTI process, the types, reasons and length of interventions, the frequency of the observations, RTI training of the screener and/or general education teacher with attention to duration of training, post-training resources,

and any additional support. Were there resources and additional support provided post-training? Was there any follow-up support after the training was implemented in their school district? The dependent variables are students' MCT2 Language Arts scores for 2010 and 2011. These variables sought to determine a direct relation to whether the RTI process was successful. The researcher investigated if having RTI implemented early in a student's academic career relates to an increase in students' MCT2 Language Arts test scores. With the exceptions of name and race (because it does not change), the MCT2 Language Arts scores were examined and compared from the previous school year scores along with the current school year in conjunction with RTI established interventions to determine if the modifications were successful. This information collected through a thirty-two question survey that was mailed through the U.S. Postal service along with a returnable, self-addressed stamped envelope to the researcher and through archival data per school district RTI participants.

Participants

This study was confined to the 158 schools districts of elementary, middle, and high schools within the State of Mississippi. With prior IRB approval, participants involved comprised of RTI/Behavioral Specialists, Administrators, TST Chair, Counselors, and/or other significant person of interest within each of the 158 school district and/or schools in the state of Mississippi using RTI as an alternative to increase student state test scores. Participants were represented by male and female students ranging between the school age of five years old

through 16 years of age, diverse in ethnicity, and assorted socio-economic backgrounds that are currently in the RTI process. School District state test scores of these participants and completed surveys were utilized for information regarding the variables as listed above. Once IRB approval was granted (Appendix A), the researcher sent via the U.S. Postal Service copies of the RTI Request for Permission Approval Letter (Appendix B), and the Respondent to complete the surveys (Appendix C:1-4) distributed to all of the 158 Mississippi School Districts.

Instrumentation

The primary method to collected data was by means of a survey (Appendix C:1-4) that took 15–20 minutes to complete via U.S. Postal Mail along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return to the researcher. The survey consists of 32 questions based on:

- 1) School district's name (pseudonym is given to protect identity)
- 2) Which grade span applies to the respondent
- 3) Frequency of RTI program
- 4) Type of positive behavioral program
- 5) Method of assessment to identify Tier II or Tier III students
- 6) Grade at which interventions are implemented
- 7) Reason for intervention
- 8) Person completing the assessment/screener
- 9) If whether the screener received RTI training

- 10) If trained,
 - a) Who was trained
 - b) How many were trained
 - c) What was the length of the training
 - d) Was any additional support training provided
- 11) Specific subject area the interventions were focused on
- 12) The frequency of interventions
- 13) Length of interventions
- 14) If intervention met the student's needs
- 15) If the interventions were successful toward student achievement
- 16) What teacher qualities are important to a successful intervention
- 17) Rating the experience of the RTI process
- 18) Rating the comfort level of using the RTI process.

Participants also added any additional comments or suggestions they felt were pertinent to this study.

The survey constructed by the researcher was also presented to a panel of experts for revisions and corrected accordingly. The survey was then disseminated to a pilot group. The pilot survey was revised and assessed for validity and reliability. Once the revised version of the survey was completed and circulated to the participants in the study via the U.S. Postal Service. Results were gathered by the researcher tabulated and analyzed the data into SPSS. There was no consequence toward those participants who opted not to participate. Once the survey met approval and the pilot study was validated, the

survey was submitted to the participants. Responses did not violate the privacy of the participants, as they remained anonymous. All completed surveys were kept confidential. All participants not partaking in the survey were referenced to in the results or narrative, but not omitted from the study. All respondents were provided a self-addressed, stamped return envelope to return their completed survey via the U.S. Postal Service. Data results were analyzed and configured into SPSS.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to access and utilize the required data for this research study met with anticipation by the researcher from the Institutional Review Board when approved (Appendices A); and the survey (Appendix C: 1- 4) each respondent completed.

Delimitations

The delimitations for this study might be the fluctuation of students moving from schools to schools or out of state that may have or may not have RTI programs. Another significant measure was if the student either dropped out or left the state.

The conclusions drawn were inconclusive based on the results from this research study prior to receiving IRB approval. It was realistic to believe that through the research, additional inherent limitations might be discovered and that the data collected may have a greater influence upon the research findings, but were unknown to the researcher at the onset of this investigation.

Data Analysis

Once the researcher obtained IRB approval, a 30-question survey was mailed via the U.S. Postal Service to the RTI Coordinator of the 158 School Districts in the state of Mississippi. Along with this survey, the researcher provided a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the complete survey to the researcher. Once the researcher received the completed surveys, the data was tabulated using SPSS and analyzed.

Once the data was segregated, the researcher tested the following hypotheses:

H₁: There was a statistically significant difference in MCT2 scores in Language Arts when RTI was used as a preventative method to increase student achievement.

H₀: There was no statistical significant difference in MCT2 scores in Language Arts when RTI was used as a preventative method to increase student achievement.

Summary

It was the intension of this chapter to present a synopsis of the customary procedures and methodology utilized in the implementation to this research study. For this chapter the anticipated participation sample, format of the instrument, procedures for collecting data, hypotheses, and data analysis materialized was presented. The following chapter sought to disclose a full statistical analysis of the data after the aforementioned procedures were approved and executed.

This chapter included the participants of study, the instruments used to measure the implementation of RTI effectiveness and an increase in student MCT2 scores. An assumption was deduced that the higher perception of the RTI program directly impacts a student's increase on their state test scores. Therefore the program's success stems from the effective implementation for school districts utilizing the applications and methods properly. It is likely that RTI presented results, which at the very least, was the anticipated desired outcome when executing the behavior modification program accurately. The acknowledgment of this study could possibly benefit students throughout the school environment as well as in outside the classroom setting. Some additional benefits to this study resulted in a decline in the dropout rate, increased student academic achievement, increase in student graduation, behavioral modification success, and increase in self-esteem when peer pressure is at its highest, personal growth. These same results should be shared with other schools and school districts as Mississippi holds the highest ranking dropout rate in the country. NCLB was designed specifically to support students not only in their academic arenas, but to also encourage personal development when utilized properly. It is the researcher's anticipated commitment to help keep our school-aged students in the Mississippi school classrooms for they are the future of today's educators.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

Since President Obama revised the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, educational institutions mandate that all schools implement rigorous interventions to improve student excellence and close achievement gaps through programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or Character Education. This study determined if there was a correlation through the type of behavioral prevention program implemented in each school, respondents' training, respondents' perception, percentage rate of students' success while in the RTI program, district MCT2 scores in Language Arts for those students in the program while in 7th grade to those same students in the RTI program in 8th grade, the number of years their behavioral program has been in place, reasons for interventions, types of assessments used for the RTI process to measure success, and specific subject areas specifically focused for the RTI process.

This chapter presents compiled results and the analysis of data to establish a relationship between RTI and student achievement through state test scores in Language Arts of 2010 and 2011 for each of the 158 Mississippi school districts. The respondents provided information on the demographics of their school, implementation of RTI, methods of establishing success, training of RTI screeners and program requirements, specific areas focused in RTI interventions, frequency of RTI interventions, length of implementation of RTI

interventions, percentage of student success goals, and teacher perceptions on importance of specific teacher qualities for the RTI to be successful. The details of the data analysis are presented in table and narrative forms.

Descriptive Data

The questionnaire used in this research was broken into six categories: school district, grade span, interventions, perception of intervention success, correlation to reducing the dropout rate, and correlation to teacher quality for interventions to be successful.

Question one requested the name of the school district in order to connect respondent to their state test data. All except one survey answered this question making the one unusable to track data. All questionnaires measured responses from RTI Coordinators/Specialists, Administrators, TST Chair, Counselors, and Teachers (Questionnaire Question #2). Based on the Table 1 (below), fifty percent of the respondents were Administrators following with almost thirty-three percent were the District's RTI/Behavioral Specialist.

Table 1

Questionnaire Question #2 – Which of the following are you?

	Frequency	Percent
RTI specialist	17	33.3
Administration	26	51.0
TST chair	4	7.8

Table 1 (continued).

Counselor	2	3.9
Other	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

The third question asked to select the grade span that applied to their school district. Respondents' choices were Kindergarten through Second grade, Third grade through Fifth grade, Sixth grade through Eighth grade, and Ninth grade through Twelfth grade.

The reason for this as many school districts are opting to keep their elementary schools in the traditional K-6th grades. However, proactive and innovative schools are choosing to blend 6th graders into the middle schools of 7th and 8th graders to make room for the Pre-K students. However, some respondents are small in population and have remained in the K-12th grade setting. These had to be included so that the K-8th grade data is not lost for the purpose of this research study.

Table 2

Questionnaire Question #4 - Does your school use a behavioral prevention program?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	39	76.5

Table 2 (continued).

No	12	23.5
Total	51	100.0

Questions four, five, and six examine the types of alternate behavioral programs implemented in their school setting. With the response to this question only having 23% (Table 2) as not using RTI within their school setting, alternate responses were using their local mental health establishment and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). As previously mentioned about federal mandates, a deeper look identifies alternative programs school districts use if RTI is not implemented.

Questions seven through twenty supplied the researcher with how long the intervention program has been in place, method of assessing/screening used to identify Tier II and III students, grades interventions are implemented, reasons for interventions, who completes the assessment/screener, was there any RTI training, who was trained, was there any additional support after the initial training, was the training shared with others, what specific areas were observed for interventions, was there any system in place for rewarding behavioral expectations, frequency of interventions, how do the interventions last, and what percentage rate was met for the individuals' needs. The next two questions asked the perceptions of if interventions were successful and helped to reduce the dropout rate.

Question twelve examined responses to if RTI training was provided (Table 3); in conjunction with question thirteen which probed into how many people were RTI trained. Although there was an overwhelming number of responses of who received RTI training, there were two No responses in addition to two who did not answer this question.

Table 3

Questionnaire Question #12 – Was there any RTI Training?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	47	92.2
No	2	3.9
Total	49	96.1
Did Not Answer	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

Question thirteen found that RTI training was provided to the entire school staff if their response to question 12 was Yes there was training provided to all Certified Staff.

Question fourteen enquired if there was any additional support provided to all those who were trained after the original training session. The vast majority stated yes, but did not elaborate as to the specifics of the training they were provided (Table 4, below). The importance to this question was to determine if the lack of latter support directly affects the success of the teacher or the lack in the program's success for the student's academic or behavior success.

Table 4

Questionnaire Question #14 - If yes to Question #12, was there additional support provided for after the training session?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	39	76.5
No	6	11.8
Total	45	88.2
Did Not Answer	6	11.8
Total	51	100.0

Question fifteen (Table 5) examined if the training was shared with anyone else in the school district. The response was in the majority that it was shared among those in the school district in addition to those who were originally trained.

Table 5

Questionnaire Question #15 – Was the training shared with others?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	44	86.3
No	1	2.0
Total	45	88.2
Did Not Answer	6	11.8
Total	51	100.0

Questions seventeen, or Table 6, solicited information using the Likert scale which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This question looked at whether if implementing their behavior program resulted in rewarding behavioral expectations from the schools' students. The results to this question can be viewed below.

Table 6

Questionnaire Question # 17 – When implementing our behavior plan, a system for rewarding behavioral expectations was established.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	18	35.3
Agree	22	43.1
Neutral	7	13.7
Disagree	3	5.9
Total	50	98.0
Did Not Answer	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Question eighteen was inquired to examine how often the RTI process affected the anticipated outcome based upon the higher in frequency the interventions taking place that there would show a higher success rate and vice-versa. When looking at the results (Table 7), the vast majority chose that they implement their interventions on a daily and weekly basis in comparison to

monthly practices. The perception is that the higher in frequency of interventions corrected the necessary skills for the students to successfully opt out of RTI and become productive and successful students within the realm of the classroom setting of instruction.

Table 7

Questionnaire Question #18 – On average, what is the frequency of intervention implementation?

	Frequency	Percent
Daily	23	45.1
Weekly	23	45.1
Monthly	5	9.8
Total	51	100.0

Question nineteen examined the duration of the RTI process. This question illustrated in Table 8 took steps to determine if the longer the intervention process affected if the success would be higher or if the lower the intervention process the lower the outcome expectations.

Table 8

Questionnaire Question #19 – How long do interventions last?

	Frequency	Percent
4 weeks	2	3.9

Table 8 (continued).

8 weeks	8	15.7
12 weeks	5	9.8
Other	35	68.6
Total	50	98.0
Did Not Answer	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Questions twenty-one through twenty-seven were designed on a five-point Likert scale which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. However, questions twenty-one and twenty-two specifically asked what the respondents' perception were on if the interventions for the current students were successful as well as if the interventions reduced the dropout rate.

Table 9

Questionnaire Question #21 - Do you think the interventions for the current students in your school are successful?

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	6	11.8
Agree	33	64.7
Neutral	9	17.6
Disagree	2	3.9
Total	50	98.0

Table 9 (continued).

Did Not Answer	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 10

Questionnaire Question #22 - Do you think the interventions for the current students in your school reduce the dropout rate?

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	8	15.7
Agree	26	51.0
Neutral	9	17.6
Disagree	5	9.8
Strongly disagree	1	2.0
Total	49	96.1
Did Not Answer	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

Questions twenty-three through twenty-seven (Tables 11-15) directly focused on respondent's perceptions if specific teacher qualities were vital to the expected outcome if these were in place at the time for successful interventions. These questions comprised of the sixth section of important teacher qualities. The elements are critical to the establishment of an effective and successfully

implemented RTI program. On the other hand, there were some points of concern from respondents to the inquiry about adequacy and integrity of Tier I instruction (differentiated instruction), Tier II, and Tier III both academically and behaviorally. Another concern was to the staggering amount of paperwork that has to be completed per child not taking into account if the intervention plan requires a change due to academic or behavior reasons.

Table 11

Questionnaire Question #23 - Rate teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful - Respect/Motivational.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	34	66.7
Agree	16	31.4
Neutral	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 12

Questionnaire Question #24 - Rate the teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful-Caring/Understanding.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	31	60.8
Agree	19	37.3

Table 12 (continued).

Neutral	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 13

Questionnaire Question #25 - Rate teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful-Job Satisfaction/Teaching Experience.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	22	43.1
Agree	22	43.1
Neutral	3	5.9
Disagree	2	3.9
Strongly disagree	1	2.0
Total	50	98.0

A respondent's concern was that having question twenty-five's qualities two teacher qualities together was difficult to score together. While she strongly agreed to the Job satisfaction part, found that bitter teachers don't produce effective interventions. Then she went on to write that she disagrees with Teaching experience. She described that she can train an assistant with one year experience to implement an intervention with equal effectiveness as a 20+ year teacher with master's degree (with proper training being the key).

Table 14

Questionnaire Question #26 - Rate the teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful-Subject Area/Content Knowledge.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	35	68.6
Agree	15	29.4
Disagree	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 15

Questionnaire Question #27 - Rate teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful - A Safe and Inviting Environment

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	31	60.8
Agree	19	37.3
Disagree	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Then the next two questions shows how respondents' rated their comfort (Table 16) and experience (Table 17) levels with the RTI process using the 5 point range Likert scale. While RTI training is vital to the success of the program, there are some concerns for those who chose the some and little experience

categories. The question arises if they were trained properly and did they receive the proper support to maintain the goal of RTI program's guidelines and procedures for a successful outcome. Table 16, shown on the next page, illustrates the frequency and percentage to each category of experience levels.

Table 16

Questionnaire Question #28 - On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your experience level with the RTI process.

	Frequency	Percent
Highly experienced	14	27.5
Experienced	28	54.9
Some experience	6	11.8
Little experience	3	5.9
Total	51	100.0

Respondents' results presented were in the majority in the top two categories. Fifty-five percent felt that they were experienced enough with the RTI process in comparison to the twenty-seven percent who felt they were highly experienced. Despite all of the high regards of perceptions, training provided, additional support provided, frequencies of student interventions

Table 17

Questionnaire Question #29 - On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your comfort level with the RTI process.

	Frequency	Percent
Extremely comfortable	13	25.5
Very comfortable	20	39.2
Comfortable	13	25.5
Slightly comfortable	3	5.9
Not comfortable	1	2.0
Total	50	98.0
Did Not Answer	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 17 clearly shows that the majority of those who were RTI trained also felt that they were extremely comfortable using the RTI process for student academic and behavioral success.

Finally, the last two questions required the district scores for MCT2 Language Arts for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011 from each of the 158 schools districts that responded. This information was located at the Mississippi Department of Education website.

This next set of questions pertains to question items that needed to be treated differently in that the respondents were allowed to choose more than one

answer to the specific question. With having multiple responses, these results require further explanation to their foundations and results.

Question two found that Administrators were the most likely respondents in this questionnaire. Most curriculum directors have been found to be the RTI Coordinator for their school district. It was also discovered in Table 18 that some respondents were new to the RTI position and so someone from within the school district completed the questionnaire was with previous RTI experience.

Table 18

Questionnaire Question #2 – Which of the following titles applies to you?

	Responses	Percent
Administrator	36	40.4%
RTI Specialist	18	20.2%
Teacher	13	14.6%
TST Chair	13	14.6%
Counselor	9	10.1%
Total	89	100.0%

The researcher received only 51 respondents of the 158 sent out, but in Table 19 visibly displays 158 grade categories were selected. There are more and more schools changing their grade structures to meet the community's needs as well as within the realms of academic budgets.

Table 19

Questionnaire Question # 3 – What grade span does your school have?

	Responses	Percent
K – 2 nd grade	40	25.3%
3 rd – 5 th grade	41	25.9%
6 th – 8 th grade	40	25.3%
9 th – 12 th grade	2	23.4%
Total	158	100.0%

Table 20

Questionnaire Question #6 – Which of the following programs does your school use?

	Responses	Percent
RTI/PBIS	26	48.1%
Tier I/PBIS	23	46.6%
Other	5	9.3%
Total	54	100.0%

In the above Table 20, the majority of the inquiries' showed that they were implementing RTI in conjunction with some form of PBIS. All students are

labeled at Tier I in the beginning unless they require additional interventions from several assessment sources.

Question seven solicits how long the RTI program has been implemented within their school district. Twenty-three answers were provided from the 51 survey respondents. The researcher found that seven school districts have implemented RTI for one year; four school districts have implemented RTI for two years; four school districts have implemented RTI for three years; one school district has implemented RTI for four years; two school districts have implemented RTI for five years; one school district has implemented RTI for six years; one school district has implemented RTI for seven years at least; two school districts have implemented RTI for several years (Specific number was not provided); and one school district noted that the question was not applicable to their school district.

When analyzing Questionnaire Question #8 – What specific method of assessment or screening does your district use for identifying Tier II/III students, the results were open-ended responses. This task was very tedious and required me to tally their individual responses into several main categories. The key categories were AIMS Web (12 selections), STAR Testing – Reading, Math, or ELL (12 selections), MCT2/SATP state testing (23 selections), Dibels (9 selections), Measures of Academic Progress (10 selections), and the rest were categorized into Behavioral checklist (BASK) (8 selections), referrals for discipline/MSIS (16 selections), Progress reports/Report cards (12 selections), and universal screeners (11 selections). As more and more assessment

programs are developed and researched, the inclination that these were used effectively in conjunction with RTI and student academic achievement are breaking ground. These new and upcoming types of screeners provide RTI Specialists with the necessary tools to effectively engage and monitor students in their academic success and for educators to create detailed plans for interventions. All of the aforementioned categories factor in taking a critical stand to whether such programs have the necessary benefits of the vision and goals for the RTI program.

The data collected from Question nine presented another tedious task as it was also a multiple response question. The results to the question of how long Rtl program has been implemented in their school district are as follows: eleven responded Pre-K through 12th grade; one for Kindergarten only; one for Kindergarten through 1st grade; one for Kindergarten through 4th grade; one for Kindergarten through 5th grade; one for Kindergarten through 6th grade; three for Kindergarten through 8th grade; one for Kindergarten through 9th grade; one for 1st through 6th grade (with some in 7th – 12th grade); one for 1st through 8th grade; one for 1st through 12th grade; one for 2nd through 12th grade; one for 3rd and 4th grade only; one for 4th through 6th grade; one for 5th and 6th grade only; one for 6th through 8th grade; one using a Behavioral Checklist for 9th through 12th grades; and two stating that it RTI is used when a student begins to struggle or as needed.

Table 21 examines the results behind why students are placed into the Tier II or Tier III categories of RTI and what specific methods of assessments are

used for these placements. Each school district utilizes various forms, but all are in a consensus as to which assessment signifies the most benefits for the RTI process in student academic success and greatest achievement gains.

Table 21

Questionnaire Question #10 – Reason for student intervention?

	Responses	Percent
Academic	50	22.0%
Discipline/Behavior	47	20.7%
MCT2 Scores	45	19.8%
Parent request	35	15.4%
Attendance	27	11.9%
Staff request	20	8.8%
Other	3	1.3%
Total	227	100.0%

Statistical

The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

H¹: Schools using RTI directly impacts as a preventative method on MCT2 Language Arts scores for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011.

H²: There is a direct correlation of RTI Coordinators and/or Specialists perceptions on MCT2 Language Arts scores of r 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011.

The first hypotheses (H^1), a t-test was used to determine whether there was any correlation of those using RTI to increase student achievement through MCT2 Language Arts scores of 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011. This is illustrated in Table 22 (below) where it shows that the 12 school districts who did not use RTI in their 7th grades in 2010 had a mean score of 147.43 and a standard deviation of 8.54 for as opposed to those 39 school districts who did use RTI had a mean score of 149.80 and a standard deviation of 3.26. Table 22 also shows that the 11 school districts that did not use RTI in their 8th grades in 2011 had a mean score of 148.46 and a standard deviation of 5.67 for as opposed to those 39 school districts who did use RTI had a mean score of 149.00 and a standard deviation of 3.40.

Table 22

Group Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
MCT2 Language Arts 7 th grade	12	147.43	8.54	2.47
	39	149.79	3.26	.52
MCT2 Language Arts 8 th grade	11	148.46	5.69	1.71
	39	149.00	3.40	.55

The Independent Samples t-test yielded the following results: $t(49) = 1.445$, $p = .155$ for MCT2 Language Arts for 7th graders in 2010 and $t(48) = .401$, $p = .690$ for MCT2 Language Arts for 8th graders in 2011; therefore, there is no significant difference in comparison between MCT2 Language Arts scores of 7th

graders in 2010 or 8th graders in 2011 to those who used RTI within their district as a preventative method to increasing student achievement scores.

The second hypotheses (H^2), a descriptive statistics test calculated if interventions were to be successful that the perceptions of Respect/Motivational, Caring/Understanding, Job satisfaction/Teaching experience, Subject Area/Content knowledge, and providing a Safe and inviting environment were important teacher qualities in order for the success in student achievement using the RTI program on students' MCT2 scores. In addition to the minimum and maximum, the mean and standard deviation were also provided. The question posed was if there were any correlation of RTI Coordinators and/or Specialists perceptions on districts MCT2 Language Arts scores.

The results turned up (Table 23 below) the highest mean scores of 4.64 with the standard deviations of .52 and .50 consecutively to the importance of teacher use of respect/motivation (Questionnaire Question #23) and Subject area/Content knowledge (Questionnaire Question #26). The lowest mean score was located in question twenty-two, which inquired the perception if RTI reduced the number in dropout rates. The lowest mean score of 3.71 and a standard deviation of .93 were anticipated to uncover the correlation. Additional mean scores to whether interventions were successful for their students was 3.86 and question related to the importance of teacher qualities required in order for RTI to be successful ranged 4.24 through 4.58. This meant that all the qualities listed were found to be in the same range of importance to the success of the RTI program.

Table 23

Descriptive Statistics for Questionnaire Questions #21-27

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceptions	51	4.33	.41
Questionnaire Question #21	50	3.86	.67
Questionnaire Question #22	49	3.71	.94
Questionnaire Question #23	51	4.65	.52
Questionnaire Question #24	51	4.59	.54
Questionnaire Question #25	50	4.24	.89
Questionnaire Question #26	51	4.65	.59
Questionnaire Question #27	51	4.57	.61

With the correlation that $r(51) = -.038$, $p = .794$ in MCT2 Language Arts for 7th graders in 2010 and $r(50) = -.133$, $p = 3.56$ in MCT2 Language Arts for 8th graders in 2011 showing that there is no significant difference if the respondents' perceptions of teacher qualities directly impacts student achievement in their CT2 Language Arts scores while in the RTI process. The anticipated outcome was that the results would show when perceptions of teacher qualities needed for interventions to be successful were high so would the MCT2 Language Arts scores. However, the data proves that it was in fact reversed in that the higher their perceptions the lower the results in MCT2 Language Arts scores.

Qualitative (Research Questions)

The following four research questions were addressed in this study:

Q¹: What impact does the utilization of RTI have as a preventative method in student achievement?

Q²: Is there a correlation between Response to Intervention (RTI) and MCT2 Language Arts scores for students in 7th grade for 2010 and 8th graders for 2011?

Q³: Does research show if there's an increase in MCT2 Language Arts scores that it is correlated to the implementation of the RTI process in student achievement?

Q⁴: Is there a relationship between higher percentage of goals being successful in the RTI process and an increase in MCT2 Language Arts scores for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011?

Research Q¹ and Q² were answered through the H¹. The research revealed that there is no significant difference in student MCT2 Language Arts scores for students in 7th grade in 2010 and students in the 8th grade in 2011 when RTI is implemented within the 51 school districts that responded. This is discovered to be accurate when the similarities were made between the mean scores (Table 22).

As for research Q³, this question cannot be answered because of the limitations that there is no way to simply determine if there was an increase in student MCT2 Language Arts scores that it had anything to do with whether RTI was implemented. This setback was mentioned previously and should have been added to the questionnaire. If this had been added, the study would be able to compare the year's state test scores to when RTI was implemented, in

what sequential grade(s) did it originate, as well as what other grade it expanded to for RTI progress in student academic achievement by means of MCT2 Language Arts scores.

The researcher inquired in Q⁴, if there is a relationship between the higher percentage of a student's goals met in the RTI process and an increase in MCT2 Language Arts scores for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011. Based on the Pearson Correlation test on Question2 #4, #31, and #32 generated the following conclusion: $r(30) = -0.110$, $p = .563$ shows no significant correlation between the success rate of RTI meeting the individual's needs MCT2 Language Arts in 7th grade in 2010 and $r(29) = .075$, $p = .699$ also shows no significant correlation between the success rate of RTI meeting the individual's needs MCT2 Language Arts in 8th grade in 2011. This statement is based upon research not showing when the RTI program originated from these test scores in 2010 or in 2011.

In addition, respondents wrote comments that RTI has been inconsistently implemented over several years; began the initiated process this year to fully implement it next year; S8 stated that interventions do not always work, they sometimes must be changed; after at least three interventions at Tier III, students are referred for additional testing; S14 proudly claimed of their success and the lives have changed by RTI; S16 calls to action that there needs to be on-going training sessions in this area; and S27 is overwhelmed with sharing that the amount of material to be used for interventions is staggering – sometimes we try to do too much and end up doing nothing well.

RTI Coordinator S28 felt that placing job satisfaction with teaching experience was difficult to score together. Also states that bitter teachers don't produce effective interventions. In addition, one assistant can be trained with 1 year experience to implement an intervention with equal effectiveness as a 20+ year teacher with a master's degree with proper training being the key; and S33 suggested that the researcher would inquire about adequacy and integrity of Tier I instruction (differentiated instruction), Tier II, and Tier III both academically and behaviorally.

Respondent S36 excused as this was their first year with their school district and that Tier II provided tutoring based on needs determined by weekly assignments; S41 enlightened with to fully implement an effective RTI program requires more support staff to assist and/or carry out the process. Teachers feel overwhelmed with the amount of work that is required for the one-on-one and/or individualized planning required in relation to the numbers of students that must be served; S45 jots down that more training on data collection and analysis of RTI; S46 fills in with not sure if their plans/interventions are "RTI" – no specific training with the terminology; and finally, S48 expresses, in their opinion, that some of the questions were worded in a confusing way, not specific of intervention level, poorly worded b/c you could be referring to Tier II or III and asking me to generalize b/t the two. Maybe Tier II, but Tier III did. You may have problems w/ this item – not enough space to respond – May limit details of responses.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a correlation within the implementation of Response to Interventions (RTI) and student academic achievement. Items for discussion include an overall summary of the study, limitations of the research, and recommendations for future research into the field. The results of this study anticipates helping school districts determine whether RTI was effective when implemented properly and directly impacts an increases student achievement. The researcher examined the results of MCT2 Language Arts scores for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011 hoping to discover whether Response to Interventions made a difference in these state test scores.

Conclusion/Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between the implementation of RTI as a direct link to student academic achievement. Many schools claim to have one form or another meeting the criteria for positive behavioral programs. However, many school districts continue to have struggling students and are falling short to meeting QDI or AYP for their district. More specifically, educators are being asked to perform at a higher quantity, as well as quality, to what they already are burdened with in the classroom instructional setting. The researcher studied whether schools implementing RTI equaled the expected outcome of an increase in student state test scores. The discoveries to

the findings were surprising in comparison to the statistical information received from the respondents.

Q¹: What impact does the utilization of RTI have as a preventative method in student achievement?

Only thirty-nine respondents out of fifty-one claimed to have RTI within their school as a form of behavioral prevention program in their school while 12 listed PBIS or some other form for behavioral prevention programs. The research in this study showed implementation of RTI had no significant statistical difference to student achievement on MCT2 Language Arts scores for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011. Test scores for both sets of students did not produce any gains despite respondents' claim of high percentages in student success to meeting RTI educational/behavioral goals.

Q²: Is there a correlation between Response to Intervention (RTI) and MCT2 Language Arts scores for students in 7th grade for 2010 and 8th grades for 2011?

The results of the research showed no significant difference that RTI had anything to do with the academic success of the MCT2 Language Arts for 7th graders on 2010 and 8th graders in 2011. This is based upon the fact that neither of these two grades showed any significance in their score range from one year to the next of those who claimed to be using RTI for student achievement for each grade level.

Although this study was limited to 7th and 8th grades during the 2010 and 2011 school year, program research claims to more successful in the early

education years than in the latter. The goal in RTI is to project long term goals by ways of short term goals. Goals set for students identifies individual's needs, assesses the proper intervention, monitors while in the intervention process, and adjusts to failures and/or successes with intensive research-based instructional interventions for children who continue to have difficulty. A while-in-progress determination would be for those students who do not "show a response to effective interventions" are likely to require more testing to determine Special Education rulings of A.D.A or IDEA, etc. (Pearson Education, 2011, p.1-7).

Although more focus is placed on younger students, secondary students are offered assistance, but within the realms of tutoring or less stringent interventions. Students should have an educational foundation by the time they reach secondary years of school and result in expects minimal gains.

Q³: Does research show if there's an increase in MCT2 Language Arts scores that it is correlated to the implementation of the RTI process in student achievement?

As previously mentioned, no research was found to either prove or disprove this from within the questionnaire. In hindsight, this question would have played a valuable role to answering this question.

Q⁴: Is there a relationship between higher percentage of successful goals in the RTI process and an increase in MCT2 Language Arts scores for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011?

As the results showed that there was no significant statistical difference in percentage of successful goals for the RTI students in comparison to their grade

level district MCT2 Language Arts scores for 2010 and 2011. Although the respondents claim to achieve a high percentage in student academic success, it was not collective on the state test scores for student achievement.

The researcher attests to what has contributed to the lack of significance in the findings was that the focus to the perceptions of important teacher qualities to comparing MCT2 Language Arts scores were irrelevant. Also that there was no direct link that the implementation of RTI occurring before or in the 7th grade or 8th grade for those in the focus of this study. Outside uncontrollable factors such as discipline issues, attendance issues, home environment all could have contributed to the findings not providing a direct link to the hypothesis.

Recommendations for Policy or Practice

Based upon the results of this study, there is quite of bit of information out there yet to be discovered. The topic of Response to Interventions is gaining strength and being realized that it is a force to be reckoned with. This valuable tool is available at the finger tips of many for the taking. As years pass, more and more school districts implementing this, as well as other various forms of behavioral prevention programs, to increase student academic achievement and student test scores. Establishing individualized plans for students can only lead to beneficial outcomes if the RTI process as a whole is effectively trained, monitored, practiced, supported, assessed, and revised to maximize its potential.

The results of this study can be used to assist RTI Specialists/Coordinators in each of the 158 school districts in Mississippi as well as all other school districts across the globe. This topic is not geographically

specific, but the manner to which it is implemented needs to be adjusted on the socio-economic status comprised from the students attend to the individual school make-up to the community to which surrounds them. It is the hopes of this research that this topic opens doors to those who design it, implement it, practice it, monitor it, assess it, and train in how to use it, keep it in mind that the perception believed that it is working did not reflect the results of this study. Therefore, this is simply a tool to better serve the students of the education system. The next step needs to be taken when the initial training embarks, that there are monthly or bi-monthly meetings with follow-up care provided by the original trainers to continue the passion of encouraging our students to achieve great things through possession of their learning and academic success. One of the many benefits behind behavior interventions are to identify those students needing that extra educational assistance and provide them with the necessary tools to make better personal decisions in modifying their behavior by empowering them with educational choices.

Limitations

After the data was collected and calculated into SPSS, several problems surfaced from the beginning to the results. One limitation was that the return rate did not meet the expectations of the researcher. Surveys solicited input from the RTI Specialist/Coordinators to the 158 school districts within the state of Mississippi, only 32% of the school districts responded to the study. Despite sending and resending, many still did not get returned even with the bright neon-colored survey with due date reminder.

Another limitation for this study stems from the results of high perceptions of important teacher qualities that make an intervention successful. Despite the high teacher perceptions, the test scores were not reflective in the comparison of state test scores. There are clearly other variables hindering the increase in student achievement and academic success. This finding ponders the thought of possible alternatives as to why the research did not meet expectations. It may be that teacher qualities only result to the success of the intervention, not the measurement of student test scores.

An additional limitation for this study was that behavior/discipline referrals were not examined collectively with other forms of behavior modification. The research was to focus on the correlation between RTI and student achievement. Personal behavior has undoubtedly suffered at the hands of others and to judge a person by one form of assessment is biased in nature. This is where interventions lasting over a period of time are more effective than to make an assessment based a single, comprehensive exam. It must be taken into account that if someone were to have a bad day, they would continue to display that aggression in their work or behavior. This is where bias plays a dramatic role in how effective any assessment should be weighed solely.

Recommendations for Future Research

One recommendation would be to strategically plan to send questionnaires at the beginning of the school year. The anticipation for quick returns was expected since numerous amounts of educational data are released from the previous school year. This is not the case and is the recommendation

to contact school districts as early as possible and not wait until the beginning of the school year.

An additional recommendation would be to include asking the year and grade RTI was implemented for better data comparison. This study was limited without this question because there was no way to determine if the success of RTI was in direct correlation to why MCT2 Language Arts scores did not increase for those two academic school years. It could not be in the assumption that RTI was even implemented in these concurring grades to correlate to the MCT2 Language Arts for 7th graders in 2010 and 8th graders in 2011.

Another recommendation would be to gather data regarding what RTI Specialists/Coordinators believe to be the reasons to be for their success. This study limited them with the important teacher qualities needed to make RTI successful by having them rate on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. Since the perceptions results had a high percentage, it was shocking that the state test scores did not reflect any gains at all. These flaws found after the study of the questionnaire possibly limited valuable research discoveries.

A different recommendation would be to not limit the focus on just Language Arts, but in other core MCT2 subject areas. A medley of subject areas could offer more of an accurate measurement to student achievement and academic success. The reading components of the MCT2 might offer insight as to discoveries on why their state test scores did not show an improvement if they have an inability to read.

A broader recommendation would be to continue the research into the fidelity of RTI and its assessments. A future study could look into how the RTI assesses students to determine any prejudice or bias and how it affects the outcome to the intervention or with the interaction of the participant.

The final recommendation would consider other variables not focused in the study to be identified, researched, and analyzed to further the boundaries on this topic. An additional measure would be to look at the student's composition to determine the potential variables instead of emphasizing on the perceptions of important teacher qualities.

Summary

Again, as mandates are passed down, the responsibility lands solely in the laps of our teachers to meet the needs of our children. While increasing academic improvements within the school districts of Mississippi by meeting AYP or QDI, the needs of our students are continuously monitored and adjusted to improving achievement through state test scores;. Schools are charged with meeting those needs by implementing new behavioral programs designed to instill incentives and utilize tools to creating a sturdy educational foundation.

Collaboration between educational leaders and communities fosters a greater love for learning by reexamining the basis of the educational system. To do this, pre-teacher services are directed to the universities to improve the quality of teachers through rigorous and relevant apprenticeship so when they enter the classroom, they are more prepared for the demographics to the classroom. Behavioral programs individualize these needs and outline a more desirable

focus to the task at hand. As with any type of training, it is vital to identify factors related to student achievement. To associate teacher qualities, student discipline and attendance referrals, failing a grade, aging out, teaching/learning styles all have to be recognized when individualizing educational goals. The teacher qualities selected for this study resulted in no significant difference to which cannot be explained. The factors selected are essential when teaching a class regardless of its outcome or assigned task as to the high percentage of perceptions. The results did not offer any additional projected outcomes, but that there was no direct link between RTI and student achievement for the school districts who participated.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **11071202**
 PROJECT TITLE: **Closing the Gap Between Response to Interventions (RTI) and Student Achievement**
 PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**
 RESEARCHER/S: **Melissa A. Bouchér**
 COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**
 DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & Research**
 FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**
 IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Exempt Approval**
 PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: **08/09/2011 to 08/08/2012**

Lawrence A. Hosman

 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 Institutional Review Board Chair

8-10-2011

 Date

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO RTI COORDINATOR/SPECIALIST REQUESTING PERMISSION

August 8, 2011

Dear RTI Specialist,

My name is Melissa Bouch er and I am completing the final requirements to complete my candidacy in the Doctoral Program from the University of Southern Mississippi. I am currently working on a research project entitled, ***Closing the Gap between Response to Intervention (RTI) and Student Achievement***. My research seeks to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in students' MCT2 scores in correlation to perceptions while in the RTI process. This research will survey RTI Specialists in each of the 152 school districts in the state of Mississippi.

I am writing to request permission for you to assist in my study as it relates to your school district. The study will be completed by means of a thirty question style survey. RTI Specialists will be asked to complete the survey during normal, school hours. This survey should take no more than 15 – 20 minutes of the participant's time to complete the questionnaire. I have enclosed a copy for you to complete.

All responses will be completely anonymous and confidential. Each survey requires the respondent to provide their school district when completing the questionnaire. A pseudonym will be used in reporting of results and no school district will be identified by their names in the study. This will be necessary to match the correct state data to your district.

This study will be reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research studies involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research respondent should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266 – 6820.

Please complete the survey and return in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Bouch er

APPENDIX C

RTI & STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT SURVEY

Closing the Gap between RTI & Student Achievement

1. Demographic Information

While participation in this survey is purely voluntary, your cooperation is critical to make the results of the survey comprehensive, accurate, and timely. All responses are kept CONFIDENTIAL and are used for data analysis purposes only!

1. What is the name of your school district?

2. Are you:

- RTI/Behavioral Specialist
- Administrator
- TST Chair
- Counselor
- Teacher
- Other

(please specify)

3. What grade span do you teach?

- K - 2nd grade
- 3rd - 5th grade
- 6th - 8th grade
- 9th - 12th grade

4. Does your school use a behavioral prevention program?

- Yes, go to Question #6
- No, go to Question #5 only

5. What alternate method does your school use as a behavior prevention program?

6. Which of the following programs do you use?

- RTI or PBIS / Academic
- Tier I of RTI / Behavior (Incl. PBIS)
- Other

(please specify)

Closing the Gap between RTI & Student Achievement

7. If yes to Question #4, how long has the program been implemented?

8. What specific method of assessment or screening does your district use for identifying Tier II /III students?

9. At what grade(s) are interventions implemented?

10. Reason for student interventions? (Check all that apply)

- Academic Reasons
- Staff Recommendation
- Discipline/Behavior
- Parent Request
- Attendance
- MCT2 Scores
- Other

(please specify)

11. Who completes the assessment/screener?

- RTI/Behavioral Specialist
- Teacher
- TST Chair
- Counselor
- Other

Other (please specify)

Closing the Gap between RTI & Student Achievement**12. Was there any RTI Training?** Yes No

If Yes, who received it

13. If yes to Question #12, how many people were trained?**14. If yes to Question #12, was there additional support provided for after the training session?** Yes No**15. Was the training shared with others?** Yes No**16. What specific areas are observed for interventions? (For example: Reading, Math, Language, etc.)****17. When implementing our behavioral plan, a system for rewarding behavioral expectations was established.** Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**18. On average, what is the frequency of intervention implementation?** Daily Weekly Monthly

Closing the Gap between RTI & Student Achievement**19. How long do interventions last?**

- 4 weeks
- 8 weeks
- 12 weeks
- Other

Other Comments

20. Did the interventions meet the individual's needs?Yes ___% of student's who met their goal No **21. Do you think the interventions for the current students in your school are successful?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

22. What teacher and/or teacher qualities are important for a successful intervention?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

23. Rate teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful - Respect/Motivational.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Closing the Gap between RTI & Student Achievement

24. Rate the teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful - Caring/Understanding.

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

25. Rate teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful - Job Satisfaction/Teaching Experience.

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

26. Rate teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful - Subject Area/Content Knowledge.

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

27. Rate teacher quality needed for interventions to be successful - A Safe & Inviting Environment.

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

Closing the Gap between RTI & Student Achievement

28. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your experience level with the RTI process.

- Highly experienced
- Experienced
- Some experienced
- Little experience
- No experience

29. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your comfort level with the RTI process.

- Extremely comfortable
- Very comfortable
- Comfortable
- Slightly comfortable
- Not comfortable at all

30. Please offer any additional comments, suggestions, and/or concerns regarding this survey that could be vital to this research that was not aforementioned.

31. 2009 - 2010 MCT2 Language Arts Score 7th Grade

32. 2010 - 2011 MCT2 Language Arts Score 8th Grade

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