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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS OF THE ROLE OF
MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT—FORMALLY RTI— IN
BRINGING ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY FOR BLACK BOYS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRAUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY

LA WANNA M. WELLS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In writing this dissertation, I will reference a Bible verse that exudes all I feel: “Whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48 King James Version,). This dissertation was no small undertaking, and it has taken Jesus to make it to the end. Therefore, I thank Jesus for giving me the fortitude, the desire and support systems to enable me to reach my dream of being Dr. La Wanna Wells and for making me able to help America’s babies get the love and support in which they deserve regardless of their skin color and birthright.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Laws to Address Disproportionality in America’s Special Education and Legal Systems

The reauthorized *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* of 2004 or IDEA sanctioned schools to address the disproportionate number of children of color who were identified for Special Education. Disproportionality is when the percentage of a certain demographic is overrepresented in a given area at odds to the statistical expectation due to underlying racial factors. For example, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus* online (2015) defines ‘disproportionate’ as “having or showing a difference that is not fair, reasonable, or expected: too large or too small in relation to something” (Merriam-Webster.com.). Furthermore, the reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 is a federal education law that requires that states provide accountability measurements to ensure all students succeed to promote equitable achievement for marginalized groups (students of color, students of poverty, students with disabilities, and English learners). The intention behind the law is to provide opportunity and access to those marginalized groups that have historically been underserved.

Black Males and Disenfranchisement

One marginalized group that has a history of disproportionate amounts of success and failures are people of color. This concept of disproportionality is addressed by Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, who attributes the long term effects of slavery in America as the cause of the disproportionate amounts of people of color, primarily the African American male, who are overly represented in our prison system but are as equally underrepresented in the job market. Alexander (2010) attributes the disenfranchisement of the Black males to the ramification of America's history and states:

The clock has been turned back on racial progress in America, though scarcely anyone seems to notice... More black men are imprisoned today than at any other moment in our nation's history. More are disenfranchised today than in 1870... Young black men today may be just as likely to suffer discrimination in employment, housing, public benefits, and jury service as a black man in the Jim Crow era. (pp. 180-181)

Alexander goes on to say that the disproportionate number of Black males incarcerated is "the new normal, the new racial equilibrium" or the modern Jim Crow, the modern disenfranchisement of African American males" (p. 181).

Furthermore, Alexander (2012) states that Black men have disappeared from their households and society. She states the following:

We may wonder aloud 'where have the black men gone?' but deep down we already know. It is simply taken for granted that, in cities like Baltimore and

Chicago, the vast majority of young black men are currently under the control of the criminal justice system or branded criminals for life. This extraordinary circumstance—unheard of in the rest of the world—is treated here in America as a basic fact of life, as normal as separate water fountains were just a half century ago. (p. 181)

This transfer of Black boys of color from high school to Black men in prison is titled the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Dancy, 2014, p. 476). Dancy states the “school-to-prison pipeline refers to the disturbing national trend in which children are funneled out of public schools and into juvenile and criminal justice systems,” as a form of further disenfranchisement and disproportionality in regards to the Black male (p. 476). In Dancy’s study that aimed at theorizing the contributors to high incarceration rates, titled: “(Un)Doing Hegemony in Education: Disrupting School-to-Prison Pipelines for Black Males,” Dancy attributes the systemic low expectations for Black males in the classroom to the conversion of students labeled as school discipline problems into becoming future inmates, and that the constructs (conceptual associations) of America as a system of belief and bias, does little to address the perpetuation of the overrepresentation of Black males in the outer limits of society. Dancy stated the need to address the disenfranchisement of the Black male both locally and nationally as follows:

If this hegemony is not resisted on macro-and micro-levels, much is at stake. America suffers when school-to-prison pipelines continue to persecute black males. Indeed, society has an opportunity to fulfill its own interests (i.e., increased tax revenue, reduced reliance on social services, and rising civic engagement)

through supporting black male education and achievement. Instead, America appears to be forsaking its duty to educate all citizens in favor of fulfilling the low and unspeakable expectations of a sordid national past. (p. 490)

Dancy has argued that it is up to all levels of authority to address the disenfranchisement of the Black male. “American history is replete with defining moments in the quest among disenfranchised groups for equal educational opportunities” (Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004). Another reason listed by the study conducted by Harris et al. in the article “African Americans and Multicultural Education: A Proposed Remedy for Disproportionate Special Education Placement and Underinclusion in Gifted Education” as a probable reason as to why African American males are less successful in American society and its public schools is that they are “involuntary minorities” in that they subconsciously reject assimilation with mainstream American values and ideals, as in Eurocentric ideals, and act out aggressively or disrespectfully to white authority figures. Harris et al. attribute the “unhealthy assimilation” of people of color to their history of forced slavery or forced emigration and stated:

Such subordinate minorities as African Americans, Mexicans, and Native Americans had all been ill-treated by White Americans and either came to the United States unwilling or were cordoned off on reservations. Consequently, many marginalized students now resist assimilation, almost instinctively, by developing an oppositional social identity in which they rebel against schooling. These groups are referred to as involuntary minorities. (p. 310)

In addition, some studies argue that the rejection of “American values” has preceded the inability of the African American male to obtain success in education attainment, employment attainment, etc. Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, and Marshall (2014) cite the internalization of negative stereotypes or the rejection of mainstream ideals as the probable causes for increased suspension rates and/or referrals to Special Education programs for the Black male. Gibson et al. stated:

Many students also were critical of their Black peers. They expressed the opinion that Black students receive more suspensions because they misbehave more than other students. Some of these responses suggest that some Black students have internalized a negative view of Black students' behavior, and that some of their peers may have developed an oppositional identity. (p. 277)

Furthermore, peer-edited research by Leitner, Hehman, Deegan, and Jones (2014) indicates a relationship between poor self-image due to racial discrimination and achievement; it concluded that African American students may disengage from his or her education and the probable cause of this disengagement is self-protection to protect oneself from rejection or negative feedback atypical of a marginalized group. Also Brown, Barbarin, and Scott (2013), stated that “in gender and racial comparative studies, Black boys are suggested to have relative difficulty in their social functioning.” This difficulty is posited as social incompetencies due to lack of adequate care and/or emotional support prior to formalized education, resulting in disruptive and reactive behavior in a formal education setting. In addition, Leitner et al. (2014) call this self-protecting disengagement as “adaptive disengagement.” Leitner et al. state the following:

Given that engaging in unsuccessful domains can diminish self-esteem, one possibility is that dynamic engagement is an important element of self-esteem maintenance. Specifically, individuals may protect self-esteem by disengaging from isolated instances of negative feedback, a process we refer to as adaptive disengagement. This process is adaptive because it involves responding to environmental cues with changes in engagement. (p. 1436)

Leitner et al.'s adaptive disengagement research suggest that due to the social biases placed on Black males, Black males internalize the negative feedback and emotionally disengaged from stressful environments as a form of self-protection, thus perpetuating the cycle of disenfranchisement.

Social Justice Efforts

The disenfranchisement of systems that perpetuate racial, gender, or social identity is the aim of social justice. For example, Rawls (2010) stated: "Commonly, social justice is a policy-making theory that tries to ensure that all members of society are treated fairly and that all have the same opportunities to partake of and share in the benefits of society" (p. 14). Social justice efforts have been set in place to aid the Black male in obtaining an American education. These social justice efforts target "an end to discrimination based on race, creed, ethnicity, income, or sex...." It targets "...economic justice that provides equality," and it "...promotes equal access to education and job placement" (p. 14). The aim behind social justice is equality for marginalized groups, which may be groupings by color, gender, race, creed, income, power, self-rejection, etc.

Pimpare (2008) stated that social justice would benefit Blacks who are the majority of the impoverished and the majority of those who are or were jailed and are disallowed to vote. Pimpare states that Black males, followed by Hispanic males, are the highest prison population although they are “minorities” in the sheer number of the national population. Pimpare states the following:

Another omission, given the range of policy domains attended to here, is our criminal justice policy: the majority of those confined within American prisons and jails are black and Hispanic men, and overwhelmingly poorer and less educated. This not only distorts our electoral system, thanks to the varied felon disenfranchisement statutes in most states, but exacerbates the problems in low-income communities of color, as the males who could serve as fathers and as wage-earners are plucked from their neighborhoods (and then counted as residents of the cities in which they are incarcerated, conferring an electoral bonus for prison sites, not unlike the bonus once granted to slave-holding states by the three-fifths clause). (p. 574)

Children of poverty. Pimpare (2008) also attributed the continuation of social injustices to wealth and income disparities. He stated, “In the first years of the twenty-first century the United States has levels of income and wealth inequality not seen since the eve of the 1929 stock market crash, or perhaps since the late nineteenth century” (p. 572). The wealth distribution within America is congruent with race and adversely affects African American children more so in today’s modern times than years past. Specifically, African American children who were born into poverty in 1950 were 1.6

times more likely to die before his or her first birthday in comparison to a white child; yet, in 2002, an African American child born into poverty was 2.4 times more likely to die before his or her first birthday in comparison to a white child (p. 573). One often cited reason as to the increased death rate of children of color is the continuation of subpar living conditions and segregation. As a result, children of color are more likely to experience inadequate educations due to poor school funding, the inability of schools in poor districts to retain high quality teachers, and the inability of schools to access necessary school materials because a school's funding is based primarily on local taxes. For example, Richard Kahlenberg (2012), author of "Magnifying Social Inequality," stated:

Inequality is growing in the United States, and social mobility is slowing. A study by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 62 percent of Americans raised in the top one-fifth of the income scale stay in the top two-fifths; 65 percent born in the bottom fifth stay in the bottom two-fifths," and that "education, long praised as the great equalizer, no longer seems to be performing as advertised. (pp. 1-2)

Along with Kahlenberg, Pimpare (2008) supports the notion of Blacks are remaining poor and a competitive education as not the norm for Blacks as Pimpare stated:

Because of the manner in which residential class segregation (also on the rise) relates directly to how schools are funded, in these places classes are larger, teacher pay is lower (helping to drive away the better ones), libraries are poorly stocked, and computer and other equipment is harder to come by. In some of the worst of these schools, the dropout rate is over 60 percent. The consequence is a

vicious cycle, fostering yet more inequality as the children in these schools are less likely to have the education, skills, and social networks that will help them secure better-paying and upwardly mobile jobs. (p. 573)

The “vicious cycle” of “fostering yet more inequality” for people of color due to the economic divide was studied in the article “Quantifying Separate But Equal” (Osypuk, Galea, McArdle, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2009), which addressed neighborhood poverty and stated:

This analysis found that not only is the average neighborhood poverty environment worse for the average Black or Hispanic person compared to Whites but also that the racial-ethnic distributions in neighborhood environment barely overlap and that this lack of overlap is strongly associated with racial residential segregation.... Not only do minorities disproportionately inhabit high-poverty neighborhoods but Whites also disproportionately inhabit low-poverty ones. (p. 25)

Both Kahlenberg and Pimpare assert that poverty is prevalent among Black neighborhoods and schools, which are funded poorly due to primary reliance on local property tax, which does not generate much money to be levied by schools to support the school program to fund education. In turn, Blacks are not competitive academically and/or in the career market due to a lack of resources and a systems failure. The system of education continues to fall behind the needs of minorities.

Nationally, America is filled with a wide array of people who are either wealthy, middle class, or poor. The majority of those who live in poverty are people of color.

Historically, a person's financial status, social status and scope of influence is often linked to one's race and one's culture. In America, children born into poverty are often the children of the impoverished, who are usually of color, and it is the perpetuation of status, generationally, and lack of status that is realized in America's school systems. Students of poverty are also more likely to be involved in illegal activity thus leading to high expulsion rates of Black boys from schools and into America's prison systems. Alexander (2010) calls this transfer of Black boys *from schools to prison* "The New Jim Crow." Alexander, a civil rights lawyer, describes how prisons are a covert way to rob Black men of opportunity, and that this new, less overt path of racism has the same effects as Jim Crow laws of the 1930's. She compares the overrepresentation of Black men in the prisons of today to the lynchings and denial of access of Black men of yesteryears. She states the following in regards to the New Jim Crow:

What has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language we use to justify it. In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color "criminals" and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational

opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it. (p. 2)

Alexander likens poverty to less access and opportunity and describes how it is a system that cycles back around, which may lead to negative routes for children of color who are also children of poverty. Like Alexander, Fitzsimmons (2008) states that poverty is a cycle that continues to harm future generations. She states:

Children of poverty are more likely to leave school with lower levels of reading and academic proficiency, which increases the difficulty of getting and keeping living wage jobs. The odds that these children will raise their own children in conditions of economic poverty are then increased, and the unfortunate cycle starts once again. Indeed, children raised in families in which parents do not have a high school education are twice as likely as their schoolmates to suffer problems in academic achievement (Schorr, 1988). It is integral to focus support on these populations because the economic differences between low-income families, middle-and upper-income families, or the so-called have and have-nots—is greater in recent years than at any other time in our history since 1929. (Gaziano, 1997)

An avenue in which the perpetuation of the lack of status for the “have-nots” might be addressed is in our education system. The next section will discuss educational

laws such as ESEA, IDEA, RtI, and MTSS and the government's response to racial inequality and social injustice.

Additional Government Responses to Racial Inequality and Social Injustice

Elementary and Secondary Education Act Becomes Enhanced under No Child Left Behind

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, impoverished students received federal funding to increase access and opportunity for low income households. Ten years later, students with disabilities had the legal right to access education. The specifics of this legal right occurred under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975, which required that all schools create individualized learning plans or (IEP) for students with disabilities. Both ESEA and IDEA provided access to America's school systems, yet equitable access to resources still was disproportionate for marginalized groups such as Black males and students with disabilities. To address this systems failure, another comprehensive education mandate would take the place of ESEA and include the concepts of IDEA within it.

No Child Left Behind Act

Therefore, due to inequitable success rates of marginalized students, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was developed. NCLB was the re-authorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965. NCLB become our nation's most comprehensive education reform model in over thirty years at the time in which it was successfully passed by congress (isbe.state.il). NCLB intended to monitor the success of marginalized students as subgroups instead of total state proficiency scores to ensure the

proper attention was being paid to those students who historically and repeatedly fell in the cracks of achievement and support. According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington (2001), the major components of the No Child Left Behind Act are listed as follows:

The major focus of No Child Left Behind is to close student achievement gaps by providing all children with a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. The U.S. Department of Education emphasizes four pillars within the bill:

- 1) **Accountability:** to ensure those students who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency.
- 2) **Flexibility:** Allows school districts flexibility in how they use federal education funds to improve student achievement.
- 3) **Research-based education:** Emphasizes educational programs and practices that have been proven effective through scientific research.
- 4) **Parent options:** Increases the choices available to the parents of students attending Title I schools.

ESEA and Rtl

In regards to this research, No Child Left Behind was a government bill that addressed equity, yet it was the reauthorized ESEA of 2004 that specifically targeted the disproportionate numbers of African American male students (Black boys) who were being placed within Special Education services to be reviewed. The No Child Left Behind act was a federal funding metric that required states to circumvent the

overrepresentation of “certain types of people” (i.e., Black males) in Special Education within K-12 education. It does not state that the law is specifically on the behalf of the Black male; however, it does state that it is a legislative response to a culture that has systematically and systemically allowed the perpetuation of social inadequacies to continue at length and that special education students, low income students and minorities are often “left behind.” For example, “The overidentification of minorities in special education poses a challenge in appropriately referring, assessing, and providing services to students from non-English backgrounds” (Ericdigests.org, 2016). The goal behind the reauthorized ESEA’s Response to Intervention (RtI) is to have authentic special education students receiving special education services and to support students who lacked educational opportunity to receive intensified supports outside of the Special Education classroom. For example, the RtI Network defines the components of RtI as follows:

1. *High-quality, scientifically based classroom instruction.* All students receive high-quality, research-based instruction in the general education classroom.
2. *Ongoing student assessment.* Universal screening and progress monitoring provide information about a student’s learning rate and level of achievement, both individually and in comparison with the peer group. These data are then used when determining which students need closer monitoring or intervention. Throughout the RTI process, student progress is monitored frequently to examine student achievement and gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Decisions made regarding students' instructional needs are based on multiple data points taken in context over time.

3. *Tiered instruction.* A multi-tier approach is used to efficiently differentiate instruction for all students. The model incorporates increasing intensities of instruction offering specific, research-based interventions matched to student needs.
4. *Parent involvement.* Schools implementing RTI provide parents information about their child's progress, the instruction and interventions used, the staff who are delivering the instruction, and the academic or behavioral goals for their child.

Black Males in Special Education

According to research, there are disproportionate numbers of Black students identified as needing special education services who are not truly special education students. Harry and Klingner (2007) attribute education staff bias as the sole contributing factor to minority identification as in a student being assessed as in need of special education services for "perceived" deficits in learning and behavior. These researchers state that "ambiguity and subjectivity contribute to the disproportionate placement of minorities in special education" (p. 16). In addition, they assert "the categories with the highest incidence of disproportionate minority-group placement are also those categories whose criteria are based on clinical judgment," which indicates that social and cultural factors attribute to de facto negligence and cultural bias. According to these authors, this social injustice is perpetuated due to the inability of America's school systems to teach

minority students apart from ingrained prejudices. Harry and Klinger attribute the ingrained prejudices against minority students to the stigmas associated with how equal education rights began with the paramount court decision of *Brown v. [the] Board of Education*. They state:

The roots of this problem lie deep in U.S. history. Looking at how the mandate for school integration intertwined with special education, Ferris and Connor (2006) analyzed public documents and newspaper articles dating from *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 to the inception of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. The authors show how African American students entering public schools through forced integration were subject to low expectations and intense efforts to keep them separate from the white mainstream. As the provision of services for students with disabilities became a legal mandate, clear patterns of overrepresentation of Mexican American and African American students in special education programs emerged. Plagued by ambiguous definitions and subjectivity in clinical judgments, these categories often have more to do with administrative, curricular, and instructional decisions than with students' inherent abilities. (p. 17)

Minorities are placed in Special Education at high rates, with the highest being the African American male. For example, Moore, Henfield, and Owens (2008), author of "African American Males in Special Education," indicated that Black males were the most likely to be placed in special education and that Black males are overidentified by 300%. Furthermore,

African American males are frequently [twice as much] identified as seriously emotionally disturbed... These figures are even more striking when taking into consideration that African American males only constitute 17% of the student population... Too many African American males are placed in special education programs in comparison to their national representation found in public schools in general. (pp. 907-909)

There is a discrepancy between teaching and assessment of innate ability. These figures indicate that there is a disconnect between African American males and their school experiences. This is a social justice issue and has nationally been identified as one because the achievement gap broadens each year as African American males lag behind all other disaggregated groups. To lessen the achievement gap, preventative measures such as Response to Intervention practices are suggested amongst America's schools.

Response to Intervention (RtI) Evolves to Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

“Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems” (rti4success.org). In addition, RtI, now re-authorized as MTSS, is considered proactive measures of interventions as opposed to the “dumping” of African American males into special education, which was the former reality under the Discrepancy Model that is adequately coined the “wait to fail” model. Now that RtI/Multi-tiered Supports are mandated within IDEA, it would be beneficial to the field of education to gauge from principals how viable implementation may or may not be, and if RtI/Multi-tiered Systems of Support have empowered typically marginalized students. In order to answer these

questions, high school principals could present their perceptions of what curbing the disproportionality of Black boys (African American boys) in special education courses or remedial classes looks like in his or her district. Therefore, it is the premise of this study that schools that implement MTSS aim to close the achievement gap because systems of supports could be positive methods to address the social justice issue of the overidentification of African American/Black males in special education.

From Response to Intervention (RtI) to Multi-tiered Supports.

RtI addresses disproportionate amounts of Black males in Special education. According to the *National Center on Response to Intervention*, innate to the RtI (unmandated) law is a culturally responsive piece for educators to understand the cultural components of students. The article “Response to Intervention and the Disproportionate Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education” as listed on the National Center on Response to Intervention website introduces the benefits of RtI practices (p. 6).

Response to Intervention or RtI is a three-tiered approach for providing educational supports that range from general to intensive supports. According to Lenski (2012), RtI addresses students who come from impoverished, underprivileged neighborhoods from being improperly labeled as in need of special education services because of deficit academic and social experiences and is intended to offset historical racial inequality. It is also created upon the theory that some struggling students simply have not had enough learning opportunities, which is not a learning disability but rather an opportunity inability. Furthermore, it requires that administrators take a more active approach to

student learning. Mahoney (2013) stated: “With Response to Intervention being a federal initiative, all educational leaders find themselves immersed in the development of these processes and implementation of these plans with fidelity” (Retrieved from ProQuest Loyola University).

Multi-tiered Supports or MTSS is defined as a comprehensive system of supports ingrained in the instructional and behavioral programs of schools. Like RtI, there must be targeted interventions, yet MTSS expands upon supports to include behavioral supports. In addition, MTSS specifies that progress is monitored as part of an ongoing system to ensure implementation fidelity. MTSS continues the continuum of teaching the whole child in that it is a systems approach to education. For example, Forman and Crystal (2015) state: “School-based problem-solving consultation is seen as a key method for implementation of systems-level reforms such as MTSS” (p. 277). MTSS adds school wide problem solving techniques, addresses the social-emotional aspect to a child along with RtI academic and behavioral supports. As stated by the Illuminate Education (2019) website, MTSS supports must include the following:

1. Provide: “for a multi-tier system of supports for literacy services.” As well as for specific groups of students such as at-risk, disengaged, unmotivated, unresponsive, underperforming, or consistently unsuccessful students.”
2. Provide: “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making.”
3. Institute: “Positive behavioral support systems.”

4. Provide: “Services, programs, strategies, and interventions to ensure that students with disabilities, with developmental delays, who are English learners, and who are struggling with literacy can meet the challenging State academic standards.”

Purpose and Significance of Study

This study will go beyond assessment of the system of RtI/Multi-tiered Instruction that is typical in many studies and dissertations on this mandate and will focus on the *intention* of this Illinois mandate, which is: to lessen the achievement gap and to help those who are often overlooked in keeping with the purpose of educational leadership and social justice advocacy. This will be assessed in terms of the criteria of disproportionality listed under the RtI/Multi-tiered Instruction mandate and through the lens of social justice, specifically, in the area of culture bias using a fidelity tool created by George Batsche titled, “Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation (SAM).” The National Center on Response to Intervention defines ways in which social justice practices in terms of culture should occur. The National Center on Response to Intervention article, “Essential Components of RtI: A Closer Look at Response to Intervention” (2010) asserts the following:

The use of culturally and linguistically responsive practices by teachers and other school staff involves purposeful consideration of the cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic factors that may have an impact on students’ success or failure in the classroom. Attention to these factors, along with the inclusion of cultural elements in the delivery of instruction, will help make the strongest possible connection between the culture and expectations of the school and the culture(s)

that students bring to the school. Instruction should be differentiated according to how students learn, build on existing student knowledge and experience, and be language appropriate. In addition, decisions about secondary and tertiary interventions should be informed by an awareness of students' cultural and linguistic strengths and challenges in relation to their responsiveness to instruction. (p. 6)

Research Questions

The research within this study is intended to assess how culture and equity is enhanced by the RtI/Multi-tiered Supports mandate in terms of equity and justice for the field of educational leadership. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to assess and analyze through the lenses of high school principals' perceptions *if* and *how* the aim of cultural equity is enhanced by the RtI/Multi-tiered Supports mandate in terms of equity and justice for the Black male. The research questions listed below are the foundation of this qualitative, critical research study.

1. RQ1: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are the perceptions of social justice as it relates to the citizenship of all students, particularly African American males, within their building?
2. RQ2: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are their perceptions of how social justice principles apply to

their work as school leaders related to addressing disproportionality of African American males?

3. RQ3: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: How do social justice principles apply to the work of school leaders in relation to addressing the disproportionality of African American males in Special Education?

Methodology

This study will be a qualitative, critical research study. The criteria or the lenses provided within this critical research study in which the perceptions of these high school principals will be assessed using thematic coding and qualitative analysis. In other words, this research will review the perceptions of the participants within this study as to the feasibility of implementing MTSS in schools. Additionally, the instructional practices and belief systems of the participants within this study will be reviewed in regards to implementing RtI/Multi-tiered instructional practices. This is a critical research study because Flick (2013) states, “critical social research attempts to reveal the socio-historical specificity of knowledge and to shed light on how particular knowledges reproduce structural relations of inequality and oppression.” Within this critical research study, additional research of primary sources such as the RtI mandate, the Multi-tiered Systems of Support mandate, demographic and achievement data supplied by host administrators and state websites concerning achievement and course placement data of African-American/Black boys will be conducted. There shall be in-depth interviews of human

subjects and their oral histories as high school principals who hold the leadership position of the instructional leader in education. There will also be a self-assessment survey of MTSS implementation by the participants to understand their perceptions of ensuring MTSS systems with fidelity. The principals interviewed are from two distinct school regions: the south suburbs of Chicago and the northern suburbs of Chicago. They each will be interviewed on two occasions with an initial interview of 45 minutes and a two-week follow-up interview consisting of 15 minutes for triangulation as is necessary in oral histories. The principals' perceptions will be triangulated for patterns through meta-analysis of multiple variables such as demographic, tenure, years of service etc.

Finally, in the concluding chapter of this study (Chapter 5-Findings, Conclusions, and Implications), the qualitative findings will be reviewed through the lenses of education leaders as well as the guidelines of qualitative research. It is the goal of this study that the perceptions and experiences of principals who have implemented RtI/Multi-tiered Supports within their schools will be presented and used as a contribution to future study.

Key Terms

Due to the all-encompassing nature of a qualitative study, key terms are listed below as they relate to jargon associated with education (isbe.net), special education (greatschools.org), education laws (educationlaws.com), and language as seen in American, societal constructs (edglossary.edu).

1. Achievement Tests: Measures of acquired knowledge in academic skills, such as reading, math, writing and science.

2. Achievement Gap: Refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and minorities, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-income households.
3. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): NCLB required states to measure "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for school districts and schools receiving Title I funds with the goal of all students reaching the proficient level on reading/language arts and mathematics tests by the 2013-14 school year. States must define minimum levels of improvement as measured by standardized tests chosen by the state. AYP targets must be set for overall achievement and for subgroups of students, including major ethnic/racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient (LEP) students and students with disabilities.
4. Assimilation: The process of becoming part of a community or culture (macmillandictionary.com).
5. Black: A person born of African American descent.
6. Civil Rights Movement: It was a mass popular movement to secure for African Americans equal access to and opportunities for the basic privileges and rights of U.S. citizenship. Although the roots of the movement go back to the 19th century, it peaked in the 1950s and 1960s (scholastic.com).
7. Coding: The process of assigning a category to information or data collected.

8. Critical Race Theory: The belief that racism is ordinary, normal, and deeply embedded in everyday life and institutions (encyclopedia.com).
9. Cultural Competency: Awareness of one's own culture and its implications as well as understanding other cultures as well.
10. Culturally Responsive Interventions: Response to Intervention (RTI) as a culturally responsive model for ensuring evidence-based, high-quality opportunities to learn in inclusive settings for all students, including those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (nccrest.org)
11. Culture (School Culture): Generally refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity.
12. Disenfranchisement: Being deprived of a privilege or a right or a form of exclusion.
13. Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was a Great Society program enacted in 1965 that allocates federal funding for primary and secondary school education and forms the establishment of a national curriculum.

14. Equal Educational Opportunity Act: It is a law that says one's education cannot be denied based on race, color, sex, or national origin due to deliberate segregation (educationlaw.com).
15. Equity: Refers to the principle of fairness.
16. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): This is a law that supports equity-based federal funding and targets measures to decrease the achievement gap in schools.
17. Fidelity: Is the faithful/good attempt for the completion of an act.
18. IDEA: Federal law that provides for special education and related services to be eligible for children with special needs and disabilities.
19. Jim Crow: Laws that promote racism and segregation.
20. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): LRE requires that, to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities aged 3 through 21, in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled. The ISBE will monitor programs and institutions that serve students with disabilities to ensure that the first placement option considered is a regular education environment, with the use of supplemental aids and services as needed. Special classes, separate schooling, or other placements by which students with disabilities are removed from the regular education environment should occur only if the student's Individual Educational Program ("IEP") team determines that the nature or severity of the disability is

such that education in a regular classroom setting, even with the use of supplemental aids and services, cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

21. Mandate: State mandates are statutory provisions that states have placed on institutions.
22. Marginalized: To treat someone as insignificant due to gender, race, ability, etc.
23. Microaggressions: Intentional and unintentional verbal or nonverbal insults.
24. Minority: It usually means a specified societal group that may be small in numbers and therefore considered to have limited political influence, such as homosexuals or members of certain ethnic or religious groups.
25. Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): A comprehensive framework for progress monitoring, data and targeted instruction.
26. No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): NCLB was signed into law January 8, 2002. It is the latest revision of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and is regarded as the most significant federal education policy initiative in a generation. The overall purpose of the law is to ensure that each child in America is able to meet the high learning standards of the state where he or she lives.
27. Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS): Numerous studies have shown the positive impact of school-wide approaches on student behavior. Components of these approaches have included changes in structure, organization, and practices. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports is an

example of a school-wide approach focused on establishing a positive social culture and the behavioral supports needed for all children.

28. Primary Source: A source that is an original source at the time of study.
29. Purposive Sampling: To selectively choose participants in a qualitative study based upon the researcher's judgement.
30. Response to Intervention (RtI): [The goal to] improve the learning and performance of all students in grades K-12 by building the capacity of Illinois public school districts and schools to develop, use, and sustain a *multi-tiered system* of research-based curricula, instruction, intervention, and assessment.
31. Secondary source: Second-hand source usually in the form of a book or journal.
32. Socioeconomic Status (SES): An individual's or group's position within a hierarchical social structure. Socioeconomic status depends on a combination of variables, including occupation, education, income, wealth, and place of residence. (dictionary.com)
33. Social Justice: The objective of creating a fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognized and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest.
34. Special Education: Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of eligible kids whose educational needs can't be met through modification of the regular instructional program; provides for a range of options for services,

such as pull-out programs, special day classes; available to kids enrolled in public schools

35. Subcategory: Subordinate or second rate social placement.
36. Survey: A document that a participant completes according to his or her beliefs for data purposes.
37. Title I: Schools where at least 40 percent of the children in the school attendance area are from low-income families or at least 40 percent of the student enrollment from low-income families are eligible to receive federal Title I funds. The proportion of low-income families is most frequently measured by the percent of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch. Title I funds are to be used for programs designed to improve the academic achievement of children from low-income homes.
38. Transcription: A written record of an oral interview.
39. Transferability: A research finding that may be applied to similar research studies.
40. Triangulation: Using multiple data points to strengthen research.

Summary

Oppression of a group does not have to be intentional; instead, it can be so intertwined with how we think and how we behave that it may even exist within policies. Societal oppression is evidenced by achievement of the peoples who live within that society. As the Biblical scripture cites, “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:16, KJV). In

other words, the evidence of societal flaws within the inner workings of our education system is most prevalent in the status of the most ostracized sub-group: the African American male (Hucks, 2011). Historically, African American males are the least employed, the most imprisoned, and the most oppressed people in America. Hucks has described the existence Black males face. They are not successfully immersed in American society at alarming rates, nor are they accepted as seen by the systematic incarceration of Black males. This leads to the need for some solution to help Black males. Like the psychologist Jean Piaget asserted, assimilation is really a person's ability to use cognition and metacognition; therefore, we cannot expect Black males to be productive to the degree that other groups can be if they are the attainers of the least amount of education yet the attainers of the highest amounts of incarceration. We must meet Black males with solutions, because if we do not attack this societal weakness and address this ongoing system of disenfranchisement of Black males, we may soon have 80% of Black males incarcerated and high school dropout rates will continue to increase. For the purpose of this study, solutions to current policies to educate African American males are the focus, although other sub groups may benefit to the solutions found within these research findings. In upcoming chapters, the use of MTSS strategies will be analyzed by the researcher and school principals as to the perceptions of these principals about the effectiveness of MTSS in their public schools. The crux of this research is to understand and critique how MTSS and culturally responsive interventions impact Black males who would normally be incorrectly identified as in need of special education services; when in fact, they just needed education that offers MTSS supports for the

emotional, cultural and social underpinnings behind a history of low achievement for the Black male.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Education—Academics and Behavioral Disadvantages of the Black Male
Historical Perspective of the Black Male (1776-1954)**

No historical document within American culture garners as much significance as the *Declaration of Independence*, which states: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (www.history.org). All American laws refer to this historical document as the archetype of democratic ideals. Yet, a document written on July 4, 1776, more than 239 years ago, is still yet to be realized simply because not all the categories of people in America have access to an equitable share of resources due to low income or minority status. In particular, the Black male has advanced the least in job obtainment, financial stability, and education. Historically, Black males have been sold as slaves, denied access to education, lacked equitable job opportunities and status.

Atlantic Slave Trade and the Emancipation Proclamation

As early as the 13th century, African slaves were sold for profit and forced, unpaid labor. Africans were “ideal” slaves due to their darker skin, making them identifiable among their fairer skin captors and owners. The route from Africa to countries willing to purchase slaves was known as Atlantic Slave Trade due to it being a

route along the Middle Passage. Africans were taken from their homes, separated from families, raped, maimed, and murdered without penalty for their abusers. According to BBC's "The Story of Africa," the first groups of slaves were sold directly to Americans in 1518 and the American slave trade would not end until the year 1808, more than 290 years after America began purchasing slaves (Bbc.co.uk, 2019). Although the slave trade officially ended in 1808, slavery was not abolished in America until 1865.

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1865 is defined as the day slaves were freed, yet slaves were conveniently freed to increase the numbers of the northern army known as the union to combat southern states for government rule. The article, "Emancipation Proclamation" describes the freeing of African Americans from slavery was more politically motivated rather than an act of social justice. The article states:

The proclamation didn't actually free any slaves or destroy the institution of slavery itself—it still only applied to states in active rebellion, not to the slave-holding border states or to rebel areas already under Union control. In reality, it simply freed Union army officers from returning runaway slaves to their owners under the national Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Any escaped slaves who managed to get behind the lines of the advancing Union armies and any who lived in areas subsequently captured by those armies no longer had to be returned because, in the words of the proclamation, they were "thence forward, and forever free."

(HistoryNet, 2016)

Plessy v. Ferguson and Jim Crow South Living

African Americans returned to secondary status to Caucasian Americans post Emancipation Proclamation. The Civil War ended and efforts to keep access and opportunity from African Americans continued both legally and socially. The court ruling *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruled that separate is equal in 1896, thus maintaining racial segregation as a law. The ruling furthered the separation of races. The Supreme Court ruled the following:

A statute which implies merely a legal distinction between the white and colored races—a distinction which is founded in the color of the two races, and which must always exist so long as white men are distinguished from the other race by color—has no tendency to destroy the legal equality of the two races.

(www.encyclopedia.com, 2019)

African Americans continued to seek status and legal protection well into the 19th Century, yet restrictions on the rights of Blacks and violence in southern states against Black people challenged the citizenship of African Americans in America.

For example, Summers (2004) stated that the disenfranchisement of the Black male continued into the 19th Century. Summers states that Black men were oppressed by laws known as Jim Crow laws or laws that prevent Black men access to legal, economic, political, or social opportunities with the intention of limiting the evolution of Black people. Summers states as follows:

For black men in the United States, manhood was equally a matter of some consequence. The arrival of the twentieth century marked the maturation of Jim

Crow in the South, a complex of legal, economic, political, and social practices whose logic and mechanisms of oppression were primarily based on race but which also shaped the gender identity formation of blacks and gender relations within black communities. Disfranchisement, implemented at the state level and upheld by state and federal judiciaries between 1890 and the first decade of the twentieth century, attenuated the links between manhood and citizenship for blacks. Economic discrimination and the inability of most black families to survive solely on a male breadwinner's income militated against the patriarchal organization of the black household, further making it difficult to obtain manhood by dominant cultural standards. The ever-present threat of lynching and mob violence, which purportedly sought to police an aggressive black male sexuality and often incorporated the horrific act of castration, made any assertion of independence or brazen behavior a potentially perilous action. (pp. 14-15)

The living conditions aforementioned by Summers highlighted the Jim Crow South. According to Tuttle (2008), Jim Crow laws were “system of laws and customs that enforced racial segregation and discrimination throughout the United States, especially the South, from the late 1800s to the 1960s.”

Historical Perspective of the Black Male (1954-1990)

Brown v. Board of Education. The year 1954 continued the Civil Rights Movement or a further awakening of America's trend towards a desegregated nation due to *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Civil Rights Movement was a reaction to the social rejection of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling of the legal requirement to desegregate all

public entities, especially the public school case known as *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Brown Foundation (2013) explains the significance of *Brown v. Board of Education* and states:

What the *Brown* decision represents is at the core of United States history and the freedoms we enjoy. It reaffirmed the sovereign power of the people of the United States in the protection of their natural rights from arbitrary limits and restrictions imposed by state and local governments. Those rights are recognized in the Declaration of Independence and guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

With the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the current state of education for minorities in America was intended to be equal access to the same standard of instructional institutions, teachers etc., but it was not being enforced by school officials, governors, mayors and others. Schools were then forced by the National Guard to desegregate on behalf of President Kennedy and later President Johnson. Furthermore, this is why Martin Luther King, Jr. stated in his "I Have a Dream" speech that one day all children would have the same access to an equitable education. King stated:

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. (Americanrhetoric.com, 2019)

Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of integration and desegregation of education systems did occur, by court order, shortly after his assassination, but the reality of equal access has yet to be fully attained.

Post *Brown v. Board of Education*. According to Moore et al. (2008), post *Brown v. Board of Education* still is a system where African Americans have yet to realize the full access of the “American Dream” or cultural acceptance and status. Moore et al. describes how the effects of social bias and the lack of cultural competence has led to Black males lacking in education attainment. For example, Moore et al. states the following:

More than 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), it is unfortunate that African American males continue to experience educational inequalities and inconsistencies in public school systems all around the country. Educational gaps remain disturbing, persistent, and significant. Surprising as it may seem in 2006 [and currently], the nation has failed to remedy permanently the educational disparities found among different racial, gender, and socioeconomic student populations. Because African American males are disproportionately placed in special education, it is understandable that there is a heightened interest in this topic. (p. 51)

The periods of 1960-1990 were a time of reform and renewal for the Black male. Hundreds of years after the *Declaration of Independence*, firsts were still happening in education and status attainment for Black males. According to the (*Washington Post* 2001) news article titled “African American Men: Moments in History from Colonial

Times to the Present,” “James Meredith becomes the first Black man to attend the University of Mississippi [in 1962] after the governor, the Ku Klux Klan and a racist mob attempt to block his way”; “Thurgood Marshall is appointed the first Black Supreme Court Justice [in 1967] by President Lyndon Johnson”; “Gen. Daniel "Chappie" James Jr., becomes the first African American to achieve four-star rank [in 1975]”; and “Virginia elects L. Douglas Wilder as its first African American governor [in 1990]” (p. 1). What is truly significant, however, is that Wilder’s election was 215 years after the first Caucasian governors were elected in American during the Revolutionary War of 1775. This is one example of how minorities are disproportionately represented in leadership positions.

In the article, “Developing the Talents of African American Male Students during the Non School Hours,” Fashola (2003) stated: “Why focus on African American males? One of the terms frequently used to describe this population is endangered species” (p. 3). Fashola cites that Black males are “endangered” because the advancement of this group wanes far behind other demographics. Fashola argues that no demographic in America has had hundreds of years of desolation, self-destruction and disadvantage like the Black male. The author further goes on to cite how the futures of Black males are the results of unsuccessful educations that disproportionately reflect futures of unemployment, incarceration and the highest homicide rates in the nation. Chen (2018) states: “African American males have one of the highest incarceration and homicide rates in the country, and this has been the case for more than a decade.” The Black male’s unsuccessful integration into American culture has been attributed to historical sources. Sources such

as the prohibition of education for the Black male in times of slavery, post-slavery, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and the emergence of the inner city as in urban, low socioeconomic “potholes” of African American culture. The lack of an equitable education obtained by Black males has reached beyond the *Civil Rights Movement* of the 1960’s, beyond the systemic incarceration of Black males in the 1990’s well into the inequitable classrooms of the 21st Century.

Historical Perspective of the Black Male (1991-2014)

The concept of oppression is often seen as the unjust treatment of a person or group whether by control, the unintentional denying of, lack of access, or causing mental stress. Historically, Black males were not allowed to read or be educated due to laws under Jim Crow such as the Grandfather Clause that only allowed literate voters to vote. Today, instead of not allowing Black males to enter classrooms or to become literate, the research states that Black males are oppressed due to a systems failure whether intentional or not. Green (2008) argued that negative experiences of African American males during their elementary and secondary educations may have long-term effects such as incarceration in that there are more incarcerated Black males than there are in higher education institutions. Green further asserted that these negative experiences are ingrained in our education system because race is a social construct not biological.

Researchers have also suggested that Black males are systematically taught that education is for nerds by Black culture and that their customs via ingrained perspectives and behaviors are insufficient to immersion with white culture. Furthermore, Anderson, John, and Keltner (2012) enacted a study where they compared and contrasted household

norms that predisposition the white male to school; behaviors that are not ingrained within the African American culture leaving Black males at a disadvantage whether it be self-inflicted, through cultural norms and/or fear. Within this analysis of behavioral motivations of the Black male, Anderson, et al. claim:

During their early years, young Black boys in particular are warned and reminded repeatedly by their parents, teachers, and other Blacks that when they venture into the wider society, they are at racial risk and need to be careful. Operating as role models, they essentially say, ‘You have one-strike against you, and don't [behave in a way to] make it two....’ At the same time, growing up in “White” middle-class circumstances means that children have almost ready access to socially defined “cultural” enrichment acquired in the home environment and also in their local communities. ...In these settings, habits and conversations engaged in by “educated” adult caregivers [not the perpetuation of miseducation] and shared in the home and around the dinner table subtly but powerfully reinforce the norms of the school. By the time these students reach the school, generally they have been programmed to be receptive to the lessons of the school and not to behave in ways viewed somehow as deviant, and in need of explanation. This is not so for Black children of the inner city. (p. 594)

In analyzing the psychological research of Anderson et al. (2012), the assertion within his statements are that Black males are socially informed towards negative expected behavior. They are preconditioned to be fearful and preconditioned to reject social norms, which Anderson et al. asserted, makes Black males appear to be defiant and

unruly. In fact, they are simply untutored in “normal,” socially acceptable behaviors, which are, according to Anderson et al., in themselves biased because culture is the acceptance of ideal or “normal” behaviors. As stated by Anderson et al., Black males do not exhibit the behaviors of other cultures and demographics leaving them at a disadvantage to becoming successful members of America’s culture.

Opponents to the concept of Black male oppression cite that education is not about race or systemic failures but more about choice; therefore, the negative reinforcement of negative behaviors by the Black community lead to low achievement for Black males then who are responsible for their lack of education; the lack of education then often leads to criminal behaviors. Riley (2010) cites that

Blacks are 13% of the population but comprise 38% of prison or jail inmates in the U.S., and black-on-black violent crime is the norm. Blacks commit 52% of all murders and make up 49% of all murder victims -- 90% of them are killed by other blacks.

Riley’s article proposes that more Blacks are harmed by other Blacks than unfair social systems. He asks that Black families instill core beliefs into their children, but he believes that is unlikely when 70% of Black children are born to unwed mothers. “Apathy is the true villain of the ghetto” (Alex & Nazaryan, 2015).

Closing the Gap

Why are Black males historically the most adversely affected demographic in American society? Why is the Black male disengaged from the classroom? Researchers such as Irvin (2012), say that the daily rejection of Black men as a “less than” minority

and Black males' lack of connectivity to a society that reject them contributes to the achievement gap and poor behavior. Irvin attributed Black male aggression to teacher mismanagement of Black males due to teachers' fear and the lack of cultural awareness of this particular minority group as the most probable cause of Black male disengagement. He (Irvin) stated: "Toward that end, leading theories and research on student engagement suggest that there are actions that schools can take to increase at-risk students' behavioral and psychological engagement." With proactive measures, "students will suppress aggressive behaviors as these interfere with learning and may result in losing their connection to school" (Irvin, 2012). Irvin argued that positive reinforcement garners better outcomes than negative reinforcement. Excessive expulsions and special education behavioral plans serve to marginalize minority students, and Irvin iterated the need for more practical solutions conducive to student achievement. For example, the perpetuation of subpar achievement scores on standardized tests by students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system is low in comparison to other Illinois school districts that are well-funded and have less students of color. Simply stated, CPS is a broken system filled primarily with Black students; color does not negate failure, yet color does negate systemic opportunity.

In CPS, "the 2015 ACT, city-wide composite score for a white male on the ACT was a 22.4/36 and for a Black male it was a 16.3/36, well below the national average" (cps.edu). The composites were taken as the average of disaggregated scores for 112,007 students, showing that Black males are typically at the "below proficient" mark on the ACT. The Black male counterpart, the Black female, also struggles academically,

behaviorally and often lives in low income households, yet unlike the Black male whose adult male role model is often incarcerated or lives separate from a Black male's mother, the Black female has access to a role model, breadwinner and source of social information; that person is her mother. Black women are second to white men in education attainment, job attainment and home ownership.

Education Laws and Mandates

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) or ESEA

The mantra of “equal education” began with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Within the act, its purpose is stated as such: “The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (2.ed.gov). The goal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was to establish a standard of achievement for all types of students, to provide rich curriculums delivered by qualified instructors and to widen the scope of the local education governments. It was also the first comprehensive education program that targeted the allocation of resources and instruction to impoverished, low income areas where the students whom would benefit were of ethnic descent. The establishment of Title I programs began with this school reform act. Under Title I, students in poverty would benefit from equal access to education programs with the goal of lessening the achievement gap and the socioeconomic gap in America. According to Hansan (2016), the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965 was aimed towards the following goal within the ESEA bill:

On April 9, 1965, Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (P.L. 89-10), the most expansive federal education bill ever passed. It is significant to note the bill was enacted less than three months after it was introduced, as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty." A former teacher, President Johnson believed that equal access to education was vital to a child's ability to lead a productive life. This piece of legislation constituted the most important educational component of the "War on Poverty" launched by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Through a special source of funding (Title I), the law allocated large resources to meet the needs of educationally deprived children, especially through compensatory programs for the poor.

With this law, America's impoverished children would have a chance for a free and adequate education. Furthermore, it was the first time where all students of any race, gender or class had a legal right to an education.

Equal Educational Opportunity Act (1974) or EEOA

The federal and local governments have truly aimed to give all students a free and public education, and this goal was expanded to encompass immigrant families. The belief of providing an education for all students was furthered with the passing of the 1974 federal law known as the *Equal Educational Opportunity Act*. Basically, "the Federal law requires states and school districts to provide an equal educational opportunity to students learning English. States and districts must take "appropriate

action” to “overcome language barriers,” which usually means teaching academic content in the language students understand, while also teaching them English (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). For example, in the study, *Ambiguity and Subjectivity Contribute to the Disproportionate Placement of Minorities in Special Education*, conducted by Klingler, personal teacher bias contributed to the adverse labels often placed on minorities. Klingler (2007) argues that the disproportionate numbers of Black males and other minorities that are placed into Special Education courses are unfounded and are attributable to cultural bias. He asserted:

When a habit of looking for intrinsic deficit intertwines with a habit of interpreting cultural and racial difference as a deficit, the deck is powerfully loaded against poor students of color. Speaking about her African American 1st graders, one teacher in the study pointed out that ‘they don't know how to walk, talk, or sit in a chair. It's cultural!’ Comments like this really don't refer to whether the students can or cannot do these things. Instead, they show that the manner in which the students do these things is unacceptable to the teacher. The teacher's focus on deficiencies predisposed her to see the students as limited by their culture and, ultimately, to refer almost one-half of her class of normally developing children for evaluation for special education.... If it is evident that students' early home and community experiences have not prepared them well for schooling, what do schools do?” (p. 20)

Klingler emphasized that schools needed alternatives beyond referrals to special education courses or school expulsions as solutions for targeting nonconformity by Black males. He

went on to state that if Black males were labeled by ability rather than being forced to fit into ideal behaviors and perspectives, then we would see less marginalization of them and obtain better results in educating Black males. His thesis was that all students would receive an equal education as the EEOA requires because referrals and interactions would not be incited by prejudices and misconceptions.

No Child Left Behind Act (2001) or NCLB

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is a comprehensive education law in the United States aimed at school reform. No Child Left Behind Act is a revision to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. NCLB was an update to the past 50 years of education law with two new key components—federal fiscal allocation and school systems remediation. Within NCLB, changes such as more federal influence within the running of American schools contrast to the original ESEA that gave more local control. This is manifested through funding a system of rewards seen monetarily through increased funding for educational programming. America's overall school funding system is fixed due to little revenues garnered beyond state income taxes; any chance to increase limited dollars would greatly add to a school district's budget to pay for instructional costs such as in teacher pay, technology, capital improvements and so forth. Additional funds provided by the federal government in the form of No Child Left Behind monies are an incentives for schools to be in compliance with federal regulations and expectations. This is especially true for highly impoverished districts because they rely on local property taxes that are low in value. The education organization for administrators known as ASCD (Educational Leadership, 2008) stated the following:

Public school funding in the United States comes from federal, state, and local sources, but because nearly half of those funds come from local property taxes, the system generates large funding differences between wealthy and impoverished communities. Such differences exist among states, among school districts within each state, and even among schools within specific districts.

As a result of funding to low income districts from funds under NCLB programs, particularly Title I funds, schools without adequate funding have a chance to obtain monies that they would not normally have access to, yet the offset of this is that impoverished districts generally have students with low achievement and high mobility rates. Therefore, NCLB funds may or may not reach the districts that are in the direst positions, yet funds provided by the federal government can offset district debt and are intended to be used for such. For example,

Traditionally, Title I money, though ostensibly targeted for low-income children, has been spread very thin. Under the "basic grant" formula (the bulk of Title I funding), funds go to schools with as few as 2% of children below the poverty level draining limited government funds. (schoolfunding.info)

Within *No Child Left Behind*, guidelines to meet federal regulations focus on a district's ability to offer instruction and curricula to enable student proficiency in math and reading. Proficiency requirements such as *Adequate Yearly Progress* or AYP, targeted areas of math and reading, making Illinois schools accountable for student outcomes garnered by state achievement tests because of the No Child Left Behind Act of

2001. Students had to make *Adequate Yearly Progress* (2002) to be in compliance with federal regulations:

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires all states to measure each public school's and district's achievement and establish annual achievement targets for the states that wish to access Title I funds. The overarching goal is for all students to meet or exceed standards in reading and mathematics by 2014. Each year, the state will calculate a school or district's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to determine if students are improving their performance based on the established annual targets. (isbe.net)

The No Child Left Behind Act targets a school's structure, fiscal assistance and staffing. Unfortunately within this model, if students, particularly sub groups that traditionally achieve less such as Black males and special education students do not meet AYP, the funding provided by the federal government will be cut in that school district. As a result, other education programs like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA sanctioned comprehensive reforms that required the scores of students with disabilities to improve as well. For example,

On December 3, 2004, President Bush signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, reauthorizing IDEA and aligning the law with the goals and purpose of No Child Left Behind. These two historic laws are now working together to ensure that high standards are set for all students with disabilities, and that every child receives a quality education. (isbe.net)

Both IDEA and NCLB promote high standards for all students.

No Child Left Behind Act and Disaggregated Accountability

NCLB's stated purpose is to increase 'accountability' for schools by requiring rigorous state educational standards in reading and math by mandating state testing to determine whether children are meeting those standards. Test results are broken out by race, ethnicity, income, English proficiency, and disability. (Siegel, 2014, p. 54)

The disaggregation of school achievement data by demographics is a shift in previous holistic scores due to its nature of requiring schools to improve achievement for *all* students; demographic data requirements now hold schools responsible for the achievement of the marginalized as well. Furthermore, Siegel asserted: "Reading or math difficulties caused by lack of instruction are not covered. When Congress amended IDEA in 2004, it made a distinction between reading problems covered by a learning difficulty and those caused by poor or no instruction" (p. 56). Meaning, special education is intended for students who truly have disabilities and is not a containment center for the poor, those of minority status and equitable social disadvantages. Additionally, special education resources can be provided to those who qualify as having a disability, not for those who have a lack of educational experience.

IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) is the reauthorization of IDEA, a federal law governing all states. Specifically, IDEA "establishes a formal process for evaluating children with disabilities and providing specialized programs and services to help them succeed in school. Parents play a central

role in determining their child's educational program" (Siegel, 2014). Under IDEIA, stricter laws and guidelines are in place. The guidelines require schools and parents to work together. The changes included: a school district must "conduct the initial evaluation within 60 days" of parental consent; "... the requirement of 'severe discrepancy' between achievement and intellectual ability" is discouraged; and the costs to schools incurred by parents who "request more than one evaluation in a school year" has changed to agreement by both the parent and the school district to support teamwork and the balance of power (Siegel, 2014).

No Child Left Behind and Response to Intervention (RtI)

Under NCLB, the focus is on high stakes testing and increased access for marginalized students. The goal is to allot much needed federal funds to those school systems that aim towards increasing the education attainment of students historically marginalized. Moreover, the RtI system of interventions is intended to identify students who need either increased instruction as opposed to a Special Education designation based upon lack of educational opportunity rather than a true disability. RtI is a holistic approach to educating. According to the article, "RTI: A Practitioner's Guide to Implementing Response to Intervention" (Mellard & Johnson 2008) stated:

RTI [Response to Intervention] represents one of the many policy initiatives that compete for a school's resources, attention, understanding, and implementation. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) include an emphasis on accountability and the use of scientifically based curricula. In addition to these federal initiatives,

state and local policies related to assessment and instruction affect school functioning. Ultimately, most policy initiatives have a shared goal--improved learning for all students--although they often focus on a narrow aspect the curriculum, school functioning, or school population. (p. 11)

The RTI Network (2006) also stated that “a common RTI framework may strengthen RTI implementation by helping schools understand how programming becomes increasingly intensive” (rtinetwork.org). Schools are accountable for ensuring each child within their district receives instructional supports as part of a school-wide system. Specifically, RtI is intended to ingrain behaviors within the administration of education. Mellard and Johnson (2008) list five aspects to the RtI model. These steps are as follows:

The following are core requirements of a strong RtI model:

1. *High-Quality, Research-Based Classroom Instruction.* All students receive high-quality instruction in the general education setting. General education instruction is research based; general education teachers assume an active role in students’ assessment in the classroom curriculum.
2. *Universal Screening.* School staff, including the classroom teachers, conduct universal screening of academics and behavior. Specific criteria for judging the achievement of all students are applied in determining which students need closer monitoring or intervention.
3. *Progress Monitoring at All Tiers.* Progress monitoring is essential. In Tier 1, progress monitoring allows teachers to readily identify those learners who are

not meeting expected standards. In Tiers 2 and 3, progress monitoring enables teachers to determine the interventions' effectiveness and to make changes as needed.

4. *Research-Based Interventions at Tiers 2 and 3.* When a student's screening or progress monitoring results indicate a deficit, an appropriate instructional intervention is implemented. School staff implement specific, research-based interventions to address the student's difficulties.
5. *Fidelity Measures.* The fidelity with which instruction and interventions are implemented is systematically assessed and linked to continuing professional development to increase the effectiveness of the RTI process.

Together, these components offer a school wide model of integrated instruction, assessment, and data-based decision making. The RTI model can serve three distinct functions within a school setting: screening and prevention, early intervention, and disability determination. (pp. 5-6)

RtI is a comprehensive reform model that, if implemented as intended, layers scientific research, ingrained intrinsic procedures to help struggling students improve, and ongoing supports and measures to ensure future student and programmatic steps that intend success for general education students, which will help general education students prior to becoming special education students--if special education is even needed at all. Simply put, RtI offers supports that are proactive. Essentially, the RtI model is in direct contrast to the *Discrepancy Model* or the "wait to fail" model of years past. Mellard and Johnson (2008) also assert: "Together, these components offer a school wide model of

integrated instruction, assessment, and data-based decision making. The RtI model can serve three distinct functions within a school setting: screening and prevention, early intervention, and disability determination” (p. 6). Also, Mellard and Johnson state:

Research on an RTI framework has demonstrated the need and value for early identification of students with learning difficulties and for intense interventions delivered with fidelity. One of the most significant findings in the research on RTI is that the components and procedures used within this framework lend themselves to a better understanding of instructional quality and informed decision making. (p. 7)

The overall purpose of RtI practices being implemented into a school is to change school culture to have a system of checks and balances or “progress monitoring” for teachers and students. “RTI is a relatively new framework, these core components have been a part of recommended classroom practice in isolation for some time” (Regan, Berkeley, Hughes, & Brady, 2015, p. 234). Conversely, skills to properly implement RtI strategies and already overburdened teachers explain that the theory of RtI is “nice” but the practicality is not easily attained. Educators describe a “feeling of being overwhelmed with the amount of new information, inadequate training, and time needed for data collection and entry. In addition, the RTI framework created new responsibilities that were not evenly exchanged with previous responsibilities” (p. 235). Also, its implementation does not have a universal nor consistent methods, leaving the identification of “at risk” students arbitrary.

The RtI network conducted a study on the universal screening process and found consistency lacking. According to Kauffman and Bader (2016),

Universal screening is paramount in identifying students at risk for academic difficulty in the RtI model. Correct identification of at-risk students is especially important so the right students receive appropriate tiered interventions.

Unfortunately, based on the different conventions of cut scores, severity, and levels of risk, it is very difficult to generalize percentages of at-risk students across measures and samples. (rtinetwork.org)

In a study of RtI (Stecker, n.d.), it stated that RtI requires progress monitoring training, which is also a challenge because “diverse” students will be added to the general education setting causing more challenges to teachers who are trying to implement RtI strategies.

RtI and Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (PBIS)

RtI supports are academic interventions and with PBIS supports, or behavioral interventions, the whole child is educated in that both emotional and learning supports are provided within school systems. According to Hierck, Coleman and Weber (2011), “PBIS [Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions] focuses on behavior...” (p. 18). It is also behavioral supports that intensify on a tertiary level. Tier 1 is for students “without serious problem behaviors” or general needs (p. 14). Tier 2 is for “students at risk for problem behavior” or students where general interventions are not enough and must be increased (p. 14). Tier 3 is the for “students with chronic/intense problem behavior” or for students where intensive interventions must be offered and assessed to

determine if there is a true need for Special Education services (p. 14). Hierck et al. also state:

The pyramid has three zones--green, yellow, and red. The bottom of the pyramid is the solid base. This 'green zone' is where the majority of students in our schools reside. These students are easy to reach and easy to teach. The middle group on the pyramid represents 5 percent to 10 percent of a student population. Sugai and Horner (2006) refer to these students as the 'yellow zone'. These students may be a challenge to teach but easy to reach, or vice versa. The tip of the pyramid represents 1 percent to 7 percent of students in a school. Sugai and Horner (2006) refer to these students as being in 'the red zone'. These are students who might be identified as being a challenge to teach and reach. (p. 15)

The three tiers of behavioral interventions are a visual way of targeting supports so they are most effective based on need. Just as in academic supports, behavioral supports must be increased based upon a student's needs. These "positive" behavioral interventions help school leadership teams to: 1.) identify the current status of school systems, and 2.) give leadership teams a plan of action for future improvements. A "blueprint" on how instructional teams should implement school change is listed below as "Guidelines for Use" (pbis.org):

1. If needed, identify a facilitator who is fluent with systemic PBIS implementation process and blueprint elements and can guide assessment and action planning.

2. Form team comprised of behavior-related leadership personnel who are responsible for establishing and coordinating implementation of PBIS practices and systems.
3. Collect and use assessment results to develop and monitor an implementation action plan that will enhance local implementation capacity.
4. Conduct resource mapping (identification, alignment, integration, adaptation) of existing behavior-related efforts, initiatives, and/or programs to maximize use and impact of existing resources.
5. Review existing data: (a) behavior-related (e.g., suspension/expulsions, screening outcomes, behavior incidents, discipline referrals, attendance, achievement scores, dropout rates, school climate, student/family surveys) and (b) implementation fidelity (e.g., Tiered Fidelity Inventory, School-wide Evaluation Tool, Benchmarks of Quality).
6. Rate general implementation status as IP = In Place (>80%), PP = Partially In Place (50-80%), or NP = Not In Place (<50%).
7. Prioritize implementation elements for action planning with respect to importance of short and long term student outcomes and need for systems level capacity development.
8. Review implementation elements to develop actionable steps for multi-year action planning (1 year, 2-4 years, and 5+ years).
9. Emphasize use and organization of existing resources for implementation of action plan.

10. Review progress on action plan activities and outcomes at least monthly.
11. Conduct annual evaluation and updating of action plan implementation fidelity and outcome progress.

ESSA and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Where RtI and PBIS Meet

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the federal government has replaced NCLB with an education bill that targets traditionally marginalized students. Therefore, schools must provide a cyclical process to education that monitors the success of students of color, students of poverty, students with disabilities, and students that are English learners. Multi-tiered Systems of Support are coinciding, integrated systems of instruction that negotiates behaviors for the administration of instruction, the basis of teacher delivery, and the inclusion of scientific research. Unlike prior education mandates, Multi-tiered Systems of Support combine multiple education models, theory and common sense to alter the lens through which education may be administered. This instructional model is a step beyond academic and behavioral interventions because it combines both academic and behavioral interventions and moves beyond a topical layer of evaluating what we teach kids and how we teach it. The PBIS website (2016) detailed the five components within the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS): “Five key components comprise the structure of many multi-tiered models found in today’s elementary and secondary classrooms: (a) tiered instruction; (b) high-quality instruction; (c) evidence-based practice; (d) screening, monitoring, and diagnostic assessment; and (e) instructional fidelity” (www.pbis.org).

Likewise, Nelson, Layous, Cole, and Lyubomirsky (2015) opined the following as follows:

Multi-Tiered System of Supports represents one of the most significant advancements in improving the outcomes of students for whom typical instruction is not effective. While many practices need to be in place to make multi-tiered systems of support effective, accurate implementation of evidence-based practices by individuals at all tiers is critical to obtain student outcomes. Effective strategies to achieve program fidelity are available; however, maintaining program fidelity at the individual level remains elusive (861).

Hoover and Nelson's assertions about the intention behind Multi-tiered Systems of Support suggest that whole school reform is needed for America's schools to better help struggling students rather than to perpetuate the problem of inequality. Additionally, Benner (2012) iterated:

It is well-documented that youth with or at-risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BD) have severe deficits in their academic functioning. To begin to address these deficits, we focus on the need to close the opportunity gap by providing access to multi-tiered systems of academic prevention, maximizing academic learning time, and providing explicit instruction for youth with E/BD. We offer recommended positive behavior interventions and supports necessary to improve engagement in instruction. Closing the achievement gap using multi-tiered academic supports requires best practices for universal screening and diagnostic assessment to understand youth academic need (183-184).

Under the Multi-tiered Systems of Supports, it is hypothesized that schools can integrate proactive measures to help the whole child.

MTSS with Fidelity

Having Multi-tiered Systems of Support embeds the following: tiered instruction that intensifies with academic need, high quality instruction that centers upon evidence-based strategies, research-based curriculum, evidence-based interventions, differentiated instruction, which leads to progress monitoring of students in the form of screening, diagnostic assessment to *each* child to ensure fidelity or the promise of fair implementation by the teacher, by the school, and by infiltration throughout the school program as a whole. A challenge for fidelity is how to ensure fidelity for *every* child as intended, and particularly for African American boys who often do not receive effective interventions. Fidelity is implemented by people, so people's biases may challenge social justice. Mellard and Johnson (2008) states:

Fidelity of implementation refers to the delivery of instruction in the way in which it was designed to be delivered...If teachers do not follow the sequence or the method, a student may not learn to decode accurately. However, it would be unclear whether the failure to learn was due to a problem with instruction (e.g., the teacher didn't follow the curriculum procedures) or a problem the student faces with learning. In an RTI model, fidelity is important at both the school level (e.g., implementation of the process) and the teacher level (e.g., implementation of instruction and progress monitoring. (p. 118)

The concept of “fidelity” is one that is based on training, circumstance, and teacher integrity. Fidelity is the decision by an instructor to ensure that each child who struggles is targeted for intensified instruction. The goal of fidelity within our nation’s RtI model is to design accountability measures to be fully immersed in a school’s education system. This is a goal that is supported by many and is often referred to as “differentiated instruction.” Falk, Blumenreich, and Abani (2012) stated it is difficult teaching a wide range of learners with the lowest of learners who are usually found in the classrooms of urban school districts. They suggested the following:

One teacher is usually responsible for the learning in a classroom of about twenty-five children. In some schools, especially urban schools, this number can be even higher. In one classroom there may be children who begin the year advanced in many areas of the curriculum while others are in need of tremendous support. The diversity of learning abilities, styles, and needs can range from children who need help understanding English, children who need assistance staying organized, or children who have special academics, social, or emotional needs. (p. 95)

In other words, teaching a child in anger management while simultaneously teaching an ESL student (English as a Second Language) while also teaching a student who has a learning disability can be overwhelming for one teacher who has to teach 28-35 other students at the same time. However, it is possible if MTSS strategies are implemented with fidelity. According to the Illinois RtI Network, “Fidelity must be implemented across all tiers. The Illinois Rti Network suggests curriculum must be adhered to as planned; adhere to instructional strategies/ routines as planned; administer

scoring assessments reliably; and adhere to the overall process as planned” (rtinetwork.org). As intended, each of these four fidelity measures should be met. Yet, the nuances within an educated teacher’s ability to differentiate instruction for all students, regardless of socio-economic or cognitive experiences, is still dependent on teacher quality and commitment. To subvert teacher bias and/or Eurocentric curricula often criticized within America’s schools, theorists call into focus the *Culturally Responsive* component of RtI/Multi-tiered Supports.

Addressing Disproportionality through Culturally Responsive Educational Systems

Culturally Responsive teaching is teaching with a social conscience derived from empathy; it is the act of awareness and non-judgment. Its intent is to support the restoration of those who are oppressed. It also is taking on the challenge of seeking reformations to current systems to end the perpetuation of injustice; it is a direct answer to the *Critical Race Theory*. “The Bridge,” a Harvard website, defines *Critical Race Theorists* beliefs. It states:

Critical race theorists reject the idea that "race" has a natural referent. Instead, it is a product of social processes of power. People do not have a race, writes Kendall Thomas; they are "race-d." Unveiling the legal, social, and cultural operations by which people are assigned and invested with races is one central project of critical race theory. They urge recognizing race not as an inherent characteristic of people but instead a product of social practices. Because unconscious as well as intentional practices construct racial status, stereotypes, and practices, legal

reforms must address unconscious practices as well as intentional ones.

(harvard.edu, 2016)

If the beliefs systems of *Critical Race Theorists* are rationalized within American culture, we must assess from *where* do our views of the status quo derive? Critical theorists rationalize that “good” behaviors are repetitive of socially acceptable behaviors. Social status, power and coalitions begin with identity; if a group’s identity is taboo, he or she will be marginalized. This appears to be the case with many groups categorized negatively as “the unfortunate others.”

For example, Klingner et al. (2005) contended: “Mainstream educators generally interpret culturally diverse students’ performance through white middle class normative parameters of competence. Because culturally diverse students’ performance does not always align with such parameters, it is often regarded as deficient.” The Klingner et al. study ascertains that if educators *themselves* are embodied with the perpetuation of hegemonic perceptions from which they view diverse students’ performance as in behavior and academia, then inequities are permissible because they are so natural they go unchallenged; this is likewise for educational policies that in themselves are racially biased, so how culture maladies are challenged is with culturally responsive educational systems.

Black Americans in the Education System

It is as equally important to assess how current Black educators view America’s education system, for their opinions offer an insider’s knowledge first as a marginalized group, and secondly, as educators. Black educators in many instances have expressed

their feelings of “otherness” within our education system. The day-to-day dichotomy of behaving acceptably versus tensions against changing one’s own skin, so to speak, to be accepted. In “Black principals' perceptions of how their racial, cultural, personal, and professional identities affect their leadership,” Vinzant (2009) stated:

Dubois’ famous concept of the “Double Consciousness” applied to the “peculiar sensation” of being a black American and having to choose between ones black and American identities (1903). The tension of these identities stemmed from commonly accepted and perpetuated societal stereotypes, images, thoughts and beliefs that blacks Americans were less than whites intellectually, morally, and spiritually and that they, therefore, could be denied a significant proportion of their human rights. Blacks in Dubois’ time desperately wanted acceptance into American society. They needed to believe that they too could pursue the American dream and reach for the inalienable American rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. ...Thus their identities were constantly at war, balancing the need to conform to society and the need to remain true to themselves.

So students do not have to set aside their personal cultures in order to be accepted by mainstream school systems, culturally responsive interventions are one component to the RtI model.

Culturally Responsive Interventions are understood as the necessary fiber of a progressive, balanced education for all student types within the RtI model. It is intended to ensure that intervention strategies are equitably distributed and may thwart biased curriculums and/or teacher bias that prevents students who are marginalized and are not

stereotypical learners from benefiting from culturally appropriate interventions like their homogeneous counterparts do. According to the *National Center on Response to Intervention* (April 2010):

The use of culturally and linguistically responsive practices by teachers and other school staff involves purposeful consideration of the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors that may have an impact on students' success or failure in the classroom. ...Instruction should be differentiated according to how students learn, build on existing student knowledge and experience, and be language appropriate... [and] tertiary interventions should be informed by an awareness of students' cultural and linguistic strengths and challenges in relation to their responsiveness to instruction. (p. 6)

Culturally Responsive Interventions

The *National Center on Response to Intervention* has iterated that another goal of culturally responsive interventions is to go beyond inclusion and move towards assessing cultural barriers within the basis of America's curriculums to see where a student of color struggles. This means that staff is truly informed and does not reduce difficulties in achievement of a minority student to "that student is unlearned" but puts the focus on "how are we creating an environment or school culture for this diverse student to learn?" For example, the article: "A Framework for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Design of Response-to Intervention Models" (Garcia & Ortiz 2008) stated:

Many of these concerns and limitations are of particular relevance to our interest in the ability of RTI to successfully close the equity gap and to reduce

overidentification and underidentification of CLD [culturally and linguistically diverse] students. ...The persistent gap between achievement of CLD students and their White peers suggests that school reform efforts based on universalistic assumptions about how all students are best taught are not effective. (p. 26)

As previously stated, deficit thinking has a negative impact on African American males. According to the research, deficit thinking is counterproductive due to low expectations of Black males. The RtI Framework states that all students can learn and can benefit from high quality instruction, including minority students.

Summary and Upcoming Chapters

The prevalent yet true cliché of “we learn history so as to not repeat the mistakes of the past” rings true. America’s history has shaped the Black male into the wounded person seen today. He has begun his journey in America as a slave and lives in it today most often as an inmate within America’s prisons; his journey is one of oppression and disadvantage, which has resulted in the education achievement gap and as an outcast from American culture. Yet, his plight has not remained unnoticed. The federal government has listed the overrepresentation of Black males in special education courses, prisons and high death rates as a crisis that needs immediate attention. Research also shows that the uneducated are criminalized and are more often criminals. RtI (Response to Interventions) and MTSS (Multi-tiered Supports) are now an education requirement in Illinois to help teachers and principals to support the Black male. Specifically, culturally responsive interventions within the RtI model asks educators to review the biases that have continued throughout history to improve educational strategies to support students

of color such as the Black male. The new education target within MTSS is to create a new norm for the Black male and other disenfranchised groups to promote a future of success, acceptance and inclusion into modern society.

Future chapters within this study will aim to assess perceptions and implementation strategies of MTSS practices. Specifically, Chapter III will describe the history of each of the four selected schools for this study as well as their current demographic and achievement data and culture within each school. The schools will differ in diversity and socioeconomic status and will be schools within Illinois. The selected districts will be high schools from the northern and southern suburbs of Chicago, IL and will range from high, middle and low SES neighborhoods. Also, Chapter III will include a transcription of each of the four principals' perceptions through surveys and interviews in accordance with a qualitative study. In addition, demographic data will be discussed but in compliance with IRB standards for protecting human subjects.

Chapter IV will be the interpretation of data through the use of qualitative data referred to as a Critical Research study. Data will be triangulated according to the perceptions of the participants; the interpretation of presented data will be analyzed through the lens of qualitative research methods. All data will be triangulated to ensure there are multiple sources of data to ensure credible research. And finally, Chapter V will provide suggestions for future courses of study. It will provide implications to the field of education because it will offer solutions to how principals might assess MTSS school systems and culture to support Black boys in education. It will seek to define universal

practices that are relevant to all stakeholders and future educators who are in favor of socially-just schools.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Understanding how to best address the achievement gap in America is the core of this study. One method in which the academic success for minority and low socioeconomic students has been addressed is within the Multi-tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) model, in which targeted interventions are set into play to thwart the continuation of poor academic and behavioral performance due to the lack of learning and behavioral opportunities. Under the MTSS approach, proven research-based strategies are used to proactively help at-risk students. Specifically, the ‘culturally and linguistically responsive practices’ component of RtI asks educators to consider cultural and historical factors that may contribute to the successes or failures of *all* students and to use these practices to reach traditionally, underperforming groups (rtinetwork.org). Principals have the role of instructional leaders; therefore, school principals in the metropolitan area of Chicago will be interviewed and surveyed on their perceptions of culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions. Assessment data such as the results from the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) test and school-wide achievement comparative analysis by demographics within each school will be observed and analyzed to determine if Black boys achieve more than they would if they received Special Education services.

Problem and Purposes Overview

Under the Discrepancy Model, students were given aptitude tests that compared their intelligence to other students in the same grade level on a bell curve of ‘normal intelligence’. If a student scored low on this aptitude test, he or she was labeled with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and received Special Education services. Congress reauthorized and former President George W. Bush reauthorized IDEA and created *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* or IDEIA in 2004, which determined that limited educational opportunities do not qualify a student as learning disabled. Instead, students who fell behind the abilities of students in the general education classroom should benefit from targeted interventions *specific* to that child’s needs.

Throughout this study, research suggests that the lack of opportunity for the Black male has lessened his advancement disproportionate to the numbers of educational successes for other demographics in America despite receiving Special Education services. For example, in “RTI: Getting It Right This Time” (Tileston, 2009), it states: “Only 27 percent of black males in special education graduate from high school.” In addition, America’s history has been a history of social injustices that have negatively impacted the success of Black males either through social constructs and histories such as the lack of positive assimilation of Black males to Eurocentric behaviors, slavery, the New Jim Crow (as aforementioned by Lewis) and/or by a vast number of Black males’ incarcerated in America’s prisons. A school principal’s leadership and understanding of culture and equity can decrease the continuing low education attainment of the Black

male by ensuring compliance to the MTSS ideology in the school in which he or she leads.

Research Questions

The research within this study is intended to assess how culture and equity is enhanced by MTSS supports in terms of equity and justice for the field of education. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to observe the perceptions of school principals who have implemented Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for a minimum of three years as instructional leaders for the high schools in which they run. Through the participant perceptions, information will be gathered in terms of providing equity and access for the Black male. The research questions listed below are the foundation of this qualitative, critical research study.

1. RQ1: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are the perceptions of social justice as it relates to the citizenship of all students, particularly African American males, within their building?
2. RQ2: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are their perceptions of how social justice principles apply to their work as school leaders related to addressing disproportionality of African American males?

3. RQ3: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: How do social justice principles apply to the work of school leaders in relation to addressing the disproportionality of African American males in Special Education?

Research Analysis Look Fors

If students receive proactive measures instead of reactive measures, learning outcomes may well increase, improving the education of those students--predominantly Black males--who otherwise would be removed from General education classrooms and placed into Special Education classrooms. The research within this study is to observe how principals implement MTSS; the other purpose within this research is to possibly see if and or how, if present, has the enrollment of Black males, who would be identified as having a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), decreased resulting in less Black boys needing Special Education services. It is also a consideration within this study that those same students who would have received Special Education services yet now benefit from MTSS strategies will marginally improve not only academically but will improve behaviorally too. There is a disproportionate amount of students of color who are several grade levels behind in their academic progress, and within this research, schools involved in this study will discuss how they holistically improve learning in their schools. The research will also observe how participants perceive equity for minority learners, and how they support students despite the lack of resources such as personnel, financial assistance and cultural sensitivity training to do as the mandate intended. There will be an

analysis of any deficits to participant ideology to practice/implementation due to the challenge in changing school cultures and providing access.

Population and Purposeful Sampling/Elite Interviews

Schools are often cited as agents of change and it is important to critique how change occurs. This study will be a qualitative, critical research study in the form of a case study of four, Illinois public school principals. Critical research (Merriam, 2009, p. 11) does not solely focus on interpretation of the world but “goes beyond uncovering the interpretations of people’s understandings of their world,” and has its roots in “feminist theory, critical race theory” and its “goal is to critique and challenge, to transform and empower.” Principals are building level supervisors who execute curriculum, fund projects and make decisions about staff practices and student learning encounters.

“Principals are expected to possess educational expertise; to manage large organizations with complex programs, staffing, and budgets...” (Bloom, Canning, & Chan, n.d., p. 13). Furthermore, “no single learning experience has a very profound influence upon the learner. Changes in ways of thinking, in fundamental habits, in major operating concepts, in attitudes, in abiding interests and the like, develop slowly;” so “in order for educational experiences to produce a cumulative effect, they must be so organized as to reinforce each other (Tyler, 1969, p. 83). Since school principals impart culture, they will be one of the sources of data for this study. The four principals will come from the southern and northern suburbs of Chicago, IL. The four principals are responsible for the achievement of thousands of students. Each principal in this study leads in districts that vary in

socioeconomic status and minority enrollment as determined by each district's District Report Cards.

District A has 86% Black student enrollment, 2% white enrollment, 10% Hispanic/Latino enrollment and 2% mixed race students enrollment and 49% of students are low income and an overall percentage of students with disabilities at 18%. *District B* has 8.3% Black student enrollment, 45.2% white enrollment, 13.7% Hispanic/Latino enrollment, 32% Asian, .1% Pacific Islander and .3% mixed race students enrollment and 32.4% of students are low income and an overall percentage of students with disabilities at 17% . *District C* has 30.4% Black student enrollment, 32.1% white enrollment, 26.6% Hispanic/Latino enrollment, 3.9% Asian, .1% Pacific Islander, .2% American Indian enrollment, 6.6% mixed race students enrollment and 82.9% of students are low income and an overall percentage of students with disabilities at 16% . *District D* has 4% Black student enrollment, 80% white enrollment, 11% Hispanic/Latino enrollment and 1% mixed race students enrollment and 18% of students are low income and an overall percentage of students with disabilities at 18% . The sample size for surveys and interviews will be four principals out of a possible 66 high school principals, and the sample size for students will be all-inclusive to the Black, male sub group category.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The Survey

Data collection will occur by way of three methods: a survey, interview, and by primary sources analysis. The purpose of a survey is for data collection, and it will be conducted by the school's leadership team by consensus. It will be completed prior to the

interview to ensure objectivity. By definition, Fink (2009) states in the text *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide* the following:

Surveys are information-collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behavior. A survey can be a self-administered questionnaire that someone fills out alone or with assistance, or a survey can be an interview done in person or on the telephone. (p. 2)

In order to get a conceptual snapshot of each district, a survey created by Florida's Department of Education titled the Self-Assessment of Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI) will be used. This tool was created to support Florida's schools on implementation of RtI/MTSS practices. "The mission of the Project has evolved to focus on building Florida's school district capacity to implement a Multi-Tiered System of Supports..." (floridarti.usf.edu, 2012). The project aims at integrating academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports for students comprehensively and is a model for full immersion of MTSS supports (floridarti.usf.edu/floridaproject).

The Self-Assessment of Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI) survey that the leadership team will complete has four sections, with a total of 27 questions overall, and each question has an area for ratings of school processes and a comment/evidence area per question as well. The four survey sections are as follows: 1.) Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support; 2.) Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure; 3.) Implementation: Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving Process; and 4.) Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning.

Each survey question is specifically related to problem solving and MTSS services integration and rate the level of implementation as follows: **N** as in **Not Started** (the activity occurs less than 24% of the time); **I** as in **In Progress** (the activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time); **A** for **Achieved** (the activity occurs 75% to 100% of the time); and **M** for **Maintaining** (the activity was already **Achieved** and is now maintained 75% to 100% of the time). The “Comments/Evidence” and “Additional Comments/Evidence” sections are ideal for open-ended comments and examples and are driven solely by the subjects’ perceptions.

Elite Interviews

The second method will be in the form of an interview and a follow-up interview in which the four principals, who were selected commensurate with purposeful sampling, will answer questions about their experiences and strategies. Purposeful sampling is a “criterion-based selection” of subjects (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The four principals were selected in regards to these purposeful sampling criteria because they meet the following criteria (scholar.harvard.edu): 1.) Five years of administrative experience as a school principal; 2.) He or she must work as a principal in a high school that has implemented RtI/MTISS for a minimum of three years. Each of the four principals will answer the five research questions listed above (letters a-e) in an interview format. The first interview will be a 45-60 minute semi-structured interview: all interviewees will have the same questions in which to answer with sub questions naturally ingrained in context of our discussion to ensure accuracy. All participant interviews will be recorded by a digital audio recorder. The second interview will occur *after* interviews are transcribed to

ensure internal validity by double checking that there is no misinterpreting the perspectives of the people interviewed, a process to ensure validation (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). The follow-up interview will be 15 minutes and will provide the principals opportunities to add onto statements, make revisions etc. Using interviewing (Merriam, 2009, p. 88) as a means of data collection “is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” and “when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate.”

Interview Questions

1. What are your years of service as an educator and as an administrator? What are your academic credentials?
2. How has your background shaped your views on education?
 - a. Sub question: How do these childhood perceptions shape your leadership style?
3. How are students with differing abilities educated at your school? Please list academic trends and behaviors of marginalized students.
 - a. Sub question: How are students with academic and/or social needs identified?
 - b. Sub question: How do you use supports to counteract needs?
4. What are your perceptions of the current level of implementation fidelity of RtI/Multi-tiered system of supports?
 - a. Sub question: What, in your opinion, helps or hinders your ability to implement MTSS strategies with fidelity?

5. How do you reinforce a positive school culture that is accepting of diverse backgrounds and abilities?
6. What are your perceptions of how social justice principles apply to your work as a school leader in relation to addressing disproportionality of African American males in Special Education?
 - a. Sub question: How do you monitor the success of African American males?
7. Is there any information left unexplored that you feel is pertinent?

Follow up Interview Questions

1. You've had time to read transcribed notes of your interview and currently have a copy of your comments. Therefore, I will refer to each question, and specifically, question number 7 which states: "Is there any information left unexplored that you feel is pertinent?" Are there any areas of your interview you feel should be further explored?
2. Do you feel that the transcribed information accurately explains education processes within your school? If so, how? If not, why not?

Primary Sources/Document Analysis

The third and final method of data collection is through an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary sources of data. These 'sources' will be standardized assessment data disaggregated by demographics such as the SAT exam, an analysis of demographic data and student traits and content-specific final examinations, school-specific data per subject (Illinoisreportcard.com), district data such as the number of students enrolled in

Special Education courses four years ago vs. today, self-assessment survey participant data, students who are currently in a repeated course, and students who are receiving MTSS supports. These multiple sources of data will offer cross verification of findings and triangulation on the next step of data analysis. “Thus the researcher must keep an open mind when it comes to discovering useful documents. Being open to any possibility can lead to serendipitous discoveries” (Merriam, 2009, p. 150). By having assessment data, building specific data, and achievement data by sub groups, emerging themes will develop as to how are Black boys faring in districts who having incorporated RtI/MTISS practices in comparison to how they were faring three years ago while receiving special education services.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2009), “The findings of a qualitative study are inductively derived from the data collected through interviews, observations, or documents” (p. 254). This research will be an in-depth analysis of gathered data to move towards emergent themes. After the sources of data are gathered, survey and interview responses will be coded deductively. In regards to overall findings, leadership theory from Gareth Morgan, George Theoharis, and Michelle Lewis will be among the many sources of education research that will provide a lens to the gathered qualitative data.

Table 1

Tools for Providing Implications and Theory for Chapter 5

1. Organization as a Cultural Phenomenon	2. Organization and Cultural Context	3. Corporate Cultures and Subcultures	4. Culture: Rule Following or Enactment?
5. Acquire Broad, Reconceptualized Consciousness/Knowledge/Skill Base	6. Possess Core Leadership Traits	7. Advance Inclusion, Access, and Opportunity for All	8. Improve the Core Learning Context—Both the Teaching and the Curriculum
9. Create a Climate of Belonging	10. Raise Student Achievement	11. Sustain Oneself Professionally and Personally	12. Racial Equity Training

Fidelity of Implementation

Just as the ‘linguistically and culturally’ responsive piece is important to the RtI and MTSS models, the fidelity of implementation is an important aspect to holistic implementation. Therefore, survey responses and interview responses will be compared to the comprehensive RtI/MTSS model for staff titled the “Colorado MTSS Essential Components” implementation model, and for students, the “Designing School Wide Systems for Student Success” as seen in the images below.

Colorado MTSS Essential Components

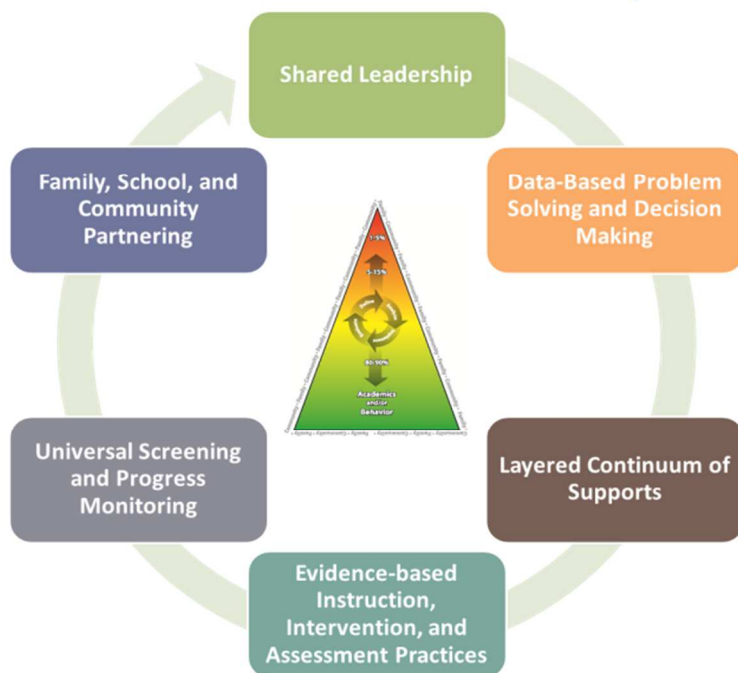


Figure 1. Colorado MTSS Essential Components

Designing Schoolwide Systems for Student Success

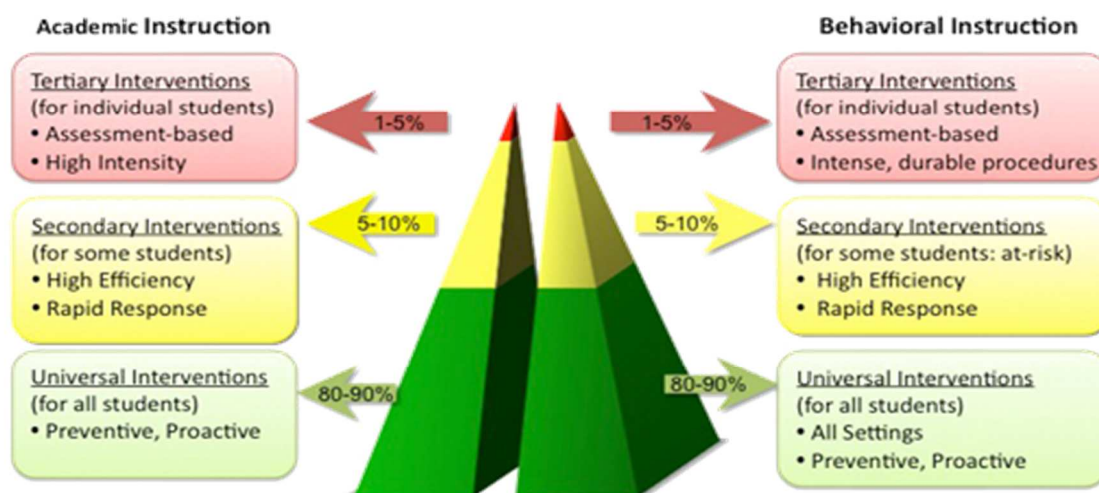


Figure 2. Designing School Wide Systems for Student Success

Data Analysis and Statistical Methodology

Data collection and assessment is a combination of researcher instinct, researcher bias and allowing information to inductively evolve. The goal of data analysis is to make connections among gathered data to enhance the research world on a given subject, and the data gathered for this research will address the research questions by assessing school culture, social justice techniques, principal perceptions and accuracy of MTSS school wide implementation. According to the research on document analysis as presented in *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (Flick, 2014), it states:

...we have to approach the analysis of documents for what they are and for what they are used to accomplish. This means paying attention to the knowledge that documents 'contain' about a setting, but also examining their role and place in

settings, the cultural values attached to them, [and] their distinctive types and forms. (p. 367)

The research of this critical research study will be transcribed verbatim in order to have a written transcription of words spoken because to transcribe is to have a “graphic representation of selective aspects of verbal, prosodic, and paralinguistic behavior; in other words, we limit our overview of transcription to vocal behavior” (Flick, 2014, p. 64). After transcription has occurred, events will be “classified into discrete categories and labelling of these categories” (p. 67). Coded occurrences will then be thematically labeled and presented as Grounded Theory in accordance to qualitative analysis.

Grounded Theory “is the systematic generation of theory from systematic research. It is a set of rigorous research procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories” (groundedtheory.com). This study will seek to make connections, understand social hierarchies and understandings, and will aim to identify what changes are necessary to establish equity and social justice. As stated by Flick and Thornberg and Charmaz (2014):

When doing a GT study, researchers aim to investigate individual and collective actions and social and social psychological processes, such as everyday life in a particular social setting, organizational changes, establishing and maintaining workplace practices, identity transformations, problem-solving processes in social groups, and responding to and coping with life changes. In GT, researchers concentrate on what people do and the meaning they make of their actions and on the situations in which they are involved. (p. 153)

The grounded theory established by the perceptions of school principals of the implementation and monitoring of MTSS practices will provide generalizations for transferability “to which the findings of one study can be applied” to future research studies that seek to understand how culturally aware, school-wide practices may impact other marginalized groups (Merriam, 2009, p. 223).

Summary

As discussed, social justice is advocacy on behalf of the disenfranchised due to socially ingrained constructs within a society. The Black male suffers from low academic performance, the lack of adequate health care and nourishment, and represents one of the highest sub groups imprisoned in America. It has been reported that a majority of those imprisoned did not graduate from high school and lacked positive integration into school systems. Given this, it appears that Black males would benefit from culturally responsive pedagogy. Furthermore, it has been stated that the teaching force does not reflect the racial and cultural diversity of students, and while progress has been made, culturally responsive curriculum, instruction, and discipline has not been truly embraced (Theoharis, 2009, p. 5). Since culturally responsive curriculum instruction can be embedded in the implementation of MTSS supports to provide interventions based on student need, it is vital to understand how principals perceive its implementation. Principals who have worked to implement MTSS practices for the past three years will complete an implementation survey, be interviewed according to their perceptions, and relevant primary and secondary sources such as surveys and standardized tests and course

placement data will be analyzed, coded and theorized towards transferable themes that will benefit the field of education.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter is organized into five parts.

- A. Section 1: Preview of how the MTSS systems strategy is the basis of all data collected.
 1. Review of MTSS
 2. Preview of data collected
 3. Review of Research Questions
- B. Section 2: Triangulation: The presentation of multiple forms of data on the same topic of student achievement of Black boys to other student demographics.
 1. Data 1 Form: Secondary Data sources
 - a. School demographic and achievement data
 - b. Comparative data of overall student achievement versus Black male achievement
 2. Data 2 Form: Primary Data sources
 - a. Participant demographic and leadership data
 - b. Participant transcribed interview data
 - c. Participant survey data

- C. Section 3: Presentation of participant perceptions
 - 1. Qualitative analysis of survey results to student achievement using the MTSS systems approach
 - 2. Qualitative analysis of interview fidelity versus survey perceptions
 - 3. Presentation of interview themes
- D. Section 4: Data Findings
 - 1. What the data shows in regards to Research Question 1
 - 2. What the data shows in regards to Research Question 2
 - 3. What the data shows in regards to Research Question 3
- E. Section 5: Chapter Summary
 - 1. Review outcomes
 - a. Survey
 - b. Outcome data
 - c. Interviews

Section 1: The Role of MTSS within this Study Introduction

Chapter IV of this study is the presentation of data. This study seeks to uncover the perceptions of high school principals who have implemented RtI/MTSS interventions within the high schools in which they lead. In recent years, education programs have sought to lessen the achievement gap for people of color. Specifically, under the umbrella of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015, schools are encouraged to offer equitable learning opportunities within a Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) approach. The MTSS method is 1.) the integration of *Response to Intervention* (RtI) or

proactive measures that vary in intensity among the three tiers; 2.) MTSS also integrates behavioral supports and emotional supports services or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) within the school system; and 3.) MTSS also integrates progress monitoring and research based decisions to guide future instructional practices with the goal of helping students achieve at higher rates. The data presented in this Chapter is qualitative and “grounded” in that the data collected from the responses of the human subjects of this qualitative research case study will guide all themes and concepts presented in this chapter.

Preview of Data Collected: Primary and Secondary Sources

The findings within Chapter IV derive from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are participant demographic and leadership data, *interview* transcriptions from participant perspectives, and *survey* data from the four high school principals who are tasked with implementing MTSS supports within their respective buildings. The presentation of their perceptions will be presented as Grounded Theory. Flick (2014) states that “Grounded Theory seeks to investigate individual and/or group behaviors based upon his or her perceptions as they fit within social and/or organizational settings.” Whereas, the secondary data sources gathered for this study will include school demographic and achievement data gathered from the Illinois School Report Card as well as comparative data that lists the overall achievement of Black males in comparison to their school peers. The secondary data will be presented prior to primary data.

Review of Research Questions

After the presentation of gathered data such as participant interviews and surveys as well as presenting secondary website data, the researcher will present the perceptions of the human subjects involved within this study; their perceptions will be used to address the research questions within this research. This chapter uses grounded theory to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are the perceptions of social justice as it relates to the citizenship of all students, particularly African American males, within their building?

RQ2: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are their perceptions of how social justice principles apply to their work as school leaders related to addressing disproportionality of African American males?

RQ3: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: How do social justice principles apply to the work of school leaders in relation to addressing the disproportionality of African American males in Special Education?

The analysis of data will begin with achievement data in the form of secondary sources. These secondary sources are school demographic data, achievement data, comparative data of students will the purpose of presenting a picture of student

achievement for each school that the participants in this study lead. The next section will present the data findings for secondary sources.

Section 2: Triangulation of Multiple Forms of Data—

School Demographic Data, Achievement Data, and Comparative Data

Secondary Sources-Illinois School Report Card Demographic and Achievement Data

Data analysis of participating schools. Four Midwestern high schools were used for this research and all information gathered within this section is posted online for public perusal via the *Illinois School Report Card* site for the state of Illinois; this government site (in which school names will be pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality) is aimed at distributing school-specific information from Illinois public schools to the public to aid school leaders, teachers, students and their families, and the community about a school district's progress. The demographic and achievement data of the students within this study are listed below from a secondary source (*Illinois School Report Card*).

Demographic and School Achievement Data

School-specific data chart explanations and achievement.

Table 2

Data Chart of School 1, School 2, School 3, and School 4

Data Categories	Thornsmith H.S.	Hillside Preparatory H.S.	Nichols Public H.S.	Vivian Franklin College Preparatory H.S.
Total Student Enrollment	1,977	1,177	2,486	2,137
Per Student Spending	\$10,092	\$9,630	\$15,134	\$9,808
Black Students	86%	89%	3.9%	4.6%

White Students	1%	1%	44.90%	77.60%
Hispanic/Latino Students	12%	5%	16%	11.40%
Asian	0.4%	0.2%	33%	5.1%
American Indian	0%	0%	0.2%	0%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0.1%	0%
Two or More Races	0.8%	5%	1.7%	1.3%
Low Income	91%	56%	32%	18%
IEP	18%	15%	8%	12%
Homeless	2%	3%	1%	1%
Mobility Rate	18%	14%	4%	3%
Truancy Rate	26%	5.10%	5%	5%
EL (English Learners)	10%	1%	6%	2%
Percentage of IEP Students that are Black	81%	98%	90%	95%
AVG SAT ELA Score	441.5	450.5	547.8	518.9
AVG SAT Math Score	429	433	544.5	524.8

School 1-Thornsmith High School trends. School 1, alias Thornsmith High School, has a total enrollment of 1,977 students with the per student spending amount at \$10,092. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 86% Black student enrollment, 1% white enrollment, 12% Hispanic/Latino enrollment, Asian 0.4%, American Indian 0%, Pacific Islander 0%, Two or More Races 0.8% and 91% of students are low income. School 1's data indicates that, overall, it is a primarily low income school district of majority Black students who do not meet the state of Illinois' academic achievement standards. In addition, School 1 is a high poverty school, so under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* which is MTSS, federal funding for teacher training is provided. School 1

is categorized by the Illinois School Report Card as “Commendable.” The *Illinois School Report Card* defines “Commendable” as “a school that has no underperforming student groups, a graduation rate greater than 67%, and whose performance is not in the top 10% of schools statewide.”

School 2-Hillside Preparatory High School trends. School 2, alias Hillside Preparatory High School, has a total enrollment of 1,177 students with the per student spending amount at \$9,630. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 89% Black student enrollment, 1% white enrollment, 5% Hispanic/Latino enrollment, 0.2% Asian, American Indian 0%, 0% Pacific Islander and Two or More Races at 5% and 56% of students are low income. Just like School 1, School 2’s data indicates that School 2 is a low income school district with Black students not achieving according to state guidelines. School 2 will also receive MTSS funding for teacher professional development training. School 2 is categorized by the *Illinois School Report Card* as “Under Performing.” The *Illinois School Report Card* defines “Under Performing” as “a school in which one or more student groups is performing at or below the level of the “all students” group in the lowest performing 5% of schools.”

School 3-Nichols Public Schools trends. School 3, alias Nichols Public Schools, has a total enrollment of 2,486 students with the per student spending amount at \$15,134. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 3.9% Black student enrollment, 44.90% white enrollment, 16% Hispanic/Latino enrollment, Asian 33%, American Indian 0.2%, Pacific Islander 0.1%, Two or More Races 1.7% and 32% of students are low income. School 3, overall, is not categorized as low income. School 3 does have some low income students

at 32% with Black students compiling 65% of students identified as low income despite Black students being only 3.9% of the student population. It should also be noted that of the 33% of students who identify as Asian, the majority of Asian students are achieving academically and are not low income. Under ESEA/MTSS, School 3 receives partial federal funding for teacher training. School 3 is designated as high SES despite having low income students. School 3 is categorized by the *Illinois School Report Card* as “Commendable.” The *Illinois School Report Card* defines “Commendable” as “a school that has no underperforming student groups, a graduation rate greater than 67%, and whose performance is not in the top 10% of schools statewide.”

School 4-Vivian Franklin College Preparatory High School trends. School 4, alias Vivian Franklin College Preparatory High School, has a total enrollment of 2,137 students with the per student spending amount at \$9,808. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 4.6% Black student enrollment, 77.60% white enrollment, 11.40% Hispanic/Latino enrollment, Asian 5.1%, American Indian 0%, Pacific Islander 0%, Two or More Races 1.3% and 18% of students are low income. School 4 has commonalities with both Schools 1 and 2 and with School 3. School 4, overall, is not low-income, yet unlike School 3, it is not meeting Illinois academic standards. Black students are 4.6% of the school’s population, yet they are identified as 68% of students who are identified as low income. School 4 does not receive federal funding under ESEA/MTSS because not enough students identify as low income at this participating school. School 4 is categorized by the *Illinois School Report Card* as “Commendable.” The *Illinois School Report Card* defines “Commendable” as “a school that has no underperforming student

groups, a graduation rate greater than 67%, and whose performance is not in the top 10% of schools statewide.”

Secondary Sources-Comparative Data of Black Boys to their Peers

Comparison of Black students’ schooling to non-Black students. In Schools 1-4 according to the *Per Student Spending* amounts, Black students predominantly attend schools that spend less on students for education costs. In addition, Black students, who attend Schools 1-4, were more likely to be low-income according to the low income rates listed in the table. Black students attending poorer schools was the case for Schools 1 and 2, yet School 3, a wealthier district, only has 4.6% of Black students yet still had a higher percentage of Black students diagnosed with IEP’s as did School 4. In regards to the percentage of Black students in attendance versus the percentage of Black students with IEP’s, School 1 has 86% Black students and 81% of IEP students are Black. School 2 has 89% Black students and 98% of IEP students are Black. School 3 has 3.9% Black students and 90% of IEP students are Black. School 4 has 4.6% Black students and 95% of IEP students are Black. After reviewing the statistical data for Schools 1-4, Black students make up a minimum of 81% of IEP students even if they are less than 5% of the overall population. Also, according to the data, Black students have higher percentage rates of IEP identification in schools where they are less 5% of the population than when they are 89% of the student population.

According to the table data, in Schools 1-4, Black students in Illinois are less likely to meet or exceed SAT success criteria in comparison to other student demographics/races. In the SAT English Language Arts exam, the success criteria is as

follows: 1.) Exceeds Standards minimum score is 640, 2.) Meets Standards minimum score is 540, 3.) and Approaching Standards minimum score is 430. For Schools 1-4, Schools 1 and 2 are predominantly Black in student population and neither Schools 1 or 2 passed the Illinois SAT exam. Schools 3 is 32% low income with 3.9% of Black students and did Meet the SAT standards. School 4 is 4.6% Black and 18% low income and did Meet the SAT standards yet at a lower rate than School 3.

The results are similar in regards to SAT success rates for Schools 1-4 in Math. In the SAT Math exam, the success criteria is as follows: 1.) Exceeds Standards minimum score is 670, 2.) Meets Standards minimum score is 540, 3.) and Approaching Standards minimum score is 450. For Schools 1-4, neither Schools 1 or 2 passed the Illinois SAT Math exam. Schools 3 and 4 did Meet the SAT math standards. School 3 was the most successful of all four schools despite having a higher amount of low income students in comparison to School 3.

Comparison of Black boys' graduation rates to their peers' graduation rates by race and gender. When a student graduates from high school, he or she has met the academic and behavioral requirements for that school; therefore, the researcher analyzed the graduation rates by demographic for each of the four schools within this study. The graduation rates are listed below.

Table 3

4-year High School Graduation Rates by Race and Gender (rounded to the nearest whole number)

School	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	2 or More	Pacific Islander	Special Education	Black Female	Black Male	Black Male in SPED
1	91%	67%	64%	94%	92%	--	86%	74%	63%	59%
2	95%	72%	91%	96%	94%	--	72%	76%	67%	65%
3	93%	85%	96%	97%	100%	94%	88%	88%	81%	76%
4	92%	88%	92%	94%	88%	100%	84%	91%	84%	81%
Avg. %	93%	83%	86%	95%	94%	97%	83%	83%	74%	70%

Based upon the table above, it appears that Black students graduate at lower rates than other races at Schools 1-4, because at each school, Black students graduate less than an 83% average. In the comparison of the achievement of Black female students at the average of 83% to Black male students' average at 74% in terms of graduation rates, Black males account for the drop in the overall graduation rate. Therefore, in schools 1-4, Black males graduate at lower rates than other races and within their own race as well. Black males in Special Education on average graduate 4% less than Black males who are not in Special Education.

Based upon the comparative data of Black males to their peers, the data gathered indicates several trends: Black males are more likely to not graduate on time, attend

highly impoverished schools, be referred to Special Education, attend schools with high student and staff truancy rates and to not benefit from MTSS systems of supports despite attending schools that receive more federal dollars to offset the disproportionate amounts of low income students. The next section of this research is the presentation of perceptions by the four principals who lead the aforementioned four high schools.

Primary Sources-Participant Data and Perceptions

Participant demographic and leadership data. The four principals selected for this qualitative study derived from purposeful sampling or a “criteria-based selection” of each participants. The criteria to be included in this study are the following: he or she must be a public school principal with a minimum of three years of experience leading a high school that has implemented RtI/MTSS in the form of RtI, PBIS, and progress monitoring. Principals that met this criteria were selected by the researcher of this study and emailed an invitation to participate.

The email respondent characteristics were four high school principals from the Midwest with a minimum of eight years in his or her current role and a minimum of 13 years in the field of education. The four respondents were either African American or European American; three were male and one respondent was female. Multiple attempts to further diversify the sample respondents according to race and sex were made, yet no other sex/race demographic chose to take part in this study. Of the four respondents, three out of the four principals originally worked in other professions beyond education in roles such as the military and clinical psychology. All four principals have minimally a Masters Degree in Educational Administration. Their personal socioeconomic childhood

backgrounds range from low income to middle class. All four principals grew up in nearby neighborhoods of one another, which was coincidental and discovered during the elite interviews by the researcher--the respondents did not know the other human subjects involved in this study to ensure the privacy of each human subject. Each respondent was a volunteer and received no compensation for his or her responses. Participant demographic characteristics are further detailed in the table below.

Four 30 minute interviews of current principals' perceptions were transcribed and coded into themes as a primary source. The four principals also completed a self-assessment survey about their implementation of MTSS as school leaders as another primary source. The survey was self-diagnostic intended to gather the high school principals' perceptions of what RtI/MTSS supports "look like" in their schools. The participants' responses to interview questions and the MTSS survey were collected to guide the researcher in identifying themes for their leadership views of the role of MTSS and its impact upon the students who would benefit from the supports the system offers.

Table 4

Participant Demographic and Leadership Data Table

Respondent	High School Principal 1	High School Principal 2	High School Principal 3	High School Principal 4
Years as High School Principal	10	8	9	10
Sex / Race	Female / African American	Male / European American	Male / European American	Male / African American

Level of Education / Work History	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pre-K educator 2. High School Educator 3. Associate Principal 4. Assistant Principal 5. School Operations Manager 6. Bachelors Double Major 7. Masters in Urban Teaching 8. EDD degree in Education 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bachelors of Secondary Education 2. Masters in Educational Leadership 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. PhD in Psychology 4. Licensed Psychologist 5. Principal Licensure 6. Superintendent Licensure 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marine 2. School Safety Trainer 3. School Counselor License 4. Double Masters Degree 5. Currently enrolled in a doctorate program
Educator Awards	Emergent Leader Award	Principal of the Year	Nominated for Principal of the Year	Won District Leadership Award
Childhood Socio - economic status	Low Income	Middle Class	Upper Middle Class	Low-middle Class
Minimum Years of Education Service	19	21	21	14
2nd Profession	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Participant Survey Data

Survey data. Each principal was given a Self-Assessment of Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI) survey about their perceptions of RtI/PBIS as MTSS practices within their respective schools. The purposes of the survey is that the researcher wanted to assess the thoughts, analyses and perceptions of the participants. The tool used as the survey is from the Florida Department of Education and is a tool aimed at collecting implementation data for RtI/PBIS or MTSS in schools. The participants completed questions broken into four major categories and 27 subcategories. Each principal selected the level of implementation fidelity that each RtI/PBIS/MTSS strategy occurs within his or her school. Each respondent completed their survey according to the categories listed in the survey. The specific categories of implementation level as the principals perceive fidelity are listed below.

1. Florida's Department of Education's Problem Solving & Response to Intervention Project MTSS survey (4 Major Categories / 27 Subcategories = 43 Questions)
 - a. Not Started (N)—(The activity occurs less than 24% of the time) Table Tabulation Value of 0
 - b. In Progress (I)—(The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time) Table Tabulation Value of 1
 - c. Achieved (A)—(The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time) Table Tabulation Value of 2

- d. Maintaining (M)—(The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time) Table
 Tabulation Value of 3

Table 5

Survey Data Questions with School-Specific Results: MTSS Principal Survey Tabulation

Not Started (N)—(The activity occurs less than 24% of the time) In Progress (I)—(The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time) Achieved (A)—(The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time) Maintaining (M)—(The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time)	School 1 Thornsmith High School	School 2 Hillside Preparatory	School 3 Nichols Public Schools	School 4 Vivian Franklin College Preparatory H.S.
Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support				
1. District level leadership provides active commitment and support (e.g., meets to review data and issues at least twice each year).	N	I	M	M

2. The school leadership provides training, support and active involvement (e.g., principal is actively involved in School-Based Leadership Team meetings).	M	I	M	M
3. Faculty/staff support and are actively involved with problem solving/RtI (e.g., one of top 3 goals of the School Improvement Plan, 80% of faculty document support, 3-year timeline for implementation available).	M	I	A	I
4. A School-Based Leadership Team is established and represents the roles of an administrator, facilitator, data mentor, content specialist, parent, and teachers from representative areas (e.g., general ed., special ed.)	M	M	I	M
5. Data are collected (e.g., beliefs survey, satisfaction survey) to assess level of commitment and impact of PS/RtI on faculty/staff.	M	I	A	M
Category (1) Tabulation	= 12/15	= 7/15	= 11/15	= 13/15
Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure				

<p>6. School-wide data (e.g., DIBELS, Curriculum-Based Measures, Office Discipline Referrals) are collected through an efficient and effective systematic process.</p>	M	I	A	M
<p>7. Statewide and other databases (e.g., Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network [PMRN], School-Wide Information System [SWIS]) are used to make data-based decisions.</p>	I	N	A	A
<p>8. School-wide data are presented to staff after each benchmarking session (e.g., staff meetings, team meetings, grade-level meetings).</p>	I	I	I	I
<p>9. School-wide data are used to evaluate the effectiveness of core academic programs.</p>	I	A	A	A
<p>10. School-wide data are used to evaluate the effectiveness of core behavior programs.</p>	M	I	A	M
<p>11. Curriculum-Based Measurement (e.g., DIBELS) data are used in conjunction with other data sources to identify students needing targeted group interventions and individualized interventions for academics.</p>	I	I	I	I

12. Office Disciplinary Referral data are used in conjunction with other data sources to identify students needing targeted group interventions and individualized interventions for behavior.	M	A	A	A
13. Data are used to evaluate the effectiveness (RtI) of Tier 2 intervention programs.	M	A	A	I
14. Individual student data are utilized to determine response to Tier 3 interventions.	M	A	A	N
15. Special Education Eligibility determination is made using the RtI model for the following ESE programs: a. Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (EBD)	M	A	A	M
15. Special Education Eligibility determination is made using the RtI model for the following ESE programs: b. Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)	M	A	A	M
16. The school staff has a process to select evidence-based practices. a. Tier 1	I	I	A	I
16. The school staff has a process to select evidence-based practices. b. Tier 2	I	I	A	M
16. The school staff has a process to select evidence-based practices. c. Tier 3	I	I	A	M

17. The School-Based Leadership Team has a regular meeting schedule for problem-solving activities.	M	A	A	A
18. The School-Based Leadership Team evaluates target student's/students' RtI at regular meetings.	M	A	N	M
19. The School-Based Leadership Team involves parents.	M	I	I	A
20. The School-Based Leadership Team has regularly scheduled data day meetings to evaluate Tier 1 and Tier 2 data.	M	I	A	N
Category (2) Tabulation	= 36/54	= 25/54	= 31/54	= 35/54
Implementation: Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving Process				
21. The school has established a three-tiered system of service delivery. a. Tier 1 Academic Core Instruction clearly identified.	N	I	A	I
21. The school has established a three-tiered system of service delivery. b. Tier 1 Behavioral Core Instruction clearly identified.	N	I	A	A

21. The school has established a three-tiered system of service delivery. c. Tier 2 Academic Supplemental Instruction/Programs clearly identified.	N	I	A	M
21. The school has established a three-tiered system of service delivery. d. Tier 2 Behavioral Supplemental Instruction/Programs clearly identified.	N	I	A	N
21. The school has established a three-tiered system of service delivery. e. Tier 3 Academic Intensive Strategies/Programs are evidence-based.	N	I	A	I
21. The school has established a three-tiered system of service delivery. f. Tier 3 Behavioral Intensive Strategies/Programs are evidence-based.	N	I	A	I
22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: a. Problem is defined as a data-based discrepancy (GAP Analysis) between what is expected and what is occurring (includes peer and benchmark data).	I	A	A	N

<p>22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: b. Replacement behaviors (e.g., reading performance targets, homework completion targets) are clearly defined.</p>	I	A	I	I
<p>22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: c. Problem analysis is conducted using available data and evidence-based hypotheses.</p>	I	A	I	M
<p>22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: d. Intervention plans include evidence-based (e.g., research-based, data-based) strategies.</p>	I	A	N	M
<p>22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: e. Intervention support personnel are identified and scheduled for all interventions.</p>	I	A	I	A

22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: f. Intervention integrity is documented.	M	A	I	I
22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: g. Response to intervention is evaluated through systematic data collection.	M	A	I	M
22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: h. Changes are made to intervention based on student response.	I	A	I	N
22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including: i. Parents are routinely involved in implementation of interventions.	I	I	I	M
Category (3)	= 13/15	= 23/45	= 21/45	= 24/45
Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning				

23. A strategic plan (implementation plan) exists and is used by the School-Based Leadership Team to guide implementation of PBIS/RtI.	M	I	M	N
24. The School-Based Leadership Team meets at least twice each year to review data and implementation issues.	M	I	M	M
25. The School-Based Leadership Team meets at least twice each year with the District Leadership Team to review data and implementation issues.	M	I	M	M
26. Changes are made to the implementation plan as a result of school and district leadership team data-based decisions.	M	I	M	M
27. Feedback on the outcomes of the PS/RtI Project is provided to school-based faculty and staff at least yearly.	M	I	M	I
Category (4) Tabulation	= 15/15	= 5/15	= 15/15	= 10/15
Total Tabulation of Overall MTSS Implementation	= 76/129	= 60/129	= 78/129	= 82/129

The principals' responses to the Self-Assessment of Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI) MTSS survey is based upon if they perceived that RtI/PBIS/MTSS strategies were implemented with fidelity less than 24% of the time (N), 25 - 74% of the time (I), 75 - 100% of the time (A), or if it is being maintained after achieving

fidelity 75 - 100% of the time (M). As this research study detailed in the Literature Review, MTSS is the leveraging of both academic and behavioral interventions as a school-wide system of support. The Literature Review also defined PBIS as a holistic system that encourages a culture for learning; RtI was defined as scientifically-based proactive academic strategies to counteract the opportunity gap.

Pseudonyms for the principals and the schools they lead were created. These pseudonyms are:

1. Principal/Location 1: Principal 1/Thornsmith High School
2. Principal/Location 2: Principal 2/Hillside Preparatory High School
3. Principal/Location 3: Principal 3/Nichols Public Schools
4. Principal/Location 4: Principal 4/Vivian Franklin College Preparatory High School

The overall success of each principal in implementing the PBIS model varied according to their responses to the 43 PBIS questions. The respondent overall MTSS survey results are listed below.

Table 6

Frequency of Participant Responses for N, I, A, or M

	Not Started (N) 0 – 24%	In Progress (I) 25 – 74%	Achieved (A) 75 – 100%	Maintaining (M) 75 -100% repeated
School # 1	7/43= 16%	14/43= 33%	0/43= 0%	22/43= 51%
School # 2	1/43=2%	25/43= 58%	16/43=37%	1/43= 3%
School # 3	2/43= 5%	11/43= 26%	23/43= 53%	7/43= 16%
School # 4	6/43= 14%	11/43=26%	7/43= 16%	19/43= 44%

Principal 1 PBIS implementation was Not Started 16% of the time, was In Progress 33% of the time, Achieved 0% of the time, and was Maintaining 51% of the time. Principal 2 PBIS implementation was Not Started 2% of the time, was In Progress 58% of the time, Achieved 37% of the time, and was Maintaining 3% of the time. Principal 3 PBIS implementation was Not Started 5% of the time, was In Progress 26% of the time, Achieved 53% of the time, and was Maintaining 16% of the time. Principal 4 PBIS implementation was Not Started 14% of the time, was In Progress 26% of the time, Achieved 16% of the time, and was Maintaining 44% of the time. The areas of implementation success varied by Principal with most achieving overall fidelity at 58% or lower per category. The implementation of these levels of fidelity will be discussed in the next section as categorical data of MTSS.

Table 7

MTSS Survey Overall Percentage of Fidelity

School	Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support	Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure	Implementation: Rtl, MTSS	Implementation: Progress Monitoring	Overall MTSS
*MTSS Category Emphasis	(a) tiered instruction; (b) high-quality instruction; (c) evidence-based practice; (d) screening, monitoring, and diagnostic assessment; and (e) instructional fidelity	(a) tiered instruction; (b) high-quality instruction; (c) evidence-based practice; (d) screening, monitoring, and diagnostic assessment; and (e) instructional fidelity	(a) tiered instruction; (b) high-quality instruction; (c) evidence-based practice; (d) screening, monitoring, and diagnostic assessment; and (e) instructional fidelity	(a) tiered instruction; (b) high-quality instruction; (c) evidence-based practice; (d) screening, monitoring, and diagnostic assessment; and (e) instructional fidelity	Fidelity of MTSS Implemen tation
School # 1	Maintaining (M)	In Progress (I)	Achieved (A)	Maintaining (M)	59%
School # 2	Maintaining (M)	In Progress (I)	Achieved (A)	Maintaining (M)	47%
School # 3	In Progress (I)	Achieved (A)	Achieved (A)	Maintaining (M)	60%
School # 4	Maintaining (M)	In Progress (I)	Maintaining (M)	Maintaining (M)	64%

In terms of categorical success for MTSS implementation, the principals' responses for Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support were that, Principals 1, 2, and 4 said their schools Achieved MTSS and were Maintaining their commitment between 75 - 100% at the leadership level. Principal 3 cited that his school was In progress at 25 - 74%. In regards to Infrastructure Development, Principals 1, 2 and 4 said

their schools were In Progress at 25 - 74% on establishing a Three tier Intervention and Problem-Solving Process. Principal 3 cited that his school has Achieved this this goal at 75 - 100%. In regards to the Implementation of RtI and MTSS within their respective buildings, Principals 1 - 3 said that their schools have Achieved this expectation at 75 - 100% implementation level. Principal 4 previously achieved this expectation and now is Maintaining PBIS implementation at a percentage of 75 - 100%. In regards to the *Implementation of Progress Monitoring*, all principals, Principals 1 - 4, are Maintaining this expectation of PBIS. Based upon their survey responses, the principals have indicated that they have each Achieved then Maintained the implementation of PBIS strategies within their buildings.

Understanding the MTSS Survey Results as Principals' Implementation of MTSS

As aforementioned, each principals' response to the MTSS survey, is his or her indication of the fidelity of MTSS implementation in the schools in which they lead. The Literature Review in this study defined MTSS strategies as having multi-leveled supports and strategies that are best practice to support the overall school program as a system. According to the MTSS framework, there are conditions that must be present. Hoover (2013) describes these five conditions as: “(a) tiered instruction; (b) high-quality instruction; (c) evidence-based practice; (d) screening, monitoring, and diagnostic assessment; and (e) instructional fidelity.” In the next section, each principal's perceptions on the MTSS survey will be compared to achievement data and graduation rates by demographic to present principal perceptions versus student outcomes. To best present the data, the categorical data per school will be compared to student proficiency.

Section 3: Reviewing Fidelity: Principals' Perceptions and Student Outcomes

MTSS Implementation and Student Report Cards by Demographic

Principal 1/school 1. Earlier in this chapter, Participant 1's MTSS Categorical Results fell in the Maintaining (M) for Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support category, fell in the In Progress (I) for Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure category, fell in the Achieved (A) for Implementation: RtI, MTSS category, and fell in Maintaining (M) for the Implementation: Progress Monitoring category in terms of MTSS implementation perceptions. The perceptions of Principal 1 would indicate that within this organization, MTSS implementation was executed as follows: tiered instruction was offered yet not according to the level of intensity of supports students needed; it would also indicate evidence-based practices to assess teaching and learning are In Progress (I); and Participant 1's perceptions in the survey also would indicate that students are inadequately screened, monitored, and diagnosed through assessments to ensure high quality instruction. Finally, it also indicates that these MTSS practices have been achieved and are now being maintained. In comparing Participant 1's perceptions, as evidenced in the MTSS survey, to actual graduation and achievement data, School 1 is not at the Maintaining level as in "ongoing" supports to ensure fidelity. In actuality, school 1 would be at the Not Started category due to "high quality instruction" and the "monitoring" of success not being equitable for students of color, which are 67% of the school's population. Participant 1's overall rating Maintaining (M) MTSS systems is more accurate than the perceptions in Participant 1's categorical data of MTSS. Students at School 1 graduate at a similar correlation to the

perceptions of Principal 1 in that School 1 graduates Black boys at 63%, does not meet passing scores on the math portion of the SAT, is approaching passing on the ELA portion of the SAT and MTSS supports are either Not Started (N) or In Progress (I) roughly 49% of the time according to the perceptions of Principal 1. The perceived distribution of MTSS systems of supports does not meet the achievement criteria needed to ensure implementation fidelity.

Principal 2/school 2. Participant 2's MTSS Categorical Results fell in the Maintaining (M) for Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support category, fell in the In Progress (I) for Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure category, fell in the Achieved (A) for Implementation: RtI, MTSS category, and fell in Maintaining (M) for the Implementation: Progress Monitoring category in terms of MTSS implementation perceptions. The perceptions of Principal 2 would also indicate that within this organization, MTSS implementation was executed as follows: tiered instruction was offered yet not according to the level of intensity of supports students needed; it would also indicate evidence-based practices to assess teaching and learning are In Progress (I); and Participant 2's perceptions in the survey also would indicate that students are inadequately screened, monitored, and diagnosed through assessments to ensure high quality instruction. Finally, it also indicates that these MTSS practices have been achieved and are now being maintained.

In comparing Participant 2's perceptions, as evidenced in the MTSS survey, to actual graduation and achievement data, School 2 is not at the Maintaining level as in “ongoing” supports to ensure fidelity. In actuality, school 2 would be at the Not Started

category due to “high quality instruction” and the “monitoring” of success not being equitable for students of color, which are 72% of the school’s population. Like Principal 1, Participant 2's overall rating Maintaining (M) MTSS systems is more accurate than the perceptions in Participant 2's categorical data of MTSS. Meaning, that Principal 2 understood the overall picture of implementation, yet did not implement MTSS in each sub category according to the intention of the MTSS mandate. Students at School 2 graduate at a similar correlation to the perceptions of Principal 2 in that School 2 graduates Black boys at 67%, does not meet passing scores on the math portion of the SAT, is approaching passing on the ELA portion of the SAT and MTSS supports are either Not Started (N) or In Progress (I) roughly 60% of the time according to the perceptions of Principal 2. The perceived distribution of MTSS systems of supports does NOT meet the actual achievement criteria needed to ensure implementation fidelity.

Principal 3/school 3. Participant 1's MTSS Categorical Results fell in the In Progress (I) range for the Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support category, fell in the Achieved (A) for Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure category, fell in the Achieved (A) for Implementation: RtI, MTSS category, and fell in Maintaining (M) for the Implementation: Progress Monitoring category in terms of MTSS implementation perceptions. The perceptions of Principal 3 would indicate that within this organization, MTSS implementation was executed as follows: tiered instruction was appropriately offered; it would also indicate evidence-based practices to assess teaching and learning are Achieved and being Maintained; and Participant 3's perceptions in the survey also would indicate that students are screened, monitored, and

diagnosed through assessments to ensure high quality instruction. Finally, it also indicates that these MTSS practices have been achieved and are now being maintained.

In comparing Participant 3's perceptions, as evidenced in the MTSS survey, to actual graduation and achievement data, School 3 has MTSS supports for all students, including Black males although Black males have the lowest success rates in terms of achievement and graduation rates. The areas of growth for School 3 is in ongoing progress monitoring and in leadership implementation fidelity, yet the perceptions of Principal 3 are accurate in comparing actual student success. Additional MTSS supports are needed for African American males to make them more competitive with their peers i.e. other sub groups, yet they are achieving. For Principal 3, the perceived distribution of MTSS systems of supports is implemented with fidelity both in perceptions and student academic success.

Principal 4/school 4. Participant 4's MTSS Categorical Results fell in the Maintaining (M) for Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support category, fell in the In Progress (I) for Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure category, fell in the Maintaining (M) for Implementation: RtI, MTSS category, and fell in Maintaining (M) for the Implementation: Progress Monitoring category in terms of MTSS implementation perceptions. The perceptions of Principal 4 would indicate that within this organization, MTSS implementation was properly executed as follows: tiered instruction according to the level of intensity of supports is present; it would also indicate evidence-based practices to assess teaching and learning are In Progress (I); and Participant 4's perceptions in the survey also would indicate that students are regularly

screened, monitored, and are assessed to ensure high quality instruction. Finally, it also indicates that these MTSS practices have been achieved and are now being maintained.

In comparing Participant 4's survey perceptions to actual graduation and achievement data, School 4 is not at the Achieved or Maintaining level. In actuality, school 4 would be at the In Progress category due to “high quality instruction” and the “monitoring” of success not being implemented as clear systems. Furthermore, the achievement for students of color at School 4 is not equitable to the other sub groups at this school. Participant 4's overall rating of Maintaining (M) MTSS systems is also inaccurate because students at School 4 graduate more in line with the In Progress category. Yet, Participant 3's categorical ratings for MTSS strategies is accurate in that 40% of the time MTSS efforts are in effect 74% of the time or less. This is reflected in the higher than average graduation rates although the approaching target SAT scores indicate more MTSS supports are needed. The perceived distribution of MTSS systems of supports does NOT consistently meet the achievement criteria needed to ensure implementation fidelity for all students. Schools 1-4 indicate even with MTSS efforts, Black males are still the lowest subgroup to achieve according to Illinois School requirements. The researcher interviewed the four principals to find additional qualitative data as to why Black males are the least successful subgroup in the four public schools. The principals’ perceptions will seek to address the achievement of Black males in the Presentation of their interviews with the researcher.

Participant Transcribed Interview Data Primary Sources–Interviews and Survey Data

Interview questions. The respondents of the elite interviews answered nine semi-structured, interview questions. Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2011) assert that semi-structured interviews aim at “identifying commonalities and differences across individual respondents on one or more topics.” Questions 1-7 were during the initial interview of 45-60 minutes. The transcriptions of Questions 1-7 were emailed to each respondent prior to the follow up interview. The follow up interview lasted 20-30 minutes with questions 8 and 9 being added as follow up questions for triangulation purposes. Open ended sub questions were asked to further investigate the perceptions of the four high school principals. The semi-structured and sub questions interviewees answered are as follows:

Interview questions–initial interview.

1. What are your years of service as an educator and as an administrator? What are your academic credentials?
2. How has your background shaped your views on education?
 - a. Sub question: How do these childhood perceptions shape your leadership style?
3. How are students with differing abilities educated at your school? Please list academic trends for marginalized students.
 - a. Sub question: How are students with academic and/or social needs identified?

- b. Sub question: How do you use supports to counteract needs?
4. What is your perceptions of the current level of implementation fidelity of RtI/Multi-tiered system of supports?
 - a. Sub question: What, in your opinion, helps or hinders your ability to implement MTSS strategies with fidelity?
5. How do you reinforce a positive school culture that is accepting of diverse backgrounds and abilities?
6. What are your perceptions of how social justice principles apply to your work as a school leader in relation to addressing disproportionality of African American males in Special Education?
 - a. Sub question: How do you monitor the success of African American males?
7. Is there any information left unexplored that you feel is pertinent?

Follow up interview questions.

1. You've had time to read transcribed notes of your interview and currently have a copy of your comments. Therefore, I will refer to each question, and specifically, question number 7 which states: "Is there any information left unexplored that you feel is pertinent?" Are there any areas of your interview you feel should be further explored?
2. Do you feel that the transcribed information accurately explains education processes within your school? If so, how? If not, why not?

Making Meaning: Transcribed Interview Data and Themes

With the permission of the four human subjects who were interviewed and in accordance to the provisions set by Loyola's Institutional Research Board (IRB), audio recordings of each interview occurred and the transcriptions of each interview was assessed with the software program NVivo. NVivo is a program that aims to assist researchers to organize multiple forms of data into a cohesive framework. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), "As soon as the field researcher begins to compile information, challenges appear. A big one comes from the multiplicity of data sources and forms" (p. 73). NVivo allotted for the analysis of interview audio transcriptions, and this analysis led to 1.) The coding of chunks of data to match beginning codes from the field as in deductive coding; 2.) the sub codes of data; 3.) the development of patterns of data; and 4.) the creation of themes.

Using holistic coding, the researcher coded data into chunks that match codes developed while the researcher interviewed human subjects. Miles et al. (2014) states: "This method applies a single code to a large unit of data." The holistic codes were then categorized into large themes deductively generated in accordance to the literary review, which included Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organization* and George Theoharis' *The School Leaders Our Children Deserve: Seven Keys to Equity, Social Justice, and School Reform*. Next, the researcher used holistic coding to develop large ideas presented by the human subjects. To consolidate large ideas, the researcher then re-read the labeled chunks of data to create sub codes. Miles et al. (2014) defines sub coding as "a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry. The method is appropriate for

virtually all qualitative studies....” The sub codes created from the children nodes within the NVivo software research program assisted the researcher to further break down the large chunks of data into multiple categories. These sub codes were edited and consolidated into patterns and themes. The patterns of perceptions from each of the human subjects were then further analyzed by the researcher (see the figure below).

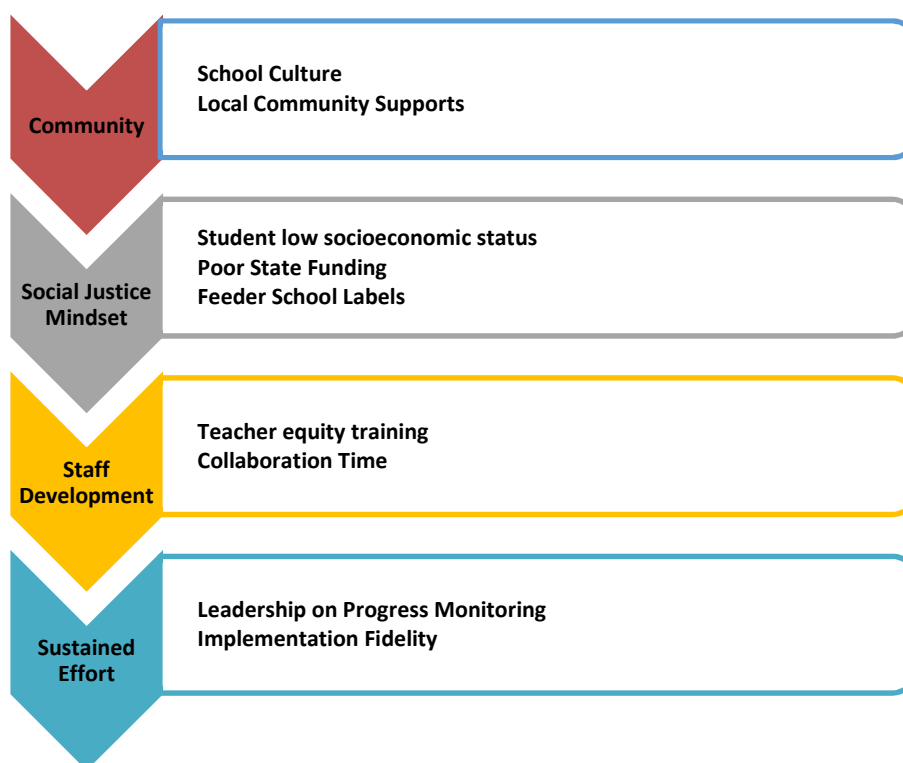


Figure 3. Patterns of Perceptions from Human Subjects

The many sub codes then were cross referenced to create nine perception patterns. They are as follows: 1.) school culture attributes to student success or lack of success, 2.) local community supports offer additional services that schools may be unable to provide, 3.) schools often have to counteract students’ low socioeconomic status; 4.) in Illinois, there is poor state funding, 5.) feeder school labels sort students into tracks of success; 6.) teachers would benefit from professional development in the forms of equity training; 7.)

school personnel need collaboration time; 8.) leadership is needed to truly progress monitor to ensure; and 9.) RtI/MTSS is implemented with fidelity. The four principals also credited their upbringing and childhood role models along with their desire to help others as the belief systems that shape their perceptions of educating students. They also perceived their roles as being the instructional leader whose job is to manage how education is disseminated.

As with qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), “the emphasis is the collection of descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects’ point of view.” The four respondents’ point of views fell into four patterns of “big ideas” or themes. These patterns led to four major themes: 1.) *Community*; 2.) *Social Justice Mindset*; 3.) *Staff Development*; and 4.) *Sustained Effort*. All four principals acknowledge that students are on “tracks” to success or unsuccess and see RtI/MTSS practices for a systematic change as one method in which to lead equitable success for students entering their systems as “at risk, marginalized” students.

Section 4: Presentation of Participant Perceptions

Presentation of Research Question 1

Research Question 1--In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTSS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are the perceptions of social justice as it relates to the citizenship of all students, particularly African American males, within their building?

All four participants within this study defined “citizenship” as preparing teenagers to be adults who contribute to society. They identified their roles as school principals as

defining appropriate standards of conduct and appropriate standards of academic success. They then applied their visions of student success to create systems with their staffs to support students with efforts to promote equality as social justice minded decisions. As aforementioned in the previous section, four major themes for MTSS implementation emerged from participant perceptions. The four themes are 1.) Community, 2.) Social Justice Mindset, 3.) Staff Development, and 4 (Sustained Effort.

Theme 1: Community. In regards to the theme of Community, participants from this study believe that students who struggle academically and emotionally can benefit from community supports as in local programs and support from community members. They also define community as additional fiscal resources outside of the school, and finally, community was defined as a positive school culture.

Local community supports. The participants believe that providing a sense of community in the form of clubs, such as the YMCA, offers support for students. Participant 1 felt that “wraparound services” or social services/service providers can support students outside of school.

Participant 2 stated:

I also think there needs to be full wrap around services, and that means money, of course, because you’re talking about agencies or social service agencies that can offer that emotional support or training or learning that they [students] may need.

Like Participant 2, Participant 4 felt that addressing social and “physiological” needs in the form of positive social connections increases student success.

Participant 4 stated: “You know, you have to be very physiological minded. I think we’ve [educators] talked about this. And, that’s where the work on the personal has to take place. And then, I think it’s very powerful to work with groups.”

Financial support. Within community supports is also financial supports to offset the lack of funding in poor school districts because schools are primarily financed from local property taxes. Fiscal support was defined by participants as a tool to create positive school to community relationships with families. Participant 1 described an initiative started to teach his primarily Black students the value of nutrition with the goal of education and health.

Participant 1 stated:

Let me give you an example, the last initiative I came up with was establishing an urban farming initiative because our communities are food deserts.... The only thing we have in our communities now is Sharks [fast food]; you know fried foods, fast foods. These are not good things, good nutrition. You know good nutrition impacts the way you think.

Along with educating students about nutrition, one participant discussed the inequities of financial resources between students from high SES households in comparison to those who are from a low SES household.

Participant 3 stated:

Now we have to think potentially different because, if that family can't afford the extra \$400 that it costs to be on the dance team, then ... and they are not going to

say anything, but they are just going to walk away from the program because \$400 means more in their world than it might for some others.

Participant 2 stated that “the role of the educational leaders is to recognize the funding limitations provided for low-income students in terms of education and access.”

Positive school culture and student citizenship. The participants believe that schools and the families within them need additional help. “Community” defined by the participants are the feelings of belonging and positive relationships with adults, peers, and outside agencies that clearly state to students and their families that “we are in this together”. Additionally, participants of this research defined “social justice as it relates to the citizenship of all students...” as the importance of teaching students what is “acceptable” behaviors and beliefs for students at their individual schools and to allow students to lead in their own ownership of these beliefs. The participants also highlighted student voice or ownership as methods to include historically marginalized students.

Participant 4 stated:

This year, for example, we have a Muslim student alliance organization, and they had after school workshops for our staff. They led them. They led the entirety of them, and we were all participants, myself, the assistant principals, the deans. They did a great job of just saying here's what we do as an organization, but also here's who we are as students with Muslim beliefs.

Participant 4 stated:

Our crux is trying to make sure that our students appreciate the things that we do in this school. We try to set traditions and create an environment where kids are

not afraid to try things or to step out of their comfort zone. We try to encourage and promote kids that are doing what they are supposed to do.

Participant 3 stated:

We created a group structure that we gave the keys to the castle to them. This is a group of seniors, and we said, 'It's got to be your school. It's got to be your year.

It's got to be what you want it to be.'

Principal 3 coined this practice as "student-led leadership." All four principals indicated that the creation of staff-student partnerships improved student success and relationships. They often cited how an educator influenced them and partnered with them to lead to their personal, academic success. For example, Principal 1 stated: "Along that way, through those life experiences I've met some great teachers along the way that have had a great influence on me and made me who I am today."

The participants of this study favored establishing clear expectations and then honoring student leadership and allowing students, with the support of educators, to implement acts of citizenship. One participant discussed how the overall goal of community is to create partnerships that promote student voice.

Participant 3 stated: "Students don't have, students doesn't necessarily have voice, you know, or families that do not have voice. And, you advocate for them and for services." Participants in this study believed that the goal of MTSS was to create a community of supports to aid students, their families and the community in which they live.

Theme 2: Social justice mindset. Another example of promoting citizenship of all students, particularly African American males, was explained by Participant 4 who said: “Trying to meet the needs of everybody--you have to be a very culturally competent school leader and teacher.” All four principals stated that if they help the school system as a whole, then all students would benefit, including those who need more supports such as African American males. Each participant also described social justice for the citizenship of all students as a personal decision.

For example, Participant 1 stated:

I am an instrument for social justice and that's proven in my work, in the things that I do, the conversations that I have, the precious conversations that I have with my students in front of my White staff members. I know it makes them uncomfortable, but those who've been around long enough, know me now. They know I'm a consummate professional who will bow down to his teachers as long as they're doing right by our students. And they know when I come with a hard rhetoric of the reality of the price of racism in a society and how it impacts my students, they don't see it as an attack on them so to speak. Majority of them don't. They don't see it as an attack on them, they just know I'm passionate about my students and delivering to them what is truth and what is right.

Like Participant 1, Participant 3 stated that “a school leader must advocate for students and their families for services internal, within the school, or external, outside of the school.”

Student low socioeconomic status. The four participants' perceptions of social justice principles in relation to their roles as school leaders who address the disproportionality of African American males who achieve less and incur disproportionate amounts of behavioral infractions described this task as challenging due to societal flaws of racism and opportunity gaps. For example, Participant 3 stated: "I've always wondered what was, there was something wrong, some inequality, some dysfunction in our system that left young Black males, young people who look like me in the rear so to speak." Like Participant 3, Participant 2 stated:

We have kids who are coming here who may not have eaten dinner the night before. I'll give you an example: I had a kid who is in a homeless shelter. Stayed with a family in another township, a church family. He was coming here on the day after we had that large snow. He had no coat and was wearing flip flops. I mean those are issues that a kid can't do anything about, so we as a school--one of the secretaries went out and brought a coat the next day for the kid. We wound up buying shoes for him. Another secretary went out and bought socks and gloves, so it's those kinds of things you have to deal with but how do you think a kid is going to concentrate on academics when they're coming in from the freezing cold with no shoes on their feet?

Another example comes from Participant 3, who said: "I think most of the administrative team, I think we've really been trying to identify, there is a difference I think with achievement gap and opportunity gap." The participants stated that social justice within the school system is the attempt to counteract the lack of academic, social

and behavioral disadvantages that students arrive to school with and the attempts to support students.

Poor state funding. The participants also viewed MTSS as a systemic reaction to a historical system of racial injustice. Through their perceptions as instructional leaders who must implement MTSS, they cited MTSS as a program that is beneficial to improve social justice and student success. Participant 3 stated: “It has provided three things that I think we didn't have as part of our system before.” Not every principal viewed the expectations of MTSS as realistic, however. Two out of the four principals cited that either poor school funding or the lack of time to train staff as hindrances to implementing MTSS to support social justice for African American males. Participant 2 stated:

I think the concept is good. I think that schools want to implement interventions. And, I think on the Tier 1 level a lot of teachers do in their classrooms try to implement as much as they can, but once it gets beyond Tier 1, then it becomes cost and other resources that may or may not be available. So, I think, unfortunately, the full gamut of wrap around services may not always be available for interventions because more often than not it's more than just an academic issue; that's impacting the students that are not doing well that are at risk. There may be issues at home that are impacting them.

Feeder school labels. Based upon the interview transcripts of Participant 1-4, the principals defined Social Justice (theme 2) for African American males as the recognition that Black males are historically at a disadvantage and their failure is almost predetermined by factors not of their own such as family structure, cultural disadvantage

and educator bias. For example, Participant 2 stated: “A lot of times they’ve already been labeled by the time they get to the high school level. I try to at least provide opportunities for them to demonstrate strengths.”

Furthermore, in analyzing the respondents’ RtI responses within the MTSS survey in comparison to each principal’s fidelity of implementation, there are varying degrees in which perceptions meet student achievement results. Yet, when each human subject was asked interview question number 4, which asks: “What is your perceptions of the current level of implementation fidelity of RtI/Multi-tiered system of supports,” they cited that students of color, more than any other student group, are already pre-identified as having needs that have not been properly address within their previous years of schooling. They stated that “at-risk” students’ needs cannot be truly addressed within any system, even within the MTSS system. Participant 4 stated: “By the time I get them (students of color), it is too late.” The four participants stated that their Social Justice Mindsets (theme 2) and continual requirements of Staff Development (theme 3) enable them to support social justice and citizenship within their schools.

Theme 3: Staff development. Three out of four participants within this study perceived RtI/MTSS as an unrealistic mandate due to limitations in teacher efficacy due to limited collaboration time. The principals/participants from this study also believed that further professional development opportunities to train teachers in equity would increase student success. As discussed in the Literature Review within this study, the majority of America’s teachers are white females and the majority of students who are expelled from schools, or fail classes and/or who are referred to Special Education are

Black males. The participants within this study discussed how the teachers in which they monitor need increased strategies for culturally relevant teaching.

Participants 1-4 stated that Staff Development (Theme 3) in culturally relevant teaching and the hiring of diverse staff are ways in which to create citizenship among students. They believe Staff Development is needed to address the needs of the various demographics that make up their schools. For example, Participant 4 stated:

I think, we have to look at systems and how kids are identified. You know, what are the behaviors, what's the learning, why are they not learning it, asking questions more so than making judgments. And, I think also, too, you have to look at your hiring. I think, Human Resources often overlooked an important piece to this, because if you have in our case, a predominately white staff, that maybe many our Black kids don't relate to, not saying none of them do, then you're at a disadvantage.

All participants supported the idea of creating a safe environment for all students by harnessing student voice and by training staff to be culturally minded. They believe that if all students feel safe, respected and honored so will the Black male.

Teacher equity training. The participants within this qualitative study perceive teacher's implicit biases, microaggressions, and lack of information about cultures other than their own as contributors to the racial achievement gap. For example, Participant 3 stated:

We talk a lot in education now, particularly at a school, like Nichols Public Schools, that's becoming more diverse in terms of backgrounds and experiences

and kids that are first and second generation. I think too often we tend to not want to ask them about their differences or who they are beyond as being students because I think many people are brought up to say, 'Well, we don't ask questions. We just live' I think the side effect of that is you tend not to understand, you tend not to be empathetic, and frankly, when it comes to a student and adult relationship, they tend to think you don't care.

Like Participant 3, Participant 2 stated:

There is a guy by the name of Rudy Careaga. I took ten teachers to see him speak last year, and he wrote a book called "Closing the Achievement Gap". I think it is important as a teaching staff that we understand and recognize and admit to the fact that there is an achievement gap.

Participant 4 attributed the need for teacher equity training as providing an introduction to the lived experiences of students of color that teachers may not relate to and/or having relevant experience in encountering. Participant 4 stated:

We talked about, you know, creating culturally relevant pedagogies and curriculum and context and the textbooks and the lesson planning and the tasks that the kids can see themselves in them. We talk about creating them because it is almost unnatural for a white person to not think 'white'.

The concept of "not meeting students where they are" was discussed by one participant. Participant 1 stated:

What we found is that maybe 95% of all the students who were failing, it wasn't because they were academically challenged. It's just that they had no connection

to the academic material and/or lacked social connections; you know there was social pitfalls that prevented them from focusing on academics, whether it's at home, or you know, somewhere else so we work through those issues.

Another participant mentioned the importance of cultural competency. Participant 4 stated: “Trying to meet the needs of everybody, you have to be a very culturally competent school leader and teacher. We’re all in the same boat.”

The solution to assist white teachers in teaching non-white students was to provide culturally relevant teaching professional development opportunities to promote systemic equity. Participants 2 and 3 both stated that they offer professional development to target race and education efforts. Participant 2 stated:

We talk about ways in which you can close that [achievement] gap, and a lot of times it is the culture and climate that makes a difference that’s going to help with academic achievement gap closing. So, we have worked very hard at trying to rebrand our school.

Participant 3 stated that “the use of targeted instruction about race has done wonders in getting staff to be aware of their own biases and decision-making about students of color.”

Collaboration time. Like Participant 2, Participant 1 believed that the expectation of MTSS practices are good practice, yet unlike Participant 2, Participant 1 felt it was more about the lack of time to train staff than monetary reasons. Participant 1 stated: “Time for professional development is a limited resource; I need my adults in the building to reflect on the choices they are making that impacts the classroom.

Otherwise...this intervention [MTSS] becomes lip service.” Participant 3 agreed with Participant 1 and stated:

I think there’s many individuals among our many staff, well intended individuals, but they just don’t know. They are not aware. There has to be a light bulb. So, there's training that you could...whether it’s through Pacific Education Group, you know. Whether it’s...SEED [Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity training], you know that could help shape the conversation about diversity.

Participants 2 and 4 stated similar comments.

Theme 4: Sustained effort. The researcher analyzed participant transcriptions and recognized that the principals who cited the most success in gains for students of color detailed that the implementation of RtI/MTSS strategies is from a conscious effort to maintain/monitor progress with fidelity. The participants who felt successful discussed how he or she put systems in place to maintain that RtI/MTSS strategies were in fact in place. One participant highlighted the need for a clear system of monitoring student progress.

Implementation fidelity. Participant 4 stated: “I can’t point to one thing, one program, one intervention, one individual or what’s happening and I can only say, I think it’s a collective effort. We’ve done a lot of work with creating interconnected systems.” Participant 4’s comment of “interconnected systems” was in reference to implementation fidelity. Implementation fidelity is the intention of the MTSS mandate. The MTSS mandate requires the following be in place to create a system of fidelity of instruction: 1.) shared leadership, 2.) data-based problem solving and decision making, 3.) layered

continuum of supports, 4.) evidence-based instruction, intervention, and assessment practices, universal screening and progress monitoring, and family-school-community partnerships.

Like Participant 4, Participant 3 stated:

You know, I feel like it's my responsibility, as well as our team is to identify those kids, make connections with those kids, and make it a home for them. We can't control what happens outside of school, but we know that between 7:30am - 3:34pm, they have a safe place.

Participant 3 described the PBIS portion of the MTSS model as did Participant 2 who stated:

We have just, over the last few years, began to implement Response to Intervention, where we're trying to identify students that are at-risk and that aren't necessarily Special Education students but are at risk in terms of academic deficiencies and/or behavioral or social or emotional kind of deficiencies that they need some help with.

Participants 1 and 4 felt confident about their leadership team's ability to use data and systems to target academic and behavioral growth. Conversely, however, these systems still did not address the achievement gap for low performing students who often were students of color, in particular Black boys. Participant 1 stated: "I'll tell you I give high praise to the MTSS program here at Thornsmith. I think there's great alignment to my vision and the efforts of the MTSS staff."

Participant 4 stated:

Like I said, when I started ten years ago, all of our racial subgroups were below 5%, our free and reduced lunch was 3.5%, so what really caused us to look at the issue was that we were seeing exceptional growth in AP programs, and we've all but eradicated basic level, like we don't have basic English, math ... Well, we do have a couple maths still hanging on, but we've moved everybody up. We've halved our failure rate. We've increased our grad rate. We've increased all sorts of all these academic indicators. ACT scores were flat, and we're trying to say, "What gives?" With all these other things, you would assume that it would have a positive impact on the ACT, and what we were discovering is the achievement gap was growing mostly because our population within those areas were growing, almost doubling a year. We were seeing that was off-setting the gains made in other areas by having this population that was not performing with their peers, and it was a growing percentage of kids, so then now we've got to do something.

Leadership progress monitoring. The theme of leadership progress monitoring was provided by the participants within this study in that they often listed rhetorical questions in which they asked of themselves as leaders of implementing MTSS. "Are students learning? In other words, are there academic and behavioral gains made? If so, how do we capitalize on these gains? If not, what edits to instruction and behavioral policies are needed?" One participant felt that the intention of MTSS is good yet impractical due to costs for full implementation and teacher efficacy.

Participant 2 stated:

I think the concept is good. I think that schools want to implement interventions. And, I think on the Tier 1 level a lot of teachers do in their classrooms try to implement as much as they can, but once it gets beyond Tier 1, then it becomes cost and other resources that may or may not be available.

Participant 3 agreed with Participant 2 and stated:

I think we struggle with variability. You know, I think you talk about fidelity. I think, you know, you don't see our RtI's much anymore. You see MTSS, you know. I think some of our teachers, couldn't recognize or understand what those acronyms stand for. But, here in our core classes, we've reduced the variability. What I mean is by core classes. Like our Freshman Reading, Freshman Algebra, Science. Where, if we have students that are identified with certain test scores coming in, that they have...they'll have Algebra I with Algebra I extension of different periods to help support and individualize, which is more of our Tier 2. Our English classes...they'll certainly have the exposure, they'll have access to the text and curriculum, but they'll have double periods with English/Reading. Where English, certainly English classes, the context, the books. But, the other half of the class is on Skills Development. And, I think it's one of our Tier 2 programs. We have pretty good data on that. And, our reading plus data program. Where the kids, I'm speaking to the English/Reading Tier 2 programs.

Both participants 2 and 4 highlighted the additional resources needed to help students who are behind to make gains in learning. Participant 4 also stated that bias may

affect how teachers perform in regards to educating students of color; participant 4 discussed the small population of Black students and their placement in special education. Participant 4 stated:

Right now, we still have under 4.5% of a total population of African-American students. Within that, of the students in special education, if I had to, I could probably name them. That's how small the population is. I don't know if I've had a lot of experience dealing with this specific of a student population, but I do think that, with relation to that earlier concept that we talked about which is, do we exercise our unconscious bias when we do work with families?

The other roles of the Leadership team is to meet to identify students who need targeted interventions, problem solve as a team to strategize the best methodology for the implementation of these interventions, then review the effectiveness of prior interventions as data to see if additional resources are needed. This process is mentioned by one participant. Participant 2 stated: “Students get identified based upon their prior needs and based on, of course, IEP meetings and recommendations from THE TEAM that’s consulted with whether additional resources will be needed for those students.” Like Participant 2, Participant 1 meets with the school’s leadership team to execute MTSS. Participant 1 stated:

Here the execution is aligned to the greatness of the document and we have the data to show that too. I get presented with data on a quarterly basis of how the MTSS students are doing compared to those who are not receiving the interventions, receiving the services. And the difference is staggering.

Both participants discussed the importance of relying on their leadership teams to inform next steps to make the implementation of MTSS a cyclical process.

Presentation of Research Question 2

Research Question 2--In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTSS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are their perceptions of how social justice principles apply to their work as school leaders related to addressing disproportionality of African American males?

Participants within this study perceived RtI/MTSS as a program to counteract social injustice. All four participants cited student need as the factor that drives their decisions. Student need, as defined by the participants, is financial as in students of 'need' are students who financially come from low socio-economic households (SES); in addition, 'need', according to the perceptions of the participants, is also in the form of an inadequate prior education due to lack of access to resources such as consistent education staff, school materials etc. They also cited that students are labeled as excellent, average, below average or special needs during elementary and junior high schooling with Black males achieving the least. All four participants also stated their frustrations with America's public school system in terms of equitable access and opportunity. They defined social justice as addressing life/societal inequities that negatively impact student achievement. In regards to the four overarching themes of Community; Social Justice Mindset; Staff Development; and Sustained Effort, the participants focused their efforts on the themes of Social Justice Mindset and Sustained Effort to develop personal

philosophies to address the achievement gap for Black boys and their peers. They indicated they developed their social justice lenses during their own childhoods and adolescence. They also used targeted MTSS interventions to address the disproportionate amounts of Black boys who achieve less academically and are the recipients of higher amounts of school discipline.

Theme 2: Social justice mindset. One participant described growing up as a child of poverty, who then used this personal experience to empathize with students.

Participant 2 stated:

I wasn't always afforded opportunities that other people had because of our financial circumstances, so I didn't get---so my background has shaped a lot in terms of me understanding the students that I have before me. I feel that I was them.

Another participant cited his family of educators for his childhood lens towards social justice. Participant 3 stated:

Both of my parents are educators. They have been retired for 20 something years. My wife is a teacher; my brother is a teacher; his wife a teacher. I come from of a family of educators, so, it's kind of a family business. So, you grow up in that atmosphere in terms, you know, the work. But, I think, for myself, personally, the background, just in terms of the work of a psychologist, you're a real advocate for students.

Both participants 2 and 3 used their personal experiences as lenses to understand students and to advocate for them.

Another participant described his relationship with his grandmother as to why he wanted to understand diverse people through communication. Participant 4 stated:

I discovered myself, personally, and I think this was something in the family structure I grew up in... and particularly from my grandmother. One of my grandmothers was very much about you learn about a person through deep dialogue, so I was always ... In fact, I got in trouble a lot because I was always the one who would engage with all kinds of people, whether they were people in my circle, so to speak, versus people in other people's circles. I always asked provocative questions, not because I wanted to get a rise out of people or because I wanted to upset people, so to speak, but I always felt like that conversation was a way to really dig deep into who people are. I think that is what I try to encourage.

Like the other participants of this study, participant 4 was influenced by family yet adds that the lives of Black civil rights activists were influencers to his social justice concept and shaped his mindset as a social justice leader. Participant 1 states: "I was influenced by a couple of people along the way. Obviously, my mother, my parents--I was also influenced by teachers coming up in my community and the stories of civil rights leaders." Overall, the participants within this study stated that their social justice mindsets enable them to be creative in creating opportunities due to inadequate school funding and teacher bias that disproportionately labels students of color as low performing and misbehaved.

Feeder school labels. In the participants' continued responses to research question 2, the participants identified education as a system that reproduces inequitable outcomes. One participant disliked the outcome or pattern of Black students achieving less and failing more. This participant took on the role of a "disruptor" in terms of breaking the pattern of Black student failure, and the participant also acknowledged that Black students come into high school from feeder schools behind the progress of their peers. Participant 1 stated:

There is something fundamentally wrong in America--at its core--in that I already know my incoming freshmen, who will require the most reading interventions, the most behavioral coaching, the most work to build trusting relationships with staff will be my African American kids. They are kids that America keeps failing, so I made up my mind that I will discontinue the cycle.

Another participant gave examples of the types of interventions that low performing students obtain from MTSS interventions to counteract feeder school inadequacies. This participant also discussed that skills taught are not necessarily academic skills such as reading or math, but the skills are more introductory skills to being a student and a self-advocate as is the case with executive functioning skills. For example, Participant 4 stated:

You know, a couple days a week, they spend minutes in the Reading Plus program and we progress and monitor watch. You know, for private or lack of. They're responding to it. If they don't, we do have reading interventionist in the building that will work with kids one on one. You know, meeting in various small

groups, 2 to 3. You know, getting their skills up. But, we're seeing anywhere from...you know, anywhere from 3 years growth. I may be underestimating it from the program. So, we're seeing a response to it and it's successful, you know of what we're trying to do. But, you know, is it, there's a lot of skills that beyond just the Reading Skill Set or the Algebra Skill Set, but the Skill Set of more of the Executive functioning, developing metacognition of learning about school and learning, you know, how to organize, prioritize. So, those are differences skills set. But, they're also benefitting within those Tier 2 and Tier 3 classes.

Participants 4 and 1 described that they use MTSS interventions with fidelity, yet they describe the achievement gap among students of color versus white students in high school due to remedial skills being unlearned at the middle school and elementary levels. They feel that their roles as social justice leaders require strategic interventions to close the achievement gap.

Theme 4: Sustained effort. Earlier in Chapter IV, in the section titled “Secondary Sources-Comparative Data of Black Boys to Their Peers,” comparative data of Black male achievement to their peers in the research participants’ schools was presented. The data presented in Table 1 and Table 2 illustrated that in the schools in which participants 1-4 lead, Black boys are more likely to grow up in poverty, come from homes where at least one biological parent is absent, read at least two grades or more below grade level, be math literate at least two grades or more below grade level, have higher truancy rates than peers, be the primary receivers of microaggressions and negative teacher bias, incur disproportionate amounts of school discipline infractions, be

on the lowest course track as in the lowest course level, be referred for Special Education services disproportionately, and graduate less than all other subgroups--white, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, Black girls etc. Therefore, the participants in this study explained their ongoing efforts to implement MTSS strategies to address this learning disparity.

Implementation fidelity. In revisiting the criteria of the MTSS framework, implementation fidelity must include the ongoing process of 1.) shared leadership, 2.) data-based problem solving and decision making, 3.) layered continuum of supports, 4.) evidence-based instruction, intervention, and assessment practices, universal screening and progress monitoring, and family-school community partnerships. The MTSS framework alters instructional and behavioral needs to the needs of students. Participants within this study said that they use MTSS strategies as systems of interventions that help struggling students. They also said that MTSS strategies can benefit Black males because interventions can counteract the failures of America's overall system of education.

One participant described the feeling of being called to public service to help the "dysfunction" of America's education system that produces Black male failure.

Participant 1 stated:

I've always wondered what was...there was something wrong, some inequality, some dysfunction in our system that left young Black males, young people who look like me in the rear so to speak. I wanted to use myself as an instrument to contribute to that void. It's a major void and it still is presently, but I wanted to use myself as an instrument to feel that void and there's no better place to look to

fill that void than in the educational system. I became an Educator in my community, back to the community that I actually grew up in. I'm now in service to that community, to all the students in particular to that community.

Participant 1 agreed with Participant 4's view of the failure of schools to reach Black males. Participant 2 stated:

Our Black boys look up to the Black males in our school, so we leverage that. We then pair our academic and behavior methods with coaching concepts from athletic teams. We use supportive strategies to push MTSS along, you know?

Both participants target Black boys' success by being strategic in their interventions.

They cited the use of data to evaluate programmatic needs.

Participant 4 stated:

There are different levels and different leverage points that we've looked at to close those gaps and flatten them out. You know, the most recent ACT data then SAT data that we've had--tracking from 2012 to recent [years], has seen our data from Asian, White, Latino, Black narrow. Those trend lines narrow. Not close.

Participant 2 explained that the result of MTSS-based interventions led to academic gains of low performing students to narrow the achievement gap, yet not close it.

Like Participant 2, Participant 4 cited the use of data to inform social justice decisions for curriculum and instruction. Participant 4 stated:

What we did, actually, we just completed essentially an 18-month deep dive into our data only because some of those populations we didn't see much more than 3% to 4% of our total student population, so the data was very challenging to

make sure it was reliable because our population size was so small. What we've really looked at recently is our students who are free and reduced lunch because that's grown from 3% in 2011 to about 17% now, so significant growth. Also, obviously, a larger population of students. We've also looked at our home language kids, kids that speak a different language at home, because that's also grown at roughly the same rate, actually slightly higher. What we've noticed is, in all the major, at least what we would define as major categories, there's significant gaps, so with GPA, there's about a half-point gap. Discipline it's about a 40% to 60% larger population of students of color who receive disciplinary action compared to white students.

Participant 4 described how the school's leadership team conducted an analysis of student data that revealed that those who were on free and reduced lunch due to low SES, those identified as English language learner students whose literacy skills were lower than peers, and students of color received more disciplinary action than other groups. This data informed the leadership team to see the experiences of transfer students who entered the school system. The data analysis, as an MTSS strategy, informed the team areas in which to target to create access and opportunity for new students.

Teacher equity training. The participants within this study discussed the issue of student “tracking” into levels of course offerings from a young age that often leads to students of color being enrolled in the lower level courses or innately denied access to higher level courses due to implicit bias that may be conscious or unconscious.

According to Burris and Garrity (2008), student placement is often a combination of student test scores and teacher perceptions. They state:

In some schools, tracking begins with kindergarten screening. IQ and early achievement tests designed to measure so-called 'ability' determine track placement in the elementary years, thus setting in place an educational trajectory for 12 years of schooling. In other schools, tracking is meritocracy that relies on teacher recommendations, grades, and student motivation to determine placement. (p. 16)

One participant from this study detailed the role of MTSS in counteracting a system of tracking that places students of color often in the lowest levels of course options while not using a student's color to determine interventions. Participant 3 stated:

Our leadership team implements MTSS as a system. What we are finding is that we are trying to counteract a system that has already placed students of color at the bottom. We do not create interventions based on race but on which students' academic or behavior progress is lagging.

Participant 1 agreed with Participant 3 in that although students who benefit from MTSS strategies are not specifically targeted due to their race, yet are targeted as in need of additional supports and happen to more often be students of color. For example, Participant 1 stated:

There was a time where students were deferred just primarily to our special education pipeline, which means you have the PPS meeting, the People Services Meeting and from there there's a determination made. Then there's a testing,

there's an assessment that takes place to find out okay is this person qualified for Special Education Services. That was a norm. Now we have a very strong, very concentrated, very focused, very organized NTSS program headed by some caring teachers. They've turned around a lot of students, lot of students that we were able to get relationships with the social workers, school counselors, you know if it was a social emotional issue, to get past that. Then build relationships and then build efficacy and build confidence in students that they could do the work. They themselves did the work, too, to understand their own limitations and biases.

The “pipeline” in which participant 4 was referring was the direct line from the lowest track of learning in elementary, then middle school, and then high school--resulting in the lowest track of all: Special Education.

All participants agreed that their implementation of MTSS interventions and supports do not target students by race. Participants believe if they implement MTSS “with fidelity” then those who achieve less and are the least successful behaviorally, will improve due to interventions in a “target all at the lowest levels approach.” A student’s race is disconnected to that student’s received interventions and supports. Although the participants cited that MTSS supports were universal and non-specific to race, they did cite the need for teacher cultural competency training in order to not perpetuate the original cycle of disproportionality. One participant, Participant 4 stated: “We've defined the line at Vivian Franklin College Preparatory High School [alias] being it's not about race or other factors as much as it is about failures and referrals being reduced.”

In response to research question 2, participants 1-4 had similar perceptions, yet the area of differentiation is to compare their embedded MTSS supports to their perceptions. Participants 3 and 1 experienced greater success than that of Participants 2 and 4, which based upon their sentiments, was financial resources to explicitly teach staff about racism as a history and implicit bias to help predominantly white teachers to teach students of color. They cited that students are not identified by their race to receive supports, yet there is a need of cultural competency for their teaching staff due to the disproportionate amounts of students of color being tracked at the lowest levels of learning in their education systems. Based upon the principals' responses, the schools that followed the MTSS implementation criteria of having a Leadership Team for ongoing problem solving and required staff development on race and implicit bias as well as had the financial resources to pay for that training, were the schools whose perceptions and implementation addressed the disproportionality of Black males being referred to Special Education. This will be explicitly analyzed in the perceptions illustrated in Research Question 3.

Presentation of Research Question 3

Research Question 3: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTSS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: How do social justice principles apply to the work of school leaders in relation to addressing the disproportionality of African American males in Special Education?

Research Question 3 was addressed by the principals' transcribed interview responses and by their responses to the MTSS implementation survey they completed. Just as the principals described in their responses to Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 that a "socially just" principal ensures that the needs of *all* students are addressed, in Research Question 3, they described their perceptions of the viability of implementing MTSS strategies in their schools because they felt that, if implemented, MTSS interventions could address the overrepresentation and overidentification of Black boys in Special Education. For Research Question 3, the principals described their current MTSS practices in comparison to the intended framework of MTSS as catalogued in their responses to the MTSS survey. They also described their perceptions of how they see the effect of / lack of effect of MTSS strategies in relation to addressing the disproportionality of African American males in Special Education.

All of the major themes emerged from the four participants in their responses, and they are: Theme (1)-Community, Theme (2)-Social Justice Mindset, Theme (3)-Staff Development, and (Theme 4)-Sustained Effort. Within the participant responses, the sub themes of positive school culture, the challenge of poor state funding, the importance of teacher equity training, and collaboration time to learn from co-workers were described as essential components to address the overrepresentation of Black boys in Special Education courses. The participants felt that if any aspect of the aforementioned themes and sub themes were missing, then their ability to support Black boys achieve was significantly hindered. They also felt as the school leader that it was their job to initiate systems that create equitable outcomes.

Theme 1's (positive school culture). The research participants felt that additional training in communicating with students who lacked socialization to school culture could benefit staff with increased tools to foster positive relationships with Black boys. They discussed the importance of partnerships with stakeholders as well as a clear consensus as to what "MTSS is" to be established within the schools at every level, so that all educators in the building were on the same page. The participants' survey responses indicated that creating a "Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support" as indicated in Table 4 varied among each education leader. According to the perceptions of the participants, School 1 implemented *Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support* at 12/15 or at 80%, School 2 implemented *Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support* at 7/15 or 47%, School 3 implemented *Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support* at 11/15 or 73%, and School 4 implemented *Consensus: Comprehensive Commitment and Support* at 13/15 or 87%. The survey scores indicated that the schools with scores higher than 80% have district leadership, school leadership, faculty and staff support, a data leadership team, and ongoing data collection in place to support MTSS strategies as a school system.

Those were the perceptions of the participants, yet although they perceived that a positive school culture and clear communication is needed to support Theme 1's Positive School Culture, each participant's self-assessment MTSS survey indicated the lack of fidelity in implementing a clear "Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure" as indicated in Table 4. According to the perceptions of the participants, School 1 implemented *Infrastructure Development* at 36/54 or at 67%, School 2

implemented *Infrastructure Development* at 25/54 or 46%, School 3 implemented *Infrastructure Development* at 31/54 or 57%, and School 4 implemented *Infrastructure Development* at 35/54 or 65%. Since no scores were higher than an 80%, this indicates that curriculum-based measures, databases for progress monitoring, Special Education eligibility determination based on an evaluation of Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities according to the ESE standards of social-emotional well-being, school-wide data points, reflections of behavior/discipline data, and tier 1-3 strategies were implemented either ineffectively or inconsistently to the intention of MTSS and/or that there was a breakdown in the Leadership team's ongoing evaluation of learning targets.

Theme 2's (poor state funding). Participants attributed their inability to create maintainable systems of fidelity within their school's infrastructure due to inadequate state funding to provide wraparound services for students and families who need additional supports. They also attributed the lack of adequate funding to afford the compensation of additional staff to monitor interventions such as school psychologists, reading teachers, teacher-tutors etc. For example, Participant 2 stated: "We help as best as we can with what we've got, and that is dependent on our community to provide scholarships and donations, so we rely heavily on our constituents who simply do not have it." Research participant 4's response indicated that resources that could go to the school's academic programming are instead used to support families that live in poverty. As Table 1, titled "Data Chart of School 1, School 2, School 3 and School 4", indicated in this study, that schools where there are high percentages of Black males in attendance, are schools that also have high poverty rates, attending schools that support student basic

needs such as food, clothing, shelter and social-emotional support, rather than having access to enough funds to focus solely on curricular and academic needs.

Theme 3's (teacher equity training). The participants within this study felt Cultural Competency training would help to address the fact that the main diagnosis category that African American males are defined as having in Special Education is: ED or Emotionally Disturbed. Participant 1 stated:

There was a time where students were deferred just primarily to our special education pipeline, which means you have the PPS meeting, the People Services Meeting, and from there, there's a determination made. Then there's testing; there's an assessment that takes place to find out okay is this person qualified as ED [Emotionally Disturbed] for Special Education Services? That was a norm for our Black males.

Like Participant 1, Participant 3 asserted that African American males have less exposure to diverse classrooms leading to less exposure to learning experiences and people due to the disproportionate amounts of Black male referrals for Special Education services.

Participant 3 stated:

If you are an African-American male, you don't have a lot of peers that are like you. Most of their peers are different than they are culturally, or whatever, and if we do have exclusive special education classrooms, then their exposure to diversity is even less because everyone is a Black male! They don't have the exposure.

Participant 4 also discussed that by having a “disproportionate amount of Black males in Special Education, that staff--apart from the Special Education staff--lack the opportunity to develop their cultural competency due to limited interactions with Black males”. Like Participant Principal 4, Participant 1 stated: “But, honestly, that fact was a challenging one for me because there's just not been a large group of students that I've encountered in my eight years in this role.”

Participant 3 stated:

In Special Education, even more, it's important for us to get to know our kids individually. And, again, having staff members that can connect and relate to our kids. Maybe...and to look like them can be very powerful too. So, I think, the socially just principal, I think, believes in access and opportunity. And, when you see disproportionate number of students of a particular race, something is wrong, you know? Something is going wrong.

Researchers such as Pedro Noguera found that Black males experience education categorized as the “other” as opposed as to being fully integrated within schools systems. He also states that Black students as well as educators equally receive negative messages about the ability of Black students to achieve. Noguera (2009) attributes the low status of Black males in American society as the cause of their lower achievement in comparison to other sub groups. Noguera asserts that the rejection of the Black male by society along with generational inequities attributes to low achievement. He states:

For educators, understanding the process through which young people come to see themselves as belonging to particular racial categories is important because it

has tremendous bearing on the so - called achievement gap. Throughout the United States, schools are characterized by increasing racial segregation and widespread racial disparities in academic achievement. Blatant inequities in funding, quality, and organization are also characteristic of the American educational system. Despite overwhelming evidence of a strong correlation between race and academic performance, there is considerable confusion among researchers about how and why such a correlation exists.

Noguera's (2009) research indicates that educational opportunity and access is tied to race. One's race may be an advantage or a disadvantage according to Noguera. He details how America's achievement gap is due to inequitable funding, education quality and the organization of a school's educational system. Noguera also asserts the ongoing system within education of students of color achieving less than their white peers reinforces stereotypes and teacher bias. Noguera states:

In addition to reinforcing stereotypes, grouping practices, which teachers and administrators say are not based on race but on ability or behavior, often have the effect of reinforcing racial separation. Unless the adults in a school are conscious of how this separation influences their own perceptions and that of students, over time this separation may be regarded as normal. For example, Black students may assume that because there are no Black students in advanced or honors courses they cannot excel academically.

Like Noguera (2009), the participants felt that increased cultural competency for their staff would address the bias that places Black boys predominantly in Special

Education classes. They called this cultural competency a “disruptor” to unequal access to higher level courses for Black boys and other socially marginalized groups. In addition, according to the perceptions of the participants and according to their survey responses for “Implementation: Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving,” School 1 implemented *Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving* at 13/45 or at 29%; School 2 implemented *Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving* at 23/45 or 51%; School 3 implemented *Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving* at 21/45 or 47%; and School 4 implemented *Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving* at 24/45 or 53%. The participants perceived RtI and PBIS interventions as their weakest areas of MTSS implementation fidelity due to the lack of monies to hire needed support staff and the lack of time to support one another as collaborators.

Theme 3’s (collaboration time). All four participants in this study indicated that educators need time to collaborate to improve on their abilities to assist children and families through professional development and time for reflection and analysis. The participants, who are heads of their School Leadership Team, also indicated their need to have time to learn as opposed to using the school day “overburdened” with administrative tasks. One participant stated that self-care is an ongoing effort that competes with wanting to address the many challenges to lead a public school.

Participant 1 stated:

I give all I can and still it is not enough to meet the need, you know? So, to be the best leader I can be, I have to mentally make myself disconnect from my cell

phone and all communication for at least one day a month because it was affecting my health, my mind, and my clarity of purpose. Luckily, I have good people who can support the mission when I cannot.

Another participant discussed how the demands of the job keep this leader from having time to continue needed professional development time.

Participant 3 stated: “To lead the way I’m supposed to, I have found that reflection helps me. It challenges my thinking and gives me time to process and to sound off with my administrative team to problem solve...when we have time!” This participant’s perceptions are that collaboration time as an administrative team is important to continue the role of leadership.

The participants further revealed their perceptions of collaboration time to implement the MTSS framework as a Leadership Team. Within the MTSS framework survey, category 4, “Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning” as indicated in Table 4, varied among each education leader as either collaboration time happens regularly or barely. According to the perceptions of the participants, School 1 implemented *Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning* at 15/15 or at 100%; School 2 implemented *Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning* at 5/15 or 33%; School 3 implemented *Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning* at 15/15 or 100%; and School 4 implemented *Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning* at 10/15 or 67%. Based upon the participants’ responses, Schools 1 and 3 had a district-wide strategic plan that guides PBIS and RtI efforts, the schools meet at least twice a year to review not only data but implementation efforts of programs, the school’s leadership

team then partners and collaborates with the District Leadership team for a consensus of curriculum, and that that consensus and collaboration informs yearly changes. The survey responses for School 2 indicates a 33% success rate of collaboration for the “Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning” of MTSS indicating this area of MTSS implementation is unsuccessful. School 4 is more successful than School 3 according to the perceptions of its principal at a 67% collaboration rate for the “Implementation: Monitoring and Action Planning” of MTSS. The levels of collaboration indicated by the participants were linked to Theme 4, “Implementation Fidelity”, which is the consistent, ongoing process of making supports and data relevant and ongoing for students as a system, driven by educators who work in sync as a cohesive unit. According to the perceptions of the participants, their success was dependent on time for them, themselves, to develop professionally as well as time for their staff to have the same opportunity.

Theme 4’s (implementation fidelity). In regards to Sustained Effort (Theme 4) and Implementation Fidelity (sub theme), each of the four participants varied in their success rates of MTSS implementation fidelity. Based upon their responses as to their fidelity in implementing MTSS, they said the intention of MTSS is better than its feasibility and fidelity is easier said than done. For example, Participant 2 stated:

So, while the concept of RtI and interventions supports are great, I also think there needs to be full wrap around services, and that means money, of course, because you’re talking about agencies or social service agencies that can offer that emotional support or training or learning that they may need, or training or

learning for even our staff to be able to deal with it. And there are some things we are just not equipped to deal with in a school system, so...I think we have a ways to go with RtI and systems of supports, but I think it is a good start.

Like Participant 2, Participant 3 stated:

We have made a lot of strides within tier one to tier two. We are just, again, starting to make some strides within tier three in way that we're trying not to exclude students from the school itself in tier three.

The participants indicate they understand the systems that should be in place to implement MTSS with fidelity as intended, yet they state that “there are factors and conditions that are simply out of my staff and my control” as one participant stated.

Theme 4's (leadership progress monitoring). Overall, based upon the data collected and participant perceptions for Research Question 3, the participants expressed their perceptions as to the fidelity in which they implemented MTSS strategies within their interviews and MTSS survey responses as working towards disrupting systems, in that based upon a student's race, achievement and success vary. The MTSS survey that the principals completed asked them to reflect on the implementation of RtI, PBIS and MTSS. The level of fidelity of MTSS implementation for School 1 was self-assessed by the research participant at 59%; The level of fidelity of MTSS implementation for School 2 was self-assessed by the research participant at 47%; The level of fidelity of MTSS implementation for School 3 was self-assessed by the research participant at 60%; and The level of fidelity of MTSS implementation for School 4 was self-assessed by the research participant at 64%.

Research Findings

The elite interviews in which they completed asked them to offer an analysis as to why MTSS and the achievement of Black boys are interrelated. Based upon the four participants' perceptions of the ability in which they are implementing MTSS in their schools and their actual success of implementing MTSS, achievement for Black males is the combination of social justice, leadership, systems, teacher buy in, monies to hire support staff, and the awareness of race-based disadvantages within the world of education, and at times, within the mindsets of educators themselves. In conclusion, according to the participants' self-assessment/survey, they have indicated less than 65% overall implementation fidelity of MTSS as an ongoing, cohesive, systemic system of instruction and systems monitoring. The participants overwhelmingly perceived that MTSS fidelity of implementation is negated by systems failures at the national and historical levels that have yet to be addressed in which schools cannot subvert.

Section 5: Chapter Summary of Qualitative Research

The identification of Black males and other sub groups as in needing forms of support to address the achievement gap led to each of the four respondents to catalogue their approach to lessening the achievement gap. In keeping with qualitative data research, five rules of qualitative research were applied. According to Yin (2010), the five features within a qualitative study are as follows:

1. Studying the meaning of people's lives, under real-world conditions;
2. Representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study;
3. Covering the contextual conditions within which people live;

4. Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior;
5. Striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

The five features within qualitative research listed above were used to identify four emergent themes expressed by the respondents. The themes were: 1.) How establishing a sense of *Community* for students supports student success; 2.) How a *Social Justice Mindset* appeared in their decision making as instructional leaders; 3.) How *Staff Development* would help to decrease implicit bias and the overidentification of African American males in Special Education; and, 4.) How it must be a *Sustained Effort* to implement MTSS strategies with true fidelity.

The findings of this research go beyond the concept of Black males need more support and their disenfranchisement. Black males are the sub group to most likely experience early trauma; they are most likely to grow up in households without fathers due to the high mortality rate and incarceration rates of Black men; they are more likely to experience daily rejection and microaggressions in society, and they are more likely to be feared by educators. Students of color, particularly Black males, can achieve with strategic counter measures to fix systemic education failures according to the perception of the participants within this research. The researcher created a diagram that is a visual of the data gathered from this qualitative research presented as Grounded Theory in regards to Black male achievement. It is listed below as an original Figure (see Figure 4)

created by the researcher as a visualization of the qualitative findings gathered from this research.

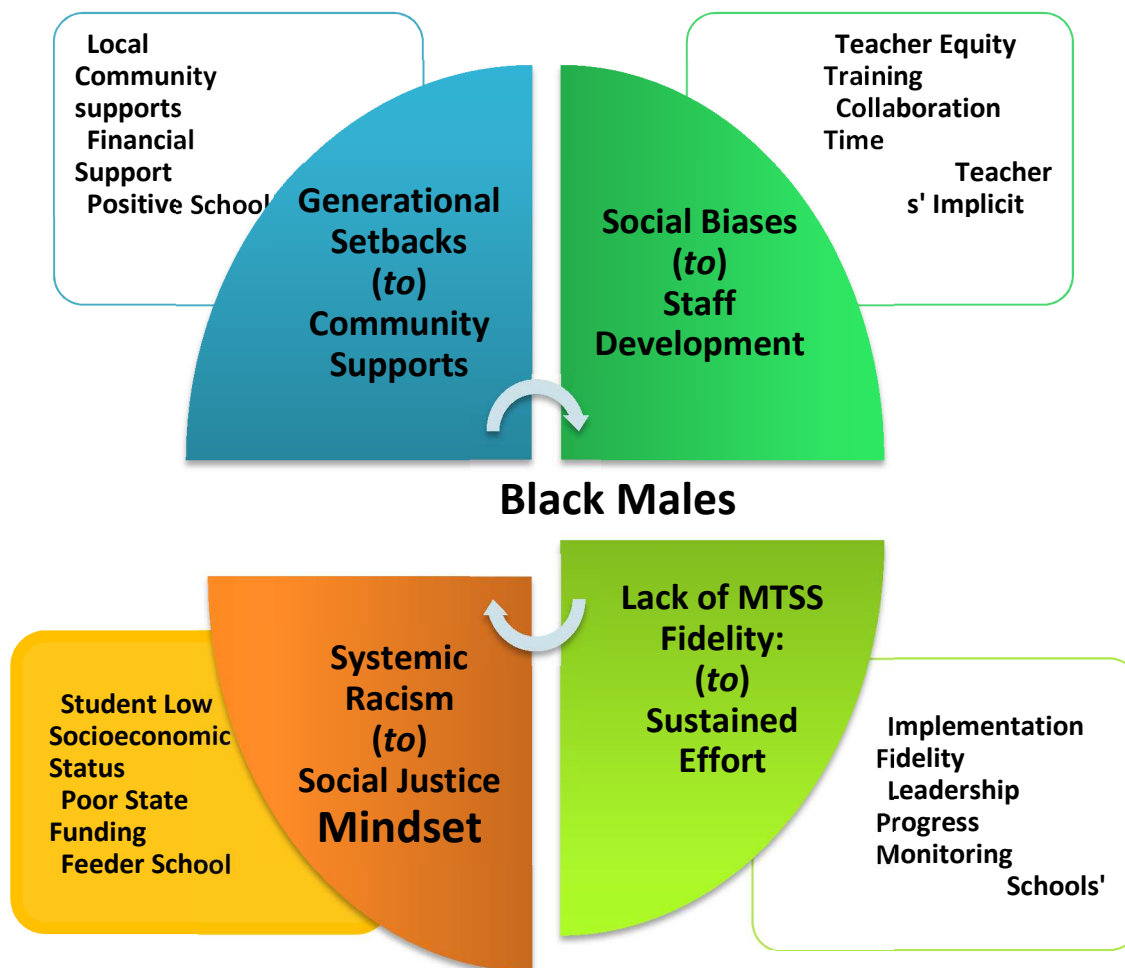


Figure 4. Grounded Theory in Regards to Black Male Achievement

The implications of this Grounded Theory, qualitative analysis will be discussed and assessed in Chapter V, the conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER V
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Chapter V is the presentation of research findings, conclusions, and implications from the research. Chapter V will be presented in the following order: 1.) a summary that provides an overview of the entire study will be detailed for the reader; 2.) a presentation of the research findings from the analysis of this research will be presented to the reader; 3.) a researcher's account of the conclusions gathered from the research will be shared with the reader; 4.) a series of suggestions as implications will be noted for the reader; and 5.) a summary of the overall purpose, findings and conclusions for this study will be listed for the reader. A summary of this study will be provided in the next section.

Summary of the Study

MTSS and Black Male Achievement

The purpose of this research was to analyze how Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) may impact the educational experiences of marginalized students, in particular, Black males. The purpose of MTSS is to create a sustainable system in schools that will have checks and balances to support students who are disenfranchised from society. A school that has incorporated MTSS should have the following systems in place: 1.) shared leadership; 2.) data-based problem solving and decision making; 3.) layered continuum of supports academically and behaviorally; 4.) universal screening and

progress monitoring, and family-school-community partnerships. Since principals are the instructional leaders of the schools in which they run, four public high school principals from the southern and northern suburbs of Chicago, IL were selected to ascertain their perceptions. This was intentional by the researcher because the crisis of the achievement gap is an ongoing challenge for instructional leaders, so the researcher selected principals who chose to implement MTSS, an equity-based systems approach to schooling, to learn implications for best practice to address the lagging education of students of color to their peers.

Data Collection

Four high school principals with a minimum of three years of administrative experience were selected by email and volunteered to be elite interviews. The researcher wanted to understand their perceptions of implementing MTSS in their schools. The purpose was to gauge their understanding of the role of race in systems. Two out of the four participants regularly intertwined their racial consciousness to the researcher within their answers. Both of the two “racially conscious” participants were of color. In a recent study (Goodman, Moses, & Jones, 2012), it states:

Some suggest that as we become more at ease with our nation’s multiracial legacy, racial classifications and identities will become more fluid. Yet, even in parts of the world where racial identities are already more complex than those traditionally employed in the United States, skin color discrimination persists. (p. 109)

In other words, people of color, who are formally students of color, are innately aware of their race as their identity. The researcher encountered a self-awareness piece that equitable leaders selected to employ within their practice.

Therefore, primary and secondary source data was collected by the researcher in accordance to qualitative research guidelines to assess how the participants perceived fidelity for all students, particularly Black boys. In regards to primary data, four principals completed a principal's tool for MTSS fidelity titled Self-Assessment of Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI). In addition to the principals/participants' survey data, participant interviews were audio taped, transcribed and coded into themes by the researcher to understand perceptions. According to Thornberg and Charmaz (2014), "By coding, researchers scrutinize and interact with the data as well as ask analytical questions of the data. They create their codes by defining what the data are about" (p. 156). Therefore, the researcher compiled a list of qualitative themes that were gathered. Secondary sources such as school demographic and achievement data were collected along with comparative data of overall student achievement versus Black male achievement for each school that the participants lead. All of the data compiled was to answer the following research questions for this study, which are:

1. RQ1: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are the perceptions of social justice as it relates to the citizenship of all students, particularly African American males, within their building?

2. RQ2: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: What are their perceptions of how social justice principles apply to their work as school leaders related to addressing disproportionality of African American males?
3. RQ3: In high schools that have RtI/Multi-tiered (MTISS) instruction practices in place for no less than three years, according to the perceptions of the principal: How do social justice principles apply to the work of school leaders in relation to addressing the disproportionality of African American males in Special Education?

Reviewing the Literature

The Literature Review presented in Chapter II provided a summary of the historical and social experiences of Black males. As stated in the Literature Review, Riley (2010) cites that

Blacks are 13% of the population but comprise 38% of prison or jail inmates in the U.S., and black-on-black violent crime is the norm. Blacks commit 52% of all murders and make up 49% of all murder victims -- 90% of them are killed by other blacks.

These statistics indicate a disproportionate amount of Black males who are small in number representing a large number of those imprisoned or murdered. The need for a more successful path for Black males that does not lead to jail or death has been the subject of many studies. For example, Alexander (2010), likens today's system of

disproportionate school expulsion rates and disproportionate prison rates to an updated version of Jim Crow laws and tactics titled “The New Jim Crow.” Furthermore, it is the intention of federal education laws such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to target “high-risk” marginalized students and support them. ESSA requires that schools must provide a cyclical process to education that monitors the success of students of color, students of poverty, students with disabilities, and students that are English learners, and this cyclical process is MTSS or Multi-tiered Systems of Support.

Research Findings

Secondary Source Data

Black male achievement. The researcher gathered demographic and achievement data from Illinois State Board of Education’s school information website titled “Illinois Report Card.” The data gathered from the ISBE site was reviewed with the participants and verified. Based upon the information collected as secondary sources from participant schools 1-4, Black students overall are behind their peers in both academic and social success. As presented in Table 8, Black children were more likely to attend low income schools, have high mobility rates, come from single parent households with fathers absent or incarcerated, they were also a disproportionate number of Special Education placement, and their Scholastic Aptitude Test scores for Math and Reading were the lowest subgroup in all four participant schools. The demographic and achievement data gathered found that the cycle of low achievement for Black students was continuing. This information was no surprise to the researcher because across the nation, regardless of wealth and access to highly qualified instructors, Black children disproportionately

achieve less. The researcher intended for this study to address systems failures for Black students. Based upon the perceptions of the participants and collected data, the historically rooted inequities of the public education system is hardly addressed. The researcher found that regardless of local wealth of Illinois schools, students of color still disproportionately are less successful in school. This was the case in all four of the participant schools, which schools ranging from low-income districts to wealthy districts. A recent study found (Keierleber, 2019) the following: “Overwhelmingly white school districts received \$23 billion more than predominantly nonwhite school districts in state and local funding in 2016, despite serving roughly the same number of children, a new report finds.” Furthermore, (Meckler, 2019), states: “Racial disparities in funding persisted even when poverty was considered. Nationally, poor white districts received nearly \$1,500 more per student than districts serving poor nonwhite kids. Poor nonwhite districts got less money than low-income white districts in 17 states and they got more in 12 states.” As the researcher presented in Chapters 1 and 2 of this study, historically students of color receive less in regards to government support for their education than white students do. The inequitable funding of predominately Black and Brown schools is still the case today. It is not surprising that the achievement gap then eventually the wage gap for people of color exists.

Demographic and school achievement data. The next data trend collected and reviewed by the researcher separates Black students by gender and compares graduation rates and achievement by race. Table 2 presents high school graduation rates and Special Education placement (IEP) for students by percentage for schools 1-4. According to the

data collected, Black boys overall graduate the least. For example, at School 1, Black boys graduate at a rate of 63% in comparison to Black girls at 67%, White students at 91%, Hispanic students at 64%, Asian students at 94%, and Biracial students at 92%. The same trend applies in Schools 2, 3, and 4. It was also found through the research that Black males were disproportionately the highest subgroup with an IEP. At school 1, Black boys were 86% of the Special Education population, 72% of School 2, 88% of School 3, and 91% of School 4. Finally, based on the data collected, Black males in Special Education are the least likely to even finish high school; they have the highest graduation rates at all four research sites. The participants within this study were well aware of the data and indicated the need for supportive resources and professional development for staff is needed. Suggestions for supports and professional development will be presented later in this chapter.

Primary Source Data

Survey data. The participants in this study completed a self-assessment survey of their perceptions of MTSS implementation fidelity at their schools. The Self-Assessment of Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI) survey had four major categories and 27 subcategories for a total of 43 questions. Participants had to answer each question according to the following criteria: 1.) Not Started (N)—(The activity occurs less than 24% of the time); 2.) In Progress (I)—(The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time); 3.) Achieved (A)—(The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time); and 4.) Maintaining (M)—(The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time). In terms of scoring, N =

Table Tabulation Value of 0; I = Table Tabulation Value of 1, A = Table Tabulation Value of 2, and M = Table Tabulation Value of 3. The total tabulation points were added up for each participant/school.

The overall implementation percentages per category at each school/principal varied from 47% to 64%. Based upon participant responses, the findings were that School 1 was at 59%, School 3 was at 60%, and School 4 was at 64% in terms of overall implementation of MTSS as a cyclical system. Schools 1, 3, and 4 were right about the same level of overall MTSS implementation fidelity with the average implementation percentage among the three at 61%. School 2 had the lowest amount of implementation fidelity at 47%. The participants' low to marginal success of implementing MTSS strategies as the most qualified executive leaders of their districts indicate a disconnect from administrative preparation programs to practice. The researcher found that participants indicated that addressing the achievement gap is slow-paced and that they applied life experience more than their experiences in graduate programs. As stated in Chapter 1 of this research, cultural competency training is more an afterthought to administrator training in nationally accredited education programs. In the presentation of the interview themes, in the next section, participants offered insights into their MTSS implementation scores.

Interview themes. The four participants' transcribed and coded interviews began the construction of the Grounded Theory behind this qualitative research. "Grounded theory," according to Thornberg and Charmaz (2014), is "a research approach in which data collection and analysis take place simultaneously" (p. 153). The researcher created

thematic codes from both participant perceptions, interviews, and achievement data to create four themes. These themes were as follows: Theme 1: Community Supports, Theme 2: Social Justice Mindset, Theme 3: Staff Development, and Theme 4: Sustained Effort. Each theme had sub themes as well. Figure 5 as seen below is a visual of all themes gathered from the research.

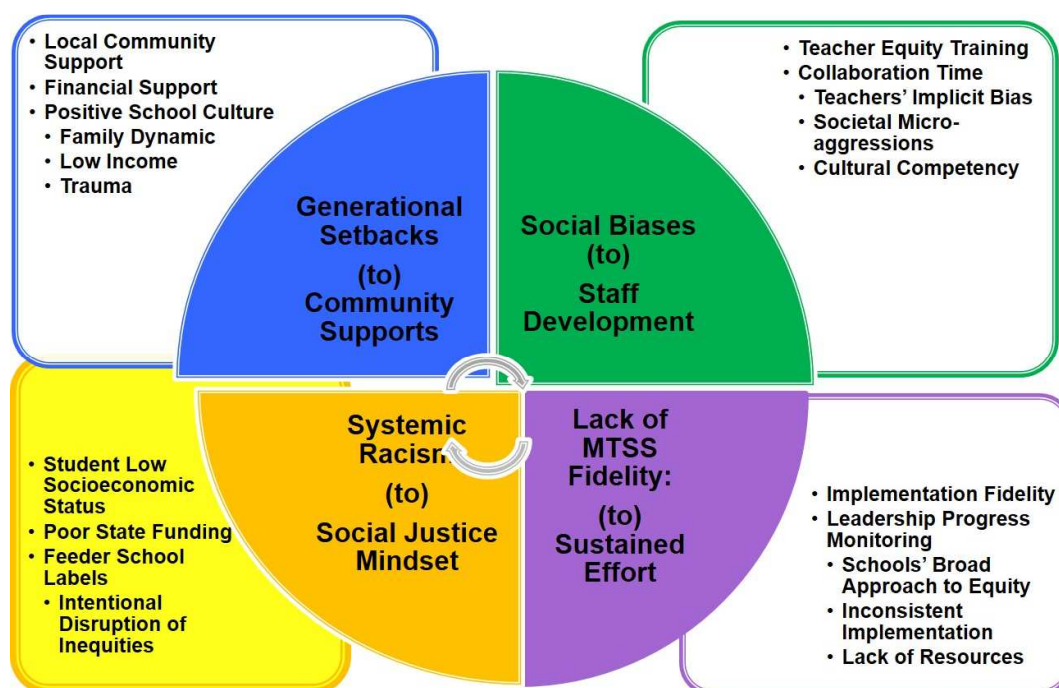


Figure 5. Thematic Codes as Grounded Theory

Research Question 1 Findings

Participants described the perceptions of social justice as it relates to the citizenship of all students, particularly African American males, within their building as preparing students to be functional adults or citizens of society. That students will be able to make livable wages, have positive reactions with others and feel empowered to take on life's obstacles, obstacles such as racial bias. To support Black males, the participants

presented the theme of community. Community is defined as local community supports such as the YMCA or counseling services to help students cope with family and societal trauma. It is also defined as much needed financial supports due to the schools not having enough funding to help low income students and to fund additional staffing, and community is also providing a positive school culture or feelings of belonging and positive relationships with adults, peers, and outside agencies that clearly state to students and their families that “we are in this together.”

Participants also related the citizenship of all students and Black males to the theme of social justice. They indicated that barriers such as a student’s low socioeconomic status and feeder school labels cannot stop the will of the school leader who must protect students from the cycle of disenfranchisement that society continues to perpetuate. The participants cited as social justice mindset that motivates them to keep looking for ways in which to level the playing field and to address the achievement gap. Along with social justice, participants stated that citizenship is also for the educators too. Staff development was another theme that participants named as an avenue to provide a positive school culture for students. The participants felt that if their staff had equity training to improve upon their cultural competence that marginalized students will have better experiences in school and make connections. They cited the lack of time and money to pay for professional development as one of the biggest inhibitors of positive student-staff relationships.

Overall, in response to research question 1, participants indicated that a sustained effort of school wide processes of MTSS would be the only ways to see a statistical

improvement in student scores. They said implementation fidelity or “interconnected systems” as is the intention of the MTSS mandate with leadership progress monitoring are the only ways in which gains will be made to address the achievement gap. The participants regularly referred to MTSS as a system of fidelity of instruction, and that the following must be ongoing: 1.) shared leadership, 2.) data-based problem solving and decision making, 3.) layered continuum of supports, 4.) evidence-based instruction, intervention, and assessment practices, universal screening and progress monitoring, and family-school-community partnerships. Based upon the participants’ feedback within this research, it is recommended by the researcher that collaboration time is a weekly occurrence within school systems. This will give administrators time to lead teachers. It will give teachers time to collaborate and assess student learning. Much needed collaboration time can also lessen the stress and work loads of educators because it will be shared work. Vannest et al. (2009) states: “There is a critical need to improve the time use of teachers for reasons such as improving student performance and potentially decreasing teacher attrition.”

Research Question 2 Findings

The participants’ responses to research question 2 were their perceptions of how, as school leaders, they use social justice principles address the disproportionality of African American males in terms of having the highest high school dropout rates, school suspensions and expulsions, the highest amounts of low level courses, yet the lowest amounts of graduation rates. The participants said that MTSS supports were universal and non-specific to race. They also said if leadership teams target struggling learners,

then they will indirectly address the disproportionate achievement of Black males. They did suggest that teacher's participate in equity training due to the overwhelming amounts of Black students entering high school with feeder school labels, which deny them access to higher course curriculums. They felt that equity training would help their staff to acquire a social justice mindset. However, the participants cited their frustrations with the slow process of change. They indicated that there is something inherently wrong in public schools were despite the student, the outcomes based upon race were often the same. As one participant stated: "I've always wondered what was...there was something wrong, some inequality, some dysfunction in our system that left young Black males, young people who look like me in the rear so to speak." Participants felt that a sustained effort for the implementation fidelity of MTSS supports was the only way to address the disenfranchisement of Black male students.

The researcher agrees with the participants yet with a more focused approach. Due to the many parts of creating school systems, alignment of thought and vision must be clear to all constituents: top down and bottom up. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the researcher that along with the school's Mission Statement, a Vision Statement of Equity for all students and staff should be created. Then, a team of respected and equity-minded staff should create an equity-based leadership team in which equity targets are created. For example, explicit equity targets for math should be created in regards to what will be learned and who (which students) will learn it. The equity targets by department should be ongoing and interconnected with the building leadership's annual goals and then the district's annual goals often titled SIP or the School Improvement Plan. It should

not be a surprise to teachers, administrators, parents, the community, and yes, even students of what the targets for addressing the achievement gap will be along with specific accountability measures to improve learning. Without accountability specific to the number one weakness in education—equity—there will be inconsistent gains that will not be systemic or understood by all stakeholders of that district. Furthermore, within the literature researched within this study, the goal behind the federal mandate Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) is to ensure all students have access to learning and that schools address systems failures that reproduce the lack of opportunity for marginalized students (i.e., students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities and low income students).

Research Question 3 Findings

For research question 3, participants had to address how they apply social justice principals in relation to addressing the disproportionality of African American males in Special Education. The participants stated that a positive school culture, the challenge of poor state funding, the importance of teacher equity training, and collaboration time to learn from co-workers have to each be addressed to move Black boys who are either already in Special Education or headed for Special Education towards higher course levels and achievement. They felt that there are two components to true MTSS implementation to support Black boys from inaccurately being labeled as a Special Education student. Technically, MTSS should be implemented and monitored by school leadership as intended. Adaptively, MTSS can only truly be supported with cultural competence and strategy.

Research question 3 was less about technical fixes and more about adaptive solutions. The participants adjusted their lens of a positive school culture to spread beyond a student's experience to just an overall teaching and learning culture of "all students can learn." They cited that mindset can surpass obstacles such as poor state funding and feeder school labels because address disproportionality is the undoing of a system by the intentional disruption of inequities. The participants felt that the only way to address disproportionality is to go back to the source: the school's culture. A suggestion by the researcher is for the full examination of educators to examine their comfort with talking about racism in schools as well as covert biases they reproduce—intentionally or not. Gone are the days of most educators explicitly saying: "I don't think brown and black kids can learn." Rather, today one sees instances of internalized racism that go unchecked due to our inability as a nation to explicitly discuss racism in schools. This was noted in the data section of Chapter 4 in that the highest instances of low level class tracking, student discipline and expulsions, and Special Education placement were for students of color. All four participants within this study cited that they have teachers who have little to no cultural competencies and often ask about student of color's histories and culture due to lack of exposure to diverse people throughout their childhoods and educational experiences.

This collected information precludes the necessity for white educators to examine their comfort with people of color. For instance, one education leader who publicly discusses her journey as a white educator to understand her own biases and lens towards

people of color is Robin DiAngelo. DiAngelo (2018) describes how well-intentioned progressives rationalize racism. She states:

It [racism] exists under the surface of consciousness because it conflicts with consciously held beliefs of racial equality and justice. Aversive racism is a subtle but insidious form, as aversive racists enact racism in ways that allow them to maintain a positive self-image (e.g., ‘I have lots of friends of color’...). Whites enact racism while maintaining a positive self-image in many ways:

- Rationalizing racial segregation as unfortunate but necessary to access “good schools”
- Rationalizing that our workplaces are virtually all white because people of color just don’t apply
- Avoiding direct racial language and using racially coded terms such as urban, underprivileged, diverse, sketchy, and good neighborhoods
- Denying that we have few cross-racial relationships by proclaiming how diverse our community or workplace is
- Attributing inequality between whites and people of color to causes other than racism. (pp. 43-44)

Like DiAngelo, the researcher suggests that not only should people of color live with a consistent awareness of how race is an ongoing force in his or her racialized experience, white people should often be magnanimously aware of the role of race in their own lives and the lives of people and students of color in which they encounter. Furthermore, the participants in this study described how teachers, counselors, administrators, parents and

students have to be on the side of social justice and to address inequities strategically. Therefore, the researcher believes improving teacher equity training can help teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, and administrators with necessary tools to address their own biases to prevent both macroaggressions and microaggressions such as harsher consequences for behaviors steeped in culture and the absence of the learned histories of other cultures. The participants also cited that their staff requires much needed collaboration time to learn and grow from one another. As stated by the researcher, scheduled and consistent staff development time is needed to address issues of race and improve a staff's cultural competency.

Qualitative Summary

The participants within this study attribute their success as school leaders to the leadership of staff to improve achievement for all students. They have indicated that the achievement gap is a result of both historical and societal inequities ingrained within the lenses of educators and education systems. Each of the four school leaders had similar perceptions as to how to implement MTSS with fidelity, and they are the four thematic codes of community, a social justice mindset, staff development, and sustained effort. The participant perceptions were in accordance to the literature reported by the researcher. As the literature on schools state, students are more successful when they encounter positive relationships with adults at school with the biggest influence being the classroom teacher. The literature also defines the school community as ideally one that is positive and supports students and their families along with the surrounding community. The researcher also believes that a social justice mindset corrects societal wrongs, past or

present as do the participants within this study. Additionally, the researcher has cited literature that staff development is the providing of continuing education for education staff indefinitely as a sustained effort towards personal and professional growth.

Conclusions from the Study

Racism is Ingrained in America's Education System

Several conclusion can be derived from this research. Specifically, research question 1 addresses the citizenship of Black males in schools. Due to schools being representations of American society, the ways in which students of color, particularly Black males, are viewed through lenses of racial bias has to be addressed openly with an equity lens and specifically with strategies to target structural inequities. Gorski (2013) states: "Class disparities in education are the result of inequities, not the result of cultures." In other words, Black male is synonymous with criminal, low achiever and degenerate in the mindsets of many. A Black student is seen as uneducated when in reality that Black student lacked the opportunity to have educational experiences compatible with his peers. Furthermore, the majority of teachers are not of color and live in isolation of students of color until it is time to teach students of color, which indicates a learning gap of cultural awareness. Singleton (2006) attributes the harsher punishments and criminalization of the Black male to the "white-black binary" in that no two races are considered more opposite to another than White people and Black people. All participants of the study stated the need to address the school's culture. Morgan (1986) states: "When we talk about culture, we are usually referring to the patterns of

development reflected in a society's system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day ritual" (p. 116).

In review of American culture of the Black male, we have a history that called a Black man cattle, 3/5ths of a person, a negro, an Afro American, the darker skinned brother, an IEP student, and an inmate; therefore, the participants' strategy of actively disrupting systems of inequity appear to be a combination of awareness, empathy and deliberate actions of social justice. The conclusions gathered from research questions 2 and 3 are a combination of needed services and interventions to target learning and behavior. MTSS instructional practices have both learning and behavioral interventions embedded within its framework. Academic interventions at varying levels of intensity are within the RtI component of MTSS, and behavioral supports and interventions are embedded into the PBIS component of MTSS. However, the participants' lenses of "race is not an identifier for additional services is inaccurate." They have acquired the mindset of MTSS supports are universal supports that will benefit low achieving students who so happen to be of color. Education is a system with a history of racism, so we must target systemic racism with race at the forefront.

Use Race as an Instructional Strategy

Education leaders and government laws need to specifically target race when addressing opportunity gaps. Lewis, author of *Despite the Best Intentions* (2015) states:

The challenge for understanding what is 'racial' about 'racial achievement gaps' comes in part from the challenge of keeping the larger history of race in mind when we are trying to understand daily processes. This is the challenge of paying

attention simultaneously to the very bigness and the very smallness of its effects and to the connections between the two. (p. 5)

Participants cited sustained effort as the only way to ensure MTSS strategies were in place long enough to narrow the achievement gap, yet they have the challenge of addressing racial bias, microaggressions, staff development apart from daily instructional practices. It is left to varying levels of leadership teams to analyze data to progress monitor what interventions are successful. In *The Color of Success* (2006),

Conchas states that high achievement for African Americans goes back to three factors: 1.) the importance of family and home life, 2.) the significance of adult role models, and 3.) the role of the school context [teachers as nurturers]. (p. 51)

It may be beneficial to specifically state to students, parents, faculty and the school community that our school will systematically and systemically address the racial achievement gap by targeting students of color for success and then supporting them with MTSS strategies.

Black Boys and Special Education

The disproportionality of African American males in Special Education can be addressed using MTSS strategies among other strategies. Since the participants of this study cited a social justice mindset as a contributor to addressing the status of Black boys in schools, it may be prudent to expand upon the concept of social justice and provide a framework for it. George Theoharis, author of *The School Leaders our Children Deserve* (2009) describes how a school leader such as the principals/participants of this study can focus social justice efforts in seven steps. The seven criteria are as follows:

- 1) Acquire Broad, Reconceptualized Consciousness/ Knowledge/Skill Base
 - a) This is a broad awareness of challenges to social justice and knowledge about tracking pull out programs.
- 2) Possess Core Leadership Traits
 - a) This is the concept that a strong leader provides ongoing staff development focused on equity and reaches out to marginalized families and community.
- 3) Advance Inclusion, Access, and Opportunity for All
 - a) This is the idea to confront injustice by eliminating tracking to promote access, opportunity and inclusion for all students.
- 4) Improve the Core Learning Context—Both the Teaching and the Curriculum
 - a) This is the leading of curriculum to reflect the leader's social justice mindset by eliminating insufficient curriculums.
- 5) Create a Climate of Belonging
 - a) This is the creation of a warm and welcoming school climate, fostering classroom community building, and incorporating social responsibility into the curriculum.
- 6) Raise Student Achievement
 - a) The act of raising student achievement with particular attention to the achievement/achievement gap of marginalized students.
- 7) Sustain Oneself Professionally and Personally

- a) Leaders who move towards social justice may encounter resistance due to change, so the leaders must develop resiliency.

Combined with MTSS, social justice measures can improve results more expediently, which is necessary because Black boys who end up in Special Education are the least likely to graduate. Therefore, according to the suggestions of the participants and theory, targeting Black boys and providing them intensive supports will enable them to move up course levels. The students will need encouragement, ongoing support then a gradual release yet all students can learn.

Implications Derived

People of Color Have No School Funding Solution

The implications of this study is that there is a lack of continuity for instruction in America. With court decisions such as the 1975 ruling of *San Antonio v. Rodriguez*, funding for public education will always favor the wealthy over the poor with the poor being predominantly students of color. The *Constitutional Law Reporter* (2017) describes the case. It states:

The class-action suit was brought on behalf of school children from poor families who resided in school districts with a low property tax base, making the claim that the Texas system's reliance on local property taxation favored the more affluent. Accordingly, the suit further alleged that the financing system violated equal protection requirements because of substantial inter-district disparities in per-pupil expenditures resulting primarily from differences in the value of assessable property among the districts.

The court ruling that local property taxes fund a student's education limits what school leaders can do to train staff, provide updated instructional materials and attract highly qualified candidates. Money does not equate ability, yet reasonable funding measures need to be in place to help fund schools. Federal grants and monies owed to schools by the state of Illinois are not being paid at the rates of promise due to the mismanagement of school education funds. Now, pensions (TRS) for school employees cannot fund retiring staff appropriately and there is a teachers shortage due to the lack of stability in education as a career.

Increase Partnerships with Nonprofit Organizations (403c)

The participants of this study discussed the need for “wraparound services” to support families of color. There is a direct need for student mentorship, health awareness, counseling, job shadow experiences and trade development that can be offset with the assistance of nonprofit organizations that receive their own funding separate from schools. It may be prudent for schools that have a small tax base to reach out to local communities with higher tax bases for sponsorships to gather monies to pay for needed instructional tools and resources. Local churches and community centers are cited as sources of support for Black students, so any way in which to formalize those partnerships within the context of the law are suggested.

Future Research

Research Design and Participant Limitations

The researcher understands the limitations of this qualitative case study. Four participants were the basis of this research along with relevant data to provide

triangulation. Nonetheless, however, the researcher understands that four participants in Illinois do not reflect the perceptions of all high school principals across Illinois as well as the nation. In addition, the researcher understands that a topic as broad as MTSS cannot be fully assessed with one lens. Furthermore, the participant views reflected in this qualitative analysis are not intended to speak for all principals as implementers of MTSS in high schools. The researcher does contend that the research is reliable because the study design had a clear rationale of equitable access to instruction using MTSS as the conceptual framework. The participants in this study were selected based on comparable criteria and all data was coded using NVivo software as is the case with qualitative research. Yet, a limitation of this research was in that of the participants' cultural lenses because this research analyzes the role of race in education and racial disparity. The elite interviews reflect this disparity due to the participants being binary in that two were White and two were Black. Three of the four participants were male, leaving one Black female. None of the participants cited ever having learning disabilities or as being English Language Learners as is the case for marginalized groups. For future research, a more diverse participant pool is suggested to fully represent the many cultures and sub cultures that still need a voice within education systems.

One group that could greatly benefit from research of MTSS would be English Language Learners, particularly, the LatinX population. The LatinX population is struggling academically and is second to the Black population in school dropout rates, incarcerations and low achievement. Furthermore, this study focused on MTSS implementation at the high school level. Due to the participants citing "feeder school

labels” as one of the many contributors to low course placement for Black males, future research on the implementation of MTSS at the elementary and middle school levels can begin to address inequity and social injustice in school systems at a speedier rate than high school. Since the lack of collaboration time with peers for professional development was listed as a challenge for the participants within this study, future research on Professional Learning Communities, Late Starts, and/or Early Dismals for racial equity-based professional development time might be researched to diversify participants.

Other Limitations

Participants completed a self-report survey (SAPSI) in which they had to evaluate their own leadership as implementers of MTSS. It may have been difficult or some attachment to shame for participants to be unbiased in their evaluations of their efforts. Nonetheless, the quality of the research design is still both reliable and valid in that the SAPSI self-assessment is widely used across the country and is recognized by education researchers as a valid and reliable tool because the SAPSI survey is used regularly to evaluate MTSS programs.

A limitation of the secondary data used for this study is that the data accessed for this study breaks students down by traditionally marginalized racial lines that are not reflective of the vast cultures that make up America’s students. For example, the Illinois School Report Card defines Black students as African-Black-Caribbean or as self-identifying. This indicates that if a biracial student identifies more as a Black student than a Black/white student, then the student and his or her family will select “Black” as the

race. Race is a social construct within American culture and cannot fully represent the vastness of people who live here.

A final limitation of the study was that of the interview. Participants sat across from the interviewer for an extended interview. Pressure to be socially accepted by the interviewer may have taken place making participants answer questions more favorably than their true perceptions of reality. In addition, participants received the semi-structured interview questions in advance, which could have been extended time for participants to review question concepts inauthentically, making responses predictable and less reliable similar to the concept of studying for a test. The interview, however, is one of the biggest tools a qualitative researcher uses to gauge participant perceptions, so every effort to present context-rich and meaningful descriptions were made by the researcher (Miles et. al., 2014).

Summary

Educators want to educate students. Challenges such as students working below grade level, the lack of time for grading and planning and paperwork, the bureaucracy of learning targets and the lack of presence of students of color and their families at important nights such as Parent-Teacher Conferences may indicate to educators that there will always be an achievement gap with students of color lagging behind traditional students. This does not have to be the case. With informed decisions and strategies such as MTSS and an equity lens, education leaders and teachers can help students make gains. Awareness, empathy and recognition of systemic inequities can build bridges to those who are disenfranchised. In addition, the recognition of racial bias in education

does not negate efforts made to fix the plights of marginalized students, yet we cannot lose our vigor. Spring (2001) states: “Despite the movement to a post-racial society, the legacy of slavery, segregation, discrimination, and deculturalization continue to affect the descendants of America’s enslaved Africans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans” (p. 149). We may be headed towards a post-racial society, but we are not there yet. Just as the popular financial text titled *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* illustrates, there are different conversations that the wealthy parent has with his or her child in which the poor parent wished he or she knew. The academic lessons that White parents share with their children in which parents of color may not be conscious of must be shared with belief system that education is a fundamental right for all students. Therefore, future research should focus on the achievement gap and should address how the achievement of students of color must be racialized to fully address equity-based systems of instruction.

APPENDIX A

PRINCIPAL’S SCHOOL ASSESSMENT TOOL

Self-Assessment of Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI)*

Directions:

In responding to each item below, please use the following response scale:

Not Started (*N*) — (The activity occurs less than 24% of the time)

In Progress (*I*) — (The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time)

Achieved (*A*) — (The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

Maintaining (*M*) — (The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

For each item below, please write the letter of the option (N, I, A, M) that best represents your School-Based Leadership Team’s response in the column labeled “Status”. In the column labeled “Comments/Evidence”, please write any comments, explanations and/or evidence that are relevant to your team’s response. When completing the items on the SAPSI, the team should base its responses on the grade levels being targeted for implementation by the school.

<u>Consensus:</u> <i>Comprehensive Commitment and Support</i>	Status	Comments/Evidence
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1. District level leadership provides active commitment and support (e.g., meets to review data and issues at least twice each year).		
2. The school leadership provides training, support and active involvement (e.g., principal is actively involved in School-Based Leadership Team meetings).		
3. Faculty/staff support and are actively involved with problem solving/RtI (e.g., one of top 3 goals of the School Improvement Plan, 80% of faculty document support, 3-year timeline for implementation available).		
4. A School-Based Leadership Team is established and represents the roles of an administrator, facilitator, data mentor, content specialist, parent, and teachers from representative areas (e.g., general ed., special ed.)		
5. Data are collected (e.g., beliefs survey, satisfaction survey) to assess level of commitment and impact of PS/RtI on faculty/staff.		

Additional Comments/Evidence:

Scale:

Not Started (*N*) — (The activity occurs less than 24% of the time)

In Progress (*I*) — (The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time)

Achieved (*A*) — (The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

Maintaining (M) — (The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

<u>Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure</u>	Status	Comments/Evidence
6. School-wide data (e.g., DIBELS, Curriculum-Based Measures, Office Discipline Referrals) are collected through an efficient and effective systematic process.		
7. Statewide and other databases (e.g., Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network [PMRN], School-Wide Information System [SWIS]) are used to make data-based decisions.		
8. School-wide data are presented to staff after each benchmarking session (e.g., staff meetings, team meetings, grade-level meetings).		
9. School-wide data are used to evaluate the effectiveness of core academic programs.		
10. School-wide data are used to evaluate the effectiveness of core behavior programs.		
11. Curriculum-Based Measurement (e.g., DIBELS) data are used in conjunction with other data sources to identify students needing targeted group interventions and individualized interventions for academics.		
12. Office Disciplinary Referral data are used in conjunction with other data sources to identify students needing targeted group		

interventions and individualized interventions for behavior.		
13. Data are used to evaluate the effectiveness (RtI) of Tier 2 intervention programs.		
14. Individual student data are utilized to determine response to Tier 3 interventions.		
15. Special Education Eligibility determination is made using the RtI model for the following ESE programs:		
a. Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (EBD)		
b. Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)		

Scale:

Not Started (N) — (The activity occurs less than 24% of the time)

In Progress (I) — (The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time)

Achieved (A) — (The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

Maintaining (M) — (The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

<u>Infrastructure Development: Data Collection and Team Structure (Cont'd)</u>	Status	Comments/Evidence
16. The school staff has a process to select evidence-based practices.		
a. Tier 1		
b. Tier 2		
c. Tier 3		
17. The School-Based Leadership Team has a regular meeting schedule for problem-solving activities.		
18. The School-Based Leadership Team evaluates target student's/students' RtI at regular meetings.		
19. The School-Based Leadership Team involves parents.		
20. The School-Based Leadership Team has regularly scheduled data day meetings to evaluate Tier 1 and Tier 2 data.		

Additional Comments/Evidence:

Scale:

Not Started (*N*) — (The activity occurs less than 24% of the time)

In Progress (*I*) — (The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time)

Achieved (*A*) — (The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

Maintaining (*M*) — (The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

<u>Implementation: Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving Process</u>	Status	Comments/Evidence
21. The school has established a three-tiered system of service delivery.		
a. Tier 1 Academic Core Instruction clearly identified.		
b. Tier 1 Behavioral Core Instruction clearly identified.		
c. Tier 2 Academic Supplemental Instruction/Programs clearly identified.		
d. Tier 2 Behavioral Supplemental Instruction/Programs clearly identified.		
e. Tier 3 Academic Intensive Strategies/Programs are evidence-based.		

f. Tier 3 Behavioral Intensive Strategies/Programs are evidence-based.		
22. Teams (e.g., School-Based Leadership Team, Problem-Solving Team, Intervention Assistance Team) implement effective problem solving procedures including:		
a. Problem is defined as a data-based discrepancy (GAP Analysis) between what is expected and what is occurring (includes peer and benchmark data).		
b. Replacement behaviors (e.g., reading performance targets, homework completion targets) are clearly defined.		
c. Problem analysis is conducted using available data and evidence-based hypotheses.		
d. Intervention plans include evidence-based (e.g., research-based, data-based) strategies.		
e. Intervention support personnel are identified and scheduled for all interventions.		

Scale:

Not Started (*N*) — (The activity occurs less than 24% of the time)

In Progress (*I*) — (The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time)

Achieved (*A*) — (The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

Maintaining (*M*) — (The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

<u>Implementation: Three-Tiered Intervention System and Problem-Solving Process (Cont'd)</u>	Status	Comments/Evidence
f. Intervention integrity is documented.		
g. Response to intervention is evaluated through systematic data collection.		
h. Changes are made to intervention based on student response.		
i. Parents are routinely involved in implementation of interventions.		

Additional Comments/Evidence:

Scale:

Not Started (*N*) — (The activity occurs less than 24% of the time)

In Progress (*I*) — (The activity occurs approximately 25% to 74% of the time)

Achieved (*A*) — (The activity occurs approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

Maintaining (*M*) — (The activity was rated as achieved last time and continues to occur approximately 75% to 100% of the time)

<p><u>Implementation: Monitoring and Action</u></p> <p><i>Planning</i></p>	<p>Status</p>	<p>Comments/Evidence</p>
<p>23. A strategic plan (implementation plan) exists and is used by the School-Based Leadership Team to guide implementation of PS/RtI.</p>		
<p>24. The School-Based Leadership Team meets at least twice each year to review data and implementation issues.</p>		
<p>25. The School-Based Leadership Team meets at least twice each year with the District Leadership Team to review data and implementation issues.</p>		
<p>26. Changes are made to the implementation plan as a result of school and district leadership team data-based decisions.</p>		
<p>27. Feedback on the outcomes of the PS/RtI Project is provided to school-based faculty and staff at least yearly.</p>		

Additional Comments/Evidence:

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VITA

La Wanna Marie Wells graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English Secondary Education from Northern Illinois University, where she won the *Exemplary Student Teacher Award*. She went on to publish “Why Do Minorities Feel Excluded from the English Classroom?” and to teach 8th grade American History and Literature in Lansing, IL at the same middle school she attended as a pre-teen. During La Wanna’s second year of teaching, she enrolled in the Educational Administration program at Governors State University in University Park, IL to earn her Master of Education degree and Principal Endorsement. Passionate about English and with a fondness for Shakespeare, La Wanna went on to act in plays such as “Murder on the Nile” and “Jesus of Nazereth” when she was not teaching secondary English for high school freshman and seniors in Homewood, IL. It was La Wanna’s admittance to Loyola University of Chicago’s Doctor of Education program that pieced together her love for learning and passion to fight for the marginalized.

After sixteen years of being a classroom teacher, leading professional development, analyzing achievement gaps and data, and advocating for at-risk students, La Wanna transitioned to administration full time as a cabinet-level administrator in Skokie, IL where she works as the Director of Equity. With her Doctor of Education and major of *Administration and Supervision* and her four minors of *Finance, Instructional Leadership, School Law* and *Special Education*, La Wanna Marie Wells believes that her

education and life experiences will help her continue to help communities, students and their families gain access and opportunities they deserve. She believes social justice and equity are a choice and the greatest missions that must be fully realized to help our children's children thrive—as they should.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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