

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF PBIS, RTI, AND MTSS IMPLEMENTATION ON  
CLASSROOM TIME, STUDENT BEHAVIOR, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Robert L. Pettit

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Graduation Year

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## Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover how elementary schools implement evidence-based, multi-tiered programs (i.e., Multi-Tiered System of Support [MTSS]) to improve students' academic and behavioral successes. Today's teachers are expected to have a constantly expanding knowledge base and skills that support working within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, including Response to Intervention (MTSS/RTI). Since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 and subsequent regulations that allowed school districts to use alternate processes for determining learning disabilities, implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks in preschool to 12th grade (PK-12) schools has steadily increased. However, most teachers lack the skills and training to implement them successfully. The focus of recent field-based professional development activities is the current teaching force. Most PK-12 schools, however, require an entering teacher to gain this knowledge and skills during their teacher preparation program. Unresponsiveness to instructional interventions is a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and Response to Intervention concepts. The Multi-Tiered System of Supports and Interventions (MTSS/RTI) is composed of several tiers that encompass classroom experiences, elucidate interventions, and delineate behaviors that foster learning opportunities. The study investigates behavioral observation to inform steps that could be taken for children who are not responding to elementary school to middle school literacy instruction to fill this information gap in the MTSS-RTI decision-making process and proposes the central research question: How do general education elementary school teachers implement tier one, tier two, and tier three of the

MTSS/RTI model while delivering differentiated core curriculum instruction in both academics and behavior?

*Keywords:* MTSS, RTI, PBIS, professional development, language and literacy, instruction, child academic engagement

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## **Dedication**

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the love and encouragement of my loved ones and the prayers of my coworkers and friends. I owe a debt of gratitude to my family—my wife, Janet, and my children, Perri, Bentli, Quinn, and Sydni—for having faith in me during this endeavor.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Copyright Page.....	5
Dedication .....	6
Acknowledgments.....	7
Table of Contents .....	8
List of Tables .....	12
List of Figures .....	13
List of Abbreviations .....	14
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	15
Overview.....	15
Background.....	15
Historical Context .....	16
Social Context.....	19
Theoretical Context.....	21
Problem Statement .....	22
Purpose Statement.....	25
Significance of the Study .....	25
Research Questions.....	28
Central Research Question.....	28
Sub-Question One.....	28
Sub-Question Two .....	28



Sub-Question Three .....	28
Definitions.....	28
Summary.....	29
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	31
Overview.....	31
Theoretical Framework.....	31
Related Literature.....	36
Summary.....	60
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	64
Overview.....	64
Research Design.....	65
Research Questions.....	71
Central Research Question.....	71
Sub-Question One.....	71
Sub-Question Two .....	71
Sub-Question Three .....	71
Setting and Participants.....	71
Setting.....	71
Participants.....	74
Researcher Positionality.....	75
Interpretive Framework .....	76
Philosophical Assumptions.....	76
Researcher’s Role .....	79

	10
Procedures.....	80
Permissions .....	81
Recruitment Plan.....	81
Data Collection Plan .....	82
<i>RTI Beliefs Survey</i> .....	82
Semi-Structured Interviews .....	88
Observations .....	89
Focus Groups Data Collection Approach .....	89
Data Synthesis.....	92
Trustworthiness.....	93
Credibility .....	93
Transferability.....	94
Dependability.....	94
Confirmability.....	95
Ethical Considerations .....	95
Summary .....	95
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>97</b>
Overview.....	97
Participants.....	98
Results.....	103
Central Research Question.....	103
Sub-Question One.....	104
Sub-Question Two .....	105

Sub-Question Three .....	106
Theme Advancement .....	108
Theme 2: Teachers Need the Support From Their Administration and Peers to Fully Implement RTI/MTSS .....	112
Theme 3: Teachers Must Have Effective Intervention Strategies to use in Their Classrooms .....	114
Summary .....	118
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	120
Overview.....	120
Discussion.....	120
Interpretation of Findings .....	120
Implications for Policy or Practice .....	124
Theoretical and Empirical Implications.....	126
Limitations and Delimitations.....	129
Conclusion .....	132
References.....	134
Appendix A.....	158
Appendix B.....	160
Appendix C.....	163
Appendix D.....	165
Appendix E .....	172
Appendix F.....	174
Appendix G.....	176

### **List of Tables**

Table 1. Open-Ended Interview Questions.....	70
Table 2. Open-Ended Focus Group Questions.....	73
Table 3. Participant Demographics.....	85
Table 4. Theme Development.....	94

### List of Figures

Figure 1. MTSS Under the Umbrella.....	18
Figure 2. Comprehensive, Integrated, Three-Tiered Model of Prevention.....	19
Figure 3. Washington State MTSS Framework.....	35
Figure 4. MTSS Support Model.....	53

### **List of Abbreviations**

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Effective Behavioral and Instructional Support Systems (EBISS)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA)

Local Education Agency (LEA)

Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Specific Learning Disorder (SLD)

Special Education (SPED)

State Educational Agency (SEA)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is to provide early screening and targeted interventions to students who are struggling both behaviorally and academically (Cruz & Rodl, 2018). Implementation of MTSS and Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks in preschool to 12<sup>th</sup> grade (PK-12) schools has steadily increased, expanding the knowledge base and skills of today's teachers. This system allows the educators to monitor the benchmarks and current achievement gap. The framework will enable teachers to identify students who are not performing at their best, providing the necessary knowledge using academic and behavioral strategies. These approaches influence teachers to use innovative teaching strategies to help students grasp information faster and make their concepts more straightforward.

Chapter 1 introduces this study. The chapter commences by expounding on the study's background, with specific attention to the historical, social, and theoretical frameworks. The problem statement scrutinizes the breadth of the recent literature on RTI, along with teachers' perceptions of its implementation and effectiveness. In addition to discussing the problem statement and goal of the study, this chapter introduces the research questions that leads the investigation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the study and a glossary of common terms.

### **Background**

Members of the educational community have argued about educational options for challenging children since the 1960s, and they are concerned about the rapidly growing number of students enrolled in special education programs (Jahnukainen & Itkonen, 2015). Following the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, a recommendation was made to

use RTI. RTI is a research-based, tiered academic and social assistance system that provides academic or social intervention based on a student's specific area (s) of need. This approach enables educators to work with and identify struggling students earlier by allowing them to close the gap between benchmarks and current achievement. In the event that educators of general education are unable to aid pupils in bridging the academic disparities in communication, knowledge, skills, motivation, and environment, it is crucial to consider different approaches. Students are often referred to special education programs prematurely because they do not get the adequate data necessary to assess them for referral. The pre-referral process ensures the child has tried reasonable accommodations and modifications before being referred for special education evaluation. Occasionally, a change in the classroom can improve their performance and eliminate the need for special education services. However, eligibility criteria under the IDEA are decided on a dichotomous basis, using arbitrarily determined cutoff points: either a student does or does not have a disability and, as a result, is or is not eligible for services. In fact, a child's placement in a special education program is frequently determined by just one point on an IQ test or another type of standardized test (Morgan, 2021).

### **Historical Context**

Researchers and educators have seen significant improvements in student outcomes due to federal special education legislation. Over-identification of academic and behaviorally challenged students, such as special education students, sparked the creation of RTI. As a result of the discrepancy model's flaws, various scholars began working on this model beginning in the late 1970s. RTI has existed for some time, but it was not recognized as a formal program until President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, which required educators to incorporate scientifically based research into their instruction and intervention strategies

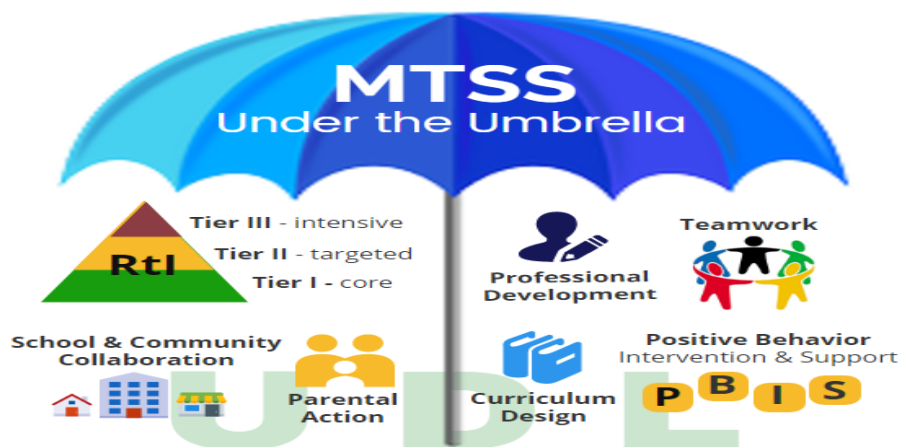


(Thorius & Sullivan, 2013; Voulgarides et al., 2017). Former President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on December 10, 2015, to replace the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The legislation aimed to ensure that all students have unrestricted access to a free and appropriate public education regardless of aptitude. RTI was authorized to be used indefinitely as part of IDEA (2004), and a multi-tiered support system establishes a means of securing additional assistance for all students, reducing the number of students receiving additional education services referrals, and lowering the overall costs of special education services (Jahnukainen & Itkonen, 2015).

The RTI framework originates in multiple domains, including learning disorders, behavioral consulting, and data-driven program modification (Bergan, 1977; Deno & Mirkin, 1977). Figure 1 represents the concept of using a multi-tiered approach in general education classrooms and was first proposed in 1982, but it was not until more than a decade later that the idea of using a multi-tiered approach in general education classrooms was revised at the federal level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019). Parents' groups and educational psychology have impacted RTI (Preston et al., 2016). However, Heller et al. (2012) (National Research Council, 1982) were among the first researchers to conceptualize RTI's origins in their theory that general education teachers are ultimately responsible for providing multiple interventions for struggling academic and behavioral students and documenting student progress within these interventions (Preston et al., 2016).

### **Figure 1**

*MTSS Under the Umbrella*



*Note.* From “*MTSS Chapter.*” (n.d.). Cedar.education.ufl.edu. Retrieved 29 August 2022, from <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/mtss-udl-di-dev/MTSSchapterStart.html#mtssIntro>

According to Gartland (2020), to reduce the over-identification of students for special education, general education teachers must follow established protocols before referring a student to special education. A child’s potential is not determined by their starting point but by how much they improve as a result of being taught (Gartland & Strosnider, 2020). The tiered intervention approach in special education has its roots in the preventive models used by the social and health services administration (Zhang et al., 2019).

Illustrated in Figure 2, three levels of prevention are proposed; Kauffman (2021), one of the first researchers to recognize the direct use of these three levels of prevention in the context of special education (SPED) interventions aimed at addressing emotional and behavioral disorders (primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention) (Kauffman 2021; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011).

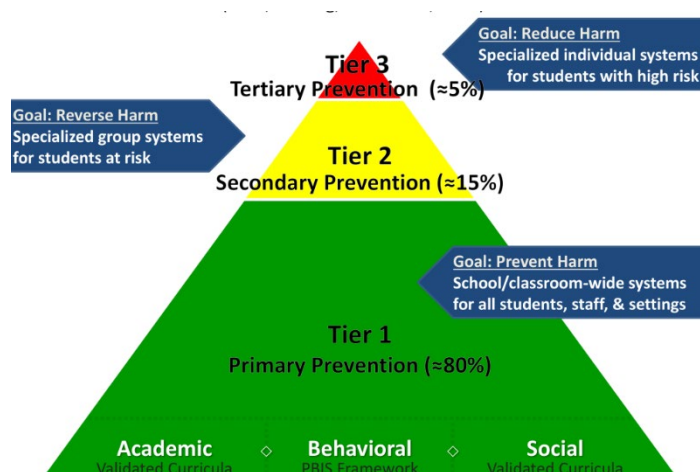
*Primary Prevention (Tier 1):* The focus in tier one is on the entire class. All students are taught using methods that have been shown in studies to be effective.

*Secondary Prevention (Tier 2):* Interventions are held in small groups in tier two. Some students receive more individualized assistance in small groups.

*Tertiary Prevention (Tier 3):* Individualized, intensive assistance is provided, usually with one-on-one support in tier three.

**Figure 2**

*Positive Behavior Support Model*



Note. From “Positive Behavior Support Model,” by Lane et al.(2009). Ci3t.org.

<https://www.ci3t.org/>

The MTSS is a comprehensive framework that provides individualized support for all students. It centers on helping the *whole child* through academic, behavioral, social, and emotional services, whether the learner is advanced or struggling. These levels of support also represent the Three-Tiered Model of Prevention for RTI and MTSS (McCart, 2019).

### **Social Context**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) made significant and far-reaching reforms to the educational system in the United States, increasing pressure on general education instructors to

highlight the significance of providing high-quality, research-based instruction and interventions for all of their students (Klotz & Canter, 2007). Additionally, NCLB established the practice of holding schools and teachers formally accountable for their students' progress every year through the use of mandated standardized assessments, and mandating that special education students not only have access to the general education curriculum but also participate in all standardized assessments (Jahnukainen & Itkonen, 2015). As part of the NCLB accountability movement, control of schools that did not improve their performance standards had to shift from local school districts to the state level. As a result, scholars have described the current tiered RTI approach as a shift in the focus of special education away from civil rights and toward educational excellence and accountability (Itkonen, 2009; Jahnukainen & Itkonen, 2015).

When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, schools were permitted to include an assessment of a child's response to scientific, research-based intervention as part of the evaluation process (614[6]B) when identifying pupils with learning disabilities (614[6]B). The reauthorization, which enabled states to adopt RTI for both prevention and detection of learning problems, was spurred by rising concerns that the previously used IQ-achievement discrepancy approach had devolved into a *wait and see* strategy (Dawkins, 2020; Jahnukainen & Itkonen, 2015; Kovalesski et al., 2013; Reschly, 2005; Voulgarides et al., 2017; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011). In numerous situations, children had to fall so far behind their peers and fail before receiving aid or interventions, and for many of them, the academic gap had grown so significant and evident that closing it was practically impossible.

Due to the disparity model's omission of evidence-based therapies and instructional response, teachers typically struggled to differentiate between struggling children. It was especially important because the children had not responded to treatments and were still failing

as a result of insufficient classroom instruction (Vellutino et al., 1996; Voulgarides et al., 2017). RTI proponents claimed instructors would more accurately distinguish which students have an actual disability than pupils who had just not gotten evidence-based education by employing a multi-tiered response approach. Schools must employ a continuum of systematic, coordinated, evidence-based strategies to respond to the different intensity of demands that children have connected to their academic and social-emotional/behavioral development to implement MTSS successfully.

### **Theoretical Context**

On April 11, 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) after decades of congressional attempts and failures to pass educational legislation. The statute restructured the federal government's educational role. It offered cash to upgrade school libraries, perform educational research, and assist economically underprivileged and pupils with disabilities (Nelson, 2016). The new law enhanced the federal government's investment in education to ensure that places with many economically disadvantaged pupils receive a high-quality education (ESEA, 1965). Two objectives were accomplished through the use of RTIs. First, to meet the needs of special education students who required structured support in general education academic classroom settings, the primary objective stated was to provide those supports. Second, the objective of RTI was to decrease the number of children identified for special education review by emphasizing teamwork and data-driven decision-making to increase overall student accomplishment. When a student demonstrated the need for further academic help, school employees were willing to offer special education evaluations in place of classroom or school-supported interventions.

According to educational researchers, such as Fuchs and Fuchs (2019), early

identification of students at risk of falling into a risk zone or who have learning disabilities, including research-based instruction are topics frequently discussed among various educational experts. One unintended consequence of the disproportionality method of determining needs was that students of color and low-income families were commonly over-identified as impaired and needed special education services. According to the 2019 Nation's Report Card for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 34% of eighth-grade students performed at or above the competent level on NAEP reading examinations; this percentage decreased by 3% from 2017 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). These vulnerable children graduate from middle school unable to comprehend and expand on the material and terminology of their other studies.

RTI was created to meet the needs of children enrolled in special education, Title I, Title III, English language learners, gifted and talented programs, and other special education programs. National database data indicate that overrepresentation and under-serving minorities remain a concern, notwithstanding changes in state policy and legislative initiatives to ensure equal access to the general education curriculum and to limit placement in special education programs (Bell, 2017; IDEA, 2004; McCart & Miller, 2019; Sugai et al., 2010; Witzel & Blackburn, 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is transitioning all students who meet the benchmarks from elementary to middle school or middle to high school, the following assumptions should be considered: (a) do pupils receive the same level of help in MTSS/RTI? and (b) how can the implementation of an MTSS curriculum with (middle/high school) children be defined as not being grade-level? (Braun et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2020; Wexler, 2018). Braun et al. (2020) emphasized this

problem, stating that when working within the MTSS framework, teachers were frequently confused about the procedures and their ability to strengthen interventions to fit the requirements of their pupils.

The primary objective is to determine the main focus of the necessary interventions. If the needs are only academic, then the intervention team focuses on academics; if the need is only social/emotional, then the intervention team focuses on the function of the behaviors and developing interventions to promote alternate behaviors. The students with both academic and social needs require improved advocacy efforts, including family–school collaboration and what teachers can identify in the profession’s scope (Haley & Allstopp, 2019). Recommendations for improvement typically originate from either the perspective of families or that of teachers. Investigation into whether the struggle with academics is increasing frustration and behaviors or if the social behaviors are impeding the students’ access to academics. However, the issue with RTI is that most students can make significant progress at the first level using high-quality instruction to aid children in catching up (Choi et al., 2020; McCart & Miller, 2019). Students who require further support can receive it at the second and third levels of the RTI program. An MTSS is more comprehensive than a one-tier support system. It may combine all three RTI levels concurrently. RTI encompasses more than academics; it includes social and emotional support (National Association of School Psychologists, 2016).

Federal teacher recruitment and training involvement has grown significantly over the past decade. Nevertheless, for more than five decades, the federal government has implemented regulations that oversee teacher training and hiring, as noted by Wei et al. (2009). Notwithstanding the changes in laws, insufficient research has equipped lawmakers with a structure for drafting these laws. In addition, it provides opportunities for educators to further

their professional development. The primary focus of MTSS lies in developing adult interaction strategies that aid children facing difficulties. Integrating the RTI framework and the MTSS approach is a viable prospect.

The two concepts may have become inextricably linked, which could explain the discrepancy. Regardless of whether it utilizes RTI, multi-tiered support systems, or a combination of both, the aim of every educational institution is to guarantee that all students receive the essential interventions to excel academically. There are two forms of assistance: academic assistance and social and emotional assistance (Hannigan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the problem with Response to Intervention lies in the fact that most students can achieve remarkable advancement in the initial stage, which emphasizes delivering top-notch education to assist children in keeping pace with their peers. Students who request more intensive support at the second and third stages of the RTI process will receive proper instruction. MTSS is detailed and adds a comprehensive and responsive framework for systemically addressing barriers to student learning. The grouping could include any three RTI levels as well and in-depth planning from the professional learning teams at each grade level (Sink, 2016). MTSS/RTI encompasses more than academic and social and emotional support for students and the support needed by staff to plan for their students' needs and implement researched interventions with fidelity. Adults and children in school can and should be included in the MTSS process (Hannigan et al., 2020). MTSS and professional development comprises continual education and training for teachers.

Whether it uses RTI, MTSS, or both, the purpose of any school is to ensure that all children receive the necessary interventions to succeed in school. Additionally, MTSS focuses on creating collaborative techniques for adults to assist children with difficulties. The RTI



framework can be used in conjunction with an MTSS technique, and that the two concepts have become so inextricably linked is one of the reasons for their mutual relationship.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how teachers implement RTI and MTSS and how this implementation affects classroom time, student behavior, and student achievement. The study looks at how teachers are utilizing PBIS, RTI, and MTSS and the professional development to apply these strategies in classroom duration, student conduct, and academic achievement objectives.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is that, previously, schools applied a discrepancy model to establish special education and related program eligibility. The paradigm of *wait to fail* was observed by special education teams and school districts, as it failed to effectively cater to the requirements of students. Furthermore, the correlation between MTSS and the dissimilarities in RTI academics instruction and performance for at-risk and low-aptitude students remained unclear. For this reason, a need exists to investigate how professional development, current teaching practices, and policies relating to teachers' accountability and incentives may or may not align with quality teaching. MTSS stands out as one of the most contemporary and extensively applied programs for improving the academic success of all students by addressing their unique needs. MTSS is growing in popularity (Fien et al., 2021). When applied, two ideas, products, and programs, diffusion of innovation theory can explain how an idea, product, or program acquires traction before being adopted by a specific community. Diffusion of Innovation (2018) described innovation in education as changes implemented within the school

environment, which can range from minor curriculum adjustments to significant social shifts in the school culture.

LaMorte (2019) defined diffusion as when a specific population adopts innovation and begins to act in a new way due to the innovation. When the Diffusion of Innovation theory is applied to the adoption of the MTSS/RTI framework in the school setting, it becomes clear how essential teachers' perceptions of the process are to its successful implementation, as these perceptions determine whether the targeted population eventually adopts the innovation of RTI or not. Despite being strongly promoted or enforced by certain states or school districts, the adoption of MTSS or the RTI project for educational transformation is often met with reluctance by teachers and school personnel (Avant & Lindsey, 2015). The extent to which schools make decisions that benefit the entire school community during the implementation of reform efforts is positively related to the amount of information they have on the perceptions of the critical stakeholders.

Teachers are critical stakeholders in any educational reform effort and understanding and successfully implementing such broad-reaching reforms as the RTI program relies on their perceptions of the program. Teachers' impressions and opinions are becoming increasingly irrelevant as new educational reforms make their way through the public school system (Evans, 2017). As a result, addressing teachers' perceptions and concerns is critical to ensure that the RTI program is effectively implemented (Rinaldi et al., 2011; Shirley & Hargreaves, 2006; Werts et al., 2014).

Policies and education professionals can acquire valuable insight from teachers' attitudes and voices to prepare teachers for the effective implementation of programs, such as RTI (Alahmari, 2019). Even though understanding teachers' perspectives is an essential aspect of the

RTI framework, teachers' thoughts and opinions are frequently overlooked (Lally, 2017). As with many other educational programs, there is still a gap between research and practice with RTI (Crone et al., 2019; Kearney & Childs, 2021). Many RTI-related studies have focused on student growth and development (Konopaseki et al., 2016; Zvoch, 2016). Other studies have focused on teachers' ability to effectively implement the process (Sullivan et al., 2015; Thorius & Tan, 2015). In 25 school districts, the Effective Behavioral and Instructional Support Systems (EBISS) initiative was adopted. By adopting an implementation science perspective, the program aimed to support district leaders and teachers in effectively utilizing the EBISS model, offering instruction and mentoring throughout the process (Chaparro et al., 2019). However, few studies (Simonsen & Sugai 2013; Guage, 2017; Kim, et al., 2021) have focused solely on teachers' perceptions of RTI. The few studies conducted do not provide sufficient information or guidance to better understand teachers' views or inform professional development (Haley & Allstopp, 2019; August et al., 2018).

The current study was completed to help fill a research gap in teachers' perceptions of RTI and how various factors may influence such perceptions as identified in the literature. By examining the impact of delivery on special education services, the gaps in delivery, and the tracking of students' development, this study benefited all stakeholders involved. By understanding the influence of this study, teachers, students, support staff, administration, and parents will have benefited from it. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will help educators plan and prepare for the support, resources, and professional development needed to make RTI more effective in the classroom. The confusion and lack of standardization in the application of RTI or MTSS is detrimental to the student experience. The confusion and lack of standardization is especially detrimental for students who require greater assistance but do not

exhibit a condition requiring special education accommodations. The research was completed to facilitate open communication among staff members to improve the process. The research has guided the decision-making process for the future of RTI and the identifying procedure for children who require special services.

### **Research Questions**

The study's research questions focus on how elementary school general education teachers described their implementation of the MTSS/RTI approach while delivering diversified core curriculum instruction. The following research questions were used to guide the study.

#### **Central Research Question**

How do general education elementary school teachers implement tier one, tier two, and tier three of the MTSS/RTI model while delivering differentiated core curriculum instruction?

#### **Sub-Question One**

What strategies were given to teachers in their training to assist them in implementing RTI/MTSS effectively?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

How do teachers' perspectives affect the level of buy-in and comprehension of MTSS implementation?

#### **Sub-Question Three**

How does professional development assist both the teacher and the student's success?

### **Definitions**

1. *Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)* – A Multi-Tiered System of Support is a term used to describe an evidence-based model that uses database problem solving to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. The integrated instruction and

intervention are delivered to students in varying intensities (multiple tiers) based on student needs (Hannington et al., 2020).

2. *Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS)* – is an evidence-based three-tiered framework to improve and integrate all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. PBIS creates schools where all students succeed (Hannington et al., 2020; Witzel et al., 2018).
3. *Response to Intervention (RTI)* – is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavioral needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom (Hannington et al., 2020; Witzel et al., 2018).
4. *Specific-Learning Disability (SLD)*–is a disability that affects one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language, resulting in an impaired ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations (Hannington et al., 2020).

### **Summary**

The perceptions of professional school employees are critical in determining the success and problems of the RTI initiative. This study addressed the problem of instructors lacking emotional and tangible support from their schools while exerting the time, energy, and resources essential for successfully implementing the MTSS framework's components (King et al., 2012). In addition, this chapter introduced the research problem, its significance, questions, and the theoretical framework for this study covered in it. This study was completed to help all professionals better understand the differences in perceptions they have about the RTI model that

is currently in place, and it allows the district and others outside of the study to make some recommendations about the efficacy of RTI/MTSS.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

A systematic literature review was conducted to explore continuing educators' professional development decision-making process in RTI/MTSS frameworks. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support (SWPBIS) all contribute to the alteration of behavior in a classroom environment. Educators widely regard RTI/MTSS as a school-wide program that prevents and intervenes to improve academic achievement and student well-being. Historically, schools may have used a wait-to-fail strategy in which pupils did not receive the necessary services in a timely manner (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018). RTI/MTSS are associated with the support systems for educators and their students and how technology affects the social aspects of education. The first section discussed the theories relevant to the theory of learning, including behavioral and social identity theory, and the following section synthesized recent literature regarding the social aspects of the educator's continuing to enhance their professional development skills and expertise. A gap in the literature is identified, presenting a need for current and future studies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of Effectiveness (1977) collaborates to construct the conceptual framework and provides a primary lens through which we view phenomena in this study. However, following a theoretical framework can lead to informed decision making that allows for better control over the achieved results (McEwen & Wills, 2007). According to Social Cognitive Theory, human behavior is the result of a reciprocal link between behavior and the environment (Bandura, 1986). MTSS is a framework that encompasses both RTI and PBIS.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is a multi-tiered framework for behavioral supports, whereas Response to Intervention is a multi-tiered framework for academic supports. Tier 1 (school-wide), Tier 2 (targeted), and Tier 3 (individual) assistance levels the emphasis of Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The review covers the RTI/MTSS framework as a comprehensive framework for addressing children's and youth's academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development. It encompasses many academic disciplines, including psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and education.

Beginning with the 2015 school year, the Obama administration adopted a new guideline to standardize the methods utilized by state and local agencies “with the purpose of improving equity under IDEA” (USDOE, Dec. 2016 p.96). The policy mandates states to “identify and address the factors contributing to the large disparity, which may include economic, cultural, or language challenges to appropriate identification or placement in certain educational settings” (USDOE, Dec. 2016 p. 98). According to the United States Department of Education (2019), the once-reasonably secure position of the United States in the world is now threatened by other countries' scrutiny when it comes to providing a solid education for all. In addition, the report emphasized that education is a necessary investment for success in the digital age. The legislative initiative acquired considerable momentum, which has not abated. According to the The National Center for Education Statistics (2019), enrollment in public prekindergarten through eighth-grade education increased from 35.39 million in the fall of 2015 to 35.48 million in the fall of 2016.

The RTI/MTSS framework integrates a continuum of system-wide resources, strategies, structures, and evidence-based practices for addressing barriers to student learning and discipline. RTI is a framework many schools use to assist students who are struggling



academically. RTI has three levels of intervention. RTI typically employs a school-wide, three-tiered approach to assess students' progress frequently and deliver interventions to aid them in meeting grade-level standards (Hilton, 2007). General education teachers are responsible for using research-based instructional practices within Tiers 1 and 2. If a student does not respond to specific individualized interventions, teachers can refer them for special education based on the principles of RTI and PBIS (Anderson, 2008; Bandura, 1977; Picciano, 2017). The discussion included other theories concerning online education. These theories emphasize the significance of creating the foundation for further conversation.

A multi-tiered support system (MTSS) is comprehensive and could include all three RTI levels. However, MTSS is more than just academic. It also includes social and emotional assistance, which may include a behavioral intervention plan. Additionally, MTSS includes adults in the classroom as well. It includes teacher professional development. MTSS also focuses on finding ways for adults to work together to assist struggling children. The RTI framework can be used in conjunction with an MTSS approach. The approach is the reason the two concepts have become so inextricably linked. Understanding how the school implements RTI or MTSS can help parents advocate for their children. Whether the school employs RTI, MTSS, or both, the objective is to ensure that all students receive the necessary education.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports , Multi-Tiered System of Support , and Response to Intervention programs are policy-based strategies that enhance the school's role in social skills and behavior assistance (Eun, 2018; Michie et al., 2017). The frameworks develop strategies to transform unwanted behavior into more desirable ones. Behavior modification is accomplished through the instruction of proper actions and social skills. These initiatives are

policy-based measures that expand the school's role in delivering social skills and behavior support.

The emergence of online education has revolutionized the field of higher education, bringing about dynamic changes and a tremendous growth in recent years, thereby expanding the scope for pursuing advanced studies. Anderson (2008) identified the increased utilization of online academic programs in advanced studies as one of the most remarkable technological breakthroughs in academics. Recent studies conducted by researchers have demonstrated that all segments of society undergo a continuous process of change as a result of distinct technological advancements. In future studies, the significant issue of concern revolves around the most prominent contribution of technological advancement. Technology has been the most significant breakthrough (Cook et al., 2018; Doabler et al., 2019).

The teaching and learning phenomenon is a concept gaining traction as an essential aspect of education. In both online and offline modes of education, the critical aspect of education is the smooth teaching-learning procedure. Since the teacher is responsible for transferring knowledge in the classroom and during the teaching-learning process, the teacher is referred to as the knowledge carrier. It is their obligation and responsibility to possess the knowledge required to instruct the students (Enright et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Sayed, Munna & Kalam, 2021). The social aspect of learning is not absent from online courses; it only changes. The behavioral change portion of the teaching-learning process is an influential phenomenon that contemplates integrating a range of variables together by which the learners work to achieve an objective and acquire new knowledge and skills (Eun, 2018; Picciano, 2017). Learning theory is an essential component of the teaching-learning process that focuses on the outcomes of the above-mentioned processes. Researchers and educationists have vehemently defined different

learning theory perspectives (Michie et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2020) which concluded that both the traditional and online modes of education rely on a profound basis of an effective teaching-learning system.

However, because of the distinctiveness of the modes, the impact of the teaching-learning aspect is different for different modes the teaching and learning theory guides behaviorism, constructivism, and cognitive aspects (Anderson, 2008; Bandura, 1986; Picciano, 2017). Cognitive learning theory deliberately focuses on the innate ability of a learner to acquire knowledge by observation, experience, and understanding. The process involves acquiring knowledge and skills through cognitive or mental processes (Eun, 2018).

Another typical learning theory that contributes to a proper learning process is the behavioral learning theory. It focuses on the idea that behavior determines the interaction with the environment of education (Anderson, 2008; Bandura, 1986; Hew & Lo, 2018). The theory promotes the context that justifies the fact that an individual's behavior is influenced by the learning environment and suggests that behavior gains innate or inherited factors (Michie et al., 2017).

However, some researchers believe that education and educators' impact on students can effectively influence their behavior in the classroom (Grichland, 2017). In this context, online education has little effect on the theory of behavioral learning (Anderson, 2008; Bandura, 1977; Kim et al., 2021). Since a virtual platform cannot influence a person's behavior in general, virtual education is a significant concern for education because online education does not surpass traditional education. The theory can also be associated with social learning theory (Kim et al., 2021). The theory of social learning (Bandura, 1977; Eun, 2018; Michie et al., 2017) suggested

that social behavior develops in an individual by observing and imitating other people's behavior in society. From the educational viewpoint, it profoundly nurtures the personality of a learner.

### **Related Literature**

Education theories propose various educational models designed to keep a solid teaching-learning process. The literature on the most appropriate style of professional development in education analyzes the critical aspects of technology in the current setting, and it is a valuable resource. Learning theories, behavioral change theory, and social learning theory are discussed in the first section, followed by an overview of recent literature on professional development and educational challenges. The literature analyzed the significance of continuing education for workers in PBIS, RTI, and MTSS and how this factor contributes to pursuing long-term goals and objectives in various fields of study. Next, the literature on the factors that lead to the development of continued support for successful outcomes will be discussed. In conclusion, a gap will be found in the existing research to prove why the current investigation is warranted.

### **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**

Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) has been acknowledged for over three decades as an effective, evidence-based method to lower problematic behaviors and improve individuals' quality of life (Lucyshyn et al., 2015). The Pyramid Model is a program-wide PBIS framework for organizing evidence-informed early childhood practices. It establishes three stages or tiers of support for children's social and emotional competency. The first tier comprises universal techniques that encourage responsive caregiver relationships and high-quality supporting environments for all children. Targeted services for specific groups of children requiring more systematic and focused social-emotional teaching are the second tier. The third tier contains techniques that provide tailored positive behavior support to children with chronic

problematic behaviors that do not respond to interventions in the previous tiers. The objective of PBIS is to assist schools in implementing proactive staff behavior, as opposed to reactive conduct, such as detentions and suspensions. Any persistent pattern of behavior or perception that interferes with or threatens to interfere with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers and adults is classified as challenging behavior (Ai, 2022).

### **Response To Intervention (RTI)**

RTI is understood by the majority of educators on at least a superficial level. Since the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), prohibits states from requiring school districts to use IQ-achievement discrepancy criteria in the identification of students with specific learning disabilities (2008). IDEIA encourages the use of a scientific, research-based approach known as response-to-intervention, therefore, school districts are encouraged to use this method (Wills et al., 2016).

### **Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS)**

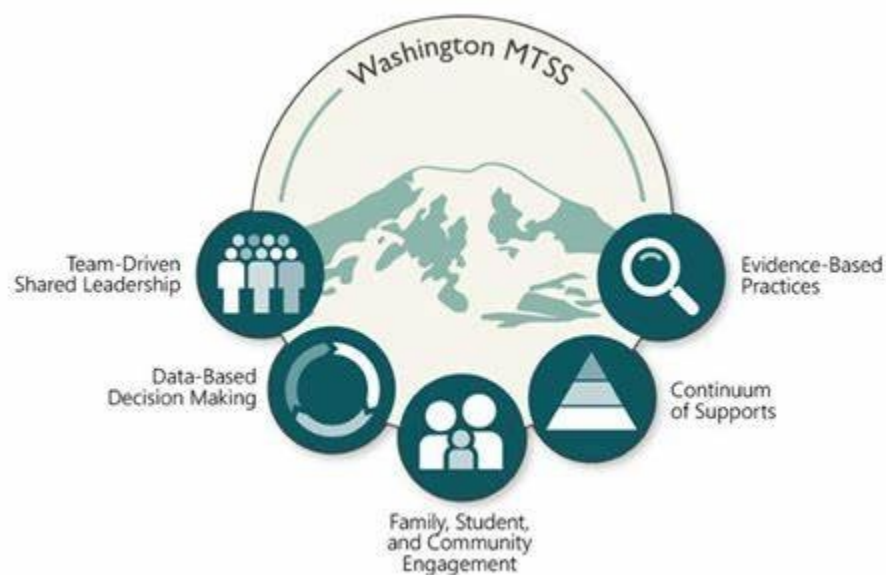
MTSS is used to explain PBIS and RTI techniques in this paper. McIntosh & Goodman (2016) explained that whether MTSS is used only for behavior or academics, or both are incorporated into a single system, the guiding concepts are the same in RTI. They emphasize that RTI focuses primarily on delivering intervention to students in need of assistance, whereas MTSS emphasizes high-quality individualized core education and focuses on both intervention and prevention. Various misconceptions exist about MTSS, including its application to students with disabilities. MTSS does not exclude students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The tiered framework meets all student needs in all areas (academic, social, emotional, and behavioral). The modifications, support, and services on a student's IEP should supplement, rather than replace, the tiered support available to all students under an MTSS framework. Each

student can access support as soon as needed, which is a hallmark of effective implementation. Tier 1 supports should be available to all students, including students with disabilities, and Tier 3 supports should be available to all students, regardless of eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504.

Figure 3 represents the State of Washington’s MTSS framework and contributes to ensuring that students benefit from nurturing environments and equitable access to universal instruction and supports that are culturally and linguistically responsive, universally designed, and differentiated to meet their specific needs.

### Figure 3

#### *Washington State MTSS Framework*



*Note.* From “Washington State MTSS framework,” by Flores et al.(2020). OPSI

<https://www.k12.wa.us>

The essential components of MTSS are interrelated, and as the intensity of student need increases, each component also increases in intensity. The essential components are broken down

into the following five components for the Washington State MTSS framework (Flores et al., 2020).

### ***Team-Driven Shared Leadership***

In order for MTSS to be implemented, the organization must be able to lead and support the essential aspects of MTSS. The school's leadership teams are responsible for planning, coordinating, monitoring, and adjusting MTSS implementation activities to aid all staff members. Leadership teams are responsible for developing the team's ability to lead the work, providing the training and support that staff, families, and community partners require to complete the work as planned. Leadership teams should have a broad range of people and a reliable way to attain input and information from faculty, students, families, and community associates (Flores et al., 2020).

### ***Data-Based Decision-Making***

Assessment data, inspection reports, or examination results are used to inform decision-making at all system levels (district, school, grade). To enhance their decision-making and improve support, district and school teams adhere to a standardized process aimed at ensuring the reliability and the validity of the data (Flores et al., 2020).

### ***Family, Student, and Community Engagement***

Family engagement occurs at the district, school, and classroom levels (Garbacz et al., 2019). MTSS should also emphasize student voice in educational decisions, as well as opportunities for instructional choice, designing supports that are tailored to their specific strengths and needs. Building comprehensive systems requires involving community partners in multi-tiered supports. The framework and methods for implementing supports in collaboration with community stakeholders, families, and students are provided by MTSS.

### ***Continuum Of Supports.***

On a continuum, instruction, enrichment, and intervention are provided to fulfill the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of all students. The purpose of enrichment and intervention is to accelerate learning and eliminate obstacles that prevent students from receiving the full benefits of universal education and supports. Providing students with integrated, needs-based, and universal instruction-aligned assistance will promote independence and development in universal education (Garbacz et al., 2019).

### ***Evidence Must Support Evidence-Based Practices***

In order to improve the effectiveness of instruction, there are four levels of evidence that can be utilized: strong, moderate, promising, and rationale-based. Strong evidence (Tier 1) represents the highest level and is supported by one or more well-designed and well-implemented randomized control experimental studies. Moderate Evidence (tier 2) is the second and is supported by one or more well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental studies. The Third (Tier 3) is encouraging and one or more well-designed and well-implemented correlational studies supported it (with statistical controls for selection bias). Lastly, the rationale-based (Tier 4) are practices that have a well-defined logic model or theory of action, are supported by research, and have some effort underway by an SEA, LEA, or outside research organization to determine their effectiveness. Implementing MTSS guarantees the fair adoption of evidence-based strategies for the benefit of all students. Tiers reflect the level of assistance provided but do not define students (Sandoval, 2022). Interventions implemented under Title I, strong, moderate, or promising evidence (Tiers 1-3) must support Section 1003 (School Improvement. Tiers 1-4 can be used for all other programs under Titles I-IV).

### **The Tiered System of MTSS Framework**



Whether the MTSS framework is used only for behavior or academics, both are incorporated into a single system, and the guiding concepts are the same (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). MTSS framework is a methodology that entails adopting three levels of instruction or support, with each tier focusing on distinct learning needs, rising in intensity. For the successful implementation of MTSS, collaboration must occur between the general and special educators. The MTSS model should frequently progress and monitor a targeted skill versus the baseline, examine how students' skills relate to curriculum materials, and make instructional changes based on data.

### ***Tier 1 Primary Prevention***

RTI incorporates various instruction levels intended to prevent the implementation of poor instruction over extended periods and prevent deficiencies from developing or becoming more severe (Wyse et al., 2020). Tier 1 is the general education curriculum designed to accommodate varied student learning needs. Since MTSS data might possibly identify pupils with a learning disadvantage, Tier 1 must involve the deployment of research-based instructional strategies. Schools may be required to provide teachers with professional development on the effective use of materials and practice, and they must be able to defend the core instructional programs as generally effective in promoting student achievement or have research-based justification for improved achievement. Teachers may require continuing support, professional development, or coaching to ensure instructional techniques are implemented with fidelity.

Screening measures can identify students at the beginning of the school year who have a chance of achieving crucial educational objectives. Screening procedures can identify pupils at risk who require preventative teaching. Schools may also use benchmarking assessment systems

in which all students are reviewed annually. By analyzing their test scores, teachers can identify individuals at risk of failing (Wyse et al., 2020).

### ***Tier 2 Secondary Prevention***

Students who do not progress in Tier 1 will receive more support in supplemental Tier 2 (Wyse et al., 2020). Tier 2 services are often pullout instructional services frequently offered to small groups of students (Stecker et al., 2008). Targeting students in Tier 2 and designing systemic treatments for students in small groups with progress monitoring is the purpose of the second tier (Vaughn et al., 2007). Besides Tier 1 core education, students in Tier 2 may receive interventions for 20 minutes per day for a maximum of 20 weeks (Bradley et al., 2007). The MTSS framework can use traditional treatment protocols and individualized problem-solving strategies to enhance education. Similar to Tier 1, supplementary education should be based on scientific proof of its effectiveness. Schools must guarantee that the supplementary programs are also given as expected in their true form. According to Richards et al. (2007), some individuals receiving Tier 2 instruction/intervention may not make any progress in fulfilling grade-level benchmarks; hence, students who do not react to Tier 2 interventions will receive Tier 3 instruction. The same measures used for assessing progress at Tier 1 can be applied to monitoring at Tier 2. Depending on the amount of instructional time already spent in Tier 2, students may receive an additional round of Tier 2 intervention or move to Tier 3 if their development in Tier 2 is poor or slow.

### ***Tier 3 Tertiary Intervention***

Students in Tier 3 are usually 2-5% of all students and receive instruction/intervention in smaller groups than Tier 2. Instruction/intervention in Tier 3 is more intense and explicit and may take 45-60 minutes (Vaughn et al., 2007). As with Tier 2 instruction/intervention, students

receiving Tier 3 instruction should also receive Tier 1 core instruction (Allsopp et al., 2010). Once multiple rounds of preventive aid have been provided, including more targeted assistance within Tier 2, and the student still performs poorly academically based on the slope of improvement and level of performance, special education is considered. The district assesses whether or not Tier 3 instruction/intervention makes up special education services. Berkeley et al. (2009) stated that special education referrals should only follow the delivery of tiered instruction/intervention within MTSS.

The importance of Tier 3 is the monitoring of student progress (Stecker et al., 2008). Teachers utilize curriculum-based measurement (CBM) data to assist and define long-term goals and to track students' development throughout the year. Educational leaders may be better able to determine when instruction is generally effective if they employ progress monitoring measures with all students. Another advantage of using progress monitoring data with all students is determining if students who may have surpassed benchmarks continue to grow academically. MTSS can provide teachers with an instructional and intervention framework based on student data. In an RTI model, students are screened three times per year. Student performance is compared to grade-level benchmark norms.

### **Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports Intent**

The MTSS and PBIS frameworks, based on public health and prevention science, provide a structure for the adoption and implementation of universal prevention practices (Tier 1) for all children, targeted interventions (Tier 2) for children at risk indicating early signs of problems, and intensive interventions (Tier 3) for children and youth with more serious problems (Sugai & Horner, 2006). A primary goal of PBIS is the reduction of problem behaviors that frequently result in office discipline referrals (ODRs), suspensions, and a decline in academic engagement.

Several studies have examined the impact of the Tier I feature on student behavioral outcomes, such as ODRs and suspension rates (Freeman et al., 2019; Gage et al., 2020; Southern, 2021).

Sugai and Horner (2020) discovered that roughly 25% more schools evaluate Tier 1 implementation fidelity than Tiers 2 or 3 in a summary of the past 20 years of federally subsidized PBIS implementation and sustainability. Although 65% of schools considering Tier 1 implementation meet stated cutoffs, only 33% and 18% meet Tier 2 and Tier 3 implementation standards, respectively. Besides the growing use of PBIS, there has been a growing national push to expand school-based mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention practices with collaboration from community-based mental health providers in schools, supplementing the work of school-employed mental health staff, school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors.

### ***Assessments and Progress Monitoring***

Assessment data should play an integral role in Tier preventative practices. Assessments are an integral element of the learning process since they define a student's current level of comprehension and give teachers helpful information on what is and is not working (Fisher & Frey, 2010). The beginning of the year can target screening measures, and students may achieve significant educational outcomes if identified early. RTI/MTSS is primarily a model for resource allocation. Data from assessments are used to match student needs with interventions. As a result, sound assessment practices and data-driven decision-making are cornerstones of RTI, and improved student outcomes are the most substantial evidence for the validity of any assessment-data decision.

### ***Financial Aspects***

The passage of new pre-school programs by a Republican-controlled Congress as recently as 2015 implies that such projects may become politically viable again in the near future. In special education, monetary issues are always a worry. Zerkil (2019) noted that implementing RTI for disability identification would need substantially more time and money than the current testing-based paradigm. There are differing opinions regarding the financial impact of RTI. Fuchs and Fuchs (2019) predicted that a two-step screening and progress-tracking method would save school districts' money by targeting Tier 2 education to students who genuinely require it. Gerber (2005) addressed several concerns regarding the expense of RTI (The Federal Funding to Support Response to Intervention | RTI Action Network, n.d.).

Bradshaw et al. (2020) used shadow cost to estimate the approximate cost of liability to a school. The most significant cost savings were related with higher standardized test scores (\$139K for elementary and \$72K for secondary). Reducing violent and disruptive behavior in primary pupils, as well as bullying behavior, resulted in significant cost savings (\$166,000 in total). Savings associated with fewer suspensions (\$33,500 for elementary and \$11,400 for secondary) augment these cost-cutting gains. Other findings include student truancy, office discipline referrals, and mental health concerns (Bradshaw et al., 2020). The data, when taken together, demonstrate the significant cost savings associated with previous PBIS Tier 1 implementation and scale-up to the current MTSS framework. Finally, it analyzes how the statewide implementation of MTSS can cause cost reductions across several agencies.

Because educators' primary focus has been on implementing the former universal PBIS framework, it is possible that implementing targeted treatments within the wider multitiered systems of support model will generate additional mental health benefits (Bradshaw et al., 2020). Individually and collectively, these systems must include time and resources for educators to

engage in self-reflection and high-quality in-service professional development. Future research should combine these two sets of cost data by conducting a more formal, pre-planned benefit-cost analysis for MTSS and a more specific focus on the cost savings associated with the deployment of additional evidence-based programs at the advanced tiers. The means of overcoming this challenge is through petitioning the government and other philanthropic organizations to provide adequate funds for obtaining sufficient resources to execute and maintain the RTI/MTSS framework.

### **Educator's Professional Development (PD)**

Any educator's career would be incomplete without ongoing education and training. Fortunately, there are numerous options for education and training. Professional development (PD) helps teachers reflect on their teaching practices, learn new skills, develop new classroom strategies, and keep up with the educational trends. Recent developments in online education have redesigned the system of the teaching-learning process itself. PD, such as attending conferences and workshops, is an excellent way for educators to further their education (Childress et al., 2021). When taking a closer look at the idea of teacher PD, why it is so critical, and some of the best places to do so? Most occupations require some form of ongoing PD to stay on top of one's skills and knowledge (Deng, 2022). There is no escaping PD regarding education and future advancement in the career field (Walberg, 2018). After obtaining a teaching credential and beginning work in a school, education terminates. The renewal of a teacher's license in most states requires PD for teachers in the K-12 education sector.

Asynchronous and synchronous modalities of instruction existed in numerous institutions prior to the pandemic's occurrence (Picciano, 2017). Most significantly, online modes of instruction have emerged as a significant context in higher education that has grown rapidly in

recent years. Because of the pandemic crisis in 2020-2021 and its consequences, the framework for online education has become more mature, and significant strides have been made toward an effective teaching-learning process through online education. On the surface, it is clear that online education has evolved considerably into a pedagogical shift away from the conventional technique, a modern approach to teaching-learning that has moved away from the physical classroom to the virtual classroom and away from seminars and webinars (Koonce et al., 2019). Teachers benefit from PD that encourages them to think outside the box for school improvement. Formative assessment, data-driven decision making, policy implications, leadership, community, educational technology, and teaching methodology all fall under the umbrella of PD.

Teachers' professional learning is essential for helping students develop the increasingly sophisticated skills they will need to succeed in the twenty-first century. Successful students must develop critical thinking, complex problem-solving, effective communication and collaboration, and self-direction. Teachers need effective PD to help them learn and refine the instructional strategies required to teach these skills. Teachers who receive quality PD have more time to learn, practice, implement new ideas, and reflect on their progress (Ha et al., 2021). As a result, effective PD programs typically engage teachers in learning over several weeks, months, or even academic years rather than short, one-off workshops.

### ***Social Theory***

The quality of teacher education programs can only be improved if teacher educators assist student teachers in identifying the gap between teaching and theory and continuously assist them in connecting their learned theory and practice. Social and emotional skills are often discussed in the context of teacher education. This is because higher education is a very stressful time (Acharya et al., 2018; Bai et al., 2020). It is not enough for a teacher to have a variety of

engaging activities at their disposal; they must also be familiar with and able to implement a variety of instructional strategies, and they must use these strategies while keeping in mind that the strategies are not an end in and of themselves in this context. Koonce et al. (2019) revealed that the quality of teacher education programs can only be improved if teacher educators assist student teachers in identifying the gap between teaching and theory and continuously facilitate them in connecting their learned theory and practice. On the contrary, Burner and Svendsen (2020) believe that, in the absence of sufficient theoretical knowledge, it is a challenge for educators and researchers to change the training of teachers who teach in a traditional style for their educational practices to change. During the COVID-19 outbreak that has been going on for the past few years, we have accumulated sufficient evidence to cast doubt on both ideas. Despite this, we wanted to give some credence to the skepticism by investigating the matter.

### ***Professional Development into Practice***

When it comes to putting PD into action, it must meet the specific needs of teachers and students, including the educational setting as a whole. It is essential to plan for these common obstacles to PD during the program's design and implementation phases. Previously, online education was synonymous with distance education or e-learning courses, but this has changed. Although the COVID-19 era significantly increased the number of students enrolled in online courses, it also steered the entire education system toward a technology-based teaching-learning process (Nagro et al., 2018; Purba et al., 2019). End-to-end teaching and learning systems that support students in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should include well-designed PD.

Professional learning should be linked to teachers' preparation, induction, teaching standards, and evaluation to ensure a cohesive system that supports teachers throughout the



professional continuum. To ensure a comprehensive system that focuses on the growth and development of teachers, it should also include leadership opportunities. In classroom management, the term *positive behavioral support* refers to tactics that assist teachers in identifying and addressing the underlying causes of disruptive conduct and strategies that transform the learning environment to foster the behavior they want to see in their students.

### ***Challenges***

As teachers transition from the PD context to their schools with evolving affinity identities, they may acquire new concepts that alter classroom cultures, norms, and instruction. Quality of implementation has an impact on the overall effectiveness of PD initiatives. Researchers have found that teachers sometimes cannot implement PD practices because they neglect the practice or do not consider it important enough, and they encounter obstacles they are powerless to overcome. The most well-intentioned initiatives can hamper learning even to enhance teacher effectiveness and elevate student skill sets. As a result, it is critical to recognize the role of theory in educational research and practice, particularly in teacher education (Olivier et al., 2019). Accountability difficulties also compelled states and school districts to examine professional development concerns at all levels more thoroughly, particularly for first-year teachers, to support their learning efforts and assist their growth as teachers. Classroom teachers and teacher educators need to be aware of and informed about the numerous theoretical frameworks that influence and shape classroom instruction, the educational theory, and research that guides and develops teacher education (Bovill & Woolmer, 2018). Supportive teacher PD communities must foster teachers' self-reflection and inquiry, much as an effective teacher uses unexpected situations to excite a students' curiosity. Various facets of growth have been examined within studies on the new teacher. These studies investigated cognitive and ego-level

maturity, and the new teacher's developmental periods or stages, being essential in the continuing improvement of PD and skill progression.

### **The Role of Professional Development for Success**

In general and special educational settings, RTI is an evidence-based early intervention method for students who have difficulty with their learning or conduct. RTI's fundamental tenets include: the provision of evidence-based instruction at Tier 1 with fidelity, the frequent monitoring of student development, the evaluation of student responsiveness to intervention, and the modification of instructional strategies as required (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005). There has been a notable shift in education reform efforts with a distinct approach, which is one that originated from the grassroots level. It is not enough for teachers to use progress monitoring systems and scientifically based instructional practices when implementing RTI (Bohanon & Wu, 2020). A comprehensive, school-wide system reform is produced by the employment of data and instructional practices to advance the development and sustainability of RTI implementation (Young, 2018).

RTI is designed to address several concerns related to traditional special education identification procedures, the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education, the integration of general and special education, and the delivery of evidence-based programs to students. Now, both state initiatives and federal legislation have approved the efficacy of RTI and other programs that are pretty comparable to RTI. Several opportunities exist for professional education to begin the teaching-learning process and open up numerous possibilities for synchronizing educational systems, especially regarding the RTI/MTSS framework. The first and most important feature is that the online education system has broken down geographical

barriers and made it easier for anyone to receive education from anywhere (Tamim, 2020). It has substantially strengthened the learner's sense of belonging while also assisting them in mobilizing and strengthening their learning philosophy (Bohanon & Wu, 2020). The instructor's ability to impart his or her expertise and understanding to the students effectively plays a significant role in the growth of teaching and learning processes (Lumpkin, 2020).

The most significant aspect of online education is that it has simultaneously failed both time and geographical barriers. Part of the social aspect is removing the need for students to travel long distances and reducing the time and travel expenses incurred by professors, which can deter students from attending classes (Song et al., 2020). It is also important to note that online education offers considerable advantages in terms of convenience, as students can access the learning module whenever convenient. Students take part in virtual classroom conversations within their course's online learning platform, rather than in a physical classroom on campus, to help them learn more about their course material (Willermark & Gellerstedt, 2022). These discussions may even be more satisfying for them than the typical course discussions. Students in virtual classroom discussions must each contribute something significant to the conversation, which may not always be the case in traditional classroom discussions where participation grades may be based on whether the student spoke up rather than what he or she contributed to the conversation (Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017).

As the RTI model is implemented in different states, experts generally urge a gradual introduction over several years so that educators and administrators have time to adapt to the new procedures (March et al., 2020). Core implementation components of RTI defined by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NCLD) include a) use of high-quality research-based classroom instruction in conjunction with appropriate interventions, b) universal

screening for academics and behavior, and c) tracking students' response to interventions regularly. When it comes to implementing RTI or other tiered interventions, NCLB strongly emphasizes evidence-based practice, data-driven decision making, and multitiered intervention. Specifically, IDEA (2004) expands on NCLB's emphasis on preventing learning issues, minimizing achievement inequalities among minority children, and intervening early with pupils struggling to learn. The utilization of online learning modes encourages students to make better use of technology and improve their digital abilities, becoming increasingly vital in the digital age. IDEA (2004) emphasized instructional practices and decision-making to prevent minority special education students from being misclassified because of insufficient instruction or cultural bias. IDEA advocated improvements that integrate special and mainstream education systems at their core.

Children at risk of learning difficulties and those with identified learning disabilities will benefit from the law's emphasis on improving their outcomes. According to researchers and studies, the synchronization of online and traditional education will be an essential aspect of the digital age (Braun et al., 2020). An effective online education system can reduce physical infrastructure costs while using shared digital resources (Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017). The frequency with which the behavior is expected to occur, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) has proven to be popular among SDQ-using educators. A SDQ instrument has been translated into seventy languages, is sensitive to detecting intervention effects, and it has widespread national and international application. Assessment programs like Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) for reading and math (K-2) (Good et al., 2003), Standardized Testing and Reporting of reading and math (STAR) (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>) (Renaissance Learning, 2010), and Core Phonics Surveys (Park et al., 2014) are tools being used to determine

accurate assessments. Determining such as the use of RTI's teacher support teams, problem-solving procedures, and databases in making decisions has been on the agenda of policymakers for quite some time.

### **Professional Development**

For practically every element of society, technology is one of the essential factors in structural change. Technology is proper for any intervention framework. The RTI/MTSS framework has evolved into one of the essential components of any grade level, resulting in a considerable increase in output (Barari et al., 2020). Incorporating professional learning into Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) school improvement initiatives, such as new learning standards implementation, the use of student data for informing instruction, improving student literacy, increasing student access to advanced coursework, and creating a positive and inclusive learning environment, can all enhance school improvement. Numerous attempts have been made to find a method, structure, or ideology that can make the promise of appropriate education for all without special education a reality, allowing schools to be inclusive of all students without identifying or *separating out* any for education apart from the general education population. Administrators could identify and develop expert teachers as mentors and coaches at the state and district level to help other educators learn in their particular areas of expertise (Ali et al., 2021).

Technological features in the teaching-learning process fill the classroom with digital technologies that expand the course options, experiences, and educational materials available to students (Ali et al., 2021; Mosher, 2023). Technology has broken down geographical barriers to learning, providing support for learning 24 hours a day, seven days a week. According to the study's authors, technology has also significantly enhanced student involvement and motivation

in the learning process (Florida Problem Solving & Response to Intervention Project - Home, n.d.).

Technological advancements have boosted educational productivity and sped up the learning rate by lowering the costs involved with acquiring instructional materials and program delivery. Technology has also revolutionized the teaching-learning process by introducing new models of connected teaching. Teachers and students are linked together via digital resources and professional content in this new teaching approach, which helps teachers enhance their education and tailor learning (Vo et al., 2017).

### **Professional Development Across Disciplines**

Employers place a high value on personal and professional skills, which are also seen as essential for lifelong learning and general success, making them beneficial for both responsible citizenship and job success. Employers report a *skills gap* or difficulty finding job candidates with soft skills, such as communication, customer service, problem-solving, flexibility, and critical thinking. As tuition costs continue to rise and stakeholder demands for accountability increase, universities have placed more emphasis on metrics related to employment after graduation. The significance of personal and professional abilities extends beyond the workplace. Besides cognitive techniques, counseling graduate programs frequently use experiential learning theory by combining cognitive learning growth with interactive field experiences as a crucial element of learning (Aubrey & Riley, 2016). Academic success has been linked to the soft abilities associated with emotional intelligence. In Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, the concept of belonging is introduced first. Maslow believed belonging is a motivating factor for an individual's behaviors and actions. Belonging and love need to follow physical and safety needs for individual needs as psychological needs for interpersonal relationships (Briesch

et al., 2020; Cook et al., 2018; Maslow, 1954). Transferring the concept of belonging to higher education institutions has been identified as an indicator that promotes success, engagement, and student success in the RTI/MTSS framework.

Educational institutions are integrating general and special education, providing students with evidence-based programs. RTI emphasizes integrating program areas, applying a problem-solving strategy, and using evidence-based instruction with progress monitoring data because of the effectiveness of these strategies (Johnson & Stage, 2018). RTI is designed with programmatic collaboration in mind, as it requires coordinated decision-making and resource sharing among personnel in general education, special education, and related services.

An example of an evaluation and assessment program is Kahoot! Assessment and evaluation in the programs play an essential role in gamification. These simple assessment programs contribute to students' success at various levels (Purba et al., 2019). Kahoot!, the focus of the research, seems to be on themes related to learning, which have a significant impact on classroom dynamics, student engagement, motivation, and learning. Additionally, the study suggests a minimal use of overly intrusive student conduct and personal identification (Zhang & Yu, 2022).

### ***Intrinsically***

Some researchers have long argued that insufficient evidence demonstrates the cost-effectiveness and validity of aligning instruction to diagnostic classifications. Involving students in interactive and flexible online education allows them to advance their careers while increasing their academic results and employability. Because of this program, the faculty members are also better qualified for better jobs in this digital age (Hannigan et al., 2020). Education has grown more accessible because of the widespread use of online learning, which increases the

convenience of students while also increasing their academic achievement. Recent RTI studies argue that RTI's supply of information directly relevant to the design, delivery, and monitoring of student development through more practical teaching is a significant advantage over the IQ-achievement discrepancy paradigm (Bradley et al., 2017). Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) provides teachers with a universal screening tool from kindergarten through second grade that includes a variety of screening indicators of student performance, including naming letters, phonemic awareness, reading comprehension, reading letters and words, and vocabulary. The advancement of technology has resulted in numerous tools that consider learners' academic achievements and comprehension abilities (Hew & Lo, 2018). Using Bloom's taxonomy, the online learning environment has consistently provided educators with the ability to assess students' progress and monitor progress toward goals (Bloom, 1956; Crompton, 2019; Hassan et al., 2020). Previously, to be classified as having a specific learning disability (SLD), a student had to demonstrate a significant gap between their general intelligence and academic progress using the discrepancy model. Once students have completed two or more years of school, they are more likely to notice a gap in their academic performance. Many believe this is a *wait and see* strategy detrimental to early action. Early detection and remediation for pupils with SLD are beneficial to researchers (American Psychiatric Association, 2021; Morris-Wiseman & Nfonsam, 2021).

Considering this analysis of how an RTI approach to early reading is implemented in one school, further research into the relationship between reading research and racial disproportionality is warranted. The federal government has implemented no rules against using intelligence tests to evaluate reading capability and identify students who may require special education. Teachers can help a child avoid failure in school if they diagnose them with an SLD



before the child falls below their expected performance level (American Psychiatric Association, 2021). In schools, educational policies have a significant impact. Because RTI is used as a referral tool to determine special education eligibility, fidelity is an essential component of the referral process. Decisions about special education services should be made with fidelity, even in schools with exceptional mental health promotion, prevention, and Emotional and Behavioral Health (EBH) programs. It is often impossible to develop a comprehensive and effective EBH crisis response.

One obstacle to effective crisis management is that frontline teachers and school workers feel unprepared to support children before and during a crisis (Frauenholtz et al., 2017). There are numerous ways that educational policy affects the size of schools, the number of students in each class, the qualifications, and pay of teachers. To achieve positive student outcomes, fidelity must occur at all levels of the RTI process. Positive student outcomes include an increase in academic growth during the intervention and progress monitoring at an appropriate rate of acquisition for a student to demonstrate learning, while avoiding the need for specialized instruction through special education (Alahmari, 2019). Educators who already have a packed schedule may find it challenging to keep up with PD, other district-required training, and certifications. PD workshops allow teachers to learn about the policies that have the most significant impact on their classrooms. PD is system-level training that is required to implement and facilitate the RTI process (Castillo et al. 2018). When effective, high-quality professional development increases teachers' knowledge and skills, self-efficacy and student outcomes are enhanced. Teachers can ensure that their classes meet state and school requirements by becoming familiar with the educational policies.

*Extrinsically*

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close their doors, teachers were forced to adapt their instructional methods quickly (Fahrurrozi et al., 2021). Teachers can benefit from PD by focusing on specific issues, gathering data from experts, and presenting practical solutions. Consider the fact that technological growth is changing the educational system, and new models and types of literature are being developed to ensure that the teaching-learning process remains successful (Lumpkin, 2020). Because of the difficulties of the previous year and a half, various schools predicted a considerable increase in the number of students at risk of academic failure in the following year. Schools can now collect, consume, and analyze data much faster than in previous decades thanks to advances in technology. The move from categorizing/labeling students to focusing more on the educational requirements of students – meeting them where they are – is aimed at making instructional decisions based on how students are growing. As a result of the COVID suspension, districts were frequently compelled to reduce or even temporarily halt their RTI/MTSS supports . It is hoped that this transition will assist in integrating general and special education, streamline resources, and promote greater participation of students with special needs. Of course, how a person approaches their professional growth determines their particular career goals and preferred learning style.

The low cost and the removal of geographical and physical restrictions have boosted the relevance and application of online education systems, which has increased their relevance and applicability. On the other hand, recent educational literature has pondered the possibility that specific components of traditional education cannot be successfully supplanted in the online education system (Hannigan et al., 2020). RTI has the potential to help reduce the disproportionate number of students from racial and ethnic minorities who are enrolled in special education. State Performance Plans that are submitted to the Office of Special Education

Programs hold all states and schools in the United States accountable for disproportionality in special education. An example of this is Georgia's Department of Education: there is a severe problem with disproportionality in the state, and Georgia is currently under consent decrees ordering the elimination of this disproportionality (Morgan, 2021).

Using RTI as an approach, it is possible to reduce the disproportionate identification of minority pupils by considering cultural and language factors, including disparities among students. Current and future challenges are complex, with far-reaching implications for the global economy, health-care system, and general well-being. Students will present with a wide range of academic and social-emotional needs when schools reopen fully, and schools will need to adjust systems and practices mindfully to meet the needs of their unique student population. Schokof (2020) showed that RTI can help lessen the disparity in the number of minority students. RTI has been shown to reduce the number of minority pupils placed in special education (Schokof, 2020). A new study from the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) calls the RTI method for improving student literacy into question; a similar study by Connor et al. (2019) discovered that minority students responded significantly better to early intensive instruction. Researchers at Penn State University's Center for Educational Disparities Research discovered that, when socioeconomic status and past performance on standardized tests were controlled for, Black and Hispanic students were less likely than their White peers to be referred for assistance. People have praised and criticized these findings in the public sphere, particularly since they adopted them as evidence that IDEA provisions meant to combat disparities may actually prevent minority students from being referred for an IEP evaluation too soon (Elder et al., 2021). Finally, researchers have discussed

response to intervention (RTI) as an alternative to the traditional IQ performance discrepancy paradigm for detecting and addressing learning challenges and disabilities in young children.

Educators in the academic community are always seeking new ways to improve how they teach and learn for their students. According to research, effective Professional Learning Centers (PLC) improve teacher collaboration and student achievement. Some studies suggest these communities predict greater collective efficacy, whereas others suggest that teacher efficacy predicts collaboration among teachers. The fidelity of implementation will increase if teachers understand and have sufficient knowledge of RTI. PD opportunities boost teacher confidence, making it easier to adopt a new practice (Burner & Svendsen, 2020). It is unfair to ask teachers to read every new study when they already are overextended because of their responsibilities. Experts who have the time to review and analyze the findings design PD workshops based on the newly published research (Board, 2022). PD can be achieved as an individual or in a group. Individual PD opportunities can be quite beneficial for those who need to complete their PD on their own time. Continuing educational opportunities allows educators to network while exchanging ideas. Taking part in PD can bring educators closer to their coworkers or link them with educators from all over the world. This platform allows teachers to share ideas and provide support to one another (Harkoma et al., 2021).

### **Summary**

There are several similarities between MTSS, PBIS and RTI. The frameworks promote student growth and achievement, but they are not identical. RTI is a well-researched, targeted strategy for enhancing the academic success of at-risk students across all grade levels. MTSS, on the other hand, is a comprehensive method aimed to assist students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. School counselors must teach behaviorism strategies for students

with EBD as part of the school counseling curriculum in order to increase school competency in implementing behavioral interventions, by expanding the integration of cognitive and experiential learning theories in counselor education programs. PD for educators has continued to impact school districts worldwide. Given the detrimental long-term consequences for children with emotional/behavioral disorders, additional study is required on school staff-administrable behavioral therapies based on empirical evidence. Models of school-wide MTSS should help all children by employing behavior modification techniques and positive reinforcement to promote pro-social behaviors. Researchers have investigated the factors contributing to attrition because district administrators or school leaders decide to provide the design and support required by teachers pursuing advanced degrees to succeed in their areas of expertise. Despite the support provided by the computer program for teachers, the educator remained to play an important part in decision-making. The researchers expected that depending only on computer aids would isolate teachers from the data, diminishing effective data-driven decision making. Teachers, for example, were more accurate in timing instructional adjustments if they initially formed and entered instructional judgments before obtaining computer input than if they got computer feedback only. Researchers have recently investigated the validity and practical applicability of using the RTI/MTSS framework, prioritizing tiered intervention over other characteristics, such as special education services, across disciplines. PD, defined as the passion and perseverance to pursue long-term goals beyond continuing education, can refer to a wide range of relevant educational or training opportunities pertaining to the professional's work (MacPhail et al., 2019). Many professionals interested in advancing their careers may seek opportunities for PD and continued education on their own initiative, even if it is not expected of them. Researchers have little knowledge about the life experiences that lead to developing the trait that facilitates

the achievement of the long-term objective. There is a gap in this body of research concerning the appropriate education or experience required to complete coursework. Recent literature supports the critical role of PD in ensuring students' long-term success.

Continuing education enables professionals to stay abreast of new developments in their field. Taking advantage of available PD, including education and training options, is an excellent approach to staying abreast of current business trends and developments (Antley, 2020). Because of the ongoing evolution of every profession, educators should take advantage of PD and training opportunities to widen their knowledge, learn about new methods and procedures, and adopt new technologies (Antley, 2020). We have improved our comprehension of how pupils gain knowledge through educational research. It is possible to credit the transformation of the classroom from traditionally oriented on the instructor ,to centered on the students, to the work that John Dewey provided as an educational theorist (Deng, 2022).

Educators should discuss PD options with their supervisors to determine what is required and what is not. Teachers in most schools must attend PD workshops, but their education does not have to finish there. There are several excellent online resources for continuing education. Teachers have time to go back to school through PD. Additionally, PD fosters the talents of teachers who aspire to become educational leaders and impact student outcomes (Antley, 2020).

Unfortunately, there is no way to avoid the structural difficulties affecting higher education and career education. Although enrollment and income in traditional higher education will continue to decline in the foreseeable future, there will be a significant increase in professional/skills-based education, likely in industry-provided programs rather than in career colleges themselves. Unfortunately, despite the growth in skills-based training, there will be fewer career colleges, as institutions continue to close the professional development gap.

Between conventional career schools that issue degrees and those that provide non-credit, non-degree skills training that eventually leads to training and certification, there will definitely be some *blurred lines*.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how teachers implement Response to Intervention (RTI ) and Multi-Tiered Student Support (MTSS) and how this implementation affects classroom time, student behavior, and student achievement. The research examined how educators utilize PBIS, RTI, and MTSS, and the professional development opportunities available to apply these strategies in terms of classroom duration, student conduct, and academic achievement objectives.

The research examined the utilization of MTSS/RTI by elementary school teachers when teaching core curriculum. There is also a discussion about how continuation schools incorporate evidence-based, multi-tiered programs (MTSS) to improve students' academic and behavioral success through educators' professional development (PD) skills. IDEA allowed the RTI methodology to replace the calculation of the discrepancy between a student's IQ and academic achievement in a comprehensive evaluation to identify students as having a learning disability (Munoz et al., 2020). Even though researchers and educators lobbied for this change, the literature showed widespread concern in the field about implementing the RTI process in elementary schools. Among these considerations is the psychometric challenge of determining *reaction in intervention response*. The process of analyzing data to develop an appropriate response involves a series of critical decisions, including determining whether to increase or decrease the intensity of the intervention or pursue comprehensive strategies. In determining the optimal response, data analysis provides the required insights, enabling decision-makers to make informed choices. (King et al., 2012).

The research design, problem statement, and research questions are included in the



remainder of this chapter, as well as the research methodology, research design, population and sampling, and data sources. The present chapter is dedicated to discussing the fundamental aspects of data analysis, management, and collection. In particular, the chapter is concerned with examining the crucial issues of reliability and trustworthiness, as well as the ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations that may have an impact on the research process.. This chapter concludes with a summary.

### **Research Design**

This study is phenomenological and is shaped through an interpretative framework of the socio-cultural theory of cognitive development. To effectively explore the experiences of teachers implementing MTSS in an elementary school located in a rural area in northwest Washington, a qualitative methodology was selected to better understand the perceptions and lived experiences of teachers who are implementing the MTSS framework. A systematic instructional design model was utilized for the development of the implementation guide. The process involved the identification of needs, based on a review of literature, and the development of a system to meet those identified needs. The researcher identified needs and goals by reviewing literature on PBIS, RTI, and MTSS, with the purpose to make meaning of participants' perceptions using a qualitative methodology (Gall et al., 2007). By employing transcendental phenomenology, the researcher seeks to establish an exact representation of fundamental facts. Therefore, researchers must put aside their preferences and judgments (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology, on the other hand, emphasizes the researcher's point of view, interpreting the descriptions and co-constructing meaning with the participants (van Manen, 2014). The researcher selected the transcendental type to reveal the beliefs of the participants by employing raw data.

The research focuses on RTI and MTSS, with teacher/student perceptions of reactions and unpopular/controversial applications. Whereas RTI is a model for identifying and addressing the specific academic needs of struggling students, MTSS has a much broader scope (Phillips & Weingarten, 2013). MTSS addresses academic, social, and emotional areas (non-academic), including behavior, and other topics, such as attendance. Although MTSS relates to other domains, the author concentrated on the PD related to the educator's ability to understand and implement the process in the classroom (Hannington et al., 2020). Student-centered RTI/MTSS is a preventive paradigm that includes many layers of interventions tailored to meet each student's specific requirements. Careful assessment of the student's progress is conducted to ensure they are progressing toward meeting criterion standards, and the preventive strategy is put in place by introducing layers of assistance during the earliest stages of development (Maskill, 2013).

MTSS is the acronym for Multi-Tiered System of Supports, a framework that assists educators in providing academic and behavioral methods to students with a variety of needs. MTSS emerged as a result of the combination of two different intervention-based frameworks: RTI and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) (Witzel, & Blackburn, 2018). The RTI assessment model was developed as part of IDEA (2004), which congress amended in 2004. MTSS was designed to improve student outcomes by integrating academic and social-emotional teaching, placing a strong emphasis on prevention, inclusionary practices, high-quality instruction and intervention, as well as the use of data-driven decision-making and structured problem-solving models, as seen in Figure 3. Through the integration of both teaching types for instruction and support, the support model is accomplished. Educators are given the direction and tools they need to allocate resources and supports in an appropriate manner in order to meet

the academic and social-emotional needs of all learners, putting those learners on the path to reaching their fullest potential when they follow an MTSS blueprint (Briesch et al., 2020; Witzel, & Blackburn, 2018). The blueprint provides educators with a road map. The model's design is to identify and provide qualifying support for children who might benefit from intensive support. Besides varied evaluation methodologies across academic and behavioral domains, guidelines on how frequently assessment should occur may differ. Guidelines generally require that academic progress monitoring should occur at least monthly at Tier 2 and biweekly or weekly at Tier 3. Academic and behavioral domains may have distinct criteria for evaluating intervention responsiveness. Because well-defined benchmarks for performance or predicted rates of growth do not exist for behavior in the same manner that they do for academic concerns, criteria may vary across areas. Since its introduction as a method to boost educational accomplishments for students in special education, MTSS has grown to include all students at every stage.

### Figure 3

#### *MTSS Support Model*



*Note.* From [MTSS Support Model/MTSS Toolkit](#)

Instead of the *waiting for failure* assessment strategy used before implementing the IDEA, MTSS offers a proactive approach to identifying pupils who may be struggling academically or behaviorally. Early identification and intervention for these pupils can assist them in catching up with their peers more quickly (Sugai et al., 2010). The following are the five most critical components of MTSS:

1. Most importantly, parental involvement
2. Ongoing data collection and continual assessment
3. Schoolwide approach to expectations and supports
4. Tiers of interventions that can be amplified in response to any level of need
5. Universal screening of all students early in the school year

Students receive the necessary education, support, and interventions, depending on their needs, while using MTSS tiers which assist schools in organizing levels of support based on intensity. As a result, students' identities are not determined by their tier levels. Individuals are instead designated as pupils who require additional help. The process enables educators to respond effectively, providing students with the assistance they require to succeed in the learning environment.

In this, a comprehensive analysis would help educators know the opinion of experts and the participants regarding MTSS usage in the K-12 school system. Instead of using the well-known methodology. Educators can gain valuable insights on the usage of MTSS in the K-12 school system by conducting a comprehensive analysis that considers the opinions of both experts and participants. Instead of utilizing the well-known methodology, they decide to utilize multiple methods of application, thus indicating a lack of commitment to a particular approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The utilization of this process empowers educators to effectively

respond to students' needs, thereby equipping them with the necessary assistance to excel in the learning environment (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

Percy et al. (2015) explained that qualitative study methods provide the teachers' partial or complete effort in a qualitative study and must include a source of data for it to be valid. The researcher compared it to other methods as ethnography, case studies, and grounded theory. The author narrated can be challenging to understand the time for implementing a qualitative study when differentiating between the phenomenological research and the generic qualitative study's reliability.

A phenomenological study concerns personal subjective opinion. The information indicates the inclination towards understanding the people's viewpoint, plan, or assumptions about a particular issue or event (Percy et al., 2015). In contrast, the generic qualitative study is suitable when the researcher needs to know the exposure to the outer world.

For this dissertation, the researcher used an elucidative or an interpretive model to demonstrate participants' points of view. An interpretive model is a model that concise, revolving around the things that add up to reality (Schwandt, 1994). Here, the general qualitative research is most suitable because it focuses more on the participants' perspectives than their personal experiences regarding the MTSS implementation strategy. Interpretivism is a logical outlook toward distinct viewpoints, stating that real-life experiences can be produced when researchers and participants interact efficiently and put forth the actual incidence (Gall et al., 2007).

The researcher used Guba and Lincoln's (1994) three queries that focused on understanding the study's model: 1) the existential question (practicality); 2) the scholarly question (the association between the participant and the researcher); and 3) the methodic

question (the method of study). The researcher presumed that the experts and participants had different outlooks. Even though the participants and experts have the same perspective regarding the assumptions, barriers, and mentors of MTSS execution, they are most commonly applied in all schools.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education provided vital points in implementing MTSS:

1. Providing excellent guidance and mediation according to the student requirement,
2. Observing the development regularly helps in making decisions regarding the objective, and
3. Putting out the student feedback on significant scholastic issues (NASDSE, 2008).

Possible hurdles in MTSS application would be because of planning problems, ethnic and conventional assumptions, tutor workload, movement in educational systems, and misinterpretation about the group of facts and figures used in the secondary framework.

Compared to elementary school, the lack of accessible data to support the documentation in high school becomes problematic (King et al., 2012; Sansosti et al., 2010; Windram et al., 2007).

Building a stronger community and school management system aids in the cooperative efforts of learning in all subject areas and the use of an advanced alert system to recognize pupils at peril rather than the syllabus-based plan that is in use in almost all the schools. A few efforts would help the students implement the MTSS plan in schools (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Koselak, 2017; NHSC et al., 2010). In the context of generic qualitative research, systematic procedures may be most appropriate for a more optimistic paradigm. Through semi-structured interviews and an inductive subject survey, participants could express their experiences on their terms. In addition, other materials and MTSS contributed by the community were incorporated into the

analysis.

### **Research Questions**

The study's research questions focus on how elementary school general education teachers described their adoption of the MTSS/RTI approach while delivering diversified core curriculum instruction. The following research questions were used to guide the study.

#### **Central Research Question**

How do general education elementary school teachers implement tier one, tier two, and tier three of the MTSS/RTI model while delivering differentiated core curriculum instruction?

#### **Sub-Question One**

What strategies were given to teachers in their training to assist them in implementing RTI/MTSS effectively?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

How do teachers' perspectives affect the level of buy-in and comprehension of MTSS implementation?

#### **Sub-Question Three**

How does Professional Development assist both the teacher and the student's success?

### **Setting and Participants**

Participants for this study come from a convenient sample of elementary school teachers in the Northwest Washington region of the United States. The researcher depended on the readily available volunteers, possessed the required knowledge, and classified as accessible (Gall et al., 2007).

#### **Setting**

The participants in this qualitative study were drawn from a stratified sample of all

professional staff of three primary schools in Northwest Washington. Purposeful sampling is beneficial for ascertaining the perspectives of persons implementing the RTI protocol in the district (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). Eliciting information from general education teachers and staff associated with RTI/MTSS it allowed for various opinions from parties involved in RTI implementation. The total number of students enrolled in the district under this study was 4,517, whereas the total number of primary students enrolled was 1,945. All participants considered were regular education teachers, special education teachers, team chairs, reading specialists, therapists, and other staff members, such as music, art, and physical education (PE) teachers. Occupational, physical, speech, and language therapists and school psychologists are all types of therapists. Table 1 delinates information about the participants in this study. The total number of professional elementary staff was N=201. A purposeful sampling technique based on maximum variation was used to ensure high-quality, detailed descriptions of each professional staff position and collect the critical shared patterns that all professional staff receive (Patton, 2015). Using maximum variation sampling to form focus groups comprised of participants from various professional roles, age groups, and schools increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect the differences or divergent perspectives associated with RTI and MTSS in the district for the study.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Professional Staff in the District Studied*

Professional Staff Positions	Number of Professional Staff Per Position
Regular General Education Teachers	103
Special Education Teachers	25



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School Psychologists	8
Paraprofessionals/Specialists (reading)	15
Physical Therapists	6
Occupational Therapists	6
Speech and Language Therapists (SLP)	12
Other classified positions (Art, music, PE)	26

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The researcher reviewed the data and selected participants from various professional positions and teaching grade levels to create balanced focus groups that allowed diversity in roles and perspectives. Individual responsibilities in the school context are likely related to how each participant perceives RTI and MTSS. By studying each individual's perceptions within the focus group, some conclusions can be drawn about the group's collective impressions of RTI and MTSS. The district's schools were each represented by two focus groups consisting of professional staff members from kindergarten to second grade and from third to fifth grade. The professional staff, who offered to participate but had a caseload other than kindergarten through grade two or grades three through five, selected the group that was most similar to their caseload. Two regular education teachers, one special education teacher, and one school psychologist/speech and language professional (SLP) were included in the K-2 focus groups. In contrast, the 3-5 focus groups included three regular education teachers, one special education teacher, and one SLP.

Each focus group had two to three participants who were professional staff from various positions (e.g. para professional). The different grade-level focus groups illustrated that RTI can be vastly different at each level. Kindergarten through grade two, for example, is a critical time

for detecting and implementing interventions (Vellutino et al., 2007), which frequently results in more students and staff involved in the RTI process in those grades, particularly in reading. Furthermore, staff working with students in grades K-5 or some other combination of grades, including an ELL teacher who works in grades K-6, were present in the K-2 and 3-5 focus groups.

Kindergarten has a 45-minute block three times a week where therapists, reading specialists, and special education teachers design and implement centers based on the needs of the students, allowing the staff to identify and remediate students at risk. Students meet in a small group based on their reading level during a one-hour block three times a week in grades one and two. Rather than triaging the entire grade, the intermediate grades (3-5) administer RTI/MTSS interventions one-on-one or in small pullout groups.

### **Participants**

The researcher followed Liberty University protocol to obtain IRB approval. Liberty University approved the proposal, and the Liberty University IRB granted permission for the study to proceed. In qualitative research, there is no minimum or maximum sample size, according to Patton (2015). The number of participants in a study is determined by the context of the study, its practical limits, and the researcher's need for either breadth or depth of data. The individual interviews and focus groups included professional staff from the district's two elementary schools with a minimum of one year of experience in their perspective role. The school district administration permitted the study to be conducted.

Each building principal was asked to grant permission for focus groups to be held in their building if Zoom was not available at the time of the group meetings. All professional staff received a letter (Appendix C) outlining the study and requesting permission to take part in focus

groups. A human consent form, the study's purpose, and the reason for and importance of their participation in the focus group interview were all included in the letter. The researcher talked briefly to the participants about the study and the need for volunteers from various professional staff members at each of the study's other school locations. The volunteers who took part in the study were presented with a recruitment letter (Appendix C) by the researcher. The researcher gave a packet containing the consent form (Appendix D), interview questions (Appendix F) and a RTI belief scale (Appendix H) to the ten participants who volunteered for the study after signing the recruitment letter. All participants were sent a follow-up email to schedule a time to meet, complete the interview questionnaires, and inquire about interest in the focus group. Six participants volunteered for the initial interview and four volunteers to complete the focus group portion.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Before the design and methods section, discussing the researcher's positionality is essential. Before researching, it is necessary for the researcher to consider work positions, social class, race, and gender of the participants. In order to maintain the reliability and validity of the research, it is critical to examine the implications of positionality. Except for the researcher's school, the researcher talked briefly about the study and the need for participants from various professional staff members at each of the study's other school locations. The data are invalid if the researcher's actions influence the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that it is the responsibility of the critical researcher to be reflexive; to analyze concerns, such as positionality and insider/outsider perspectives in research and to strive to own their effects in the process where this is possible.

Professionally, the researcher has worked in education for seven years. Throughout his

professional tenure, the researcher gained both a master's degree and an educational degree in curriculum and instructional design. Considering the researcher's educational background, there is an inherent bias toward the infrastructure and implementation methods the researcher thinks are most effective. As a researcher, it is vital to know bias may be an issue within the study. One's positionality might influence the research questions and the research method. The researcher made assumptions about the public-school system's MTSS systems, program implementation, and pre-built school architecture for the survey and interviews. MTSS deployment may occur at different levels at different sites, and the researcher is aware of this. The researcher considers that site managers and leadership teams may not utilize the same systems at every location.

### **Interpretive Framework**

The researcher successfully implemented an MTSS plan to remediate and enhance proficiency. According to Bhattacharjee (2012), understanding how people's experiences shape social reality is the basis for the phrase *interpretive research*. It is possible to conduct an interpretive case study by focusing on specific aspects of a given environment. For this reason, the researcher selected to conduct qualitative research using a phenomenology technique, tracking the implementation based on various levels of PD and educator experience, according to benchmark scores. For example, a small reading group study examines the integration of MTSS into the core curriculum and the use of tier interventions in an authentic setting based on the educator's knowledge of the RTI/MTSS framework.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight that, since behavior is a phenomenon that I have personally observed, the research incorporated several philosophical presumptions. Philosophical

assumptions can provide a conceptually strong basis for these procedures, leading to the promotion of methodologically sound study designs (Matta, 2022). It is of utmost importance that researchers scrutinize their philosophical convictions and gain an understanding of how those presuppositions impact the research being pursued. According to Aguinis et al., (2021), it is imperative to maintain transparency in order to structure the research process. During their attendance at school, a considerable majority of students do not exhibit severe behavioral issues. In the classroom, there have been instances where a few pupils have had outbursts, but these have been promptly addressed. Conversely, certain students seem to be contemptuous. They are the individuals who receive considerable attention from administrators. In order to assist each of these individuals, a multi-tiered approach to behavioral support is essential. The teaching of positive behaviors is explicit in effective schools. The creation of positive schoolwide and classroom-specific procedures guarantees students' understanding of school-wide expectations. The differentiation between permissible and impermissible actions is clear-cut. Children's misbehavior is a manifestation of their unmet needs. The combination of PBIS and RTI with a multi-tiered behavioral support approach establishes a mechanism for facilitating students' academic success. When students are unable or unwilling to follow the procedures, it is time for an intervention.

### ***Ontological Assumption***

The ontological assumption involves one's beliefs on the nature of reality. Is there one universal reality, or are there multiple realities? At Liberty University, it is difficult to get too far away from God's Truth as the singular reality, and that the human understanding of this Truth is imperfect, which may explain mistaken perceptions by some that multiple realities exist. In the field, there are people who believe that multiple realities are the only possible explanation of the

world. Because of the stark contrast of viewpoints, it is necessary for scholars to articulate their ontological perspectives to readers, enabling a better understanding of their research methodologies.

### ***Epistemological Assumption***

The epistemological assumption addresses what counts as knowledge, how knowledge claims are justified, and, more specifically, what is the relationship between what is being researched and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In quantitative research, the objective is to create a completely unbiased study in which the researcher is not relevant to the process or the outcomes. Thus, in statistical analysis, they regarded facts as knowledge derived from the source, which is an objectivist view of knowledge. Qualitative research is subjective, and, as such, knowledge is likely derived from the subjective experiences of an array of people and not necessarily from those who are experts.

### ***Axiological Assumption***

The researcher brought his values into the study somewhat. Again, for quantitative research, the values of researchers ideally are neither known nor influence the study. Conversely, it is essential in qualitative studies not only to convey one's values, or positionality, concerning the context and setting of the research to the reader, but also to be aware of those values and biases effectively to bracket those in order to best seek the truth of the information gathered as data and in composing the final report. For instance, a veteran conducting research on other veterans may include the recognition of being a veteran and their strong conviction that veterans usually excel in various aspects rather than needing aid and support. An individual who is not a veteran but is researching student veterans might choose to explain that they have a close connection to veterans and can be very passionate in their support of the veteran community.

Understanding these nuances is crucial to reading the final dissertation effectively, despite the presence of bias.

### **Researcher's Role**

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board approved the study to comply with 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. The researcher was careful not to introduce positionality or insider information during the recruitment, survey, or interview procedure. Therefore, the researcher was aware of the effect on the responses of the participants. Additional qualifications for the position included the researcher's prior experience handling students with exceptional needs. Medically and developmentally, the researcher's own child had a disability. Because of this experience, the researcher and their family developed a strong desire to assist children in attaining their educational goals. In the process, the family's perspective on the specific medical needs of each individual widened, and they were more sensitive to the particular needs of everyone. Working with Title 1 special needs populations has impacted the researcher's perspective and understanding of special populations and the various solutions that special needs populations require.

Through the integration of data-driven decision-making and diversified structures aimed at meeting students' academic, social, and behavioral needs, the researcher asserts that the implementation of MTSS can lead to the enhancement of educational services for all students. The researcher employed this framework and approach to cater to the needs of the most marginalized students by addressing their social and emotional learning requirements, which are usually overlooked by the conventional school support systems (Patton, 2015). Methodology for meeting the requirements of a child's whole self is the focus of the MTSS. As a result of the

researcher's predisposition, the data's validity and reliability were maintained through an objective evaluation and analysis.

The purpose of making this information available is to equip other educators with the ability to adopt MTSS and aid the most vulnerable students in achieving their academic and social potential. The researcher's goal is to generate dependable study outcomes and best practices that have the potential to contribute to the field of education's knowledge about MTSS implementation. The findings presented could significantly contribute to the field's advancement, thereby improving the quality of education offered to students.

### **Procedures**

After receiving authorization from the office of the administration, I sought authorization to conduct the study from the principals of the schools where the study was to be performed. After receiving approval to proceed, the researcher finished the application for the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is necessary to comply with Liberty University for the purpose of research and study. The researcher did not start making contact with anyone until after they had received clearance from the IRB. In order to secure participants for the study, the researcher gathered email addresses from teachers who volunteered and met the study's criteria. Once the email addresses were obtained, the researcher proceeded to send emails to the instructors, providing them with an outline of the study's objectives, the responsibilities of the teachers, and the criteria for participation. Teachers who were interested in participating in the study responded to the email, and after checking that everyone satisfied the study's eligibility requirements, the researcher recruited the teachers on a first-come, first-served basis. Teachers who fit the requirements were approved into the study and requested to engage in a face-to-face interview in their respective classes to give them the freedom to express their belief with



information supplied based on the interview questions.

### **Permissions**

Each school's leadership team was interviewed in focus groups by the researcher. The researcher provided face-to-face or virtual face-to-face alternatives for the focus group (using a computer webcam and a virtual communication tool such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom with authorized passwords) and for those who wished to participate in the study knowing their information was secured and their identities are protected with the consent form. Due to district policy, an incentive to participate in the study could not be offered. Once it was determined that potential participants qualified for the study and agreed to participate, they signed and returned consent forms (see Appendix D)

### **Recruitment Plan**

The researcher began by outlining the study's goals, informed consent, privacy, and other practical considerations (Appendix D). The researcher explained the study's goals and logistical details in a brief presentation. The researcher underlined all responses would be confidential, that no individual or school names would be used, that research numbers would be assigned, and that responses would not be linked to individuals to protect subject identities. Participants were requested to be truthful and open about their experiences because of these safeguards. Focus groups lasted up to 45 minutes and were audio recorded. The researcher could use further prompts to explain or clarify thinking. The researcher also described the questioning method, including how various questions, what types of questions, and the general theme of questions that would be used. Before the focus group began, the participants were allowed to ask the researcher any questions they may have had regarding the process. After completing the focus group, each participant was asked a series of follow-up questions based on the instrument's

suggested sequence.

### **Data Collection Plan**

The researcher relied primarily on semi-structured interviews for data collection because they were undertaking a qualitative phenomenological study. I was able to study the participants' thoughts and lived experiences regarding how they approached and operated within the MTSS framework through semi-structured interviews. Triangulated data was used in the data collection process. The triangulated data consisted of interviews, observations, and a qualitative questionnaire. These multiple information sources allowed me to examine the perceptions of the elementary school's RTI/MTSS framework. Initially, the administrator of schools was asked for approval (Appendix B) to conduct the study.

In addition, the researcher sought to secure authorization from school administration to conduct research at each of the three sites during this time. The researcher attended a faculty meeting at each of the three schools. Consequently, the researcher emailed all three principals, requesting permission to study each site (Appendix C). Three unique instruments developed by the University of South Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project (2022) were included in the RTI/MTSS survey.

#### **RTI Beliefs Survey**

The Beliefs Survey (Appendix H) was the initial section of the survey and contained background and demographic information. The first four questions of the RTI/MTSS Beliefs survey were about the job, the highest degree, the years of experience in education, and the years in the current position. The second section of the poll focused on perceptions of RTI/MTSS practices, while the third section focused on perceptions of RTI/MTSS skills. The full survey consisted of Likert scaled items that could be completed within 20 minutes. The researcher

intended to convey the study's objective and significance to the participants during these encounters.

The Beliefs on RTI Survey encompassed 26 educator belief statements concerning RTI. The evaluation involved examining beliefs about educational philosophy, assessment, intervention practices, and special education concerns. The response scale spanned from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The full survey items have been specified in Appendix H.

***Directions:*** Using the scale below, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements by shading in the circle that best represents your response.

- 1 = **Strongly Disagree (SD)**  
 2 = **Disagree (D)**  
 3 = **Neutral (N)**  
 4 = **Agree (A)**  
 5 = **Strongly Agree (SA)**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), when effectively implemented, is a framework that allows educators to meet the needs of all students for:					
a. Academics	1	2	3	4	5
b. Behavior	1	2	3	4	5
c. Emotional and life skills	1	2	3	4	5
2. All students are capable of learning at high levels.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Tier 1 instruction should be effective enough to result in at least 80% of students achieving grade-level	1	2	3	4	5

	standards/expectations.					
4.	I have a responsibility to ensure that all students learn at high levels or meet grade-level standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	High school student outcomes (achievement levels, on-time graduation, post-secondary enrollment/career attainment) are related to student performance in elementary and middle school.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	The primary function of supplemental and intensive (i.e., Tier 2 and Tier 3) instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level standards/expectations	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The majority of students with learning disabilities are capable of achieving grade-level standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The majority of students with behavioral problems (EH/SED or EBD) are capable of achieving grade-level standards/expectations	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., SLD, EBD) who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level standards/expectations	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Use of universal design for learning (UDL) principles allows all students to achieve grade-level standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Implementation of differentiated and flexible instructional practices allows teachers to address the	1	2	3	4	5

needs of all students.					
<hr/>					
12. General education classroom teachers would be able to					
better implement more differentiated and flexible					
instruction (e.g., UDL) and interventions if they had:					
Additional administrator support	1	2	3	4	5
Additional professional learning (coaching, training, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Additional time for instruction/interventions	1	2	3	4	5
Additional materials	1	2	3	4	5
Additional time for collaborative planning (PLC's Lesson Study, Content/Grade-Level, etc.)					
<hr/>					
13. The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<hr/>					
14. Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					
15. The severity of a student's academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but instead by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	1	2	3	4	5
<hr/>					

16. Interventions should be provided with increasing intensity (time, group size, focus) based on student need.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Using ongoing student performance data to determine intervention effectiveness is the most accurate method (i.e., is more reliable and valid than educator judgment alone).	1	2	3	4	5
18. Evaluating a student's response to intervention(s) is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from tests (e.g., IQ/Achievement test).	1	2	3	4	5
19. Additional time and resources should be allocated to students who are not reaching grade-level standards before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or above standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Graphing student data makes it easier to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions	1	2	3	4	5
21. Measuring intervention/instructional fidelity is important for making accurate instructional decisions	1	2	3	4	5
22. Monitoring intervention outcome data at the aggregate (group) level provides information to determine effective use of resources in relation to student response	1	2	3	4	5
23. The primary goal of assessment is to measure and	1	2	3	4	5

inform effectiveness of instruction/intervention					
24. A student's parent (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about the student	1	2	3	4	5
25. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions	1	2	3	4	5
26. Parents (guardians) and community members should be involved in decisions about Tier 1 instructional strategies and curricular materials	1	2	3	4	5

*Note.* From [www.floridarti.usf.edu](http://www.floridarti.usf.edu)

Given the conceptual framework of the study, the researcher employed triangulation, along with the conceptual framework that draws upon the Social Cognitive Theory of Effectiveness (1986) and the Theory of Teaching and Learning (1952). Theory triangulation, defined by Mills (2014) as the application of several theoretical viewpoints to understand evidence, can enrich findings and assist researchers in interpreting occurrences. Over a period of six weeks, two small focus groups were utilized in order to collect the data. The focus groups were documented by the researcher through the use of audio and video recordings. The focus groups were scheduled for approximately 45 minutes each. After completing the focus group, each participant was asked a series of follow-up questions based on the instrument's suggested sequence. A \$5 gift card was offered as an incentive to anyone who opted to participate with the option to keep it even if they decided not to complete the study. To ensure the accuracy of transcripts, participants were reminded that they would be able to request a copy or summary of

the research findings. Finally, a thank-you card was given to each participant by the study's author.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

As one form of data collecting, an asynchronous, confidential, online, open-ended interview was completed for this investigation. The study's interview questions were designed to elicit free-form responses to each question. Fixsen of the National Implementation Research Network (2013) used implementation science ideas in designing the interview guides for staff. To gauge the extent to which MTSS was being used in continuation schools, the interview process included responses to a series of questions (Appendix I). Based on the researcher's understanding of implementation science, he adopted the RTI beliefs scales questions for the interview.

As indicated in Table 2, a significant number of participating schools have enrollments of 50 or fewer students. Two hundred students represented the most significant group of students in a school. Enrollment at the institution was subject to variation, with numbers ranging between 50 and 200 students.

**Table 2**

#### *School Enrollment*

School Enrollment	%	Number of Schools
1-50	20	1
50-100	30	1
100-200	50	
200-300	0	0
Total	100	3



## **Observations**

The observations in this study served as a research tool by taking place in a “natural field situation” with “firsthand experience of observing” (Merriam, 1988, p.87). The observations were deliberate and meticulously organized. I used a code sheet to identify behaviors, speech, and non-verbal clues to look for during observations and recorded organized field notes noting the date, time, place, physical element of the setting, and objective of the observations . As the researcher, I acted as a “researcher participant” (p. 93) by observing each teacher while they taught classroom lessons via a phenomenological lens related to the RTI/MTSS program implemented in the classroom. During classroom observations, several aspects were taken into account, including RTI/MTSS activities guided by the teacher and students, RTI/MTSS progress tracking, student involvement, student collaboration, and peer conversations.

In order to completely comprehend the RTI/MTSS program implementation, the frequency and duration (Merriam, 1988) of specific interactions and behaviors between teachers and students were also considered. For instance, the number of times a student was reminded of a correct action, or the length of time the student engaged in a challenging activity, were noted into the field notes and discussed with the participant later. Merriam noted that it is necessary to record essential parts of observations after they have occurred. As soon as I left each observation, I jotted down my recalled field notes. These field notes were later analyzed with each participant to determine how they perceive and describe these classroom behaviors and activities.

## **Focus Groups Data Collection Approach**

According to Krueger and Casey (2015), “the objective of a focus group is to gain a

deeper understanding of how people feel or think about a certain topic, idea, product, or service”

(p.1). Focus groups enable the researcher to interact with a large number of people simultaneously while also fostering discussion about the subject under investigation with the following questions:

### ***Focus Group Questions***

1. Participant Demographics
  - a. What is your primary role in the school?
  - b. How long have you been teaching profession?
  - c. How long have you been in your current position?
  - d. Are you assigned to more than one school?
2. Introductory Question (Experiences with RTI/MTSS)
  - a. What is your role in the RTI/MTSS process?
3. Transition Question (Implementation of RTI/ Change in Instructional Practice)
  - a. How is RTI/MTSS implemented in your school, and how has it impacted what you do in the classroom?
4. Ending Question/Debriefing (Additional Experiences and perceptions)
  - a. Is there anything else you would like to share about your RTI experience at your school?

### ***Focus Group Data Analysis Plan***

Qualitative focus groups were conducted by the researcher during the spring of the academic year 2023 with teams from three distinct schools. The focus group approach was employed by the researcher to carry out interviews with participants who were members of pre-existing groups, specifically the RTI/MTSS leadership teams of each school. The interview

protocol was followed by me, in which the same open-ended questions were posed to each participant in the focus group. I was given the liberty to ask additional inquiries to amplify the comprehensibility of any participant's response. A robust group discussion was achieved, as every participant in the focus group was given the opportunity to respond to the responses of other participants. Preparatory to data analysis, the focus group was electronically recorded and transcribed. Following the completion of the transcriptions and the conclusion of the focus group, I subsequently reconnected with the group to perform member verification.

### **Observation Data Collection Approach**

Data collection is a method of obtaining descriptive behavioral data. This concerns the acquisition of data through visual observation. The advantages are evident, as visual observation provides comprehensive insights into the typical occurrences from an external viewpoint. The identification of the behavior to be observed ought to be established by the research question or hypothesis. Observation is associated with several limitations, including time constraints, cost factors, and personal biases.

Three one-hour sessions in general and special education classrooms comprised the observation process. Descriptive field notes are based on observations made during the course of the study. The observation tool can be found in Appendix G.

### ***Observation Data Analysis Plan***

When each interview was conducted and transcribed, a continual comparative method (Merriam, 1988; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used to read, reread, and record my reactions, patterns, and linkages between participants. To better understand the importance of social skills, the analysis of the data was conducted with the teachers' life experiences in mind. Thus, the information obtained is how I conducted my data analysis: inductive research, open coding, axial

coding, and selective coding. There were four analytical steps that overlap. At the first stage, I analyzed the data line by line using open coding, which allowed me to define actions or occurrences inside the data, then was coded into as many analysis categories as possible. I reread interview transcripts, questionnaires, observation notes, and field notes once all data had been collected. At the second stage, I made conceptual linkages between categories and subcategories using axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). At the third step, I utilized selective coding to choose specific categories, methodically tie each category to the others, and validate these relationships by searching for cases that confirmed and refuted them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Hence, categories were again established and coded during this phase. Many categories were developed and merged, resulting in the eventual formation of large groups of comparable concepts. At the last phase of data processing, these large groups of similar notions allowed me to derive theory from the emerging overarching categories.

### **Data Synthesis**

The researcher utilized multiple instruments to authenticate the accuracy of the data, and the findings were consistent. The determination of survey results for qualitative data was made possible through the use of Nvivo 12 software. This methodology gauges the inner coherence and inter-item correlation of the technique, evaluating the uniformity of construct measurement through this approach. A coding matrix was utilized by the researcher to guarantee the consistency of the coding of qualitative data. The following phase involves categorizing the data gathered during the data review. Data quality entails the use of data that was not compiled for scientific reasons. This may include using school records from third-party institutions, letters, diaries, family photographs. Rating scales that are frequently used include the following examples: queries, interviews, and questionnaires are evaluated and categorized. The researcher

is required to delineate the specific original data elements that were utilized in the information reassessment.

Qualitative researchers employ interviews to acquire data. Additionally, the researcher conducted interviews with teachers to obtain data. The question was centered on their teaching experiences and evaluation of student data. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, allowing the student to answer, ensure the study's validity, and collect data. Interviews can be conducted in person, over the phone, or via Teams video chat, offering flexibility for data collection. Participants tend to be candid and open in interviews. Interviews allow participants to be candid and open about their perspectives. Interviews enable a complete understanding of the teachers' perceptions on student behaviors (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Trustworthiness**

Although information acquired from a single group may not be sufficient, the data gathered to finish this chapter should be regarded as reliable (Patton, 2015). In a qualitative investigation, trustworthiness is critical because it enables the study to be rational, authentic, and meaningful to all participants. By structuring the record and analyzing its contents, the researcher established his credibility. Additionally, the researcher concentrated on his own experience to exclude any potential biases that might have influenced the interview outcome or any later analysis of the acquired data.

### **Credibility**

According to Patton (2015), when conducting a qualitative study of the findings of an investigation, the researcher should minimize bias by cross-checking and authenticating all data obtained. Data accuracy is crucial for credibility; thus, the researcher must communicate what participants have contributed and ensured that the interview tapes and transcripts are accurate

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher employed transcript verification to ensure that the interviews are appropriately transcribed, and he used data triangulation to eliminate bias in the results. In addition, the researcher evaluated the information supplied by the participants and used their words and thoughts to examine the viewpoints of educators on the need for support with RTI process techniques in a variety of settings.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is attained when significant and meaningful conclusions emerge from the data due to the utilization of language by participants. Transferability is the term used to describe the application of research findings to a broader range of events and circumstances (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To demonstrate the significance of their investigation, the researcher must provide the contents of the study utilizing the participants' own words, secondary sources, and other important information from the emerging themes (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher double-checked the information provided by participants in the current study to ensure that the data matched what they reported during the interviews. Transferability can interact with participant interactions in qualitative research, facilitating the transfer of variables, and extending disclosures by assisting in transferring factors (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Dependability**

Every step was verified to ensure that it corresponds to what participants stated during their interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Additionally, reflexivity ensures that the data collected, and the research questions developed, aligned with the study's overarching objectives. This method aids in the triangulation process and ensures the accuracy of all data. The term *reflexivity* in research refers to the researcher's reflection on significant sections of a study. It

entails data evaluation, instrument refinement, addressing exploratory questions, and study bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability in a qualitative study is based on the absence of researcher bias, subjectivity, and the ability to corroborate emerging data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To avoid bias, the interviewer concentrated on the participant responses and double-checked the transcripts of a small group of participants' responses to strengthen the reliability and validity of the qualitative study. Following the study, a data audit was conducted to evaluate the data collecting and analysis techniques, judging the possibility of bias or distortion.

### **Ethical Considerations**

After receiving IRB approval to conduct the study, the researcher notified the selected participants via email or other methods to inform them of the study procedures. Before participating in the study, participants were informed of their rights and asked to sign a consent form. Also, all participants had the option to opt out of the procedures to complete the process.

All data collected was stored on a USB flash drive for security rather than a laptop or Dropbox. The information will be kept private and secure in an approved location. The data on a flash drive will be destroyed five years after the study is completed as per protocol.

### **Summary**

The individuals who responded to the RTI beliefs survey and have experience and practices with MTSS in rural schools are considered the most suitable candidates for this study. The respondents of the survey were the ideal participants, as they had practical knowledge and experiences with MTSS in rural schools. Additionally, this chapter provided a discussion on the methodologies for data gathering and analysis. In this study, a questionnaire design was used to

explore the connection between implementation drivers and MTSS in rural public schools.

Chapter three summarized and explained the current study's methodology and research strategy.

Data analysis plans were also provided, along with a problem illustration and a description of a sample population that were studied due to the need for generalized results for specific groups.

Data gathering and analysis procedures were discussed in this chapter. Chapter four will present an analysis of the results, including discussing the relationship between the findings to the literature review.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the beliefs or opinions of primary school educators on the implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). According to the literature (King et al., 2012), the problem is transitioning all students who meet the benchmarks from elementary to middle school or middle to high school; the following assumptions was considered: (a) do pupils receive the same level of help in MTSS/RTI? and (b) how can the implementation of an MTSS curriculum with (elementary/middle school) children be defined as not being grade-level? Thus, a qualitative transcendental phenomenological strategy was employed in this study to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and their experiences in structuring their career-oriented development objectives.

The following questions guided this qualitative study:

#### **Central Research Question**

How do general education elementary school teachers implement tier one, tier two, and tier three of the MTSS/RTI model while delivering differentiated core curriculum instruction?

#### **Sub-Question One**

What strategies were given to teachers in their training to assist them in implementing RTI/MTSS effectively?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

How do teachers' perspectives affect the level of buy-in and comprehension of MTSS implementation?

#### **Sub-Question Three**

How does professional development assist both the teacher and the student's success?

Subsequent to receiving an email introduction to ten teacher participants, the researcher was made aware of an upcoming school-wide in-service day. Consequently, the researcher was able to participate in a Tier 1-3 Leadership Team meeting, which all study participants were part of, if selected. Also scheduled on the agenda for the day was an in-district professional development session for the educators. The researcher could plan observations and interviews that fit both parties' schedules. The day was six hours and MTSS was the focus. The principal collected and shared school goals, meeting agendas, documentation, and norms with the participants via Google Drive. Documents from the in-service and leadership meeting were uploaded for future access.

### Participants

This study included 10 participants for the semi-structured interviews and four participants for the focus group. As shown in Table 1, each participant entered the study with distinct demographic characteristics. The participants believed the study would benefit future teachers and provide a firm foundation for further research. Each participant presented to the study with various demographic characteristics, as highlighted in Table 1 below.

Table 1

#### *Teacher Participants for semi-structured interviews*

Teacher Participant	Age Range	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Angie	40-50	15	Doctoral Degree	Social Studies	Administration

Brandon	30-40	7	Education Specialist	English Language Arts	4 <sup>th</sup>
Charlotte	41-45	14	Education Specialist	Special Education – All Content Areas	K – 5 <sup>th</sup>
Curtis	25-35	3.5	Bachelor's	General Education	1 <sup>st</sup> – 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Donna	50-60	30	Masters	School Psychologist	K – 5 <sup>th</sup>
Georgia	30-35	10	Masters	Speech and Language	K – 5 <sup>th</sup>
Gabby	40	13	Education Specialist	Science	5 <sup>th</sup>
Samuel	30-35	10	Bachelors +	General Education	2
Kimberly	30	4	Masters	School Psychologist	
Thomas	30-35	6	Masters	General Education	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup>

The participants introduced themselves to the researcher as follows:

### **Angie**

Angie self-identified as a female and provided information that suggested she is between 40 and 50 years of age. The participant has stated that she currently holds an administrative role, having previously taught all levels for more than 15 years, and has achieved the highest level of education, a doctoral degree.

### **Brandon**

Brandon presented to the study as a non-binary and within the age range of 30 to 40 years. They reported that they have an education specialist degree as their highest level of education and that they currently are in administration, although they have taught all grades within their seven years of experience.

### **Charlotte**

Charlotte reported that she was a female and was within the 41-to-45-year age range. The participant reported that her highest level of education was a specialist degree and stated that she has primarily taught special education over her 14 years of experience.

### **Curtis**

Curtis declared that he identifies as male and falls within the age bracket of 25 to 35 years. According to the participant, his educational attainment is at the specialist degree level, and he has experience teaching students from grades six to eight. The member reported that he had 3.5 years of experience.

### **Donna**

Donna stated she identified as a female and was within the age range of 50 to 60 years. The participant reported that her highest level of education was a master's degree and that she taught within the K to eighth-grade levels in the past and currently is a school psychologist. The participant reported that she had 12 years of experience.

### **Georgia**

Georgia claimed to be a female, aged between 30 to 35 years. The participant described that her highest level of education is a master's degree and that she has primarily focused on speech and language in the K to fifth-grade levels over her 10 years of experience.

### **Gabby**

Gabby was selected and disclosed she was a female within the 31-to-35-year age range. The participant reported that the highest level of education is a specialist degree and that she has experience teaching in all grade levels; however, she currently is teaching first grade at an elementary school. The participant conveyed she has 12 years of experience in teaching.

### **Samuel**

Samuel self-identifies as male and falls within the age range of 30 to 35 years. The participant conveyed that his highest level of education is a master's degree, and he primarily teaches third, fourth, and fifth-grade students. The participant stated he possesses six years of experience.

### **Kimberly**

Kimberly informed being a woman under the age of 30. The member holds a master's degree and predominantly conducts teaching activities for the third and fourth grade levels. As per the participant's report, she has a total of four years of experience in the field of education.

### **Thomas**

Thomas has reported that he is a male and falls within the age range of 30 to 35 years. The participant declared he earned a master's degree as his highest educational qualification, and his primary teaching responsibility is with first, second, and fourth-grade students. The participant stated having six years of experience.

Table 2

#### *Teacher Participants for focus groups*

Teacher Participant	Age Range	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level

Gabby	40	13	Education Specialist	Science	5th
Samuel	30-35	10	Bachelors +	General Education	2
Kimberly	30	4	Masters	School Psychologist	K-5
Thomas	30-35	6	Masters	General Education	1st,2nd and 4th

### **Gabby**

Gabby was selected as a member of the focus group. She reported she is a female within the 31-to-35-year age range. The participant reported that the highest level of education is a specialist degree and that she has experience teaching in all grade levels; however, she currently is teaching first grade at an elementary school. The participant reported she has 12 years of experience.

### **Kimberly**

Kimberly volunteered to take part in the focus group and reported that she is a female and is younger than 30 years of age. The focus group participant reports a master's degree and primarily teaches within the third and fourth grades. The participant reported she has four years of experience as an educator.

### **Samuel**

Samuel, too, was chosen to participate in the focus group and reported the subsequent demographics: he is male and falls within the 30-to-35-year age bracket. The participant has reported that they possess a master's degree, and their primary teaching responsibility revolves

around students in grades three to five. The group member stated that they have six years of experience.

### **Thomas**

Thomas was ultimately chosen as the focus group's final selection. The age range he reported falls between 30 to 35 years with gender indicated as male. The group member's response indicates that they hold a master's degree, and their focus is teaching students in the first, second, and fourth grades. The member has shared that they possess six years of experience.

## **Results**

This section represents the findings and results of the study. This section begins with a discussion of theme development, including the steps of data analysis. After discussing theme formation, I will organize the results according to each research query. My analysis for this investigation was guided by the following research questions.

### **Central Research Question**

How do general education elementary school teachers implement tier one, tier two, and tier three of the MTSS/RTI model while delivering differentiated core curriculum instruction?

In elementary school classrooms, general education teachers employ a comprehensive approach to implement the MTSS/RTI model while delivering differentiated core curriculum instruction. They start with tier one, where they differentiate their teaching methods to cater to diverse student needs and regularly assess progress through data collection. Moving to tier two, teachers identify at-risk students based on data analysis and provide targeted interventions, adjusting strategies as needed to foster improvement. For the most intensive support at tier three, educators collaborate with specialists and parents to develop individualized plans, closely

monitoring progress and making necessary modifications. This data-driven, collaborative process ensures that all students receive the appropriate level of support, ultimately enhancing their learning experiences within the core curriculum.

### **Sub-Question One**

What strategies were given to teachers in their training to assist them in implementing RTI/MTSS effectively?

This question, as per the viewpoint of numerous participants, emphasized that the staff was not provided with equivalent MTSS professional development opportunities as the teachers in the past while implementing RTI efficiently. The deficiency of training in MTSS interventions and their implementation was a concern expressed by many participants. Findings showed that school leaders must provide a purpose-driven approach to school growth and development, foster staff synergy, and have high expectations for the achievement of all staff members.

Georgia shared,

We devote time to investigating the reasons behind students' lack of response, creating a new intervention strategy for them, and then collaborating with the problem-solving teams. Our aim is to guide and assist individuals in understanding the approach we take, although it can be a lengthy process. We employ questioning and guidance to steer them towards a comprehensive understanding.

Charlotte articulated a profound statement regarding the convictions of general education teachers, stating:

In my belief, teachers have a tendency to evade tasks they are not proficient in. At the elementary school level, around 70% of teachers have a preference to teach in the same way they were taught, resulting in their reluctance to try new approaches. In my



opinion, the underlying factor is success. If individuals have not experienced success with a certain task or activity, they are unlikely to attempt it or be open to trying new things. General education teachers distribute their subject matter, presuming that students are not succeeding due to their inability to comprehend it. Conversely, the special education teacher possesses the skill set and aptitude to utilize effective strategies and work with students to enable their success. In my opinion, the majority of exceptional instructors have a mindset focused on growth. It is not uncommon to observe a fixed mindset among general education teachers, specifically at the elementary school level. Their perception primarily revolves around the child's intelligence. This is precisely why special education teachers firmly believe in it, as they have witnessed its success firsthand. There is an attempt by the general education teachers to remove those students from their classes.

### **Sub-Question Two**

How do these perspectives affect the level of buy-in and comprehension of MTSS implementation?

The participants' open responses served as a clear demonstration that the provision of necessary tools would lead to a considerable increase in buy-in level. Although it was not recognized in the pre-test open responses, the faculty acknowledged "increased staff" as a requirement when responding to the inquiry "What are the ways to enhance the MTSS framework in your establishment?" As a result of the intended fidelity implementation of MTSS and continued professional development on the framework, a requirement for increased staff was recognized. The faculty has also recognized the necessity for additional time. The researcher hypothesizes that the faculty will request an increase in staff if they desire more time, which is not feasible according to the schedule.

Based on the input provided by the study participants, it was observed that paraprofessionals and other support personnel have frequently executed interventions for students. Consequently, it is imperative for both educators and support staff to receive high-quality professional development in MTSS and support. The efficacy of the interventions highly depends on the quality of the training provided to the staff involved. Therefore, it is recommended that educators and support staff receive comprehensive training in MTSS and support to ensure the successful implementation of interventions and support services.

Kimberly was uncertain about the source: "I believe it was our principal. We haven't discussed it extensively." Gabby was more optimistic: "The administration has requested that we implement this in our classrooms. She [principal] has done this in the past and strongly believes that it works and is a good method to make things run smoothly here."

Donna, the school psychologist, felt:

I am seeking someone who can provide me with a demonstration of the specific content you are discussing within my classroom, and confirm its efficacy with my students.

Without it, you won't be able to secure buy-in. It feels as though I spend the entire day in the classroom with the children. It sounds good; everything sounds good from a theoretical perspective. There are cases where certain teachers are dealt unfavorable situations which result in their unjust categorization as substandard teachers. These teachers are often subjected to undue criticism. It is my intention to witness that work with my children.

### **Sub-Question Three**

How does Professional Development assist both the teacher and the student's success?

All three research questions are significantly influenced by the district's phased implementation process and the participants' varied exposure to training. The influence is because their engagement in training may affect their perceptions of efficacy, as observed by Mitchell (2009).

As per the MTSS Teaming Structures section of the district's MTSS Canvas course, the district-level execution team comprises the MTSS coordinator, PBIS/behavior support, curriculum specialists, school psychologists, and instructional facilitators, and carries the responsibility of creating and executing RTI/MTSS district-wide. The previously stated elements include professional development, coaching and technical assistance, research and evaluation, as well as communication and exposure. The section on MTSS Teaming Structures provides additional details on recommended leadership team structures at the school level, including the MTSS coordinator/coach, grade level, academic and behavioral representatives. Core functions of the school-level MTSS leadership team include data/information sharing, school-wide problem solving, and examining the effectiveness of tiers and implementation. Data sharing allows teams to then identify key problems and filter information to grade level PLCs to inform problem analysis and implementation planning. It is recommended that MTSS leadership teams comprise five to seven members at both levels to ensure optimal outcomes. Maintaining a concise and error-free approach is essential in conveying a sense of professionalism and expertise in an academic setting.

To be precise, Georgia stated, "Previous in-service trainings have been horrible." Donna said, "I think it's very different in our district because we just don't have the strong support systems that other districts have." Thomas' remarks reflect the study-school faculty's views on team teaching. Donna stated, "My grade level shares information such as what are you doing?"

This is what I believe, but I'm having trouble with this pupil; do you have any suggestions? Did your children receive this? This is my effort." The majority of teachers feel additional supports need to be implemented to help them succeed at their job and help their students succeed. The current in-service training system for teachers is inadequate. Additional training is needed in many areas. Curtis also addressed the concerns when he discussed PLCs. The appearance of our PLCs has undergone a sort of makeover. Previously, our PLC groups were [deep sigh] extremely administration driven. We were required to discuss a topic or follow a protocol that we did not believe to be particularly important, and it did not assist us or move us forward. In order to proceed further, the introduction of theme advancement is necessary.

### **Theme Advancement**

I used NVIVO 12 and a qualitative codebook to perform a qualitative analysis of the data. My qualitative analysis was based on Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach to examine the data from this study. Moustakas highlighted the importance of the researcher to comprehend their role before starting the analysis. I employed epoché to achieve this objective. To record my own experiences in a journal, I adopted epoché, contemplating both professional and personal insights, values, and opinions of the phenomenon being investigated. The epoché method was effective in mitigating instances of researcher partiality. I then accomplished transcendental phenomenological reduction after practicing epoché. Through transcendental phenomenological reduction, I intended to characterize the essences of the investigated phenomenon. The goal of Husserl's (2019) Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction was to define the research's discoveries in regard to the fundamental nature of the investigated phenomenon. The following stage in the data analysis involved data synthesis. I incorporated textual and structural descriptions of the phenomenon provided by the participants

during data synthesis (Husserl, 2019; Skinner, 2022) The synthesis of the data included identifying any patterns of words, sentences, or concepts that the participants had reported in their interviews and focus group. Participants used a variety of terms, phrases, and concepts within the first theme, including “time,” “having time,” “finding time,” “making time”, "time constraints," "enough time," "time in the schedule," "allotted time," and "time and caseload permitting”. They synthesized and combined these words, phrases, and concepts to form a thematic label, given the time constraints. The participants perceived that the textual and structural specifications hindered their power to fulfill their responsibilities in a timely manner. Following the data analysis, the next step was data synthesis. In my data synthesis, I incorporated both textual and structural descriptions. At this stage of the analysis, a qualitative codebook highlighted the themes that emerged under each research question from the dataset, along with participant quotations and structural and textual descriptions that supported and contributed to each theme (Roberts et al., 2019). I then applied transcendental phenomenological reduction to each participant in the focus group and semi-structured interview. After performing a data synthesis, I combined the textual and structural descriptions of each participant to represent the group, allowing me to identify themes that emerged from the data set (Husserl, 2019). Mishra and Day (2022) defined themes as characteristics of participant accounts that reflected the study's research concerns. After identifying the themes, I reported the study's findings and answered the research questions (Husserl, 2019). This procedure was carried out for each research question.

### **Theme 1: Time Constraints**

The first theme that emerged from the dataset was that of time constraints. Table 2 and Table 3 below show the participants who contributed to this theme and codes derived from the data.

Table 3. Participant Contribution for Theme 1

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	Total	%
Time Constraints	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	8	80

Table 4. Participant Contribution for Theme 1

	Codes
Theme 1: Time Constraints	Time in general, Time to build lesson plan, Time to prepare, Having enough time, Finding the time, Time constraints, Time in the schedule, Time in the day, Allotted time, Time in planning, Time and caseload in administrative duties

As depicted in Table 2, the semi-structured interviews and the focus group participants contributed to this theme. All participant contributions focused on the time constraints related to implementing the MTSS process. Angie, Donna, and Gabby discussed their struggles with time when it came to implementing the MTSS process with efficacy and fidelity. Each participant discussed the lack of time needed to meet the state requirements for students at each tier sufficiently. Angie stated there was not enough time to pull those students, work with them, and provide them with strategies assigned to their individual learning needs. Furthermore, Angie discussed time constraints when attempting to implement each MTSS strategy for their students. Angie reported, “The struggle was trying to make sure that I had enough time to implement the actual strategy for getting the student where they needed to be.” Gabby was able to discuss how there was not enough time in the day to complete all her duties when it came to working within

an MTSS system. Gabby reported: “One of the biggest challenges we have faced is the limited amount of time available. My subject area often becomes the focus for activities or assignments that are part of a larger school-wide initiative. I find myself in a situation where a considerable amount of time is being taken away from me, time that I could have used for those 30-minute implementations. However, I am faced with the difficult decision of choosing between different priorities.”

### **Theme 1: Teachers Need Time**

Time is a significant barrier. When considering instruction, teachers are expected to undertake a significant responsibility of differentiating instruction in order to cater to the individual needs of each student. Occasionally, the duration of the day is insufficient. Individuals within the focus group also were able to identify time constraints related to large caseloads of students in the MTSS process as being a barrier to implementation.

For example, Kimberly stated, “I would say my individual struggles come from the heavy caseload— having so many kids who need support with so many different aspects of readings.” Another participant, Samuel, discussed how a high caseload of students that required interventions created a time constraint, mainly because of learning what strategy works best for each student. Samuel stated that besides providing time to work individually with students, it is challenging to select appropriate intervention strategies to meet their individual needs.

Participants reported they experienced both classroom and administrative time constraints on how they had to implement processes of MTSS for their students. Curtis reported that time constraints occurred from both classroom and administrative reactions. Curtis stated: The biggest struggle has been the time constraints. They tend to place activities or assignments for a whole-school initiative in my subject area. That takes away a lot of time that I could have to

do those 30-minute implementations, but I feel like I must choose between priorities.

Charlotte discussed how she also experienced time constraints because of the different levels of learners in their classroom. Charlotte stated, “I think teachers struggle with time constraints with many different levels of learners in their class. Then we ask teachers to progress monitor, which, in turn, they see that as an additional layer of work.”

## Theme 2: Training and Support

The following theme that emerged from the data was that the participants perceived a lack of training and support from administration and peers to fully implement the framework. Table 4 and Table 5 below show the participants who contributed to this theme, as well as codes derived from the data.

Table 4. *Participant Contribution for Theme 2*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	Total	%
Training and support	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	9	90

Table 5. *Codes for Theme 2*

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Codes
Theme 2: Training and Support
Professional learning and advancement
Lack of professional development available
Lack of support from peers/admin

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Lack of knowledge in framework

Support from admin/peers

Support from parents

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As Table 4 illustrates, the participants contributed to this theme. Within this theme, participants discussed how lack of training and support acted as a barrier when working within an MTSS framework. Several participants stated they were given support without having professional development or learning, on the contrary, some of them reported not receiving support or having professional development or learning after their initial training. As an example, Caleb noted he has obtained some help, but not the level of professional guidance he believes is required. Nevertheless, he has been given aid within the building. Donna mentioned that understanding MTSS was an additional responsibility given to her and the other faculty members by the administration, without any extra professional development. Emma pointed out that the lack of training in the school system was apparent.

With regard to training and support, Gabby contributed her thoughts about collaboration and professional development. Gabby stated:

As a school counselor, I have collaborated with school psychologists and special education teachers, and as a lead, I typically provide professional development for the MTSS framework. Being a part of this was part of the experience, but also participating in those in-services to gain further knowledge of the process and how teachers, administrative staff, and school counselors can better use the program.

Gabby's thoughts indicated that her experiences participating in professional

development opportunities, while good information, could have been more effective if the content was specifically modeled with MTSS strategies. Gabby's insights highlight the importance of not only offering professional development opportunities but also tailoring them to specifically address MTSS strategies.

Angie stated, that while she had undergone training, it had not been continuous enough to guarantee that teachers' understanding was current and comprehensive. For instance, Angie said:

Initially, without an understanding of the various interventions or an awareness of the tiers, it can be difficult to determine what the student needs or how often they need it, apart from what the counselor or RTI individual has instructed. Acquiring more knowledge of it can only come from experience.

Angie's thoughts on training were similar to Henry's. Henry stated that, as a new teacher, he would need the same amount of support as his students.

I think one struggle I personally have as being a newer teacher is understanding what the implementation looks like, and because I have not had that as much as others, it's a lot of trying to figure it out somewhat on my own.

This theme showed the participants reported that a lack of training and a lack of support acted as hindrances when putting MTSS into action. The participants communicated that furnishing knowledge and giving back to the students and teachers was essential. A considerable number of participants indicated that there was a necessity for MTSS services to be consistent and organized in this area.

### **Theme 3: Intervention Strategies**

The subsequent theme that emerged from the dataset included how teachers have to use effective intervention strategies to react to interventions in their classrooms. Table 6 and Table 7

below demonstrate the participants who contributed to this theme, as well as codes derived from the data.

Table 6. *Participant Contribution for Theme 3*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	Total	%
Intervention strategies	X		X	X		X	X	X			6	60

Table 7. *Codes for Theme 3*

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Codes	
Teachers must have effective intervention strategies.	Professional learning and advancement Lack of professional development available Lack of support from peers/admin Lack of knowledge in framework Support from admin/peers Support from parents

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As Table 6 illustrates, the participants contributed to this theme. Teachers must have effective intervention strategies to use in their classrooms. Brandon and Charlotte also stated:

It's a shift in teaching, but I can't just alter everything I do overnight. In addition, it's not just the teaching aspect. Responsibilities include communicating with parents, grading papers, planning courses, and a number of other obstacles.

The enhancement of teachers' professional skills is facilitated through academic and behavior intervention programs that are integrated into the core curriculum. The implementation of these strategies are reinforced by data analysis. As part of their in-service training, the educators participated in a specialized district training program. This program introduced the teachers to the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network procedures of the RTI model. While the teachers in demonstration schools had undergone other professional development in areas related to their RTI model implementation responsibilities, there were no distinctions apparent in their survey responses with regard to these areas. The research questions evaluated proficiencies, such as data collection, storage, graphing, and analysis utilizing technological tools.

#### **Theme 4: Teachers Need for Continuous Professional Development**

The final theme that emerged from the data included how teachers need continuous professional development. Table 8 and Table 9 below show the participants who contributed to this theme, as well as codes derived from the data. Another perceived barrier and an essential component in professional development is the teachers' knowledge of effective interventions for each tier of RTI. Teachers in the schools were provided with professional development in key areas, such as identifying academic and behavior interventions, designing intervention plans, implementing the plans, and collecting and utilizing data to drive progress monitoring plans. To assist with the initial implementation of the RTI/MTSS model, professional development in all of these areas was suggested for all teachers in the district. The RTI Beliefs survey results may not have shown any differences due to several reasons, including the possibility that teachers gained knowledge from sources other than the district's professional development program, the existence of flawed survey items, or a flawed data collection process that failed to detect any differences among the schools surveyed.

Georgia emphasized the significance of formulating precise strategies and providing students with optimal prospects to succeed. Samuel reiterated that it would be beneficial to have a tangible comprehension of the types of instruction or examples employed during interventions. Regrettably, Sansosti et al. (2010) found that limited interventions are available for high school students compared to elementary, but interventions do exist that support teacher knowledge of effective interventions being both a barrier and an essential component to successful RTI implementation.

The role of school principals in implementing RTI effectively is vital. To achieve this, principals must encourage instructional practices that allow teachers to tailor their lessons to meet the unique needs of their students. The success of RTI hinges on the quality of professional development provided by principals to teachers, which should be thorough, intensive, and ongoing to enhance student learning outcomes.

Table 8. *Participant Contribution for Theme 4*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	Total	%
Teachers need for continuous professional development	X		X	X		X	X	X			6	89

Table 9. *Codes for Theme 4*

Teachers need for continuous professional development	Discord or contention between group members Knowledge, materials and skills
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	Instructional and assessment practices Leadership skills Planning and executing an effective PD plan
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### Summary

This study delved into elementary school teachers' perspectives on MTSS. It is recommended that all newly hired teachers undergo RTI program training during their orientation or within their first year of employment. Participants revealed the training would benefit future teachers. It is the responsibility of districts across the state to guarantee that educators and administrators possess the knowledge and abilities necessary to be proficient. The study's conceptual framework and empirical literature demonstrate that self-efficacy is an essential determinant of effectiveness in implementing an initiative for RTI/MTSS.

The acknowledgment of the study's results by State Education Agencies (SEAs), Local Education Agencies (LEAs), policymakers, teacher preparation programs, and teachers is crucial for the advancement of effective education practices. These findings offer valuable insights into the challenges and strengths associated with MTSS implementation from the perspective of elementary school teachers. SEAs and LEAs can use this information to make informed decisions, allocate resources more effectively, and shape policies that align with teachers' needs. Policymakers benefit from research-based evidence to guide their policy decisions. Teacher preparation programs can adapt their curricula to better prepare future educators, ensuring they are equipped to navigate MTSS effectively. For teachers themselves, this acknowledgment represents an opportunity for tailored professional development, support in areas of need, and the fostering of collaboration among all stakeholders, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes for students.

The study's conceptual framework revealed that the teachers' self-efficacy perceptions can be viewed as determining factors of their actual capacity to implement an initiative, such as tiered instruction and intervention, with fidelity. It is imperative to prioritize training and related support for all teachers. It is also crucial for stakeholders to proactively identify those with lower levels of self-efficacy. Moreover, there must be an effort made to streamline messaging and communication regarding the initiative, as well as the requirements for its implementation. The foremost priority is for stakeholders at all levels to recognize the pivotal role of teachers' self-efficacy in implementation and devise strategies to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities, thus culminating in an increase in self-efficacy.

This study revealed four themes: (a) time constraints, (b) teachers need the support from administration and peers to fully implement RTI/MTSS, (c) teachers must have effective teaching intervention strategies to use in their classrooms, and (d) teachers' need for continuous professional development. The study examined how teachers' time, effort, and resources affected the successful use of the MTSS framework.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The problem is transitioning all students who meet the benchmarks from elementary to middle school or middle to high school; the following assumptions should be considered: (a) What strategies were given to teachers in their training to assist them in implementing RTI/MTSS effectively? (b) How do these perspectives affect the level of buy-in and comprehension of MTSS implementation? And (c) How does Professional Development assist both the teacher and the student's success?

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to comprehend the experiences of elementary school teachers implementing the MTSS systemic framework. This chapter will cover the interpretation of findings, summary of thematic findings policy and practice implications, and theoretical and empirical implications. This dissertation will conclude with a discussion of the study's limitations and delimitations, as well as suggestions for future research.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study's findings considering the developed themes. Typically, findings are discussed in such a way as to highlight the voice of the researcher. Still, supporting the interpretations of findings with empirical and theoretical sources, along with complicated evidence from the study, is required. The discussion section has five major subsections, including (a) Interpretation of Findings; (b) Implications for Policy or Practice; (c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; (d) Limitations and Delimitations; and Recommendations for Future Research.

### **Interpretation of Findings**



The following section aims to examine the interpretation of the study's findings. In this investigation, information was collected from 10 participants. Four themes have been uncovered by the study, including time constraints, the necessity for teacher training and support, the importance of teaching intervention strategies for classroom use, and the need for continuous professional development of teachers. In this section, a thorough examination of the connection between the study's findings and prior research will be conducted.

### ***Summary of Thematic Findings***

The purpose of presenting a summary of thematic findings is to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report the themes that have emerged from the data. Thematic analysis, according to literature, is characterized as a valuable and effective technique that enables researchers to delve into the perspectives of different research participants. It accomplishes this by emphasizing both their commonalities and disparities, ultimately leading to the generation of unforeseen and enlightening insights (Palsola et al., 2020).. Presented below is a summary of the previously mentioned findings, with a specific focus on those obtained from the study conducted by the researcher.

**Time Constraints** The participants reported facing time limitations while applying the MTSS framework, according to this study. The majority of participants were capable of discussing their experience with both classroom and administrative time limitations when it came to implementing MTSS procedures for their students. In addition, a considerable number of participants conveyed that a high caseload of students was associated with their inability to dedicate sufficient time to preparing and working with them.

Studies have indicated that educators frequently encounter time limitations while handling MTSS, which encompasses both its implementation and evaluation. As per Lown's

(2020) findings, the efficiency of MTSS implementation might be hindered by these constraints. In an effort to delve deeper into this matter and advance the research, the author conducted a meticulous gathering and analysis of relevant information. This comprehensive data collection involved various methods, such as surveys, interviews, and observations, aimed at exploring elementary school teachers' perspectives on MTSS. By accumulating this valuable information, the study was able to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges, needs, and potential areas for improvement in MTSS implementation within the educational context. This data accumulation served as the foundation for the study's analysis, conclusions, and recommendations, ultimately contributing to the body of knowledge surrounding MTSS in elementary schools. In a comparable fashion, Verlenden et al. (2021) also reflected the time constraints within their study, that focused on screening methods of MTSS. The study has also identified several time constraints, including teachers' paperwork burden and their inability to meet students' emotional and behavioral needs, which were linked to concerns about the end of the year and inconsistent data points.

**Teachers need for support from administration and peers.** District and building leaders need to communicate more precisely, the school community needs to endorse more, parents need to be less resistant, and performance criteria need to be less ambiguous for effective implementation of RTI/MTSS, according to the participants. General education teachers must adhere to the three RTI components (rules) within the school system (community) and collaborate with school administrators and instructional staff. Voices and perspectives of participants regarding RTI implementation suggested an unbalanced system in which more explicit training, sharing with other instructors, and evidence-based research guidance are required for the system to function harmoniously. The finding is in line with previous research

that highlighted insufficient training and support as obstacles to MTSS implementation, as noted by the participants.

**Teachers must have effective teaching intervention strategies to use in their classrooms.** Teachers can learn classroom management skills through workshops and professional development, even if they are not inherent to teaching experiences Vanlommel and Schildkamp (2019) suggested that despite the fact that educators utilize analytical process data for decision-making, they frequently base their conclusions on intuitive data, relying on their intuitive process to explain their rational data. With a total of eight references from 10 participants, the most frequently cited barrier was a lack of time to partake in RTI/MTSS-related work. As Charles explained, "I get that it's a whole school improvement thing, but there's a lot of other stuff going on in my classroom that I have to deal with". In summary, the study underscores the importance of professional development for teachers, the prevalence of intuitive decision-making, and the critical issue of time constraints in the context of RTI/MTSS implementation.

**Teachers need continuous professional development (PD).** PD and training are essential for the continuous implementation of RTI. Educators who have access to evidence-based interventions and student data may be able to increase the efficacy of instruction across the various tiers. Participants in the present study agreed that professional development and training were required to comprehend RTI because they designed it for at-risk students. In the current study, only three participants reported receiving professional development support to monitor student progress through the various tiers. Participants shared that they required professional development and training to assess student knowledge and comprehend how to promote academic growth. For instance, one participant stated that RTI training was required to gain the

book contents used in ESL classes. Minor et al. (2016), Vollmer et al. (2018), and Wingate et al. (2018) have shown that the effectiveness of the RTI depends on how instructors react to it, what they know, and how they think throughout its implementation.

The reason why RTI/MTSS places a strong emphasis on integrating program areas, applying a problem-solving strategy, and using evidence-based instruction with progress monitoring data is because these strategies have consistently proven to be effective (Johnson & Stage, 2018). Many participants stated that their ability to implement RTI/MTSS in an effective manner was negatively affected due to the lack of proper training and support. The finding is in accordance with prior studies, which have consistently emphasized the detrimental impact of insufficient training and support on the implementation of RTI/MTSS implementation.

### **Implications for Policy or Practice**

The following section will address the implications, both practical and policy-related, of stakeholders. When the RTI/MTSS process is streamlined throughout a school district, school, and culture, it has implications for policy. Implementing policies can ensure a streamlined MTSS process across school districts, schools, and cultures. The implications for the practice section will comprise both teachers in the field and their students.

#### ***Implications for Policy***

Despite the clarity of laws that emphasize and support the MTSS framework and school districts' solid understanding of MTSS, more action is needed to foster a shift in paradigm and culture within the educational environment. The lack of action exemplifies how efficient procedures and student assessment can be adversely impacted (Olivier et al., 2019). It is essential to restrict the implications to the formulation of specific policies, laws, and regulations, and the

potential consequences for organizations or entities at a higher level, such as school districts and state or federal policies.

Therefore, it is recommended that school districts implement explicit MTSS process streamlining policies. For instance, many participants in this study reported that their school's procedures for evaluating student outcomes were not streamlined. Elementary school teachers were able to explain how a lack of training affected MTSS implementation. It was reported that these experiences impeded or misaligned instructors' and schools' ability to use crucial processes to evaluate student outcomes. It is recommended that school districts outline the MTSS framework and train educators so that every teacher has the knowledge to work with students and families within the MTSS model.

### ***Implications for Practice***

The matter of practice implications also necessitates discussion. It is imperative that the implications are appropriate for the population, organization, or site of the study, or can be generalized to a potentially transferable context. The implications for practice arising from this study are rooted in the specific context of the research, focusing on how teachers implement RTI and MTSS and its impact on classroom time, student behavior, and student achievement. However, it is important to approach these implications with a degree of caution, recognizing that their applicability may vary across different educational settings. Firstly, the need for tailored professional development, particularly for new teachers, is evident. While this is a valuable consideration, the extent to which it can be universally applied must be determined by individual schools and districts based on their unique circumstances. Secondly, the study emphasizes the balance between data-driven and intuitive decision-making in education. While this finding offers valuable insights, its practical implementation should be approached with

flexibility, as the degree to which schools can strike this balance may differ. Lastly, the challenge of time management and prioritization, exemplified by the participant Charles, highlights the importance of efficient resource allocation. Nevertheless, schools must recognize that strategies for addressing this issue should be adapted to fit the specific demands and available resources within their own unique educational environments. In summary, these implications provide a valuable framework for guiding practice but should be interpreted and applied with an understanding of the nuanced differences between educational contexts.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of teachers who have worked with students who lack academic motivation in social settings. The study was based on the idea that individuals are active agents who can be influenced by and shape their surroundings. It is paramount to investigate how the implementation of Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered System of Supports (RTI/MTSS) impacts a child's intervention, given the current dearth of literature on the subject. The study sought to examine the strategies and approaches that teachers have employed to address the issue of academic motivation among students in social settings. By leveraging qualitative research methods, the study gathered rich and insightful data from educators who had first-hand experience in working with such students. This study's outcomes are poised to enhance our current comprehension of successful interventions for students who exhibit minimal academic drive. The information acquired from this research will prove beneficial to educators, policymakers, and other invested parties in the education field, all of whom are dedicated to advancing student achievements.

Banduras' (1998) Social Cognitive Theory served as the guiding principle for the study. Social cognitive theory places emphasis on learning that transpires in social surroundings. From

this perspective, individuals are active agents capable of shaping and being shaped by their surroundings. Social learning theory asserted that new behaviors are learned by observing others and the consequences of their actions. Social cognitive theory has been employed to account for a broad array of human behavior, spanning from constructive to destructive social behaviors, such as violence, drug addiction, and psychological health complications (Banduras, 1998; LaMort, 2019).

The study's data indicated themes, concerns, and areas for additional exploration. The inconsistency of the data led the researcher to question how the success of MTSS was judged. The number of referrals made to special education does not necessarily determine the MTSS framework's success (Maki, 2022). In the realm of education, change implementation usually falls into one of two categories: mandated by educational authorities or initiated by educators themselves. Regardless of the origin of the decision, it is crucial that the necessity of the change, such as RtI/MTSS, is given utmost importance, surpassing any other programs and enhancements (Santiago-Rosario et al., 2021). It is the responsibility of educators to assess the urgency of this change in relation to other demands. While this evaluation may not always be straightforward during the initial stages, it may become clearer during the implementation process.

The researcher noted that the educational institution under investigation was still in the initial phases of execution at the time of the study's conclusion. The principal divulged that it took approximately four years to establish the institutionalization of the MTSS/RtI implementation process at their former institution. It could prove valuable to reexamine the educational institution after two to three years for observing whether RtI/MTSS has been fully integrated into its structure.

## **Empirical Implications**

In addition to theoretical implications, there are empirical implications that demand consideration. While the literature supports the findings of this study, it does not advocate for an elementary school setting. As an illustration, antecedent empirical investigations have corroborated the conclusions that educators encounter temporal limitations, inadequacy of education and assistance, and absence of cohesive appraisal of students while operating within the MTSS structure. Despite the lack of any form of support, numerous studies on RTI/MTSS have been undertaken in different places. The researchers persisted and managed to carry out their studies independently, despite the lack of support. The research towards RTI/MTSS has made a substantial contribution to the expanding knowledge base in their respective fields and have played a crucial role in shaping our comprehension of different phenomena. Their ability to overcome challenges and produce valuable insights is proof of the determination and resourcefulness of these researchers.

Lown (2020) exemplified that time constraints and lack of support may hinder the efficient implementation of MTSS. Likewise, Verlenden et al. (2021) also noted time constraints within their study, that focused on screening methods of MTSS. Within their study, they noted that teachers' time was limited because of their paperwork burden and concerns about meeting the emotional and behavioral needs of certain students. (Oster et al., 2021; Verlenden et al 2021).

The building-level teams are instructed by team members who have received training in RTI/MTSS. Further investigation is necessary regarding this matter. The implementation of a professional development strategy for MTSS would facilitate the improvement of educators' individual MTSS systems. Professional growth is such a wide-ranging subject. In education,



more specialized research is required in various areas. Aspects of the MTSS framework is now sufficiently established to warrant additional inquiry in relation to professional development. The primary goal of MTSS/RtI is to foster student growth. This is best achieved through effective classroom instruction, which is supported by teachers who feel confident in their knowledge and skills. Teachers gain confidence through opportunities to share their experiences, knowledge, skills, and perceptions with one another, provided by administrators who encourage collaboration. By working together, teachers and administrators can implement change more easily, as their commitment and motivation are likely to be higher and more apparent during the implementation process. The changes made in schooling due to COVID-19 since 2019 may lead to stressors for both children and parents, thereby potentially increasing risks to mental health and well-being. (Verlenden et al 2021). To conclude, the utilization of intervention data sets for teachers who are making eligibility decisions can prove to be a challenging task. The identification and modification of significant variables can be challenging because of the diverse school contexts and the levels of expertise and tolerance demonstrated by change agents, which can affect the intervention strategies.

### **Limitations**

This study included a relatively small sample size of participants from one region of the United States, so the findings may not be applicable to other geographic places. The fact that a school district is part of a certain education district and that the two are linked in terms of special education and RTI/MTSS framework implementation could also make it difficult for the results to be used in school districts that are set up differently when it comes to providing special education services. Several of the participants may have responded differently, knowing that the administration, which works for them, was included in the research. Participants' opinions may

have been influenced or limited by the researchers' use of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. There are limitations or potential weaknesses in the study that cannot be controlled.

### **Delimitations**

The utilization character of this study introduces additional restrictions. While attempts were made to boost credibility, bias and subjectivity cannot be ruled out. Transcriptions could have been perceived differently than the genuine objectives of the participant's communication. For example, when teachers were questioned about the services, they offered to schools in relation to adding additional supports, the primary researcher assumed that what they recognized was more important than what the participants believed to be useful to implementation. However, the participants may have been discussing district resources without implying their efficacy in the implementation of the RTI/MTSS framework. Furthermore, it was difficult to decipher genuine meanings or establish whether assertions were powerful or clear enough to be included in analysis and interpretation of data.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The current investigation has revealed areas that require additional examination. The primary focus should be on examining the most notable emerging matter in professional development. The study presents the question of whether the evaluation of RTI/MTSS effectiveness should be predicated on referral criteria in lieu of the quantity of recommendations dispensed. The number of referrals made to special education does not necessarily determine the MTSS framework's success (Maki, 2022). The referral constitutes a crucial stage in the procedure. Although a special education assessment can be initiated by either educators or parents/guardians, the responsibility of ensuring that every student has equal access to a free and appropriate public education lies primarily with the educators.

In order to accurately recognize a student who is facing difficulties, it is necessary to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the fundamental traits of the most prevalent disabilities. Should teachers recognize disparities in a student's age and their academic, behavioral, physical, and/or social-emotional abilities, it is crucial that they express their concerns to both colleagues and the parents/guardians of the student. By acknowledging inequalities, we can gather more data that may assist in identifying the kind of support a student may necessitate.

Because of the disparities in professional development (D), PD emerged as the recurring theme during the investigation. The district's focal point was the provision of professional development at the district level. As a result, the district proceeded to implement an RTI/MTSS plan throughout the entire district. It was recommended that subsequent research prioritize the focus on RTI/MTSS and its implementation within elementary schools and other educational levels. The variability of responses from all stakeholders will provide supplementary insights into the perceptions of MTSS processes and implementation across educational institutions. These insights could facilitate the development of more comprehensive policies, procedures, and training programs for staff in school districts and schools.

This study may be replicated in other districts by future researchers. Teachers situated in different parts of the state may have distinct experiences with MTSS. The achievement of a more extensive understanding of the perceptions of these interventions and implementation fidelity can be accomplished by conducting this study in other regions of the state. It is recommended that prospective researchers in this field only consider the usage of current teachers who are actively implementing MTSS. Due to the involvement of teachers and specialists with different levels of expertise in the interventions, the current study's findings are not fully indicative of the teachers' current experiences.

Another recommendation is to carry out quantitative studies utilizing a survey research design, which will enable future research to concentrate on more extensive sample sizes or multiple schools within a district. The objective is to gain an understanding of the efficiency of the processes implemented for RTI/MTSS framework and their evaluation methods. A concluding recommendation is that future research could comprise a longitudinal study to establish how RTI/MTSS implementation transpires and is perceived over time. Since this study singularly focused on the perceptions of RTI/MTSS implementation during a snapshot in time, subsequent research could reveal more information regarding the alignment and development of RTI/MTSS over the years.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how teachers implement RTI and MTSS and how this implementation affected classroom time, student behavior, and student achievement. The study looked at how teachers were utilizing PBIS, RTI, and MTSS and the professional development to apply these strategies in classroom duration, student conduct, and academic achievement objectives. Given the obligatory adoption of the RTI/MTSS initiative in school districts by 2020, districts throughout the state ensure that teachers and administrators possess the needed information and competencies to achieve success. Self-efficacy is a major factor of effectiveness as an implementer of an initiative like Washington's MTSS process, as evidenced by the study's conceptual framework and empirical literature base. The problem addressed in this study was how to transition all students who meet the benchmarks from elementary to middle school or middle to high school. The following assumptions was considered: (a) do pupils receive the same level of help in MTSS/RTI? and (b) how can the

implementation of an MTSS curriculum with (elementary/middle school) children be defined as not being grade-level.

Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that all participants had some level of training and experience in MTSS to generate data for each of the research questions. The findings of this study contributed to the extant body of literature on implementation science and high-quality professional development, helping to close the gap in research on successful MTSS implementation. The results of the study can provide stronger support to educators and support staff in their adoption of MTSS with fidelity. A comprehension of optimal methodologies in MTSS will result in high-quality professional development training in MTSS, thus equipping teachers and support personnel on the forefront of MTSS.

The inclusion of RTI/MTSS best practices in a sustained professional development plan that offers ongoing support for teachers and support personnel will produce superior outcomes for children. The establishment of constructive collaboration and communication, as well as the provision of necessary knowledge and skills for assisting students in achieving their academic, behavioral, social, and emotional goals through MTSS, is facilitated by the tone-setting and training of school personnel by the school leadership.

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## Appendix A

### IRB Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 15, 2023

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1274 Exploring the Influence of PBIS, RTI, AND

MTSS implementation on classroom time, student behavior and academic achievement:

A Phenomenological Study

Dear Robert Pettit and Alicia Rapson,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP Administrative Chair Research Ethics Office

Liberty University  
IRB-FY22-23-1274  
Approved on 6-15-2023

## Appendix B

### Permission letter to Superintendent of Schools

Dear Superintendent of Schools,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study. I am currently enrolled at Liberty University's Doctoral Program in Langley, Virginia, and am in the midst of completing my dissertation. The study is labeled: Exploring the Influence of PBIS, RTI, AND MTSS implementation on classroom time, student behavior and academic achievement: A Phenomenological Study. More precisely, I am attempting to ascertain which leadership attributes, traits, or other factors directly affect increased teacher morale when they work in or with this program.

I am hoping you will authorize this study project and permit me to recruit willing educators at each of the district's five campuses. If educators agree to join, I will recruit teachers and paraprofessionals from their respective schools. I want to use document analysis, individual conversations with school teachers, and teacher focus groups. Volunteers will be chosen to take part in interviews and focus groups. Before I look at any documents, do any interviews, or hold any focus groups, I will get approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for all protocols, letters, consent forms, and data collection tools. Participants will be asked to complete an interview and may be selected to be part of the focus group for this study. A RtI Beliefs Scale will be distributed to for teachers to complete as well as the Leadership Practices Inventory will be completed on paper and pencil in the traditional manner. The Rti



Beliefs Scale takes about seven to ten minutes to complete, while the Leadership Practices Inventory takes about three to five minutes.

Both measurement tools will collect no personally identifiable information, ensuring the anonymity of teachers and paraprofessionals. The RtI Beliefs Scale data and the the Leadership Practices Inventory will be collected and stored using the proper security protocols. The data will be accessible only to me, the researcher, as Google Forms is password-protected. All data collected for this study will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored in a secure filing cabinet accessible only to me.

After this study is completed, the data will be sorted and coded by campus to construct a theory about which leadership attributes, traits, and other factors contribute to increased teacher morale. The data will be maintained for a period of up to two years in a closed filing cabinet accessible only to me. If administrators choose to inspect the data, they will only be able to do so after it has been coded. However, this third party will not be able to identify the school district or individual schools.

If this study is published, only aggregated data will be included. Neither the school district nor individual participants will suffer any charges. Additionally, no dangers are foreseen for any of the study's participants. If you provide permission, interested administrators who volunteer to participate will receive an approval letter to sign (a copy of which is enclosed) and return to me, the principal researcher, prior to any data collection. I will provide consent forms for administrative clearance, and willing teachers and paraprofessionals must sign and return them to me at the start of the survey procedure. We would be really grateful for your agreement to perform this study. Kindly contact me with any questions or issues you may have.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Pettit

Enclosures

Approved by:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Letter of Recruitment

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to determine how do general education elementary school teachers implement tiered systems of the RTI/MTSS model while delivering differentiated core curriculum instruction, and how does professional development assist both the teacher and the student's success and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be at least 18 years of age and have a minimum of 1 year of experience in working in the RTI/MTSS framework. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete an interview and the RTI survey will take around 30 to 45 minutes to complete and is very informal. The interview and the RTI survey will be used to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the fidelity of implementing Tiered interventions and your beliefs on how it is progressing in your district. It should take approximately 45 minutes to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document will be given to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Participants will receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card for participating in the study.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Pettit

Doctoral Candidate



Liberty University  
IRB-FY22-23-1274  
Approved on 6-15-2023

## Appendix D

### Letter of Consent in Study

**Title of the Project:** Exploring the Influence of PBIS, RTI, AND MTSS implementation on classroom time, student behavior and academic achievement: A Phenomenological Study.

**Principal Investigator:** Robert L. Pettit, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age and have at least 1 year of experience in working with in the Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered Support systems framework. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

This study will analyze teacher beliefs on RTI and MTSS in their district and how district PD assists teachers in implementing these tiered systems.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

The interview and the RTI survey will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete and is very informal.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 45 minutes to complete
2. If selected, you will be asked to fill out an RTI Belief Scale The RTI survey will take around 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Gathering your ideas and perspectives on the accuracy of implementing Tiered interventions as well as your feelings on how it is progressing in your district will be determined through the interview and the RTI survey.
3. Focus Groups will take around 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

#### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Your participation could help us better understand the impact of Tiered interventions on student's academic growth. PD is necessary to continuing education enables professionals to stay abreast of new developments in their field.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous./will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.]
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.].
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer or in a locked drawer if removal hard drive. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

**How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the survey/interview participants will receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card for their participation. Any participant who chooses to withdraw from the study after beginning but before completing all study procedures will still receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card. Email addresses will be requested for compensation purposes; however, they will be collected at the conclusion of the survey to maintain your anonymity.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

The voluntary-participation wording **is required** for all research. Please review the options in red and select the appropriate options based on your study design.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be



included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher[s] conducting this study is Robert L. Pettit. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED].

You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Allison Rapson, at

[REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher[s], **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

## Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher[s] will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

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Signature & Date

Liberty University  
IRB-FY22-23-1274  
Approved on 6-15-2023

## Appendix E

### Interview Questions

#### *Semi-Structured Open-Ended Questions for Participants*

The guiding interview questions are as follows:

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. What is your gender (Optional)?
3. What is your age range? Under 25? 25-30? 31-35? 36-40? Over 40?
4. What is your level of education?
5. What grade or grades do you typically teach?
6. How long have you worked in education?
7. Please walk me through your teaching philosophy.
8. How clear is your school or district's vision for MTSS?
9. Describe any professional development or pedagogical assistance you have received concerning the MTSS framework since you began working.
10. Describe the challenges you have encountered implementing interventions associated with the MTSS framework.
11. Describe any accomplishments you've had with applying MTSS-aligned interventions in professional development and school-wide support.
12. Discuss some of the obstacles that your school faces while adopting MTSS-aligned interventions.

13. How could your school better assist you during the deployment and use of the MTSS framework?
14. Discuss how school administration could better support your experiences and use of the MTSS framework.
15. Discuss how policies and procedures at your school support the utilization of the MTSS framework.
16. How could your district or school adapt their policies and procedures to better support you when implementing interventions and utilizing the MTSS framework.
17. Pretend you are being interviewed in front of thousands of your peers at a convention. What would you like to tell them about the experiences they can expect when they implement intervention-based learning in their classrooms?
18. What else do you believe is important for me to know about your MTSS experience?

## Appendix F

### Focus Group Welcome Script

Welcome. Thanks for being here. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study on the implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. I want to begin by reviewing a few items:

1. Participation is voluntary, and although I am an employee of the District, I am conducting this research for partial fulfillment of a dissertation. As a small thank you, I will provide a \$5 dollar gift card of your choosing (Starbucks, Target, or Amazon.com). You may choose to discontinue participation at any time, and you still get to keep the gift card.

2. Please refer to the informed consent document. I am going to read over the informed consent document. Should there be any questions about the survey, please feel free to stop me and ask them.

3. After reading the informed consent document, what questions might you have? If you are still willing to participate in the study, please sign the informed consent document and have someone else sign the document as a witness.

4. The study will explore the lived experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams of five schools, which comprise Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-tiered Support Systems (MTSS) in one section of a major urban school district, in regards to the implementation of the RTI/MTSS framework, including (a) lived experience during implementation; and (b) levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components (multi-tiered system of

service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making). This research topic is opportune in light of the nationwide implementation of RTI as the study proposes to add to the literature about implementation considerations, particularly for urban districts and the students that these districts serve. The results of this study may be used to refine the implementation of RTI further and hence increase its effectiveness, which will improve educational outcomes across all students, including English learners, Standard English learners, special education students, and gifted students. Available upon your request will be a summary of the study's findings. You can obtain a copy by contacting me via email, telephone, or snail mail.

5. Before we begin, I want to outline that there are 13 questions about RTI implementation. I will utilize the focus group format and ask that folks answer in a rotating round-robin format and that everyone answers each question, even if it is to indicate agreement or a desire not to respond. All responses are confidential, and no individual or school names will be used; research numbers will be assigned, and responses will not be linked to individuals to protect subject identities. Please answer all questions honestly and candidly. The duration of the focus group will be about Forty-five minutes, and it will be audio recorded.

6. Thanks for meeting outside of school hours since the research cannot occur during school hours. Feel free to grab a coffee, water, or a snack. Also, feel free to take a break when needed. Are there any questions before we begin?

## Appendix G

<p>Observation Protocol:</p> <p>Exploring the Influence of PBIS, RTI, AND MTSS implementation on classroom time, student behavior and academic achievement: A Phenomenological Study.</p>	
Date	
Time	
Place	
<b>Descriptive Notes</b>	<b>Reflective Notes</b>
Narrative/Communication Responses from participant	



## Appendix H

### RtI Beliefs Scale - Revised 2018

1. District: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Role:

PS/RtI Coach       Teacher-General Education       Teacher-Special Education  
 School Counselor       School Psychologist       School Social Worker  
 Principal       Assistant Principal       Instructional/Content Coach

Other (Please specify):

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Grade levels you currently serve (check all that apply):

Preschool       Elementary School       Middle School  
 High School Other (Please specify):

\_\_\_\_\_

***Directions:*** Using the scale below, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements by shading in the circle that best represents your response.

**1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)**

**2 = Disagree (D)**

**3 = Neutral (N)**

**4 = Agree (A)**

**5 = Strongly Agree (SA)**

	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
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4. Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), when

effectively implemented, is a framework that allows

\_\_\_\_\_

educators to meet the needs of all students for:					
a. Academics	1	2	3	4	5
b. Behavior	1	2	3	4	5
c. Emotional and life skills	1	2	3	4	5
5. All students are capable of learning at high levels.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Tier 1 instruction should be effective enough to result in at least 80% of students achieving grade-level standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I have a responsibility to ensure that all students learn at high levels or meet grade-level standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
8. High school student outcomes (achievement levels, on-time graduation, post-secondary enrollment/career attainment) are related to student performance in elementary and middle school.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The primary function of supplemental and intensive (i.e., Tier 2 and Tier 3) instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level standards/expectations	1	2	3	4	5
10. The majority of students with learning disabilities are capable of achieving grade-level standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The majority of students with behavioral problems (EH/SED or EBD) are capable of achieving grade-level standards/expectations	1	2	3	4	5
12. Students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., SLD,	1	2	3	4	5

EBD) who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level standards/expectations					
13. Use of universal design for learning (UDL) principles allows all students to achieve grade-level standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Implementation of differentiated and flexible instructional practices allows teachers to address the needs of all students.	1	2	3	4	5
15. General education classroom teachers would be able to better implement more differentiated and flexible instruction (e.g., UDL) and interventions if they had:					
Additional administrator support	1	2	3	4	5
Additional professional learning (coaching, training, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Additional time for instruction/interventions	1	2	3	4	5
Additional materials	1	2	3	4	5
Additional time for collaborative planning (PLC's Lesson Study, Content/Grade-Level, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
16. The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Prevention activities and early intervention strategies	1	2	3	4	5

in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.					
18. The severity of a student's academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but instead by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Interventions should be provided with increasing intensity (time, group size, focus) based on student need.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Using ongoing student performance data to determine intervention effectiveness is the most accurate method (i.e., is more reliable and valid than educator judgment alone).	1	2	3	4	5
21. Evaluating a student's response to intervention(s) is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using !#\$%& scores from tests (e.g., IQ/Achievement test).	1	2	3	4	5
22. Additional time and resources should be allocated to students who are not reaching grade-level standards before significant time and resources !"# \$ % & are directed to students who are at or above standards/expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Graphing student data makes it easier to make decisions about student performance and needed	1	2	3	4	5

interventions					
24. Measuring intervention/instructional fidelity is important for making accurate instructional decisions	1	2	3	4	5
25. Monitoring intervention outcome data at the aggregate (group) level provides information to determine effective use of resources in relation to student response	1	2	3	4	5
26. The primary goal of assessment is to measure and inform effectiveness of instruction/intervention	1	2	3	4	5
27. A student's parent (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about the student	1	2	3	4	5
28. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions	1	2	3	4	5
29. Parents (guardians) and community members should be involved in decisions about Tier 1 instructional strategies and curricular materials	1	2	3	4	5