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Texas Educators' Perspectives on Implementing the IDEA Child Find Component Using Response to Intervention

Helen Ireton Weigand
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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Helen Ireton Weigand

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Texas Educators' Perspectives on Implementing the IDEA Child Find Component Using
Response to Intervention

by

Helen Ireton Weigand

MEd, Lamar University, 2016

BS, California University of Pennsylvania, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

The state of Texas has been cited through the U.S. Department of Education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as failing to identify students under the Child Find component of the law using Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered System of Support (RtI/MTSS). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify teachers' current knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA and their perceived barriers to RtI/MTSS implementation in Houston middle schools. Ely's conditions of change theory grounded the data collection and analysis to better understand the middle school teachers' perceived barriers regarding their schools' RtI/MTSS implementation. Interview questions supported the research questions by identifying how middle school educators currently implement RtI to identify struggling students for special education evaluation, and the educators' perceived barriers to RtI implementation. Nine middle school teachers were interviewed regarding their perceived barriers to implementing RTI in their middle schools. The transcribed responses were analyzed using a priori, open, and axial coding to determine themes to answer the research questions. Key findings were improper implementation, not using evidence-based interventions/accommodations, lack of fidelity with implementation, lack of knowledge, lack of training, and a lack of support from school leaders. The results were used to provide research-based recommendations to overcome teachers' perceived barriers to improve the implementation of RtT/MTSS in the research setting. The recommendations could improve how school leaders and educators meet the needs of students to improve RtI implementation within the schools.

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Dedication

This dissertation is in memory of my parents, Lois Balazick Ireton, and Gabriel Oates Ireton. Even though they could not see me complete this journey, they were both so proud when I began it. Because they believed in a strong education for all and their support in the knowledge of higher learning, I started this climb. This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband, David Paul Weigand, Sr, who has been my rock and support throughout marriage and this educational journey. Because of him and our children, David Jr, Jason, Alaina, Cassandra, Nathaniel, and Charles, I have completed this journey. I began my journey of working with children with special needs within special education programs as a fourth-grader helping in a self-contained EMR classroom when my school did not have school. I would not have completed this journey if not for my belief that all children with special needs must have equal access to their educational environment to succeed. So, my final dedication is to my children who I have been honored to serve as their teacher whom special needs and has required services through special education.

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I would like to thank my chair, Doctor Derek Schroll and my seconds, Dr. Jay Miller, retired and Dr. Hoffman for all their support and guidance through my dissertation process. I dedicate this dissertation to all of the amazing educators and special education educators that have nurtured me as I grew into the special education teacher I have become: Thomas Sheridan, who let me begin this journey has a fourth grader helping out in his class when I did not have school; Dr. Robert F Dickie, Mr. Paul Lancaster, Dr. Peter J. Belch, Mr. Lazor, and finally my mother, Lois Balazick Ireton, who let me work in her EMR classroom, allowing me to babysit special needs children, and for driving me to ARC Allegheny Summer Camps and respite weekends as I continued to work with disabled children.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Since 2004, Texas school districts, under guidance from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), have failed to identify students needing special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) under the Child Find mandate. In 2018, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), had the TEA create a corrective action plan to correct the state's continuing failure to identify students under IDEA. For over 20 years, an entire generation of teachers have been trained within Texas to use Response to Intervention (RtI) as a place to hold students and not refer them for special education evaluation. After years of inappropriate training, the USDE stated that TEA must retrain local education agencies (LEAs) in the implementation of RtI used to identify students through Child Find (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Rosenthal, 2016; TEA, 2020; USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b).

By interviewing Houston Area middle school educators, this study has identified how educators implemented RtI to identify students under the Child Find component of IDEA. This study was used to bridge the gap by identifying the educators' perceived barriers to implementing RtI under the Child Find component of IDEA. The results of this study could help Local Education Agencies - LEA determine their educators' current knowledge of the RtI process and what barriers are hindering their teachers with the successful implementation of Child Find using RtI.

Background

The TEA in 2004 created and began using the Performance-Based Monitoring and Analysis System (PBMAS). This system, under Indicator 10, identified the

percentage of students identified and receiving services through special education. Under the belief that students were being misidentified, Texas placed a cap on special education of 8.6% for each district. Whereas this was to help prevent the misrepresentation of students into special education, if districts had over this percentage, they were fined and lost funding to support these students. In 2016, the *Houston Chronicle* released a series of articles outlining how the TEA and Texas educators were keeping students out of special education and how students with disabilities were being kept out of special education. This series of articles brought about an investigation by the USDE in 2016, which determined that the TEA and their LEAs or school districts failed to identify students according to the IDEA under the Child Find Component. Again, in 2018, the USDE found that TEA and the Texas school districts were failing to comply with IDEA and the Child Find Component and were failing to identify students and had to create a corrective action plan to correct these violations (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Rosenthal, 2016; USDE, 2016, 2018).

After identifying these violations and creating the Corrective Action Plan, TEA identified through its website after 2018 that the state used RtI to identify special education students (TEA, 2018, 2021). In 2020, TEA sent a letter to the USDE stating that they believed they had completed and complied with the corrective action plan. However, in a response from the USDE in October 2020, the USDE stated that TEA was still failing to identify children through the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI. Finally, on August 27, 2021, the USDE sent another letter to TEA stating they had failed to comply with their corrective action plan and had 30 days to comply or risk losing

special education funding through federal grants due to failing to follow their corrective action plan and not identifying students under Child Find (USDE, 2020, 2021a).

The USDE, Office of Special Education, found in 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021, and again in 2023 that Texas Schools failed to identify disabled students, and has given the TEA and their LEAs multiple chances to correct the continuing problem of failure to identify students (USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2023a). It is important to remember that for over a decade, Texas districts used RtI as a place to hold children and not test them for special education to follow PBMAS Indicator 10. Due to this, an entire generation of teachers needed to be correctly trained on implementing RtI. Current educators need training to implement RtI successfully, which was also identified under the Texas Corrective Action Plan to the USDE (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; TEA, 2018).

Problem Statement

The problem is that Texas school districts fail to identify children with special needs under Child Find using RtI. In 2016 and 2018, the USDE informed the TEA that Texas school districts were not identifying students through the Child Find component of the IDEA using RtI. Again in 2020, 2021, and 2023, the USDE informed TEA and Texas school districts that students were still not being identified in a timely manner and that TEA had failed to implement the 2018 corrective action plan to support the identification of students through Child Find using RtI (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b).

Under IDEA, the Child Find component of the law states that a child with a disability must be identified (USDE, n.d.; Wright & Wright, 2016). Zinkle (2017) reviewed current legal court cases and found that 34% of the 91 cases reviewed found that the court found that districts had failed to identify the child. Multiple studies found that school districts nationwide fail to identify students under the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI or another MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support). These studies found that district leaders and teachers are unclear about how to implement Child Find given the language of the component within IDEA (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2018; Moore et al., 2017; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; USDE, n.d.; Wright & Wright, 2016).

In 2016 and again in 2019, the *Houston Chronicle* ran a series of articles that identified how Houston, Texas, area school districts failed to identify students using the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI. The 2016 articles helped to initiate the USDE investigation, which determined in 2018 that Texas was failing to identify children through Child Find. In 2019, the *Houston Chronicle* followed up with another series of articles that showed how Houston area schools still failed to identify children with special needs. These articles led to a follow-up letter by the USDE to TEA stating again that Texas was not identifying students through the Child Find component using RtI (Rosenthal, 2016; USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Webb, 2019, 2020). On August 4, 2021, parents of two students in Pearland Independent School District had a live press conference where they outlined what had been going on in

Pearland Independent School District and current litigation through due process due to the district failing to provide services for their children (KHOU 11 News, 2021).

This press conference was supported by a letter from the USDE to TEA from August 27, 2021, which identified that Texas failed to complete its corrective action plan and still failed to identify students following IDEA. The USDE had stated that regarding dyslexia, students need to be tested first through special education evaluations to rule out other underlying disabilities. If the dyslexic student does not qualify for special education, then the student should receive services under the state and district dyslexia programs under Section 504 (Dellinger, 2021; USDE, 2021a, 2021b). This corresponded with the information shared through the press conference. Current correspondence still shows that Texas fails to identify students under the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify how educators are implementing RtI within the Child Find component of IDEA and to identify the educators' perceived barriers with the implementation of RtI within middle schools in Houston, Texas, to comply with the Child Find Component of IDEA. Current literature, newspaper articles, press conferences and USDE findings show that Texas districts and school personnel are failing to identify students using RtI to refer students for special education evaluation and services (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; KHOU 11 News, 2021; Knight & DeMathews, 2018; Rosenthal, 2016; USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2023a; Webb, 2019, 2020). The results of this study identified themes that helped determine the

teachers' current knowledge regarding the implementation of the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI and if the teachers had any perceived barriers regarding the implementation of RtI in Houston area middle schools. The results of this study could be used to help Houston area districts and their educators set up training and programs to support their teachers based on their current knowledge of how to implement the program and their perceived barriers that the teachers believed impede their ability to successfully implement RtI/Child Find.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How are middle school educators currently implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI to identify struggling students for special education assessment and services?

RQ 2: What are middle school educators' perceived barriers with the implementation of RtI?

Conceptual Framework

To address the research question in this qualitative study, I used a basic qualitative design using interviews to determine how the middle school educators were implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI and their perceptions of the barriers that hindered this implementation. Based on these questions, I gained data on the current implementation of RtI and the educators' knowledge of RtI, their duties, and its implementation in middle schools within districts in Houston, Texas (Nagro et al., 2019). Ely's condition of change theory helped to ground the data collection and analysis to identify the teachers' perceived barriers with the current implementation of RtI under

Child Find in Texas. Ely's theory is a recognition that conditions within an environment, such as RtI, may hinder the successful implementation of an educational program (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999).

Ely (1990, 1999) identified eight conditions that could affect the implementation of innovation, which is RtI in this current study. These conditions include (a) not being satisfied with the current implementation of a program, (b) the knowledge base of the staff implementing the program, (c) materials needed for the program are readily available, (d) staff being given the time to learn and implement a program, (e) rewarding staff for their effort, (f) participation is expected, (g) district and state officials support of the program, and (h) effective and supportive school leadership. Texas districts and schools need teacher buy-in for the programs to work, and if teachers are not buying into the program's implementation, this could be a barrier (Hollingsworth, 2019).

Nature of the Study

The selection of Ely's theory was because of the eight conditions identified that could affect the implementation of a program (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999). A basic qualitative research design was conducted to determine how the middle school educators were implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI and their perceptions of the barriers that hindered this implementation. Data were collected using semistructured interviews informed by an interview protocol designed to answer the research questions. I developed the interview questions through an extensive literature review and Ely's eight conditions. Specifically, current literature and Ely's conditions were used to help develop a priori codes to analyze the interview data. In addition, I conducted open coding to

ensure a complete thematic analysis. The analyzed data were reread to group codes as needed, form categories, and then into themes. The final themes provided a deeper understanding of Houston area middle school teachers' current knowledge about the implementation of RtI and the perceived barriers preventing their successful implementation of RtI.

Definitions

The purpose of this study was to explore educators' current understanding of the RtI process and to identify whether they have some sort of perceived belief of barriers affecting the successful implementation of the Child Find component of IDEA. The terms below helped support this study and its findings.

Child Find: A component of the IDEA that states that all children suspected of having a disability living in a state are to be identified through the state and their agents for special education if they qualify through special education evaluation (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; USDE, n.d., 2016, 2018, 2020).

Response to Intervention – RtI: A multi-tiered problem-solving intervention plan integrated into all classes to help improve instructional delivery for all children. But to support struggling students (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017).

Teacher's perceptions: The beliefs teachers have about implementing an educational program, like RtI, within their schools and classrooms (Dunn, 2018).

Assumptions

I assumed all educators participating in the study provided honest and truthful responses to the interview questions. I also assumed that the middle school educators

answered the interview questions based on their first-hand experience regarding their daily implementation of RtI within their schools based on their general knowledge of the program and not using general knowledge or hearsay from other educators.

Scope and Delimitations

The participants were limited to middle school educators (Grades 6–8) in the Houston, Texas, area to identify how the middle school educators were implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI and their perceptions of the barriers that hinder the implementation of RtI through the Child Find component of IDEA. The study results are specific to middle schools in Houston, Texas.

Limitations

Limitations during this study may include participants' responses to the interview questions, the creation of the questions for interviews, and educators' responses to the social media invitations to be included in the study. Educators may have been fearful of responding to questions regarding the current implementation of RtI within their schools and their perceived barriers that impede the implementation of RtI to comply with the Child Find Component of IDEA. Also, the literature reviewed regarding the implementation barriers of RtI is from outside the Houston area, and the perceived barriers of those educators may not be the same as Houston area educators.

Significance

Since the 2016 findings against the TEA and school districts, minimal studies have been done to determine if Texas school personnel understand how to implement RtI, and that is a component to identify struggling students under the Child Find component

of IDEA. DeMatthews and Knight (2019) found that Texas schools had used RtI to hold struggling students without referring them for special education evaluation for over twenty years. The student would remain in RtI for years, and at the beginning of each school year, it would start all over again to limit the number of students being referred for special education evaluations. Districts trained teachers and administrators to keep students in RtI without recommending special education evaluations to keep their special education numbers low (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Rosenthal, 2016; USDE, 2018). DeMatthews and Knight also stated in the conclusion of their 2019 study, where they reviewed state data with the USDE findings, that future research could include a qualitative approach where educators could be interviewed about their knowledge and implementation of the Child Find Component of IDEA. Knight and DeMatthews (2020) found that since removing the 8.5% special education cap, the number of students referred for special education evaluation has only risen minimally. Recent newspaper articles have also supported this minimal increase (Raise Your Hand Texas, 2023; Swaby, 2020; Webb, 2019; Webb, 2020).

Knights and DeMatthews (2020) also identified that current teacher preparation programs do not teach future teachers about the RtI components or how to implement them correctly. The USDE has also determined and informed TEA in 2020 and again in 2023 that they have not completed the necessary training for their LEAs regarding the implementation of RtI. Since the USDE has determined that the LEA training has not occurred, this could be one of the barriers to the successful implementation of the program within Texas as a whole. However, there is a need to examine the specific

perceived barriers to implementation. The expectations of the USDE regarding progress monitoring within RtI and referral for special education evaluation have not occurred based on the Texas corrective action plan (TEA, 2020; USDE, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b).

Texas has shown minimal progress in completing its corrective action plan, which is why this study is significant. For over 20 years, a generation of Texas teachers were trained to use RtI as a holding pattern, not to refer students for special education. Due to this type of inaccurate teacher training on implementing RtI, thousands of students have been denied the free and appropriate public education and special education services that the students should have received. After years of inappropriate training, the USDE stated that TEA must retrain LEAs to implement RtI. The school personnel that were interviewed identified their current knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA and what barriers hinder the successful implementation of RtI within their middle schools. This study could bridge the gap by identifying the teacher's current knowledge base regarding the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI and the teachers' perceived barriers regarding the implementation of RtI in Houston area middle schools. The results of this study could help LEAs determine their educators' current understanding of what the Child Find component of IDEA is and what barriers are hindering them from being able to implement the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI successfully.

Summary

Since 2016, the USDE has found that TEA and LEAs within Texas have failed to identify students with disabilities under the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI.

Under the state's corrective action plan, TEA was to train LEAs to follow the Child Find Component of IDEA. TEA has identified RtI as the method the state will use. In the 7 years since the initial findings and creation of the corrective action plan, Texas schools, as well as schools in the Houston area, have still struggled to successfully identify children using the Child Find component of IDEA through the implementation of RtI within the schools (TEA, 2020, 2021; USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b).

Chapter 1 included the background behind Texas being identified as failing to identify students under the Child Find component of IDEA. Since this is an ongoing issue in Texas, current research has been minimal. This basic qualitative study aimed to identify Houston area teachers' current knowledge of IDEA's Child Find component and perceived barriers to implementing RtI within their schools. In Chapter 2, I will review primary and secondary research on Child Find and RtI. I will explain what RtI is and how it is supposed to support the Child Find component of IDEA by identifying struggling students. I will also identify possible barriers to implementing RtI in other areas outside of Texas and current research regarding Texas.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem guiding this research is that Texas school districts are failing to identify children with special needs under the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI. The USDE has found and identified that Texas has failed to identify and provide services for students under the Child Find Component of IDEA. In 2021 and 2023, the USDE still identified the failure and gave the state and their schools 30 days to comply and follow their corrective action plan. In 2018, when Texas initially created the corrective action plan, it identified that the schools would use the RtI model to identify students (TEA, 2018, 2022; USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b). Based on these current and continuing findings, the purpose of this study was to identify educators' perceived barriers to the implementation of RtI/Child Find within Houston, Texas, area middle schools.

Literature Search Strategy

Through Walden University's online library and Google Scholar, I was able to locate literature relevant for this study. Primarily, I used the Education Source Database within the Walden University Library. The key words used to search for relevant literature were *response to intervention or RtI, barriers to implementation, educators' barriers to RtI, implementing or implementation or embedding or facilitating, RtI or MTSS, and Ely's condition of change.*

Conceptual Framework

Ely's theory guided the conceptual framework of this study. Ely identified eight conditions that could affect the successful implementation of a program (Ellsworth, 2020;

Ely, 1990, 1999). Since Texas's current history has shown a continuing failure in the ability of Texas and its districts to identify disabled students using RtI within IDEA successfully, the question is why? Ely's eight conditions helped to identify what the educators perceived as a barrier to the successful implementation of RtI and the successful identification of disabled students within Texas schools. The eight conditions Ely identified were (a) not being satisfied with the current implementation of a program, (b) the knowledge base of the staff implementing the program, (c) materials needed for the program are readily available, (d) staff being given the time to learn and implement a program, (e) rewarding staff for their effort, (f) participation is expected, (g) district and/or state officials support of the program, and (h) effective and supportive school leadership (Ellsworth, 2020; Ely, 1990, 1999). Using these eight conditions along with current USDE findings of Texas' failure to identify guided this study to identify the current knowledge of educators regarding the Child Find component of IDEA and their perceived barriers to the implementation of RtI in Houston area middle schools.

Aligning the USDE finding with Ely's eight conditions shows that the current implementation of RtI has not been effective and has not aligned with the state's strategic action plan, hence why the USDE keeps finding that Texas has not complied with their strategic action plan and is still finding that Texas is still failing to identify students. This supports the identification of both conditions while supporting that Texas does not seem to be supporting the implementation of RtI due to its failure to supervise its districts with their implementation of this program (Ensinger, 2021; USDE, 2016; 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b). Since this theory can already be used to identify conditions

occurring at the state level with the implementation of RtI, hopefully, the continued use of this theory has helped this study identify the perceived barriers to the successful implementation of RtI through the local educators' perspectives.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

History of Texas's Failure to Identify Children Under IDEA Through Child Find and Misuse of RtI

In 2004, Texas and the TEA implemented the PBMAS. One of the accountability integers in the PBMAS looked at the percentage of students receiving special education under IDEA per district and their schools. Districts were fined and lost funding if the percentage of students receiving special education services was over 8.5% (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Rosenthal, 2016; USDE, 2016).

In 2016, a series of articles in the *Houston Chronicle* highlighted how Texas Schools and TEA kept students out of special education using RtI and Section 504 placements. This series of articles brought about the first investigation by the USDE regarding Texas' compliance with IDEA and the Child Find component. The USDE found that Texas had failed to identify students for special education under IDEA through the Child Find component and, by doing this, failed to provide these students with a free and appropriate public education since these services had been denied. The USDE's findings identified what Texas needed to do to comply with the Child Find component of IDEA and fix the issue of the state failing to identify students. The USDE also said they would return to review the progress in 2018 (Rosenthal, 2016; USDE, 2016).

In 2018, the USDE returned to Texas to check on TEA and the progress of Texas schools. The monitoring report sent from the USDE to TEA again showed that Texas was still failing at identifying disabled students under the Child Find component of IDEA and thus still denying students their free and appropriate public education. The USDE stated again that the state had failed to supervise and monitor their districts as directed by IDEA to ensure that school districts implement IDEA's Child Find component and Free and Appropriate Public Education - FAPE correctly (USDE, 2018).

In 2020, the USDE reviewed Texas and its districts and continued to find that TEA and its districts were still non-compliant under IDEA and FAPE. In contrast, there had been some improvements overall, but the state had not executed its corrective action plan (USDE, 2020). This led to another exposé from the *Houston Chronicle* that showed very little had changed. Students, especially those with dyslexia, were still being denied services because they were not being evaluated for services (Webb, 2020). These articles, the newest findings, and a USDE letter in August of 2021 found that Texas RTI services and local Texas laws allow Texas to not evaluate dyslexic students for special education but place them in 504 services that do not provide specialized instruction. Due to these failures, the August 2021 letter informed Texas that they had 30 days to correct the issues regarding identifying dyslexic students. Texas was not having dyslexic students evaluated through a special education evaluation first and instead was doing dyslexic evaluation and placing these students in dyslexia programs not within special education and directed by IDEA. Before placing these students in a stand-alone dyslexia program, Texas must evaluate through the Child Find component under IDEA. If the student did not qualify,

the student could be in the state's stand-alone dyslexic program with a 504 plan. The letter further stated that the district had 30 days to correct this issue or lose funding (USDE, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

Finally, in October 2021 and again in 2023, the USDE sent the latest letters to TEA and the state of Texas. It stated that since Texas had not been able to comply with its corrective action plan since 2016 and had continually failed to identify students under IDEA through Child Find, the state would lose funding by failing to provide these students with their FAPE. According to the letter, the state has misappropriated \$33,302,426.00 of the IDEA grant money for identification and providing services for students under IDEA and must repay this money—losing \$33,302,426.00 of special education IDEA grant funding (USDE, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a). This history has helped to guide this study because, given these findings and Texas' failure to fix RtI services and identification of students, why are schools and their educators failing to identify these students? This history supports the need to understand better educators' current understanding of the Child Find component of IDEA and what they believe or perceive to be the problems within their schools and districts when identifying these students for special education evaluations and possible services.

Response to Intervention

RtI is an MTSS used in most states in compliance with the Child Find component of IDEA (Berkeley et al., 2020). RtI is based on six foundational components, which are (a) screening, (b) primary or Tier 1 interventions, (c) secondary or Tier 2 interventions, (d) tertiary or Tier 3 interventions, (e) progress monitoring, and (f) multidisciplinary

evaluation. These six components can look different from state to state because of how or whether the state education agencies have communicated the state guidelines and expectations with their LEAs or school districts (Berkeley et al., 2020; McDaniel et al., 2013).

This study was driven by Texas's continued failure to identify children using the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI and the perceived barriers that Texas educators have regarding implementing RtI within their middle schools. Explaining each component of RtI may help identify the teachers' perceived barriers to RtI implementation. Each state is supposed to set up its guidelines and expectations for RtI. Unfortunately, current findings from the USDE show that Texas has failed to do this under its corrective action plan (TEA, 2018; USDE, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b). Using these components with efficacy can help produce a successful RtI program within a school system (McDaniel et al., 2013). The paragraphs below will give a general description of each of the six components.

The first component of RtI is screening. The screening component is given to all students and is the responsibility of the general education teacher. This screening and the screening data review help identify students who may be at risk for failing. School-wide beginning-of-year assessments and or reviews of previous years' state assessments are not the only way students can be identified. Teachers and parents can also identify students who may be at risk for failing. The correct identification of at-risk students is a crucial component for the success of RtI and student success (Garland & Strosnider, 2020; McDaniel, 2013).

Tier 2 interventions are the third component of RtI. The screening component identifies students receiving Tier 2 interventions as being at risk for failing and receiving additional evidence-based interventions. The general education teacher pulls the students receiving these supports into small group instruction within their general education classroom. The general education teacher is responsible for implementing the Tier 2 interventions and collecting data on the results of these interventions. General education teachers may receive collaboration to help design and monitor the intervention progress by special education teachers, school psychologists and or diagnosticians, speech and language pathologists, and other school personnel, but this is based on their state's guidelines and expectations (Berkeley et al., 2020; Garland & Strosnider, 2020; McDaniel et al., 2013).

The fourth component is Tier 3 or tertiary interventions, which continue the Tier 2 interventions through the general education teacher with the continued data collection regarding these interventions but add a pull-out high-intensity intervention for struggling students. Tier 3 interventions are generally done by pulling the student out of the general education classroom for either 1:1 or 3:1 intervention with an additional support teacher (Garland & Strosnider, 2020; McDaniel et al., 2013).

The fifth component of RtI is progress monitoring. Progress monitoring happens through all three tiers of RtI. Progress monitoring is the collection of intervention data and must be done through all tiers with fidelity. Through this data collection, the teachers implementing the interventions provide the RtI or multidisciplinary committee with the necessary documentation of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the interventions and

the student progress within the learning environment. This data/progress monitoring helps the RtI or multidisciplinary committee determine if the interventions can be discontinued, continue the current interventions, or try different interventions, or if the student needs more high-intensive interventions or if the student needs to be referred for a multidisciplinary/ special education evaluation (Berkeley et al., 2020; Garland & Stosnider, 2020; McDaniel et al., 2013).

The final component of RtI is the multidisciplinary evaluation or special education evaluation. For this component to occur, the RtI/multidisciplinary team must review the data from the progress monitoring of the Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Based on the student progress outlined in the progress monitoring data, the team will determine if the student should be referred for a multidisciplinary/special education evaluation (Berkeley et al., 2020; Garland & Stosnider, 2020; McDaniel et al., 2013). For RtI to succeed, the components must be implemented with fidelity to help support RtI's successful implementation. Teachers must know their importance to the RtI process to support at-risk students.

Teacher Knowledge of RtI and Perceived Barriers to the Implementation of RtI

Earlier in this chapter, the history of why Texas failed to identify students through Child Find was reviewed. Current findings are still showing that Texas continues to have difficulties identifying students through Child Find using RtI (DeMathews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; TEA, 2018; USDE, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a; Webb, 2019, 2020). This led to the review of current nationwide journal articles regarding RtI implementation and what teachers identified as issues that hinder the

implementation of RtI. Through reviewing these articles, the section above reviewed the six components of RtI. By reviewing these articles, it will help determine which components of RtI that the teachers are struggling with as they are implementing RtI.

The first four components of RtI include assessment/screening, Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions. Each intervention requires data collection and progress monitoring to be reviewed by the RtI team to determine whether the student needs to be referred for a special education evaluation. A review of recent articles found that teachers did not understand how to implement RtI. They did not understand the components of RtI or how to implement evidence-based interventions and collect data. They have a general misunderstanding of how to implement RtI. All teachers who were involved in these studies identified the need for training and administrative support as well as the need for more resources to help them support the students (Al Otaiba et al., 2019; Braun et al., 2020; Dunn, 2018; Henderson, 2018; Kressler & Cavendish, 2020; Mahoney, 2020; March et al., 2020; Negro et al., 2019; Nicols, 2017).

Only two studies in this literature review have dealt with implementing RtI within Texas since the USDE findings. Both studies looked at RtI and its implementation through the eyes of Texas administrators, but not the educators who implement RtI daily (Barton et al., 2020; Roberts & Guerra, 2017). Roberts and Guerra (2017) found that administrators felt they needed additional knowledge and training on special education laws and RtI and that principal certification programs should have given them more information regarding special education laws and the requirements of IDEA. This study showed that administrators do not understand the laws to implement Child Find and

comply with IDEA effectively. The second Texas study was done by Barton et al. (2020), who also examined administrators' perceptions of implementing RtI in rural elementary schools. The study's results revealed six themes to the administrators' responses that ultimately showed that these Texas administrators had concerns about how effectively their schools implemented RtI in rural Texas elementary schools. The six themes were "value, leadership, training, process; student focus, and concerns that included funding, resources, teacher turnover, training, and time" (Barton, 2020). The administrators that participated in the study did not believe they had the understanding to do so with their current understanding of RtI, and they felt they needed more training.

Most studies reviewed looked at elementary schools and the implementation of RtI. Three journal articles by Mahoney (2020), Kressler and Cavendish (2020), and Thomas et al. (2020) were found to look at the secondary setting, but only one of the articles looked at the middle school setting. Mahoney identified three areas that teachers felt hindered the implementation of RtI. The results found that the teachers struggled to match evidence-based strategies to meet the student's needs. The teachers also identified that general education teachers did not implement the evidence-based strategies with fidelity. Overall, this study identified that the teachers wanted more training to implement RtI effectively. The second study, completed by Kressler and Cavendish, regarding implementing RtI in the secondary setting found that none of the teachers understood the six components of RtI to implement the program successfully. Teachers again identified the need for training on RtI to implement the program effectively.

The final study completed by Thomas et al. (2020) dealt with the middle school environment in the secondary setting. Thomas et al. found that the teachers believed that a middle school environment was not supportive of the successful implementation of RtI due to staffing, scheduling, and service delivery. The teachers further identified that implementing RtI caused a change in personnel roles within the building capacity, and they lacked the time necessary to implement RtI. Thomas et al.'s study showed that the teachers had many misconceptions about RtI and did not understand its components. They identified that the teachers needed high-quality and intensive training on RtI and how to implement RtI within the secondary setting.

Dimarco and Guastello (2021) completed a study that reviewed previous journal articles that looked at the barriers that interfered with successful RtI interventions in secondary education settings. They included secondary principals and teachers in their study. Their review of previous research found that teachers did not understand the purpose of RtI or how to implement the program with fidelity. These findings of teachers and administrators not understanding the purpose of RtI or how to implement the program with fidelity were also supported within this literature review with studies completed by Thomas et al. (2020) and Kressler and Cavendish (2020). They further identified through the review of articles that positive administrative support helps support the implementation of RtI. They found that administrators had a better chance of successfully implementing RtI when administrators supported their teachers. Ely's eight conditions identified that for a program to be successful, district and/or state officials must support the program and that there must be effective and supportive school

leadership for success (Ellsworth, 2020; Ely, 1990; Ely, 1999). The researchers found that if the administrators provided training as well as communicating and providing resources that outlined the purpose of RtI. By administrators supporting the professional learning environments first while training and supporting the RtI implementation, these programs can help support the students in secondary education (Dimarco & Guastello, 2021).

In 2019, Alahmari reviewed RtI literature regarding general education teachers' perceptions and implementation of RtI. During this study, he focused on the role of general education teachers in implementing RtI. Based on this literature review, the barriers that impeded the implementation were a lack of time to construct instruction, a lack of support from their schools' administrators, and a lack of knowledge about evidence-based practices related to their content areas. From these results, the success of the implementation of RtI depends on teachers' knowledge about RtI and its implementation, as well as the support of their administrators.

Alahmari followed up this study in 2020 by completing a qualitative study where he interviewed four teachers in an urban Florida school. The study aimed to interview teachers to examine their perspectives on RtI and RtI intervention implementation within the classrooms and to gain teachers' suggestions regarding RtI. Based on these interviews, there were several positive perspectives regarding RtI. These perspectives were: only students in private schools demonstrated progress receiving RtI services, and the teachers believed progress monitoring helped to keep teachers on track. Findings regarding the content of RtI included training, teacher confidence in RtI, and teacher

collaboration. The results also produced some negative findings of RtI based on their perspectives. These included difficulty with planning, RtI being confusing, not having enough time to implement the program, RtI excessive paperwork, and delays in identifying students for special education services (Alahmari, 2021).

These findings helped to support the idea that teachers' perspectives were impacted by their confidence in their ability to implement the program successfully. Through training, teachers understand the components of RtI and how these components work to identify struggling students. Once given support with the implementation of RtI, the teachers reported they were able to build more confidence with their implementation of RtI and were less intimidated by RtI (Alahmari, 2021).

Based on these articles, educators and administrators identified their perceived barriers to their ability to implement RtI in secondary settings, including middle schools as it is considered a secondary setting, including (a) lack of training about RtI and its purpose, (b) lack of knowledge about evidence-based interventions, (c) lack of time to plan and create instruction and, (d) lack of administrative support (Alahmari, 2019; Alahmari, 2020; Dimarco & Guastello, 2021; Thomas et al, 2020). Ely's eight conditions support these findings because the three findings are supported by the second condition, which discusses the knowledge base of the staff implementing the program, as well as the fourth condition, which states that the staff should be given time to learn and implement the program (Ellsworth, 2020; Ely, 1990, 1999). Other articles reviewed across elementary to secondary settings found that teachers lacked the knowledge about the six components of RtI to understand why this program and their duties were essential to help

struggling students. These findings also are supported by Ely's conditions because, again, the knowledge base of the staff of the program is necessary for a successful implementation of the program as well as the staff being given the time to learn and implement the program (Ellsworth, 2020; Ely, 1990; Ely, 1999). Without an understanding of why RtI and its components are essential to help struggling students, teachers form misconceptions about the program because, according to Ely's conditions, district officials are not supporting the program's implementation due to their lack of teacher training on RtI program (Ellsworth, 2020; Ely, 1990; Ely, 1999). The studies showed that teacher training was needed to assist all schools with implementing RtI. Ely's eight conditions for successful program implementation are identified as the second condition, the knowledge base of the staff implementing the program. Suppose the teachers and administrators are not given the necessary support to understand the program. In that case, the district is not supporting the program's implementation, which is Ely's seventh condition. Without training the administration as well as the teachers to implement RtI, it does not allow the school administration to have the knowledge base necessary to give their staff effective and supportive leadership through the program's implementation, which aligns with Ely's second and eighth condition program (Ellsworth, 2020; Ely, 1990; Ely, 1999).

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter reviewed the current literature that supports teachers' knowledge of RtI and their perceptions regarding barriers to the implementation of RtI that supports this study. The Child Find component of IDEA has used RtI or other MTSS to identify

students for special education evaluation for over two decades with little consistency between states and their districts (Savitz et al., 2018). With the implementation of the PBMAS in Texas in 2004, Texas ultimately placed a cap on the number of students school districts were allowed to have in special education. This led to Texas districts using RtI for over a decade to use RtI as a place to hold children and not refer them for special education evaluation using the RtI model (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019).

Unfortunately, since the initial USDE findings in 2016 against Texas regarding its failure to identify students through Child Find in the seven years since the initial USDE finding, Texas still fails to identify students (USDE, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a). Texas's failure to identify students is the problem that guides this study because we need to know why this is still occurring.

The current literature review had one central theme: teachers needed training on RtI to help successfully implement the program. Teachers that were interviewed through these studies had misconceptions about the program and did not understand the concepts of RtI to be able to implement the program successfully (Alahmari, 2019; Alahmari, 2020; Al Otaiba et al, 2019; Braun et al., 2020; Dimarco & Guastello, 2021; Dunn, 2018; Henderson, 2018; Kressler & Cavendish, 2020; Mahoney, 2020; March et al., 2020; Negro et al, 2019; Nicols, 2017; Thomas et al, 2020). Only two studies have been completed in Texas looking at administrators' perceptions regarding special education law and the implementation of RtI. These studies found that administrators needed more training regarding special education law and RtI implementation (Barton et al., 2020; Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

This study aimed to examine teachers' current knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA, RtI, and their perceptions of barriers that hinder the implementation of RtI within Houston, Texas, middle schools. Using Ely's conditions to help align the teachers' perceived barriers helped to determine what changes need to occur to improve the implementation of RtI. This study contributed to the education field by identifying teachers' current knowledge base regarding the Child Find component of IDEA for district personnel, policymakers, and teacher preparation programs and what the teachers perceive as barriers to their successful implementation of RtI. These findings could help state and LEAs provide teacher training to help guide their teachers to successfully implement and understand RtI and its components and help Texas' struggling students.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this research study was to identify the current knowledge of their educators regarding the Child Find component of IDEA and the barriers they perceive impede the implementation of RtI/Child Find in Houston, Texas, area middle schools. Current findings of multiple years of USDE investigations show that Texas has failed to identify students through the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI. Since the first findings in 2016 until the latest update from the USDE in the summer of 2023, Texas has continued to fail to follow its corrective action plan and identify students under the IDEA component of Child Find (USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a). Due to Texas's continuing failure to identify students, the purpose of this research was to identify the current education knowledge regarding the Child Find component of IDEA and what they perceive are the barriers to implementing RtI within middle schools in the Houston area.

Chapter 2 examined current literature on the components of RtI, Texas's past and continuing problems with their inability to identify struggling students using RtI under Child Find, as well as a literature review regarding barriers that other studies outside of Texas identified that hindered the implementation of RtI. Chapter 3 provides the basic description of the research design, rationale, and methodology used in this study. A basic qualitative design was used to examine the current phenomenon and explore why or how it is occurring. For this basic qualitative study, I invited educators to participate. The instrumentation of this study was open-ended interview questions created to allow the educators to answer questions on the current phenomena occurring in Texas, which is the

failure to identify children for special education services using the Child Find component of IDEA, which includes RtI. The chapter also reviews my plan for collecting and analyzing the data. Finally, the chapter reviews the trustworthiness of the participants and the study's results and concluded with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

A basic qualitative study was conducted to investigate and identify educators' perceived barriers that impede the successful implementation of RtI within Houston area middle schools. The study participant pool was limited to middle school educators teaching Grades 6–8. The educators had different roles within their middle schools, giving the study diversity.

The research questions answered during this study are based on Ely's framework, which identifies eight conditions that support the successful implementation of programs. The literature review supported how Texas failed to identify students under the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI to determine whether the student needs special education services. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ 1: How are middle school educators currently implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI to identify struggling students for special education assessment and services?

RQ 2: What are middle school educators' perceived barriers with the implementation of RtI?

A basic qualitative study can generally be used when the researcher wants to glean information to help inform Texas stakeholders of middle school educators'

perspectives regarding the implementation of RtI (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When completing a basic qualitative study, open-ended questions allowed me to align the questions to the research question, and asking the participants open-ended questions that aligned with the research question allowed me to gather information (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Then, analyzing the responses into patterns, themes, and codes allowed me to identify perceived barriers to implementing RtI based on the educators' responses (see Saldaña, 2016).

I reviewed other qualitative research designs, including ethnographic, phenomenological, and longitudinal designs. These designs did not align with the research question of this study and were rejected. When a researcher is looking to investigate the experiences within the characteristics of a culture, they will use an ethnographic design (Babbie, 2021). This study did not focus on a cultural group and its characteristics; it looked at the perceived barriers that educators believe hinder the implementation of RtI within their middle schools. A phenomenological design looks at a single event that has already occurred (Babbie, 2021). Since the state of Texas and its school systems have been found in violation of failing to identify students under the Child Find component of IDEA/RtI beginning in 2016, these findings were not a single event but an ongoing issue of more than 5 years, so this design would not have been appropriate. The final design reviewed was longitudinal, a research design used when observing variables over time (Babbie, 2021), which was not the case in this study. This study aimed to identify educators' current knowledge of the Child Find component of

IDEA while implementing RtI and their perceived barriers to implementing RtI in the middle school setting.

When looking at a quantitative research design, I determined it was inappropriate for this study because it would not support this study's research questions. This study used individual interviews with teachers, and the data were collected through coding. Quantitative research designs are used when variables and data are collected through statistics (Burkholder et al., 2020). Quantitative research models allow researchers to test for relationships between two variables using a correlation research approach. This study did not compare the educators' knowledge of Child Find or perceived barriers to implementing RtI. Hence, the correlation research design was not appropriate for this study because the study did not test the relationships between two variables (Babbie, 2021). Since there were no variables to compare or investigate, the causal-comparative research design was not appropriate for this study (Babbie, 2021). When looking at other quantitative study designs, this study also does not align with the survey research or sampling pools. Survey research or sampling pools do not allow for individual answers from the interview questions this study asked their study participants (Babbie, 2021). Survey research or sampling pools would not have allowed me to probe and ask additional questions during the interview process used in this study.

Role of the Researcher

During this basic qualitative study, I acted as a collector of data by interviewing educators through individual interviews. Then, I analyzed and coded their responses to reflect the participants' perception of their individual beliefs about whether barriers

impede the implementation of RtI within their middle schools (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Based on the interview protocol explained by Rubin and Rubin (2012), I introduced myself as a doctoral student. Then, I asked open-ended research questions and additional questions that I had added to the interview questions to help guide me in getting the participants to add more information during their interviews when they occur, once I had gained permission from Walden University for this study. During the interview process, I was an impartial, objective, and careful interviewer. No participant in this study received any monetary stipend to be part of this study.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I found participants for this study through social media sites, including Facebook, Facebook Middle School Educator groups, LinkedIn, and X (formerly known as Twitter). Due to this, I chose to use a purposeful sampling strategy and only invited general education educators to participate in this study. Purposeful sampling allows a researcher to select potential participants based on a specific criterion, which may include a common experience that the participants share (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rumril Jr, 201). Which educators would be selected for the purposeful sampling for this study was determined by the district and Texas's RtI model. This model does not include special education or special teachers, including physical education, drama, band, choir, art, and career and technology instructors on middle school campuses. Due to Texas's and the district's practices, I used the purposeful sampling strategy, and participants came from the pool of general education educators. The inclusion criteria for this study were

that the participants taught the core subjects of English language arts, mathematics, social studies, or science.

After Walden University approved my dissertation proposal through the institutional review board (IRB) process (IRB approval no. 02-22-23-0982001), I created a social media invitation that gave a brief overview of the study and asked educators who are interested to please email me through my Walden University email.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument for this research project was a researcher-created open-ended research questions protocol (see Appendix A). Creating an open-ended questions protocol allowed me to ask each participant the same questions. It also gave me a template to follow for each question and each interview (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During the interview, I actively listened to the responses. I asked probative questions that allowed the interviewees to clarify and give more information to their initial responses to the questions.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) had nine open-ended questions with prompts to support me in asking follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. These questions allowed the participants to answer the questions how they chose. The protocol also had question prompts that allowed me to support how to follow up the initial questions with a probe to help the participants clarify their initial responses. The interview questions were created to align with Ely's theory, which included eight conditions that could affect the program's implementation (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999)—using the words “what” and “how” at the beginning of the interview questions

allowed the participant to describe their knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA and their experiences implementing RtI within their middle school (Babbie, 2021). The interview questions were created to answer each research question guiding this study and supporting the literature review.

The interviews were done using the online meeting platform Zoom. I emailed participants the link to the Zoom meeting and asked them not to log into Zoom under their names but with a participant number (P1, P2, etc.). Cameras were not used during the interview, so the interview had an audio-only recording of the participant. The recording was identified using the participant numbers, to protect each participant's confidentiality. Recordings were uploaded to my computer to allow transcription using the exact number identification into separate files.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Before beginning recruitment, I was approved to complete the study through Walden University IRB, and my social media invitation was approved through my Walden University dissertation chair. Chapters 1 and 2 explained why the research has chosen middle schools within the Houston area and, ultimately, why the educators were chosen. However, when looking at RtI, I observed that the core subject teachers had the most interaction with RtI, so I chose to use middle school educators who taught English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. After obtaining URR approval, I reached out through social media sites, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter), and invited educators to participate in the study. The invitation asked them to

email me through my Walden University email to receive more information about the study.

Based on the RtI model that TEA states Texas schools are to follow, all educators should use the tiered interventions and participate in the RtI process. Due to this, I chose to use a purposeful sampling strategy (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Once an educator emailed me and expressed their interest in the study after reviewing the social media invitation, I responded to their email by sending the Walden University consent form, which I informed them they needed to respond that they were interested. Once they responded, I sent them days and times for possible interview dates. Upon receiving a response with their date and time, I sent them a Zoom link for the study's interview. The sampling size of the purposeful sampling strategy was nine educators from the ones who agreed to be a part of the study. Currently, the districts within the Houston area do not include special education teachers or special teachers, including band, choir, art, physical education, career and technology, and drama, in their RtI model, so teachers that teach in these areas were excluded from the study.

Once I received IRB approval to proceed with the study, I identified the study's participants, and they emailed me expressing an interest in participating. I responded to their email by sending them the consent form sent to me by Walden University URR. Once the educators responded to the email with the consent form and agreed to be a part of the study, I emailed them dates and times we could have the interview, and they responded with the date and time that they wanted to be interviewed. Each interview was recorded using the Zoom platform without the participants using cameras. The

participants called in and identified themselves using the predetermined participation number of P1, P2, P3, etc., that I had sent to them before the interview with the Zoom link. After each interview, I downloaded the recording to my computer, saving it according to the participant's number assigned to the participant before the interview occurred. I could transcribe the interview using the transcription feature on Microsoft Word 360 through this download. This allowed me to create the transcription with a higher accuracy level. Once I transcribed the transcripts, I sent them to the participants to review for accuracy and determine if any statements needed clarification or removal before data analysis began.

Data Analysis Plan

Data for this study was collected through personal interviews with middle school educators who teach core academic subjects. The personal interviews aimed to collect data to identify middle school educators' current knowledge base regarding the Child Find component of IDEA and their perceived barriers to implementing RtI to identify Texas' struggling students. At first, data was analyzed to determine the educator's knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA and what barriers the educators perceive hinder the implementation of RtI within their middle school settings.

The data processes I was using for this study were a priori coding, open coding, and axial coding. A priori coding allowed me to create codes that align with Ely's eight conditions. Some examples of the a priori codes are lack of time to learn (LTL), lack of resources (LR), lack of training (LT), and lack of support (LOS) (see Appendix B). Then, I used open and axial coding to analyze the data to determine if additional codes might be

identified outside of the lens of Ely's conditions. Once the coding process was complete, the codes were grouped into categories as needed. Then, the categories were used to identify the key themes to determine the educators' current knowledge regarding the Child Find component of IDEA and to identify the perceived barriers of the middle school educators.

First Cycle Codes: A Priori Coding

I set up a priori coding to align with Ely's eight conditions. A priori codes can be created before the interview process begins (see Appendix B). Using the research questions, the literature review, and Ely's framework that identifies eight conditions for a program's successful implementation, I created the initial probe questions and follow-up question prompts to assist me during the interview process. These can be reviewed on the open interview protocol in Appendix B. The interview questions were created to allow a natural conversation between myself and the participants through broadly framing the questions to support open communication that will also help me gather the necessary data (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). The questions focus on the educators' experiences and knowledge of implementing RtI within their middle schools. Questions did not lead the participants to answer in any way and did not identify preconceived assumptions about the implementation of RtI or any judgments about its implementation through the phrasing of the questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2016).

Ely's (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999) first condition is a dissatisfaction of the status quo. The questions created in the protocol (see Appendix A) were to help

determine the educator's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current RtI process implemented on their campus. Codes that may be used to code Ely's first condition are: not wanting to change - NC; not implementing RtI - NIP; frustration with change - F; and having not been trained - NT.

The second condition identified by Ely (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999) is significant knowledge and skills that would allow an individual to proceed with the program's implementation. When coding for this condition, I coded the educator's knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA and their knowledge of RtI and how to implement the program. If educators do not have enough knowledge to understand the importance of the Child Find component of IDEA and how it supports the implementation and use of RtI, then the program implementation will be unsuccessful, according to Ely (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999). Codes for this condition included: no training/no understanding – NT2; minimal understanding/ need more training – MT, lack of knowledge – LOK, and significant knowledge and skill of program - SK.

Ely's third condition was the availability of resources (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999). For RtI to be implemented successfully, educators need access to Tier 1, 2, and 3 interventions and materials. They also need to be trained on implementing those interventions and take data on them to see if the interventions are helping the student bridge the gap. Codes to identify these conditions were: no access to interventions/materials – NA; lack of resources – LOR; do not know what interventions to use for the different tiers – DK2; have interventions/resources but do not know how to use them – HIDN, and using accommodations, not evidence-based interventions - UA.

Time was Ely's fourth condition. Educators must be given adequate time to 'learn, adapt, integrate, and reflect on what they are doing' (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999). This also refers to the organization's ability to give educators the time to learn how to implement RtI and if the educators want to learn how to implement Rti and its interventions (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999). Codes used to code this condition were: district does not give time to learn and implement program – DNT; educators do not want to learn and implement the program – ENL; and educator states that RtI takes too much time to implement and use/ do not have the time – TT.

Rewards and incentives are part of Ely's fifth condition. Ely's (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999) fifth condition involves the use of incentives by the district to help motivate the educators to learn and implement the program. Code that can be used to identify this condition includes: district/school does not provide rewards – DNR and district/school provide rewards - DR.

Ely's sixth condition was participation. According to Ely, the participants implementing the program should be involved in the decision-making. The educators should be allowed to communicate their ideas and opinions about the implemented program. Communication between the district/building administration could help to monitor the implementation of RtI (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999). Codes to identify responses aligned with this condition were: minimal communication about ideas and opinions – MC; no communication about ideas and opinions – NC, and teachers do not understand the program/ do not know who to contact - TC.

According to Ely (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999), the seventh condition was commitment. This condition delves into the commitment of the stakeholders, administrators, and educators to the implementation of the program. Commitment includes evidence that the district/administration continues to support the positive implementation of RtI within the schools. Code for this condition includes: educators do not believe that the district/administration supports implementation – DNS, and district supports implementation - DS.

The eighth and final condition identified by Ely (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990, 1999) was leadership. This condition looks at the expectations leadership implemented during their RtI implementation. Educators should be able to identify and understand the expectations for program implementation. The following codes were created to identify if the educators understand these expectations set for them by their leadership: leadership does not identify implementation expectations – LNI; leadership does not support implementation - LNS and educators do not feel supported - NS (see Appendix B).

Second and Third Cycle Coding: Open and Axial Coding

The second step of data collection was through open coding. Open coding allowed me to develop categories for the information collected in the interview process. Open coding allows the researcher to make comparisons and ask questions. Using the interview as a part of open coding, I broke down the interview responses to each question sentence by sentence. I categorized the a priori codes that were created based on Ely's eight conditions that identified the educator's knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA and their perceived barriers regarding the implementation of RtI (McCastelin, n.d.;

Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). The final cycle method I used was Axial coding. Axial coding allowed me to identify the categories connected to the initial codes and then place these categories into themes based on the a priori and open coding (Saldaña, 2016). These themes could identify the educators' current knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA and their perceived barriers regarding implementing RtI within their district/campus that ultimately supports the Child Find Component of IDEA.

Trustworthiness

Determining trustworthiness in qualitative research requires that the researcher constructs a criterion that has been agreed to by the research community. Burkholder et al. (2020) identified four concepts defining trustworthiness in qualitative research. The four concepts are dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

In qualitative research, dependability is shown when the data collected is analyzed and reported on and shows consistency. To verify or prove this, a researcher will use inquiry audits and triangulation (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Credibility shows that the research study's findings are believable based on the data collected and presented (Burkholder et al., 2020). When determining the information through the interview process, you use credibility. As the researcher, you must determine the participant's experience regarding the research subject and ensure it is first-hand information they share within the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Transferability helps to identify the external validity, which will show that the findings are generalized to the middle school educator population that were the participants of this study (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). The last concept is confirmability. With confirmability, another researcher would arrive at the same conclusion and identify the same barriers in other studies performed within other districts within Texas. Since this study used social media to gain participants, this will allow for educators' perspectives from different districts within the Houston area. Future studies with the same results and barriers would be improbable, and other researchers could compare their results with those of other educational settings. Due to this, future researchers will have to take into effect the different contextual factors within other educational settings and not expect to replicate the findings of this study exactly (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

Ethical Procedures

After the Walden University IRB approved my proposal, ethical concerns were considered. Once I obtained IRB approval for the study, I placed the social media invitation onto sites including Facebook, Facebook Middle School Educator Groups, X (formerly Twitter), and LinkedIn. Using my Walden University email address, I sent a letter to educators who responded to the social media invitation, further explaining the study. If they were still interested, I emailed them a link to meet with me to go over the consent form, which they would respond to after I read it allowed in the virtual meeting, and said, "I agree" for the interview to continue. All communication between myself and

the participants took place using personal emails for the participants to my Walden University email.

Formal consent from the participants had to occur before I could schedule or conduct interviews. I sent an email with the consent form that the participant could respond that they consented. However, since this research study requires an interview that is audio recorded, they consented to the study through the recording on the Zoom platform before the interview began. The consent form identifies the researcher, the purpose of the study, research procedures for the study, steps to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants, and that participation is voluntary and may be terminated by the participant at any time. Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher or IRB to ask questions for clarification or information about the study at any time during the process.

Research participants were told their identity and responses to the interview questions would be kept confidential. Participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identity. These pseudonyms (P1, P2, etc.) were given to the participant before their interviews. Prior to their interviews, participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from participating in the study. Participants were also assured of their confidentiality prior to the interview. Some participants may feel that identifying truthfully how RtI is being implemented on their campus may negatively affect them on their campus and within the district. It was essential to remind them of all the ethical and protective measures built into this study to protect their identity and confidentiality.

During this research study, all paper and electronic documentation, personal laptops, and audio recordings were locked in a secure cabinet in my home office. My laptop was password-protected as well. The research participants were reassured during the process that they could trust the researcher and that I would not have any documents regarding this study on my campus or classroom. All paper and electronic documents/files will be destroyed five years after the publication of this research study per university policy.

Summary

This qualitative study aimed to identify middle school educators' knowledge of the Child Find component of IDEA and their perspectives on the barriers that hinder the implementation of RtI to identify struggling Texas children under the Child Find component of IDEA. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants who met the criteria of being core subject educators for this research study. Once approved through Walden University URR, this study used a social media invitation to find participants. Participants emailed me through Walden University that they were interested, and then interviews were held to collect the data for this study. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) had nine open-ended questions to obtain the participants' knowledge and experience of using RtI, with follow-up prompts to help them clarify their responses to the initial questions. Data was collected from interviews and coded for data collection using grounded theory, which includes open, axial, and selective coding to identify codes and categories and emerging themes and patterns (Saldaña, 2016).

Using Walden University's IRB guidelines allowed me to create an open-ended interview question protocol and a Social Media Initiation. Included in this chapter were procedures to protect the confidentiality of participants as well as ethical considerations. Throughout this study, I included information regarding trustworthiness. In Chapter 4, I will present the setting, data collection, analysis, and results of this study based on the research questions guiding this study.

Chapter 4: Results

This study aimed to identify how educators are implementing RtI within the Child Find component of IDEA and the educators' perceived barriers to implementing RtI within middle schools in Houston, Texas, to comply with the Child Find component of IDEA. Current 2023 letters from the USDE and articles still show that for over seven years since the USDE first found that Texas failed to identify in 2016, the state is still not identifying struggling students under the Child Find component. Current 2023 letters from the USDE to TEA still identify that for over seven years, since the original findings against Texas in 2016, Texas is still failing to identify Texas' struggling students under the Child Find Component of IDEA (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Oettinger, 2023; Rosenthal, 2016; TEA, 2020; USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b). The research questions guiding this study are trying to determine how middle school educators currently implement Child Find using RtI to identify struggling learners and what the educators' perceived barriers are with the current implementation of RtI on their campus.

Middle school teachers' perceived barriers that hindered their implementation of Child Find/RtI within Texas schools in the metropolitan Houston Texas area were examined during this study. It was determined during the literature review that there is limited research covering secondary schools, which includes the middle school setting. Through this investigation, I have attempted to fill a gap in the research to help determine what is causing Texas school districts to be identified by the USDE as failing to identify students under the Child Find Component of IDEA. Current letters from the USDE

(2023a, 2023b) still indicate that Texas schools are failing to identify and provide struggling students testing and services under IDEA. Without information from the teachers' perceptions, some barriers hinder them from identifying and supporting the students within the RtI tiers. To address this gap, I researched the barriers that general education teachers perceive by interviewing middle school core subject teachers in Grades 6–8. This study design used a basic qualitative study. Study participants were interviewed through the Zoom platform. The interviews were transcribed and returned to participants for review. Then, the interviews were coded using a priori, open, and axial coding.

Chapter 4 will review the study's setting, including the conditions that may have influenced the participants and may affect the interpretation of the results of the data. I will describe how data were collected and how I analyzed the data through a priori codes, open coding, and axial coding. I will then review the results and how they align with Ely's condition of change theory.

Setting

The setting for this study involved nine middle school educators in the Houston Metropolitan area and their perspectives on the barriers impeding the schools from identifying struggling students under the Child Find Component of IDEA using RtI. Every educator who participated was a general education core subject teacher teaching either mathematics, English language arts, science, or social studies/history. According to the TEA (2018), Texas school districts are implementing RtI to identify and assist struggling students in determining if they need to be referred for special education

testing. Since the educators responded to a social media invitation for this study, this study did not require the educators to share the name of their district. Educators were interviewed using Zoom at various locations within the Houston Metropolitan area.

Demographics

The study participants comprised nine general education middle school teachers who taught Grades 6–8 in the Houston Metropolitan area as of March and April 2023, during the 2022-2023 school year. The teachers were interviewed using the Zoom platform after they responded to the social media invitation. Social media invitations were placed on X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and Facebook educator groups within Texas. The Facebook sites where I posted this study's invitation were as follows: Texas Teacher's Lounge, Texas Middle School Science Teachers, Texas Middle School Language Arts Teachers, Middle School Math, Texas ELA Teachers, Middle School Science Teachers, Middle School Math Teacher Community, Texas History Teachers, Texas ELA Teachers: STAAR Redesign, Texas Teachers, Texas 8th grade Social Studies Teachers, Texas Elementary and Middle School Math Teachers, History and Social Studies Teachers of Texas, Texas 6th Grade Science Teachers, Texas Social Studies Teachers, and Texas Teachers. For confidentiality reasons, teachers were not asked to share their names, and participants were not listed individually. Gender-specific pronouns were not used during the reporting of data from the interviews.

Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from the Walden IRB, I created a social media invitation following the Walden IRB guidelines. Once reviewed and approved by my dissertation

chair, Dr. Derek Scrolls, the invitation was posted on Facebook Texas Teacher sites, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter). Participants emailed me in response to the invitation if they were interested in participating in this study. I responded to their emails by sending the Consent Form, provided to me by the Walden IRB, with a request for dates and times that they would be available for a Zoom interview if they agreed to be part of the study after reading the Consent Form.

When participants responded to the email containing the consent request, they agreed to participate in the study. If they did not include days and times available for the Zoom interview, I would email them back, thanking them for their interest, and give them some days and times to pick from for the interview. Every week or so, I would post the social media invitation on the X, LinkedIn, and Facebook pages to bring it back to the front. Interviews began on March 29, 2023, and went through August 8, 2023, when I completed nine interviews. Each interview took place over Zoom because the nine counties in the Houston Metropolitan area encompassed 9,444 square miles (Greater Houston Partnership, 2021), which made meeting with all participants in person geographically impossible.

Every interview was conducted during a 30- to 60-minute Zoom meeting that was recorded. When each interview began, I reviewed the consent form I had previously sent by email, and each participant responded that they agreed to participate in the study. Once the consent form was reviewed, the interview questions were delivered to each participant, with follow-up questions as needed based on the participant's responses to

the initial questions. The interview protocol was created to align with Ely's eight conditions that identify what a program needs to be successful.

The audio recording through the Zoom platform allowed me to record and save the interviews for transcription. I transcribed each interview and listened to each interview thrice while I transcribed them to ensure the transcripts were accurate. Once I had listened to the interviews multiple times while reading the transcriptions, I emailed the participants a copy of the transcription. The copies were sent to the participants so that they could review them and make comments and corrections (Saldaña, 2016). After I sent the emails for the transcription review, I waited 2 weeks before I began coding while awaiting the response from the participants. Only one participant participated in the review process and responded to the transcript review email. The participant said that the interview was satisfactory and did not make any changes to the interview.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection process was completed and the abovementioned 2-week review period had elapsed for each participant to respond with any corrections to their transcribed interviews, I created a coding template that would allow me to code line by line (see Table 1 for a sample of this coding). Column A identified the lines within the interview's transcription, while Column B showed the questions, I asked the participants. Column C contained the responses of the participants to the questions. A priori, open, and axial codes were placed in Columns D, E, and F, respectively. Finally, any notes about the responses to help me were in Column G.

Table 1*Sample Interview Coding*

| Lines | Interview questions | What happened in the interview? | 1 st cycle: A priori coding | 2 nd cycle: Open coding | 3 rd cycle: Axial coding | Quick memos |
|-------|---|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1-2 | Describe how you are currently implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI to identify struggling students for special education assessment and services? | Well, if I knew what RtI was and what I was looking for then I could identify children that are in need. | NT1 | No knowledge of the Child Find Component or on how to implement RtI | Lack of knowledge | Does not know what RtI is |
| 8-11 | Describe how you are currently implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI to identify struggling students for special education assessment and services? | Okay yeah we got so many letters going around in the school system. I just look for kids that are struggling and this is our second year back from COVID we have a lot of kids that are struggling readers. That is my first thing that I look for. Are they reading on grade level and if not what can we do to kind of check that out and get it done by getting them the proper help. That's one of the things I do. | MT | Minimal knowledge of the Child Find Component and how to implement RtI | Improper implementation | Using universal screeners are tier 1 intervention for RtI |
| 28-35 | Describe the duties of a classroom teacher regarding the Child Find Component of IDEA? | I know that I label their assignments and depending on what it is for example like they have extra time, they have a half assignment, or I have taken away some of the questions or maybe I have changed the wording so it is easier to understand and then for an unidentified child to be honest when I have those students kind of just take what I normally do for someone else and I just apply it to them until I find something that works for them and that is how I do it in the classroom but it is not an official process just I decide okay I need to re-write this so its lower more understandable for them or I need to take away 4 of the questions or I need to give them extra time or sit them with someone that can help them you know it might be an ESL student. | MT | Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | Improper implementation | Using accommodations as an evidence-based intervention - accommodations are not interventions |

| Lines | Interview questions | What happened in the interview? | 1 st cycle: A priori coding | 2 nd cycle: Open coding | 3 rd cycle: Axial coding | Quick memos |
|---------|--|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 14–19 | Describe what the Child Find component of IDEA requires a classroom teacher to do? | It requires that you have to come up with an intervention plan and put it to use if it works you check of what works or what doesn't work then you are supposed to if I am thinking right then you are supposed to take it to the response person who takes over at that point often if I have gone through a procedure like this then very a lot of paperwork so I know for a fact I 've never been one to initiate it but if necessary my input on somebody else's student another person has identified I do try my best to give some type of response to it. | MT | Do not know what RtI/ Child Find is - minimal to no training; | Lack of knowledge | Sort of has an idea but the plan for the interventions are to come from the RtI/Child Find committee |
| 103–108 | Describe your challenges with implementing RtI? | So I think for me the hardest thing to figure out where each student is because there are so many of them and coming up with a plan that is feasible for myself and the students I know at my old school we had things we had a lot more assistance for RtI like at my old school we had all these extra programs that students could be a part of but here that is not the case at my new school. Its just if you are failing you get after school and that is it but have to have failed there is no response prior to failing the student it feels as though the student doesn't fail fail then there is no reason for intervention. | NT1 | Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | Lack of knowledge | “So I think for me the hardest thing to figure out where each student is because there are so many of them and coming up with a plan that is feasible for myself and the students” |

The first coding stage (See Table 1 for a sample of this coding) began once each interview was placed into the coding template. The first stage began with a priori codes. I created the a priori codes and aligned them to Ely's eight conditions (see Appendix B). By using a priori coding, I created predetermined themes based on Ely's eight conditions. During open coding, I used the predetermined a priori codes and placed them into categories aligned with Ely's eight conditions, participants' responses about current implementation, and perceived barriers. Finally came axial coding, where the themes were identified.

During the second coding stage (See Table 1 for a sample of this coding), I put all participants' responses together on a sheet per interview and followed up with questions aligned with the initial interview question. I also put all the coding that aligned with the participants' responses. As I reviewed all the responses from each participant per question with any additional notes, I was then able to align the responses based on the themes to answer the research question. I created this multi-step process to avoid researcher bias to support the credibility of the results. Working within the school system in the Houston area, I had to examine my own beliefs to make sure they did not influence my interpretation of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As I reviewed the data, I would make notes in the final column within each data set. Using these sheets allowed me to explain how the data were collected and analyzed in narrative form. It also allowed me to interpret the data and its findings. Using these forms allowed me to create tables that showed how the data codes were narrowed down into themes by showing the interview

excerpts with the coding. All data supported the emerging themes, and I found no discrepancy in the data. All data was aligned with the study's two research questions.

Results

This basic qualitative study aimed to identify how educators are implementing RtI within the Child Find component of IDEA and their perceived barriers to implementing RtI within middle schools in the Houston, Texas, area. I asked educators 10 interview questions about their current implementation of RtI/Child Find and their perceived barriers to implementing RtI/Child Find. Their responses created a picture of the current RtI/Child Find implementation and the educators' perspectives on the barriers to its implementation. Three themes emerged for each research question.

The first research question was designed to understand better how educators are currently implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI and identified the following themes: (a) improper implementation of RtI/Child Find, (b) not using evidence-based interventions/using accommodations, and (c) lack of fidelity with implementation. These themes will be discussed in more detail throughout this section, but it quickly became clear that the Child Find component of IDEA was not implemented or aligned with best practices.

The second research question was aimed at identifying the educators' perceived barriers to the implementation of RtI/Child Find. Three themes were also identified to support this question: (a) lack of knowledge, (b) lack of training, and (C) educators not feeling supported by the administration due to lack of training. These findings helped to

explain better why there was a lack of implementation with fidelity, as determined by the results.

Research Question 1

How are middle school educators currently implementing the child find component of IDEA using RtI to identify struggling students for special education assessment and services?

Theme 1: Improper Implementation

The middle school core subject educators shared similar responses to the current implementation of RtI within their schools. Participants stated that they are looking for struggling students but do not know what Child Find is or the proper procedure to get students placed into the Special Education program. Educators also said that they are not referring students but are a part of it because other educators have referred their students. Educators have said they do not know who to go to in order to get students referred. Participant 3 stated that he identifies struggling students but does not know anything about Child Find or the RtI process. These paraphrases align with most other participants' responses of not knowing the process. Since the participants do not know the process, they implement RtI improperly. Participant 5 identified that the process must align with STAAR testing. Meanwhile, RtI/Child Find has nothing to do with Texas state testing. RtI is an MTSS to allow students to be successful in their learning environment hopefully, but through the tiers of interventions, it allows teachers to determine if a student needs to be referred for special education if unsuccessful within the tiers of intervention (TEA, n.d.). As the coding began aligning with these themes, the open

coding identified that the educators have minimal to no knowledge of implementing RtI within the Child Find Component of RtI (See Table 2).

Table 2

Interview Excerpts Related to Research Question 1 Theme – Improper Implementation

| Categories/ open coding | A priori coding | Interview excerpts |
|--|-----------------|--|
| Minimal knowledge of the Child Find Component and how to implement RtI | MT | I just look for kids that are struggling and this is our second year back from COVID we have a lot of kids that are struggling readers. That is my first thing that I look for. Are they reading on grade level and if not, what can we do to kind of check that out and get it done by getting them the proper help. (Participant 2) |
| Minimal knowledge of the Child Find Component and how to implement RtI | MT | Okay well I identify struggling students in my class but as far as Child Find I knew this would come up. I don't know anything about it.... As far as the procedure to get them into a sped program or identified in a certain manner I don't know. I do know that you can go to RtI on campus but I actually do not know the process. (Participant 3) |
| Minimal knowledge of the Child Find Component and how to implement RtI | MT | It requires that you have to come up with an intervention plan and put it to use if it works you check of what works or what doesn't work then you are supposed to if I am thinking right then you are supposed to take it to the response person who takes over at that point often if I have gone through a procedure like this then very a lot of paperwork so I know for a fact I 've never been one to initiate it but if necessary my input on somebody else's student another person has identified I do try my best to give some type of response to it (Participant 5). |
| Minimal knowledge of the Child Find Component and how to implement RtI | MT | From my knowledge it requires the teacher to gather information necessary to determine if the child needs services (Participant 6) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | Like the person that I think is in charge of the 504 and that is mostly what I have dealt with is referring students over for 504 that don't qualify under other labels (Participant 7) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | Okay so what we are doing for RtI aside from House Bill 4545 we are actually having after school RtI and we actually have Saturday school to assist students in making sure there is some sort of intervention for kids outside of the classroom because in the classroom ... we are doing everything from giving the students extra time doing all the basics any classroom is required to do but to assist the student in small groups ... we ask the students to come in for after school tutorials and Saturday school ... and now in our district we have den that is kind of like a room that is more flexibility for us to pull a student and tutor them during class hours but his only became available to specific subjects like math and ELA and they are getting ready to open it up to 8th grade science because it is a STAAR tested subject this year otherwise it is only English and Math that's allowed to do that (Participant 9) |

Theme 2: Not Using Evidence-Based Interventions/Using Accommodations Instead

RtI requires that with implementation within the tiers of interventions, educators use evidence-based interventions. A common theme that appeared as the interviews were transcribed was that educators did not know what interventions they should use with the students on tiers two and three. Educators responded that they were making up their interventions as they went along or using accommodations they found on other students' IEPs. Educators identified that they might use chunking, extra time, modifying the assignment, shortening the assignment, small group if they could due to class size, or using Near Pod. Participant 3 stated, "because really even students that have an IEP, I will compare them to the RtI process, they may have a bunch of accommodations." Participant 7 said, "I do have a very high population of SPED students to the students that aren't labeled have fallen through the cracks get a lot of those same accommodations." This theme also supports Theme 1 because by using accommodations instead of evidence-based interventions, the educators are not implementing RtI properly. According to What Works Clearinghouse (n.d.), small groups must occur three to five times a week for 20–40 minutes. Within this small group time, the educators need to target up to three foundational reading or math skills based on the students identified through the universal screener given at the beginning and middle of the school year. By failing to use evidence-based interventions to support students and using accommodations instead, the students are not getting the education support they need, and the educators cannot collect the necessary data to support the implementation of RtI as the students move through the tiers of support (See Table 3).

Table 3*Interview Excerpts Related to Research Question 1 Theme – Not Using Evidence-Based Interventions / Using Accommodations*

| Categories / open coding | A priori coding | Interview excerpts |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Using accommodations instead of EBI | UA | I just use general interventions I kind of figure out myself what works I don't know the legal process If a student was to come and I would have gotten some paperwork from like a counselor or sped office then maybe I would know but otherwise if I encounter a student that that is having difficulties just try different things until I find something that works a lot of times I base it off of what I have seen on IEPs cause I know that they must work cause extra time that is for someone that needs that support but again as far as the RtI process and it being here is a set of interventions I've never received any(Participant 3) |
| Using accommodations instead of EBI | UA | So when it comes to tier 2 I kind of make it up as I go and then I reach out to the counselors or admin and say hey something else is going on with this kids and I don't know what to do and then they will point me in the direction they want me to go with it. (Participant 9) |
| Using accommodations instead of EBI | UA | Most of the challenges are that we have with implementing RtI is that sometimes we don't have the information readily available and when I say information we don't get the services the child needs or the <u>accommodations</u> that the child needs til maybe the second or third nine weeks let's say second nine weeks lets say that and we may have a lack of RtI teachers for those that need those outside of the classroom interventions so we could possibly depending upon the campus would lack the resources necessary or the man power (Participant 6) |
| Using accommodations instead of EBI | UA | So for tier 2 it is not exactly the real tests but the retests for students like major grades and are done in a more basic language the easiest way to ask a question is the way I will ask the student and sometimes that would mean me in the classroom asking the student pointing out specific areas so the student will be able to answer the question correctly. And then for tier 3 once they have all the accommodations, I just follow the accommodations that are given to them the student (Participant 9) |
| Using accommodations instead of EBI | UA | I'll often shorten an assignment if I know a student is especially struggling with an attention span issue that is not been diagnosed even though it is not necessarily part of an IEP I will give them a shortened assignment or chunk it for them give them breaks in between it is kind of hard to think about everything I kind of I have many different kinds of techniques that I try to use in my classroom cause I do have a very high population of sped students to the students that aren't labeled and have fallen through the cracks get a lot of those same accommodations because they just happen to be in a class with someone who is receiving services (Participant 7) |
| Using accommodations instead of EBI | UA | 8. Because really even with students that have an IEP, I will just compare them to the RtI process, they may have a bunch of accommodations but not all of those work and sometimes the stuff that work is not on there and sometimes I have to make notes until we go through the next meeting probably and for RtI again flying by the seat of my pants just figure out what works for that particular student and I am not aware of ever having a student labeled tier 1, tier 2 or tier 3 RtI intervention status so no paperwork that I knew of that I could look at and like say how long is this going to take me to figure out to see what works for the student in the classroom (Participant 3) |

Theme 3: Lack of Fidelity With Implementation

The data from this theme identifies how educators are not implementing RtI with fidelity. As the participants explained why through their responses to the questions, they identified time because they must collect data, work samples, record accommodations the students use successfully, and classroom observations of students. For example, Participant Five stated "... you have to collect samples, you have to collect assessment scores all of these things need recorded and kind of document in the more I do the more I have to do." Further, in the interview, Participant Five also stated that the amount of paperwork for parent contact and other policies is also an issue. They lack time to complete everything, which hinders their ability to implement with fidelity. Participant Two stated, "Oh yeah, Child Find. Like I said earlier, you try to locate these kids and see what their issues are and put them toward testing or recommend that they get tested for reading or dyslexia or whatever just got to figure out what their issues are". Participant Four stated that they meet daily with their skills specialist to discuss low students and discuss strategies to use (See Table 4).

The implementation of RtI requires parent contact to review the student's progress with the interventions. Data collection and policies within RtI are created to allow the team to monitor the student's progression through the tiers actively. Data Collection and monthly progress monitoring will allow the RtI committee to determine if the student's current level of intervention is successful or if the student needs to move up to tier three interventions or referral for special education testing (What Works Clearinghouse, n.d.).

Table 4*Interview Excerpts Related to Research Question 1 Theme – Lack of Fidelity With Implementation*

| Categories/ open coding | A priori coding | Interview excerpts |
|--|-----------------|--|
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | MT | You have to collect work samples you have to collect assessment scores all of these things have to be recorded and then kind of document it and turn it back in and then even from there it does not necessarily mean it is going to move a child to the next phase... I am given back the information what can I do on the next level what I can I do this time around what have you tried that worked what have you tried that was not successful so it is kind of like the more I do the more I have to do (Participant 5) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | MT | You have to record accommodations and things you put forth in place for a student it has to be documented as well as acceptable as far as TEA and the STAAR test is concerned that is like my number 1 thing to make sure the student is successful for STAAR ready for STAAR and then TEA can still turn around and say eventhough you have allowed this student to use this in class during class they can still shoot it down and say no it is not allowed on the STAAR test the main goal is to teach the student in the ideal the way that they are taught is the way they are going to be assessed so if it is not honestly if it is not blocking how they take STAAR or if they are successful on STAAR I don't worry with it therefore sometimes my process is stop at step 1 even if I was going to refer a student (Participant 5) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | MT | I feel like the duties of the classroom teacher are to be observant of all the students in their classroom and identify what needs each individual child might have as far as being able to succeed in the classroom environment when you're observant you know your students and really get to know their work and you know what areas they are struggling with and what areas they might need more assistance in then you will be more easily able to identify students for the Child Find to be able to get them to receive services (Participant 7) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | MT | We're told to make sure that that the kids because of COVID we know that there are a lot of gaps and we are just to do the best we can to fill in those gaps as we are teaching so some of the things... they haven't learned or were supposed to learn in 6th grade as it is all that would be in our STAAR test (Participant 9) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | MT | Oh yeah Child Find like I said earlier you try to locate these kids and see what their issues are and put them toward testing or recommend that they get tested for reading or dyslexia or whatever just got to figure out what their issues are (Participant 2) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | MT | Paperwork is number one number 2 is parent contact and parent feedback number 3 is most likely get in the way is the actually the policies themselves. Because they do everything for this child not to receive a label that you are struggling just to get your point across as far as your subject is concerned ... but if I see that there is a need and the other it can be all kinda like trival but I don't want to say that but it is not the right word but it become tedious and a load of paperwork instead of just I am the professional in the classroom (Participant 5) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | MT | The meeting that we have every year where the kids what we discuss with their parents and other teachers about their performance and their struggles and all of those things I am blanking on the name right now but it is only one time a year the other more substance one is every three weeks we have well every day we meet with the skills specialist but every three weeks we take a test and after those tests we sit down and we talk as a department all of us do and why these students are consistently low what can you tell me about this kid this girl has improved on the past test but she dropped on this test what can we do that sort of thing all sorts of conversations happen and we go into strategies and that sort of things. (P4) |

Research Question 2

What are middle school educators' perceived barriers with the implementation of RtI?

Theme 1: Lack of Knowledge

As the educators responded to all the interview questions, the theme identified the most was the lack of knowledge about the Child Find component of IDEA and their lack of knowledge about RtI and how to implement RtI. Through their responses, educators showed they are frustrated by their lack of knowledge hindering their ability to assist students. Participant One stated, "Well, if I know what RtI was and what I was looking for, then I could identify children that are in need." Later in the interview, the same participant answered, "As I am unaware of what RtI is asking of me, I cannot identify anything." Participant Four stated that he could speak to using RtI in the part of it but did not know the IDEA part. This statement was mirrored by participants two and eight as they also stated they do not know what Child Find is or the process for RtI to know what to do. Participant Nine believes that RtI and Child Find are to help emerging bilingual students where she is to modify the assignments and the curriculum. Participants also aligned the Child Find Component of IDEA to an Individual Education Plan/IEP, which students do not have until they have been evaluated through special education and the testing has determined that they qualify for special education services. The most concerning comment regarding RtI was from Participant Five. She believes RtI is an obstacle to getting students labeled because of identifying too many African American males for special education. She does not believe it helps because she does not want to do

it when she sees all it requires to help the student. This could be considered a lack of knowledge and implementation because she does not know how to implement her duties and does not understand how to support students with RtI. Due to this, her lack of knowledge impedes her implementation of the program (See Table 5).

The responses from the educators show a complete lack of knowledge of what the Child Find Component of IDEA is as well as their responsibilities under the component, which includes identifying struggling students for special education testing if necessary. RtI is the MTSS that the TEA has identified through their website that Texas districts should use to support struggling students and refer them for special education testing if data supports this. Current responses from Houston area Middle School Educators who took part in this study show a lack of knowledge to follow through on their duties through Child Find using RtI (See Table 5).

Table 5*Interview Excerpts Related to Research Question 2 Theme – Lack of Knowledge*

| Categories/ open coding | A priori coding | Interview excerpts |
|--|-----------------|--|
| No knowledge of the Child Find Component or on how to implement RtI | NT1 | I can speak to using the RtI part of it to be honest because I don't really know what the first thing you were saying is the IDEA part of it is probably something I should know but I am not 100% sure but I can talk about the RtI part (Participant 4) |
| No knowledge of the Child Find Component or on how to implement RtI | NT1 | Wow I'm not a 100% sure of what the Child Find component of IDEA requires me to do. I'm teaching social studies. IDEA I know about IEP and Free and appropriate public education trying to get parents and teachers to participate and of course the Least Restrictive Environment. (Participant 2) |
| No knowledge of the Child Find Component or on how to implement RtI | NT1 | I can be honest and say that I don't know that has not been discussed with us there has been no trainings there has been no ... it is not spoken. (Participant 8) |
| No knowledge of the Child Find Component or on how to implement RtI | NT1 | I am going to keep saying I am not sure what the Child Find component of IDEA is I don't know I can google it and maybe give you an answer... It is not something I have been trained on or taught or anything I have only been an 8th grade math teacher for two years yeah, I don't know to be honest I don't know anything about the Child Find component of IDEA. (Participant 4) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | Most of the Response to Intervention has been EB based not necessarily special education based like ensuring that you have things like visuals and content clarifiers for some of the students and I know that usually things for the EBs will assist the special education students as well but I've never that is actually one of the things I have brought up, I actually have a couple students that are on modified curriculum and no one has told me I have asked multiple times what exactly is a modified curriculum for this student and no one will tell me or I am told that the student can potentially do this. (Participant 9) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | So, I know that RtI is Response to Intervention I don't really know I don't understand the process to be honest I've never recommended a student I've talked about students to different people and admin but I have never actually had a student be recommended and I don't know the process now I feel horrible because now I don't understand anything of that process. (Participant 3) |
| No knowledge of the Child Find Component or on how to implement RtI | NT1 | Well, if I knew what RtI was and what I was looking for then I could identify children that are in need. (Participant 1) |
| No knowledge of the Child Find Component or on how to implement RtI | NT1 | I feel like I am totally woefully lacking in the procedure and I think the biggest challenge is that it might be a very successful program and it might be super nice if somehow somehow there would be some training on that so that I would know a little bit more about it because I don't feel that I have been able to answer your questions like I should have been. (Participant 3) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RtI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | Well honestly, I think RtI was set up to be a I guess on a negative side it is an obstacle just to get a kid labeled because the labeling part became such a big deal they were identifying too many of the African American males as special ed for special education so in order to that they went through this process right here I feel it does not help So when a lot of people see that's what it is going to take to get the kid recognized or put into the correct position to make this child more successful its annoying and it becomes never mind I don't want to do it the kid can just stay right here where he is or she is and we will just keep it moving because somebody has to pass and somebody has to fail in this and this may be the kid that just has to fail. (Participant 5) |

Theme 2: Lack of Training

As the educators discussed RtI, their lack of knowledge was evident. However, further interview questions identified that their lack of knowledge was due to a lack of training provided to them by their districts. Participants identified that they had not received any training or were given a short ten-to-fifteen-minute training. If teachers are not being trained on RtI or how to implement it based on their district's process, they cannot have the necessary knowledge to implement the program to identify struggling students successfully. Participants three, four, five, eight, and nine never recall receiving training on RtI. While Participants one, two, six, and seven stated that they received a ten-minute training on RtI. Participant One further explained that the training had more to do with English as a Second Language Learners, and when she was told it was just for reading teachers, she ignored the training because it did not pertain to her as she is a science teacher (See Table 6).

Short training that does not delve into the process and duties required to implement RtI does not give the teachers the necessary knowledge they need to help them implement. Participant Two said, "Just like this interview, these are all questions I feel I should be able to rip off answers one, two, three, and I am struggling, and as educators, we all want our students to achieve. We all want our students to improve. We look at our students at the beginning of the year and where they are in whatever subject. If we teach history or reading or math, you know you want your students to start out wherever they are, and at the end of the year, you want them to improve. But not only do you want them to improve, but if given the proper training, we can put each child on an individual path

like an IEP to maximize their improvement if that makes sense.” Bottom line is if the teachers are not trained, they cannot identify students using RtI or implement RtI to help the students be successful. Participant Six said, “It’s simple: the lack of training is students don’t get what they need if they need it, and they fall behind. It’s more of the students who have the more challenges versus the adult, and of course, the teachers just don’t know what to look for or, what to call it or, in some instances, what to do. I think we plan at the elementary level versus the middle school level. We plan small groups, we plan certain skill-based stations and things like that just any way, but I think just not knowing exactly what to look for how to approach it is the challenges the adults face, but it is the students that are ultimately facing many challenges because of the lack of training.” (See Table 6)

Table 6*Interview Excerpts Related to Research Question 2 Theme – Lack of Training*

| Categories/ open coding | A priori coding | Interview excerpts |
|--|-----------------|--|
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | I don't remember having any specific training regarding the RTI like what steps to follow or ways to identify students I've mostly been identifying students who are struggling... I do remember some brief faculty meeting type of training but nothing more than 15 – 20 minutes (Participant 7) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | It is not something I have been trained on or taught or anything I have only been an 8th grade math teacher for two years yeah, I don't know to be honest I don't know anything about the Child Find component of IDEA (Participant 4) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | We had one 10-minute training this last year and basically when the trainer said it was for reading only, I tuned out cause I don't teach reading. (Participant 1) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | None, if I am being honest if I have received Child Find training, I do not remember it and I do not think that I have (Participant 3) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | I haven't received verbal training it's a matter of if it is mentioned at the beginning of the year during when we first start school but there is nothing else between the time that I have taken training or special training for it or attended some staff development of special professional development over it (Participant 5) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | It's been a long while since I have had a training but most of the trainings, I've done has been by one of the RTI teachers and it is kind of brief just explaining in so many ways if you see something say something so that the student doesn't get to far behind the trainings are very brief in aspect unless its necessarily given by someone in the district verses someone on campus so they are basically very quick trainings (Participant 6) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | Well, no body has given me any specifics on how to implement anything in my classes they focus primarily on our ESL children and our English Language Learners so we do several things to help them out but outside of that we've been given no further instruction. (Participant 1) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | Number one I don't feel as though there is enough required trainings for teachers to really understand the Child Find program or the RTI program I don't feel teachers are trained enough on things that they need to look for how to best help those children who kind of fall between the cracks I don't think that there is any enough required trainings for teachers that is my personal biggest struggle especially with being a new teacher is that I can go out of my way to find these programs but I feel that it would be better if and more beneficial if it was part of the trainings that we were required to go to during the summer or sometimes we have teacher trainings during the year and I really feel that it should be one of those trainings that are required of any inclusion teacher (Participant 7) |
| Minimal to no trainings on how to implement RTI or on the Child Find component | NT1 | A 10-minute training doesn't count. (Participant 2) |

Theme 3: Teachers Do Not Feel Supported by Administration Due to Lack of Training and Support

As the educators discussed through the interview questions, their lack of knowledge and lack of training, the final theme was identified. The teachers do not feel supported by the administration due to a lack of training and support. Participant Two stated, “I remember the tier one, tier two, and tier three charts for Response to Intervention, not really how we’re supposed to implement them in the classroom. I can’t even elaborate, but I can show you how to do exercises on a chair, though.” Participant Seven answered that due to staffing and substitute shortages, she is unsure if the administration would support her taking off a day and attending a RtI training. Due to educators’ lack of knowledge, they believe RtI teachers should do all tier two and three interventions. Participant Eight stated that there are not enough RtI teachers (See Table 7).

As you review the educator’s interview questions, Participant Seven stated that he believes they are leaving the teachers to figure it out. He does not feel the support is there for the teachers to grow in the specific necessary elements the teachers need to have to implement RtI/ Child Find through IDEA. The educator’s frustration regarding this theme was summed up by participant one. Participant One said, “Well, I feel like a failure because not knowing how to do something that could potentially be very beneficial for a student and help them improve their learning. It feels like a failure as a teacher.” (See Table 7)

Table 7*Interview Excerpts Related to Research Question 2 Theme – Teachers Do Not Feel Supported by Administrators*

| Categories/ open coding | A priori coding | Interview excerpts |
|---|-----------------|---|
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | I know like at the beginning of the school year I mean it just one bizarre training after another like we spent a half day this year in teacher orientation talking about yoga and meditation which I suppose is fine but like we spent a minuscule amount of time about implementing the RtI process... and we spent less than an hour talking about RtI (Participant 2) |
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | And then as far as the beginning of the school year when they offer teacher trainings that they want or mandatory trainings those normally happen in such a rush I feel as though it is all a way to get us to be able to put a check in the box that they were legally had to tell us about but they don't go into any great depth so then you are kind of left with just a little information but not enough to totally understand it and case in point like the T-Tess stuff you know when they first rolled that out (Participant 3) |
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | I don't have any issues I just like to be can you just tell me exactly what I need to do to get it done when they leave it up to us to figure it out that is the part I have a problem with its not about time tell me exactly specifically what I should do and if that is what I am supposed to do let me try to do it But time is not the number 1 issue its not I don't know if I am answering that the way you want (Participant 5) |
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | No I don't feel as though we are being given enough time to learn RtI like I said the training we have had a couple 15 minute trainings there is no assessment there is not really a whole lot of teacher work days throughout the school year that I could have gone off campus to do an optional RtI training and then of course I could take a day I am pretty sure they wouldn't count it against me because I am still doing something related to work I don't think they would count that day against me it would be a professional development kind of day but there is a feeling of guilt that goes long with that because obviously everyone knows we are struggling to find subs at the moment so I feel guilty when I have to take a day off to take care of my kids cause they are sick so being able to take a professional day to take these trainings doesn't feel as though there is a lot of administrative support that would be like oh yes absolutely go do this training we'll cover you its great it'll be fine it feels a little bit I would feel guilty taking a day to do any type of training even with the RtI program (Participant 7) |
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | No not really the more I think about it the more I don't think that we do. The other thing I have noticed that even at most schools at my school now and the school I was at previously they give you all the training but they never given you the time to process the training that they have just given you and actually figure out how you are going to implement it. At my old school I had a really good colleague that if we went to a training we would bounce ideas off of each other so we could implement here at my new school I do not have that to kind of process it cause at my old school we were title 1 we had a planning period and a conference period my new school we only have a planning period and we only meet once a week as a department and at my old district we had 2 periods a planning period and a conference period so we had training that usually occurred during planning but then we had the conference period to kind of think about it and we would meet together as a group at PLC then we would actually be able to come up with a plan and here it is harder to do things like that (Participant 9) |

| Categories/ open coding | A priori coding | Interview excerpts |
|---|-----------------|---|
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | I feel frustrated in that teacher orientation at the beginning of the year I don't believe my administrators on campus it starts at the top we need to rethink how we do teacher orientation we need to rethink we prioritize for the next year of two where do we want our students to be because the state looks at it like as a monolith or at my school treating my school the same as a school in San Antonio a school in Dallas as a school in El Paso or a school down in Laredo and every school as their own individual challenges and we need to be given the freedom to and the training to spot and implement and make sure every student in the state of Texas has an IEP or has the ability to improve and maximize the improvement (Participant 2) |
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | Well I feel like a failure because not knowing how to do something that could potentially be very beneficial for a student and help them improve there learning it feels like failure as a teacher (Participant 1) |
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | I don't feel teachers are able to grow with that because some of their information that they have in their head may be 20 years old and they are not truly being shown the new best practices as far as RtI and Child Find goes (Participant 8) |
| Does not feel supported by state, district or building administration with implementation | NS | I feel as though they are just leaving us to figure it out I don't feel as though the support is there for teachers to be able to grow in that specific element with RtI training and Child Find through IDEA... lets see the Texas Education Agency and the Federal Education Agency as they learn better about how to support these children these programs change and develop and grow (Participant 7) |

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3, I identified four concepts to support this study's trustworthiness. The four concepts were dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). All the interviews were recorded through audio recordings. This allowed me to transcribe the participants' answers to the questions. Since I could go back and review the interviews until the transcriptions mirrored the recordings, this added credibility and dependability.

Once I transcribed the interviews, the transcriptions were returned to the participants to review and returned to me after they made any necessary additions if they wanted to clarify their responses. This also added credibility and dependability to the participant's interview responses, which added confirmability since the participants could confirm their responses (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). After this, I

began coding the educators' responses. Throughout this process, I used credibility because the participants were sharing their first-hand information regarding this student; their responses were credible as they were supported by the other participants' responses about what was happening in their schools. Given that the educators' responses to the interview question supported each participant's responses due to multiple variations of the same responses showed that the responses are credible and dependable as they confirm and create a picture of how RtI/Child Find is implemented and that these teachers have perceived barriers to the implementation of the program (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Since the middle schools' educators were core teachers within the Houston, Texas area, the study's transferability aligned with the study's population; the nine participants represented a small portion of the population of educators within this area. This is supported through confirmability because educators were invited to participate in this study through a social media invitation (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

Summary

Since 2016, Texas has failed to identify students under the Child Find component of IDEA. The two research questions that guided this study were created based on current USDE findings against Texas and the literature review that showed a gap in the research. The questions that this study sought to answer were how middle school educators within the Houston, Texas, area are currently implementing RtI through the Child Find Component of IDEA and their perceived barriers to implementing RtI through the Child Find Component of IDEA. Three themes were evident for each research question through

coding the interview responses. Data collected through their interview responses showed that these educators are currently improperly implementing RtI/ Child Find, are not using evidence-based interventions but are using accommodations, and are lacking fidelity with their current implementation. The results for research question one are firmly supported by question two, which wanted the teachers to identify their perceived barriers to implementing RtI/Child Find. The educators' responses identified three themes: lack of knowledge, lack of training, and that the teachers do not feel supported by the administration due to lack of training and support. The educators' lack of knowledge supports research questions and themes. Educators cannot effectively implement when they lack knowledge of the programs. The educators' lack of knowledge is ultimately due to their lack of training. The educators' responses identified that they have had minimal to no training. They continued to support their frustration due to their lack of knowledge and training by explaining their lack of support from their district and building administration. In their responses, they discussed how they need RtI training. However, their building and district administrators have not provided training; a ten-to-fifteen-minute training does not provide them with the program knowledge. They feel they have not been provided with enough training to implement RtI/Child Find successfully. In Chapter 5, I will delve into how these findings align with Ely's Conditions and how this study will impact change to help Texas educators with their implementation of RtI and their perceived barriers.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study aims to identify how middle school educators are implementing RtI within the Child Find component of IDEA and to identify the educators' perceived barriers to the implementation of RtI. This research study was conducted to help bridge the literature gap regarding Texas' implementation of the Child Find component of IDEA with RtI. Beginning in 2016 and continuing according to the latest letter from the USDE in 2023, Texas still fails to identify struggling students through the Child Find Component of IDEA. Under Texas's compensation plan they identified that Texas school districts are to be using RtI to identify struggling students under the Child Find component (DeMathews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Oettinger, 2023; TEA, 2018; USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b; Webb, 2019, 2020).

The results were used to determine that Houston, Texas, area middle school teachers are (a) improperly implementing RtI, (b) not implementing RtI with fidelity, or (c) not using evidence-based interventions but using accommodations instead. The educators' identified barriers were their lack of knowledge of the Child Find Component of IDEA and RtI. The educators' lack of knowledge was supported by their response about the lack of training. The educators who participated in this study identified that they had minimum to no training. Some educators reported a 10- to 15-minute training at the beginning of a school year to understand what they are required to do. The last theme identified was that the educators do not feel supported by the administration due to a lack of training and support. The educators are frustrated because many feel they have been

left to figure it out on their own. They also reported feeling they are failing the students because they have not been trained by the same administrators who want them to implement the program.

Interpretation of the Findings

In 2016, the USDE found that Texas had failed to identify students through the Child Find component of IDEA and failed to provide services for struggling students (USDE, 2016). Since 2016, the USDE has had Texas under a Corrective Action Plan while continuing to find that Texas still violates IDEA's Child Find Component, with the latest letter identifying the continuing violations dated May of 2023. In Chapter 2, the literature review revealed a gap in the literature regarding educators' knowledge of RtI and their perceived barriers to the implementation of RtI. Studies in the literature review found that educators did not know how to implement the program with fidelity (Dimarco & Guastello, 2021; Kressler & Cavendish, 2020; Thomas et al., 2020).

Mahoney (2020) found that educators did not understand the components of RtI and how to use evidence-based interventions. Barton's (2020) study identified that teachers felt they needed more RtI training. The findings from this study confirmed these previous studies' findings. The educators who participated in this study also felt that they needed more training, and several identified that they had only received a 10- to 15-minute training regarding RtI but said they had never received training on the Child Find component of IDEA and did not know their duties. This study found that educators were improperly implementing RtI/Child Find, not implementing RtI/Child Find with fidelity, and not using evidence-based interventions but accommodations that they saw other

children had on their IEP documents. The results of this study confirmed the findings of the previous studies used in the literature review in Chapter 2.

In regards to educators' perceived barriers to the implementation of RtI, this study determined that the educators' perceived barriers were a lack of knowledge to implement RtI, a lack of training to be able to implement RtI or the Child Find component, and the educators' do not feel supported by the administration due to lack of support and training. These were supported by the literature review through studies completed by Demarco and Guastello (2021), Thomas et al. (2020), Kressler and Cavendish (2020), Mahoney (2020), and Barton (2020).

The conceptual framework for this study was Ely's eight conditions for successfully implementing a program (Ellsworth, 2020; Ely, 1990, 1999). The first condition is dissatisfaction with the status quo. The educators identified their dissatisfaction through their responses to interview questions. Participant 1 stated, "You can't help your kids advance if you don't have training, and a 10-minute training doesn't count." At the same time, other participants are frustrated because they do not have the necessary information. The participant's responses also support the second of Ely's conditions, which is significant knowledge and skill of the program. These educators stated that they do not know their duties under the Child Find component of IDEA. They also stated that they either do not know what RtI is or know what it is, but they do not know how to implement it (See Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8*Ely's Condition 1: Dissatisfaction With the Status Quo*

| Participant | Condition element | Quote |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1 | Not satisfied with current implementation | You can't help your kids improve or advance if you don't have the training necessary to make that happen. A 10-minute training doesn't count |
| 2 | Not satisfied with current implementation | and I feel frustrated in that teacher orientation at the beginning of the year I don't believe my administrators on campus it starts at the top we need to rethink how we do teacher orientation we need to rethink we prioritize for the next year of two where do we want our students to be because |
| 3 | Not satisfied with current implementation | Well that is a good question so as I am sitting here listening to all of these questions I am thinking to myself I have been teaching for 10 years and I have heard about RtI I know it is a process I know nothing about the process and obviously I am wondering if I have had students in that process and I was not aware so the challenges to learning about it would be the fact that after 10 years you would think that I would know something of that procedure and I do not. You know so I am wondering if I have missed students along the way that needed help and I didn't give it to them adequately cause I wasn't following a procedure or process |
| 4 | Not satisfied with current implementation | I know what I know about RtI by my teaching certification and education in that regard so that is what I use to implement in my classroom beyond that I don't think not had any training they moved me because somebody left the department so I drew the short straw but two years now I think I have been doing a pretty good job great scores and all that specialized training now |
| 5 | Not satisfied with current implementation | Well I am going to do the regular ed things first and then we break ours down into tiers you have your tier 1 students, your tier 2 students and your tier 3 students and each level has a certain goal in mind and certain activities that you are supposed to do so it becomes a little bit like on the work side of it you have to record accommodations and things you put forth in place for a student it has to be documented as well as acceptable as far as TEA and the STAAR test is concerned that is like my number 1 thing to make sure the student is successful for STAAR ready for STAAR and then TEA can still turn around and say even though you have allowed this student to use this in class during class they can still shoot it down and say no it is not allowed on the STAAR test the main goal is to teach the student in the ideal the way that they are taught is the way they are going to be assessed so if it is not honestly if it is not blocking how they take STAAR or if they are successful on STAAR I don't worry with it therefore sometimes my process is stop at step 1 even if I was going to refer a student |
| 6 | Not satisfied with current implementation/does not understand how to implement program | Most of the challenges are that we have with implementing RtI is that sometimes we don't have the information readily available and when I say information we don't get the services the child needs or the accommodations that the child needs til maybe the second or third nine weeks let's say second nine weeks let's say that and we may have a lack of RtI teachers for those that need those outside of the classroom interventions so we could possibly depending upon the campus would lack the resources necessary or the man power |
| 7 | Not satisfied with current implementation/does not understand how to implement program | Number one I don't feel as though there is enough required trainings for teachers to really understand the Child Find program or the RtI program I don't feel teachers are trained enough on things that they need to look for how to best help those children who kind of fall between the cracks I don't think that there is any enough required trainings for teachers that is my personal biggest struggle especially with being a new teacher is that I can go out of my way to find these programs but I feel that it would be better if and more beneficial if it was part of the trainings that we were required to go to during the summer or sometimes we have teacher trainings during the year and I really feel that it should be one of those trainings that are required of any inclusion teacher |
| 8 | Not satisfied with current implementation/does not understand how to implement program | Not knowing what to implement because I don't have the information |
| 9 | Not satisfied with current implementation/does not understand how to implement program | So, I think for me the hardest thing to figure out where each student is because there are so many of them and coming up with a plan that is feasible for myself and the students, I know at my old school we had things we had a lot more assistance for RtI like at my old school we had all these extra programs that students could be a part of but here that is not the case at my new school. It's just if you are failing you get after school and that is it but have to have failed there is no response prior to failing the student it feels as though the student doesn't fail then there is no reason for intervention |

Table 9*Ely's Condition 2: Significant Knowledge and Skill of Program*

| Participant | Condition element | Quote |
|-------------|---|---|
| 1 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | Well, if I knew what RtI was and what I was looking for then I could identify children that are in need. |
| 2 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | Wow I'm not a 100% sure of what the Child Find component of IDEA requires me to do. I'm teaching social studies. IDEA I know about IEP and Free and appropriate public education trying to get parents and teachers to participate and of course the Least Restrictive Environment. Just like this interview these are all questions I feel I should be able to rip off answers one, two, three and I am struggling and as educators we all want our students to achieve we all want our students to improve we look at our students at the beginning of the year and where they are in whatever subject if we teach history or reading or math you know you want your students to start out wherever they are and at the end of the year you want them to improve but not only do you want them to improve but if given the proper training we can put each child on an individual path like an IEP to maximize their improvement if that makes sense. |
| 3 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | So, I know that RtI is Response to Intervention I don't really know I don't understand the process to be honest I've never recommended a student I've talked about students to different people and admin but I have never actually had a student be recommended and I don't know the process now I feel horrible because now I don't understand anything of that process. |
| 4 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | I know what I know about RtI by my teaching certification and education in that regard so that is what I use to implement in my classroom beyond that I don't think not had any training they moved me because somebody left the department so I drew the short straw but two years now I think I have been doing a pretty good job great scores and all that specialized training no |
| 5 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | The last time I received any type training of RtI was back at my (previous school's name) days so it has been a while I haven't brushed up on the whole bunch and the only thing I kind of get information from is anything that comes from a diag if it comes from the diag or from a counselor. |
| 6 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | It's simple the lack of training is students don't get what they need if they need it and they fall behind its more of the students who's has the more challenges verses the adult and of course the teachers just don't know what to look for or what to call it or in some instances what to do I think we plan at the elementary level verses the middle school level we plan small groups we plan certain skill based stations and things like that just anyway but I think just not knowing exacting what to look for how to approach it is the challenges the adults face but it is the students that are ultimately facing many challenges because of the lack of training |
| 7 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | I don't remember having any specific training regarding the RtI like what steps to follow or ways to identify students I've mostly been identifying students who are struggling I try to perceive why what is causing them to struggle and if is something that I feel they would benefit from being referred and then I do refer them over. I do remember some brief faculty meeting type of training but nothing more than 15 – 20 minutes |
| 8 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | Yeah so the only way it wouldn't be through RtI with me I notice some things about my students I monitor and I do send in recommendations for any monitoring, testing or whatever they need then if I don't hear back I usually go back to what I knew about from other schools and I implement instruction to help them so I guess for me it is just in my classroom but not officially no RtI training I don't get information, I have never got information since being at I am going to say for the past 9 years I haven't received any RtI information no mandatory training |
| 9 | Staff implementing the program does not have the necessary knowledge to implement program | <i>When asked about training</i> - Not officially this year |

The need for more training continues as they look at their resources. Adequate resources and the availability of resources is Ely's third condition. When asked about the evidence-based interventions they are supposed to use in Tiers 2 and 3 of RtI, the educators said they do not know what they are. Some educators identified that they use accommodations they have seen on other students' IEPs. Some also stated that they modified the student's assignments. However, modifications to general education assignments should only occur if the student has been identified that this is a modification based on the IEP committee's determination. Students on the tiers of instruction under RtI have not been referred for special education testing, so they should not receive a modified curriculum. Participant 5 stated that she does not use interventions, but this is due to her knowledge regarding STAR. Most educators do not know what interventions are, what materials are available, and how to use them (See Table 10).

Table 10*Ely's Condition 3: Adequate Resources: Availability of Resources*

| Participant | Condition element | Quote |
|-------------|--|--|
| 1 | Does not know what materials/interventions are available or needed | Since I don't know what tier 2 interventions are I couldn't tell you where to find anything. . . . I don't know what any tier 2 or tier 3 interventions are so I cannot use them in my classroom setting. |
| 2 | Does not know what materials/interventions are available or needed | I don't know |
| 3 | Does not know what materials/interventions are available or needed | I just use general interventions I kind of figure out myself what works I don't know the legal process. . . a lot of times I base it off of what I have seen on IEPs cause I know that they must work cause extra time that is for someone that needs that support but again as far as the RtI process and it being here is a set of interventions I've never received any |
| 4 | Does not know what materials/interventions are available or needed | I don't know if I know the tiers well enough to speak to their efficacy and what works in tier 1, verses tier 3 and all of that I am not even sure I understand the tiers 100% I don't think I am the best of persons to talk to about this |
| 5 | Does not use interventions based on her knowledge of STAAR accommodations | Honestly if I answer that honestly I can't use any of the interventions right now in class cause the STAAR test is not built that way I have to answer to STAAR each year and so if I try to implement that it is going to make a whole lot of extra work for me since the test is one size fits all I have to teach one size fits all I can only do what I can do like spend extra time with students, grouping maybe pulling that student in and making sure that the students that have already been labeled get what their possible accommodations are for instance I am supposed to have a para or even an inclusion teacher with those students legally I am supposed to have one but the inclusion person is always being pulled to sub the accommodating inclusion para is always being pulled to sub so on 5 days out of a school week I might get some type of support that I am supposed to have for that student legally maybe 1 out of 5 days its not happening so when everything is put upon me to actually do what I am supposed to do for this child to be successful I still have to adhere to whatever STAAR whatever is necessary for STAAR so right now in the month of April probably the whole year long I have been the person this kid sees 100% of the time and I have to teach for the masses in the classroom and the mass to take the STAAR so I can't do the interventions that I am supposed to do I am not capable of doing it not right now not the way class is set up |
| 6 | Does not know what materials/interventions are available or needed – Pull out is a level 3 intervention but level 2 should be happening in the classroom | So far, we our tier 2 of course would be to more than our interventions that they are pulled out during a certain time of the day or certain time of the week once or twice a week when they receive that support in addition to it but it like man powered based and then they are going to be in a group as well that is what I know of |
| 7 | Does not know what materials/interventions are available or needed | I don't actually know like I said those trainings were about 15 minutes and I am sure I have the notes written down someplace but it's not something that has stuck with me I haven't had I don't feel as though I have had enough training to know exactly what those interventions are |
| 8 | Does not know what materials/interventions are available or needed – makes it up as she goes along | Honestly I make my own we don't have a place where well I am sure we do but its not mainstreamed like go here when you need this I can go to the RTI teacher and ask her hey my student is one of yours what do we need to do but its not I am going to be honest it's not plain knowledge where is the information assessable I mean if you ask anyone about anything even my sped kids they tell us 'it is in Eduphoria' well where?'. 'Just look in Eduphoria' You know there is no time stop to get information. Implementing things in my classroom like I said I am not an RTI expert by any means but I do know me and Ms. XX we work with our kids until we get to where they are. I may not know about tiers but because I worked in the system where we're not going to get the information, we are just prepared how to reach the kid and we hardly ever get support |
| 9 | Does not know what materials/interventions are available or needed – makes it up as she goes along | So when it comes to tier 2 I kind of make it up as I go and then I reach out to the counselors or admin and say hey something else is going on with this kids and I don't know what to do and then they will point me in the direction they want me to go with it. |

Ely's fourth condition is time. Educators identified that they are not being given time to learn how to implement the program. Educators' responses fully identified one of the barriers to successfully implementing the Child Find component of IDEA through RtI: the educators' lack of knowledge. That lack of knowledge also feeds their inability to implement RtI correctly and with fidelity (See Table 11).

Table 11

Ely's Condition 4: Time

| Participant | Condition element | Quote |
|-------------|---|---|
| 1 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | Um so since I can't tell you really and truly what it is I would say that that is our biggest issue. A 10-minute presentation that focuses on reading and I am supposed to extrapolate that into science while it can be similar, I'm not only teaching English Language to many of my students I am also teaching scientific language as well so that's in a 45-minute class period I focus on my science |
| 2 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | We spend a little bit of time at the beginning of the year during what I guess is teacher orientation week not enough time and you are going to get me started on Teacher orientation week we don't (made some noises) |
| 3 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | And then as far as the beginning of the school year when they offer teacher trainings that they want or mandatory trainings those normally happen in such a rush I feel as though it is all a way to get us to be able to put a check in the box that they were legally had to tell us about but they don't go into any great depth so then you are kind of left with just a little information but not enough to totally understand it and case in point like the T-Tess stuff you know when they first rolled that out |
| 4 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | I am sure there are trainings that I can seek out challenges I mean the district has options for us to so if I was trying to learn more I am certain that I wouldn't have too much of an issue with like that is another thing I can't really speak to because I haven't researched but I believe that if I were trying to find more resources on any topic in particular the district has resources that and if not they are pretty good to pointing to region 4 and other outside communities that have just as much depth of information and knowledge... I don't think that would be difficult at all |
| 5 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | I haven't received verbal training it's a matter of if it is mentioned at the beginning of the year during when we first start school but there is nothing else between the time that I have taken training or special training for it or attended some staff development of special professional development over it |
| 6 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | I haven't seen any. I know that our trainings take place at the beginning of the year maybe the summer as needed or as interested basis through the PowerSchool portal you can find it if you want it but you get your training in the beginning and you keep going |

| Participant | Condition element | Quote |
|-------------|---|--|
| 7 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | No I don't feel as though we are being given enough time to learn RtI like I said the training we have had a couple 15 minute trainings there is no assessment there is not really a whole lot of teacher work days throughout the school year that I could have gone off campus to do an optional RtI training and then of course I could take a day I am pretty sure they wouldn't count it against me because I am still doing something related to work I don't think they would count that day against me it would be a professional development kind of day but there is a feeling of guilt that goes along with that because obviously everyone knows we are struggling to find subs at the moment so I feel guilty when I have to take a day off to take care of my kids cause they are sick so being able to take a professional day to take these trainings doesn't feel as though there is a lot of administrative support that would be like oh yes absolutely go do this training we'll cover you its great it'll be fine it feels a little bit I would feel guilty taking a day to do any type of training even with the RtI program |
| 8 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | Not knowing who has what how should I say this ... Not know who should have what accommodations or what tier each child is on not having it right in front of you and then not knowing like everything we need to know about RtI is a challenge because if someone came into my classroom and asked which tier my student was on so many things are shoved to us but not those things so I guess not being knowledgeable not having the training not having the information in hand that's the challenge |
| 9 | Staff not being given the time to learn and implement the program | No not really the more I think about it the more I don't think that we do. The other thing I have noticed that even at most schools at my school now and the school I was at previously they give you all the training but they never given you the time to process the training that they have just given you and actually figure out how you are going to implement it. At my old school I had a really good colleague that if we went to a training we would bounce ideas off of each other so we could implement here at my new school I do not have that to kind of process it cause at my old school we were title 1 we had a planning period and a conference period my new school we only have a planning period and we only meet once a week as a department and at my old district we had 2 periods a planning period and a conference period so we had training that usually occurred during planning but then we had the conference period to kind of think about it and we would meet together as a group at PLC then we would actually be able to come up with a plan and here it is harder to do things like that |

Ely's sixth condition is participation (See Table 12). Educators identified that they are expected to implement RtI but do not know what to do. Their lack of knowledge supports this. Participant 3 stated, "For RtI, again flying by the seat of my pants just figuring out what works for the particular student, and I am not aware of ever having a student label tier one, two, or three."

Table 12

Ely's Condition 6: Participation

| Participant | Condition element | Quote |
|-------------|---|--|
| 1 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | We had one 10-minute training this last year and basically when the trainer said it was for reading only, I tuned out cause I don't teach reading. |
| 2 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | There is school wide interventions you target them in the classroom as well target in the classroom then there is instruction as well |
| 3 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | for RtI again flying by the seat of my pants just figure out what works for that particular student and I am not aware of ever having a student labeled tier 1, tier 2 or tier 3 RtI intervention status so no paperwork that I knew of that I could look at and like say how long is this going to take me to figure out to see what works for the student in the classroom |
| 4 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | I can speak to using the RtI part of it to be honest because I don't really know what the first thing you were saying is the IDEA part of it is probably something I should know but I am not 100% sure but I can talk about the RtI part |
| 5 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | currently I follow the guidelines if I have students, I was referring to I am often a part of students that have been referred I'm on that end of it not mostly using it per say. The child has been identified probably through another teacher or through another cause someone else in the building but I am just on the receiving end of it I am not the one that initiates it none at the current moment. |
| 6 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | I am currently using IDEA with my RtI students as based to ensure that their interventions are protected but also to know what their interventions are and to ensure they are getting services in the classroom |
| 7 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | I feel as though they are just leaving us to figure it out, I don't feel as though the support is there for teachers to be able to grow in that specific element with RtI training and Child Find through IDEA |
| 8 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | I definitely can say at our school and I have only been in this district. RtI is not a supplement I feel as though our RtI teachers are not given a platform like at meetings when we have these staff meetings, I've never seen RtIs stand up and speak this is what we need to do or I don't see admin making a spot for them to give us training |
| 9 | Participation is expected but teachers do not know what to do | We might so the lady that runs the after school program and the Saturday school she is supposed to be like our RtI person but she is never available so like when STAAR is now coming up she is like hey I just want you to know I am going to be in your classroom and I was like when and she said whenever you have a regulars class so I was like so you are going to be with me all day and she was like well if I need to and then sure enough we started reviewing for STAAR the day before yesterday and she is nowhere to be found. So, I don't know if maybe she is a part of it and I just don't know cause this is my first year on the campus |

Ely's seventh condition is commitment (See Table 13). Educators receiving ten minutes or less of training do not show district commitment to implementing RtI.

Educators' responses to the interview questions echoed each other that they had minimal to no training regarding RtI and its implementation. Given that the lack of training does not support the district's commitment to the successful implementation of RtI.

Table 13

Ely's Condition 7: Commitment

| Participant | Condition element | Quote |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | We had one 10-minute training this last year and basically when the trainer said it was for reading only, I tuned out cause I don't teach reading |
| 2 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | ...but if given the proper training we can put each child on an individual path like an IEP to maximize their improvement if that makes sense. |
| 3 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | None, if I am being honest if I have received Child Find training, I do not remember it and I do not think that I have |
| 4 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | I've had no special training to be in the job that I have other than my content area specifications (P4) |
| 5 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | I haven't received verbal training it's a matter of if it is mentioned at the beginning of the year during when we first start school but there is nothing else between the time that I have taken training or special training for it or attended some staff development of special professional development over it |
| 6 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | It's simple the lack of training is students don't get what they need if they need it and they fall behind its more of the students who's has the more challenges verses the adult and of course the teachers just don't know what to look for or what to call it or in some instances what to do I think we plan at the elementary level verses the middle school level we plan small groups we plan certain skill based stations and things like that just anyway but I think just not knowing exacting what to look for how to approach it is the challenges the adults face but it is the students that are ultimately facing many challenges because of the lack of training |
| 7 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | Number one I don't feel as though there is enough required trainings for teachers to really understand the Child Find program or the RtI program I don't feel teachers are trained enough on things that they need to look for how to best help those children who kind of fall between the cracks I don't think that there is any enough required trainings for teachers that is my personal biggest struggle especially with being a new teacher |
| 8 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | Not knowing what to implement because I don't have the information |
| 9 | Lack of district and/or state officials supporting the program due to lack of training | No, I think if I would go to them specifically they will but when it comes to the bigger picture they don't cause they don't want to admit they have a problem so that the school that I am at is over 50% economically disadvantaged and the school district refuses to file for title 1 for that school or anymore schools in their district, so my school as over 50% of students that are economically disadvantaged and they don't want to request title 1 funding for the title 1 status cause of how it would look for their district to have multiple schools |

Ely's eighth and final condition is leadership (See Table 14). The educators do not feel supported by their district and building administrators. As the educators discussed the different trainings offered to them to complete during summer in-service and the school year in-services, the educators said that none of the trainings were about RtI or Child Find. They were frustrated because, due to COVID and students still not recouping educational losses, there is a lack of training to support the struggling or the educators needed to know how to support them.

Table 14*Ely's Condition 8: Leadership*

| Participant | Condition element | Quote |
|-------------|---|---|
| 1 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | Well, no body has given me any specifics on how to implement anything in my classes they focus primarily on our ESL children and our English Language Learners so we do several things to help them out but outside of that we've been given no further instruction. |
| 2 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | I know like at the beginning of the school year I mean it just one bizarre training after another like we spent a half day this year in teacher orientation talking about yoga and meditation which I suppose is fine but like we spent a minuscule amount of time about implementing the RtI process and all these other things that really should be taking a higher priority because of COVID and kids missing so much school in the past 3 or 4 years of education it's been an absolute train wreck and it doesn't seem like there are steps taken from the higher ups not our campus administrators but the district and state level like lets pair down the STAAR questions the STAAR components and lets go back to basics until we can raise all reading levels raise all the math levels and how to specifically spot these things we need to look for and how to implement the process of getting everyone on track and really we spend a half day on meditating and doing exercises on a chair and we spent less than an hour talking about RtI |
| 3 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | And then as far as the beginning of the school year when they offer teacher trainings that they want or mandatory trainings those normally happen in such a rush I feel as though it is all a way to get us to be able to put a check in the box that they were legally had to tell us about but they don't go into any great depth so then you are kind of left with just a little information but not enough to totally understand it and case in point like the T-Tess stuff you know when they first rolled that out |
| 4 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | I have one class that has 22 kids and I can do so much more in that class so I am going to say the biggest differentiator is class size |
| 5 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | There is a lot that can go in any direction because at one point I was at a school where it was heavily preached RtI and now I am on another campus and where it is not and yeah and once you start to not use something you start to lose it so nobody has impressed upon me to go get any extra training on RtI and I haven't had a sit down or any type of conversation about RtI in a long long time and I have been at (school's name) for 5 years now since it opened. |
| 6 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | I haven't seen any. I know that our trainings take place at the beginning of the year maybe the summer as needed or as interested basis through the PowerSchool portal you can find it if you want it but you get your training in the beginning and you keep going |
| 7 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | I don't remember having any specific training regarding the RtI like what steps to follow or ways to identify students I've mostly been identifying students who are struggling I try to perceive why what is causing them to struggle and if is something that I feel they would benefit from being referred and then I do refer them over. I do remember some brief faculty meeting type of training but nothing more than 15 – 20 minutes |
| 8 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | I definitely can say at our school and I have only been in this district. RtI is not a supplement I feel as though our RtI teachers are not given a platform like at meetings when we have these staff meetings, I've never seen RtIs stand up and speak this is what we need to do or I don't see admin making a spot for them to give us training |
| 9 | Educators do not feel supported by district/building leadership | No, I think if I would go to them specifically they will but when it comes to the bigger picture they don't cause they don't want to admit they have a problem so that the school that I am at is over 50% economically disadvantaged and the school district refuses to file for title 1 for that school or anymore schools in their district, so my school as over 50% of students that are economically disadvantaged and they don't want to request title 1 funding for the title 1 status cause of how it would look for their district to have multiple schools |

The only one of Ely's conditions not addressed due to no supporting data from the interview was condition five: rewards and incentives. In every interview, teachers discussed the minimum to no training and not knowing what to do. One participant even stated that the administration would not give her time off to train at Region 4 due to issues with not having substitute teachers. These statements do not support or rule out if educators are being given rewards or incentives, but it does not seem likely.

The analyzed data determined that middle school educators in Houston, Texas, lack the knowledge to implement RtI under the Child Find component of IDEA. This lack of knowledge impedes their ability to implement with fidelity. Due to their lack of training, educators use accommodations listed in other students' IEPs to support students, but accommodations and modifying curriculum are not evidence-based practices. The use of accommodations and curriculum modification again refers to their lack of knowledge, which hinders their ability to implement RtI. Educators identified that the first barrier to them implementing RtI is that they have minimal to no training. Due to their lack of training, which is supported by their lack of knowledge regarding RtI and Child Find, the final barrier that the educators identified is that they do not feel supported by their district or building administrators.

Limitations of the Study

In Chapter 1, the study limitations discussed were participants' responses to the interview questions, the questions for the interview, and educators' responses to the interview questions. In Chapter 1, limitations identified that the educators could have feared responding to the questions. Educators did not appear to fear responding to the

questions. The educators' responses to the questions supported the literature review, and the educators' perceived barriers identified supported that in multiple areas in the country, educators lack the knowledge to implement RtI and see a lack of training as a barrier.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research should include research to include district administrators. The plan TEA created and was approved by the USDE identified that TEA would train LEAs on the Child Find component of IDEA and how to implement RtI. Also, within this plan, they identified that TEA would create a database of evidence-based interventions that districts and educators would have access to (TEA, 2018). Based on the results of this study, educators lack the knowledge to implement RtI. These same educators have identified that they have received minimal to no training. They also do not feel supported because their districts are not supporting them by training them. The educators' perceived barrier of lack of knowledge supports the recommendations for future research to determine if TEA has trained LEAs on Child Find and RtI and if districts have access to a database or website that identifies evidence-based interventions.

Implications

Since 2016, the USDE has found that Texas and its LEAs have been failing to identify and provide services under the Child Find component of IDEA (USDE, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b). Following the USDE findings in 2018, TEA created a Strategic Action Plan (2018) to address and correct the issues the USDE identified. With this plan, TEA stated that the state would be using RtI to identify students under the Child Find Component and that they would be training LEAs on its

implementation and evidence-based interventions (TEA, 2018). The latest letter from the USDE (2023b) stated that the state had made some progress but needed to make more progress to meet the requirements stated by the USDE.

Under the Strategic Action Plan that TEA wrote in 2018 and was approved by the USDE, TEA was to train their LEAs (TEA, 2018). In 2019, a study by DeMatthews and Knight examined why Texas failed to identify and provide students with special needs services. DeMatthews and Knight's (2019) study determined that PBMAS Indicator 10 created an 8.5% cap for the number of students per district allowed to be in special education. Districts believed they had to keep their special education numbers under 8.5% or risk losing funding. TEA stated to the USDE that this was untrue. When the USDE finished its initial investigation in 2016, they found that students were not being identified under the Child Find component and were often denied testing and services (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2019; USDE, 2016; USDE, 2018).

DeMatthews and Knight (2019) further determined that district administrators and teachers did not understand the legalities of their school's duties under the Child Find Component of IDEA and did not understand special education identification requirements. The results of this study also determined that when the USDE asked teachers about RtI, the teachers did not know how to answer the questions. The teachers who participated in this study did not have significant knowledge to answer questions about their duties and responsibilities under the Child Find component of IDEA. The results of DeMatthews and Knight's study further determined that district,

administration, and educators did not understand the requirements needed to identify students for special education. The study's results also determined that when the USDE asked teachers about RtI, the teachers did not have the knowledge to answer the question. Teachers in Houston Independent School District felt that RtI was a roadblock that hindered students from being referred for testing and special education (DeMatthew & Knight, 2019). This sentiment was shared by participants in this study as well.

A new study by Venhaus et al. (2023) examined administrators' perspectives on literacy interventions using MTSS in the middle school setting. These results found that administrators did not have the time to schedule interventions into the school day and that since teachers are content-based, they do not have people to train the teachers on literacy-based interventions. The final results were training and how professional development could support the implementation of reading interventions in a secondary setting.

Another study results from studies completed using Texas as the setting determined that RtI is not being implemented daily, educators do not know where to find or how to implement evidence-based interventions, and educators need more training to be able to implement RtI (Barton et al., 2020; Mahoney, 2020; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020). Teachers need to be able to find, and implement evidence-based interventions, and the results of this study showed that educators are using accommodations instead of evidence-based interventions. Thomas et al. (2020) also determined that middle school teachers do not believe that the middle school environment could support the successful implementation of RtI. In all of the study's results as well as the results from this study, educators are lacking training and need training so educators

beliefs that RtI will not be success in the middle school environment is again based on their lack of knowledge and training (Barton et al., 2020; Mahoney, 2020; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020).

The implications of this study's results support the USDE (2023) letter that the state still fails to identify students and provide services under the Child Find component of IDEA. DeMatthews and Knight (2019) reviewed why Texas failed to identify by reviewing TEA data and USDE reports (USDE 2016; USDA, 2018). The study's results determined that administration and educators needed training to understand the law and their duties and responsibilities under the IDEA and the Child Find Component of IDEA. A further study by Knight and DeMatthews (2020) determined that administrators and educators needed to be trained on how to implement the RtI model correctly after years of using it as a place to hold students and not refer them for special education evaluation. Recommendations from these previous studies' results identify those administrators and educator needed training on their duties and responsibilities under IDEA, including the Child Find Component and training on how to implement RtI (Barton et al., 2020; DeMatthew & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020; Venghause et al., 2023).

This current study's results determined that educators are (a) improperly implementing RtI/Child Find, (b) not using evidence-based interventions/ using accommodations, and (c) lacking fidelity with implementation. The educators' perceived barriers included (a) lack of knowledge, (b) lack of training, and (c) educators not feeling supported by the administration due to lack of training. Recommendations for social

change based on this study's results included that educators need training to be able to implement RtI/Child Find effectively. This training needs to include their duties and responsibilities under IDEA and the Child Find Component, the tiers of RtI, including how to implement RtI, district procedures for RtI implementation, and how to locate and implement evidence-based interventions. Based on the results of this study and the results of previous studies, educators still have not received adequate training to be able to implement the Child Find Component of IDEA (Barton et al., 2020; DeMatthew & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020; Venghause et al., 2023). According to the Strategic Action Plan created by TEA and approved by the USDE in 2018, TEA was to train LEAs on the Child Find component of IDEA and how to implement it. TEA was also supposed to create a database of evidence-based interventions for districts to be able to access (TEA, 2018).

Future studies may address whether TEA has provided training to the LEAs on their duties and responsibilities under the Child Find Component of IDEA and how to implement RtI, which they stated in the 2018 Strategic Action Plan (TEA, 2018). Given this study's and other studies' results after 2018, it is unclear if TEA has provided the training. The continuing letters from the USDE from 2020 to 2023 do not support that TEA has trained their LEAs, and the multiple studies that stated that teachers and administration need training do not support that TEA has trained their LEAs (USDE, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2023a, 2023b).

Conclusion

Researchers in the literature review determined that educators lacked the knowledge to implement RtI with fidelity. They also identified that educators did not understand the components of RtI, or how to use evidence-based interventions, and the educators felt they needed more training (Barton, 2020; Dimarco & Guastello, 2021; Kressler & Cavendish, 2020; Mahoney, 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). Research findings from this study determined that educators were improperly implementing RtI, not using evidence-based interventions but using accommodations instead, and they lacked fidelity with their current implementation of RtI.

Educators identified the barriers that hindered their implementation as a lack of knowledge about RtI, lack of training, and not feeling supported by the administration due to lack of training and support. The evidence from this study suggests that educators need in-depth professional development regarding RtI, evidence-based interventions, and district policies and procedures on how to implement RtI under the Child Find component of IDEA. Studies conducted within Texas since the initial findings from the USDE in 2016 until the latest letter from the USDE in 2023, still identify that Texas schools are failing to identify, evaluate and provide services for struggling students through the Child Find Component of IDEA. Studies have confirmed that educators identify the need for training as well as administration also confirming the need for more training (Barton et al., 2020; DeMatthew & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020; Venghause et al., 2023). Through professional development that will train administration and educators how to implement

the Child Find Component of IDEA will ultimately support both the educators and the students with the successful implementation of RtI.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol Form

Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Describe how you are currently implementing the Child Find component of IDEA using RtI to identify struggling students for special education assessment and services?

You mentioned (Not knowing the components of IDEA) can you elaborate?

2. Describe what the Child Find component of IDEA requires a classroom teacher to do?

a. You mentioned _____ can you elaborate

3. Describe the duties of a classroom teacher regarding the Child Find Component of IDEA?

a. You mentioned _____ can you elaborate?

4. Describe the trainings you have received regarding the Child Find Component of IDEA and why it is important?

a. You mentioned _____ can you elaborate?

5. Describe your challenges with implementing RtI?

a. Possible follow up questions as needed:

You mentioned (resources, time, support, knowledge of RtI implementation, knowledge of how to use interventions, and/or data collection), can you can elaborate?

6. Where do you find interventions to use with the students when they are in Tier 2 of the RtI process?

a. You mentioned (a website, not knowing where to find interventions) can you elaborate on where you can look or who you can ask for assistance?

7. What are the current Tier 2 and 3 interventions and how do you use them within your classroom setting?

a. You mentioned _____ can you elaborate on how you use the intervention?

8. Describe any specific challenges you have related to time regarding the learning to or the actual implementation of the RtI process?

a. You mentioned _____ can you elaborate?

9. Describe challenges related to the lack of training?

a. You mentioned _____ can you elaborate?

10. Think about everything you discussed today and your experience with the Child Find component of IDEA through using RtI, is there anything else you would like to add about the barriers or challenges with implementing RtI in the school setting?

a. You mentioned _____ can you elaborate?

Appendix B: A Priori Coding

| | |
|---|--|
| Condition 1: Dissatisfaction with the status quo - the precondition for people to accept a change is that they perceive a need to change the environment. Perception of such needs usually is revealed in people's dissatisfaction of the existing methods, products, or programs. Understanding of the cause of the dissatisfaction and identifying who has dissatisfaction can help the change agent to communicate the innovation to the adopters in a more effective way. Ellsworth (2001) said that understanding sources and the levels of dissatisfaction can help the change agent to position the innovation to be more compatible with their 'felt needs' (in Rogers' term). | |
| NC | Not wanting to change |
| DK1 | Don't know what Child Find/RtI is not implementing |
| NIP | Not implementing current plan |
| DKP | Don't know how to implement current plan |
| NT | Have not been trained |
| F | Frustration with change |

| | |
|---|--|
| Condition 2: Significant knowledge and skill of program –In order to make the implementation succeed, "the people who will ultimately implement any innovation must possess sufficient knowledge and skills to do the job." (Ely,1995). It is especially evident when the innovation involves in use of a certain tool or a technique. Without enough training to use the tool or technique, the innovation will die out soon. | |
| MT | Minimal understanding/need more training |
| NT2 | No training/no understanding of RtI |
| SK | Significant Knowledge and Skill of Program |

| | |
|--|--|
| Condition 3: Adequate Resources: availability of resources – good recipe itself does not guarantee the tasty results of cooking. There must be right ingredients and right cooking utensils available for the cook to use. In the same logic, an innovation without resources, such as money, tools and materials, to support its implementation, will not be successful. | |
| LA | Limited access to interventions/materials |
| NA | No access to interventions/materials |
| DK2 | Don't know what interventions to us for the different tiers |
| HIDN | have interventions/resources but do not know how to use them |
| LOR | Lack of Resources |
| DKN | Don't know where to go to get resources |
| UA | Using accommodations Not EBI |

| | |
|--|--|
| Condition 4: <u>Time</u>: adequate time and compensated time for users to become educated and skilled in how to use the innovation. - | |
| DNT | District does not give time to learn and implement program |
| ENL | Educators do not want to learn and implement program |
| TT | Educator states that RtI takes too much time to implement, and use/ do not have the time |

| | |
|--|--|
| Condition 5: Rewards or Incentives: the existence of incentives that motivate users to employ the innovation, or rewards provided by the organization for those who do use the innovation (Ely 1990, 1999). | |
| DNR | District/School does not provide rewards |

| | |
|---|---|
| Condition 6: Participation - Participants in the implementation should be encouraged to involve in decision-making. With the opportunities to communicate their ideas and opinions, the participants can have sense of the ownership of the innovation. Moreover, the communication among all parties can help monitor the progress of the innovation. | |
| MC | Minimal communication about ideas and opinions |
| NC | No communication about ideas and opinions |
| TC | Teachers don't understand program/Don't know who to contact |

| | |
|--|--|
| Condition 7: Commitment: Since the implementation take a great deal of endeavors and time, the people who are in volved in the implementation need to make commitment to their efforts and time. There must be "firm and visible evidence that there is endorsement and continuing support for implementation" (Ely, 1995). | |
| DNS | District does not support implementation |

| | |
|--|--|
| Condition 8: Leadership: Unless to say, the leaders' expectations and commitment have a great impact on the process of implementation. Leadership also includes the availability of affective support thorough the process. | |
| LNI | Leadership does not identify implementation expectations |
| LNS | Leadership not supporting implementation |
| NS | Educators do not feel supported |