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Response to Intervention: A Program Evaluation of Implementation in a Rural School District

Angela Garrison Rodgers
Gardner-Webb University

Response to Intervention: A Program Evaluation of Implementation in a Rural School District

By
Angela Garrison Rodgers

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Angela Garrison Rodgers under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

_____   _____
Bruce W. Boyles, Ed.D.   Date
Committee Chair

_____   _____
Michael Fleming, Ed.D.   Date
Committee Member

_____   _____
Jeffrey Isenhour, Ed.D.   Date
Committee Member

_____   _____
Jeffrey Rogers, Ph.D.   Date
Dean of the Gayle Bolt Price School
of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

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The acquisition of reading skills is a key component to a student's academic progress and success in life. Effectively implemented early intervention programs have been shown to improve reading performance of struggling readers. The purpose of this study was to conduct a CIPP program evaluation of the implementation of a Response to Intervention (RTI) Program in a rural school district. The focus of this study was an RTI program in its second year of full implementation in kindergarten and first grade in 15 elementary schools. This mixed-method study utilized data gathered from reading achievement and special education referral data, district-level and school-level administrator interviews, a teacher survey, and focus groups.

Findings from this study indicated there was no significant difference in reading achievement and special education referral data in the 2 years of program implementation. Administrators and teachers demonstrated knowledge of the purpose and key elements of an RTI program, but fidelity of program implementation was an area identified for improvement. Recommendations included clearly defining and communicating program expectations to improve fidelity of implementation. In addition, careful review, selection, and alignment of screening tools, intervention resources, and progress monitoring measures were recommended to improve consistency of implementation from school to school.

The RTI program evaluated in this study was in its second year of implementation. Results of this program evaluation provided formative assessment data of the program's strengths and weaknesses. The results of this study could be useful to district- and school-level administrators and teachers as they continue to work to implement an effective RTI program designed to meet the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Acquisition of early literacy skills is critical to the overall success of students. Boushey and Moser (2009) found those who acquired early literacy skills had the tools to expand their development of knowledge, while those who failed to develop early literacy skills fell further and further behind other students. If students made only minimal progress each year, they continued to fall behind year after year. Students who completed high school with essential reading skills had greater opportunities to be successful and increased their chances to lead fulfilling adult lives. Often, students who experienced early reading failure faced difficulty in later grades and in life. By the time struggling readers reached the secondary grades, they could be in danger of dropping out of school (Gambrell, 2004). In addition, students whose reading skills failed to keep pace with their peers experienced serious reading deficits and may have been found in need of special education. Many students referred to special education programs largely on the basis of reading failure remained in special education for many years, often for their entire school careers (Slavin, Karweit, & Wasik, 1992). Students with poor reading skills may have been at greater risk for poverty, welfare dependency, incarceration, and early death in their adult lives (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010).

Children enroll in school with a wide range of backgrounds for reading. Some enter kindergarten reading while others lack early reading and language experiences. Additionally, reading difficulties may be the result of biological or neurological deficits or environmental factors such as ineffective reading instruction, low socioeconomic status, or limited English proficiency. There may be as much as a 2-year difference in the range of early reading abilities which expands by third grade. Children who are not

minimally skilled readers by the end of third grade are unlikely to become skilled readers in high school. A student's future academic success can be predicted by their reading level at the end of third grade. With wide differences in reading abilities, kindergarten teachers often find themselves identifying students as at risk for reading failure in the first year of school (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004).

Studies have shown early intervention can dramatically improve the likelihood of success for students considered at risk due to poor early reading performance. Intervention refers to systematic and intentional efforts to provide supplemental education to at-risk students. Effective interventions identified and targeted students from the moment they began to struggle (Neuman, 2007). In his testimony before the Subcommittee on Education Reform of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2001, Dr. G. Reid Lyon, chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), stated early identification of struggling readers paired with comprehensive reading interventions could reduce the number of students reading below level in fourth grade from 38 to 6% or less (Lyon, 2001). Denton and Vaughn (2010) preferred to refer to interventions for young children as prevention because these students were just beginning to read and additional instructional assistance was provided with the intention of preventing eventual reading difficulties. Struggling students provided with regular, intense interventions that go beyond typical classroom activities with regard to extra time and one-on-one or small group instruction with a highly trained professional made good progress and avoided reading difficulty in later school years (Hall, 2006; Neuman, 2007). Kotulak (1996) pointed out there was an increasing number of children labeled learning disabled because of difficulties learning to read. This number was significantly reduced through the use of

early interventions designed to prevent reading difficulties. Denton and Vaughn (2010) reported "prereferral intervention" (p. 80) reduced the overidentification of students with learning disabilities through intervention provided within general education.

Historical Reform

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, called for full educational opportunity for all. ESEA sought to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education through federal grants to state educational agencies. These grants assisted districts with low-income students, helped districts supply textbooks and library books, and provided special education centers. ESEA was reauthorized in 2001 under the Bush Administration as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB put into place criteria to identify achievement gaps among underserved students (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2015). It emphasized all children should have the opportunity to achieve in school and recognized the importance of well-prepared professionals, evidence-based practice, and accountability (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008). The Reading First Program, a key academic piece of the reauthorization of NCLB, addressed the need to ensure all children read proficiently by the end of third grade. Reading First called for the use of research-based reading and assessment programs. Reading First also indicated the importance of developing teacher skills to screen and identify student weaknesses in reading and barriers impeding student progress (USDE, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002). Beginning in 2012, President Barack Obama's administration began offering flexibility to states with regard to certain requirements of NCLB. States submitted flexibility waivers that included rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans intended to address achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the

quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students. To date, 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have received flexibility from NCLB (USDE, 2015). ESEA was again reauthorized in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). NCLB waivers will end August 1, 2016 with full implementation of ESSA expected by the 2017-2018 school year. ESSA builds on school progress gained through NCLB and continues to require high standards and accountability for students, teachers, and administrators. Through ESSA, states and local decision makers have the opportunity to develop programs and systems indicated by student need ("The Every Student," 2015). Changes to ESEA known under the reauthorized ESSA have yet to be regulated or researched and therefore this study primarily references the ESEA version known as NCLB.

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 aligned IDEA with NCLB in the call for high-quality education for all children (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008). It allowed states to identify learning disabilities as a lack of learning progress although evidence-based instructional supports were in place (Clarke, Gersten, & Newman-Gonchar, 2010). This change to IDEA recommended use of an evidence-based intervention model rather than the discrepancy model for identification of students for special education services and called attention to the need for use of research-based interventions in the general curriculum (McCook, 2006). Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) identified RTI as an evidence-based intervention with the elements to meet this recommendation. RTI is a framework for teaching reading and providing intervention strategies for students who struggle (Fisher & Frey, 2010). An RTI approach provided students with earlier identification through a stronger emphasis on prevention and a more individual approach through assessment and specially designed

instruction. This approach to assisting students who struggle with reading marked a change to the "wait to fail" (p. 1) approach found with the discrepancy model (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008). While RTI never appeared in IDEA, it is linked to scientifically based research and evolved as a policy statement within IDEA (Sugai, Horner, Fixsen, & Blase, 2010). Further, Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) indicated the RTI model was the most credible approach to replace the discrepancy model.

With its goal to decrease the number of students reading at an unacceptable level and to prepare students for success in college, careers, and citizenship, South Carolina passed the Read to Succeed Act (Read to Succeed) on June 4, 2014. Like NCLB and IDEA, Read to Succeed called for implementation of a comprehensive and systemic approach to reading instruction to provide high quality academic experiences for all students. Read to Succeed required that the state department of education and each district develop reading plans to address Read to Succeed requirements. The state plan, approved June 10, 2015, reflected the requirement for interventions in prekindergarten through Grade 12 for all struggling readers who were not able to comprehend grade-level texts. More specifically, Read to Succeed required any student in prekindergarten through Grade 3 who was not demonstrating proficiency based on assessment data or teacher observation be provided interventions through small-group or individual instruction. The state reading plan recommended a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) which included RTI (Read to Succeed Team, 2015).

Background Data

Every 3 years, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) measures the performance of 15-year-old students in math, science, and reading literacy.

Founded in 1961, OECD is a group of countries working together to "foster prosperity and fight poverty through economic growth and financial stability" (OECD, 2015, p. 1). In 2012, 510,000 students from 65 participating countries completed the PISA assessment. Six thousand students from the United States were randomly selected from 161 schools to participate. These assessments were designed to provide students with opportunities to show how well they can apply their skills and competencies. Results for the United States were reported based on comparisons to the other 34 OECD countries. In reading, the United States ranked 17th with trend data revealing no significant change over time (OECD, 2012).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) provides the largest regularly occurring assessment completed with students from across the country. The assessment is administered uniformly and remains basically the same from year to year to allow NAEP to monitor academic progress over time. South Carolina's 2013 NAEP scores for fourth-grade reading indicated an average score of 214 which is lower than the national average of 221. This score has not significantly changed from 2011. Fourth graders in South Carolina have shown growth on NAEP testing with an increase in the average score of 11 points since 1994; but performance gaps existed between White students and African-American, Hispanic, and lower socioeconomic students (USDE, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). National reading results from the 2015 administration of NAEP indicated one third of students scoring at the below basic level, one third of students at the basic level, and one third of students scoring at the proficient level. Scores for South Carolina fourth graders were not significantly different from national scores ("The Nation's," 2015).

In 2012, a brochure prepared by the South Carolina Education Oversight

Committee indicated that one in five South Carolina students in third grade was not reading on grade level. By eighth grade, one in three students was not reading on grade level (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2013). Reading results of the 2014 Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SCPASS) indicated 21.1% of South Carolina third-grade students scored in the "not met" category. SCPASS scores for third-grade students in the district represented in this study indicated 20.2% fell in the "not met" category. This number represented an increase in the number of district third graders who scored "not met." In 2012, 12.0% of third graders were "not met"; and in 2013, 12.5% of third graders were "not met" (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2014). Data analysis of SCPASS and South Carolina's High School Assessment results indicated three trends: considerable gaps in literacy achievement were evident between demographic groups; literacy achievement declined from third grade to eighth grade; and achievement gaps in literacy increased from third grade to eighth grade (South Carolina State Department of Education, 2015b).

In the spring of 2015, South Carolina administered ACT Aspire testing to students in Grades 3-8. This nationally available test was standards-based and provided information concerning a student's progress toward college and career readiness (ACT Aspire LLC, 2015). Scoring benchmarks for this test were "in need of support" (below the lowest cut score); "close" (at or above the lowest cut score but below the benchmark); "ready" (at or above the benchmark but below the high cut score); and "exceeding" (at or above the high cut score). Based on the results of the reading subtest, 48.9% of South Carolina's third-grade students scored in need of support; 19.3% scored close; 21.2% scored ready; and 10.6% scored at the exceeding level (South Carolina State Department of Education, 2015a). For third-grade students in the district represented in this study,

ACT Aspire reading results were as follows: 49.2% scored in need of support; 19.9% scored close; 20.3% scored ready; and 10.6% scored exceeding (South Carolina State Department of Education, 2015b).

Students may be identified for special education services through IDEA in a number of categories including specific learning disability, speech, other health impairment, autism, hearing or vision impairment, orthopedic impairment, or traumatic brain injury. In 2011, students ages six through 21 were identified with a disability at the following rates: nationally, 12.9%; and in South Carolina, 13.7%. Students identified with a specific learning disability represent the largest percentage of students served through special education. Nationally, 6% of students are identified in this category and in South Carolina, 6.2% (USDE, 2013).

Overview of RTI

Fisher and Frey (2010) described RTI as a school improvement process designed to ensure students received instruction, intervention, and support necessary to be successful. In the regular classroom, RTI is intentional instruction and intervention through which a teacher evaluates the needs of a learner and provides research-based interventions as needed. The teacher monitors the success of the interventions through assessment data or progress monitoring data. If there is a positive response, the learner demonstrates progress. If there is no response (student makes no progress), the teacher diagnoses the student's difficulty, another intervention is tried, and the process continues. The purpose of RTI is to make sure students who struggle are not misidentified as disabled when different and/or more intensive instruction can address their needs.

RTI is a system of intervention based on three tiers that increase in time, intensity, frequency, and expertise (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Its purpose is to provide all students

with interventions as soon as they demonstrate need. Tier 1 represents a rigorous, grade-level curriculum and highly effective initial teaching. It is important for teachers to remember that differentiation for individual student needs is essential in Tier 1. Student needs are addressed by scaffolding content based on student strengths and weaknesses and meeting with students in small groups (Buffum et al., 2010). Tier 1 meets the needs of 75-85% of students (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Tier 2 provides an additional layer of support to students who show signs of falling behind their peers. It offers small group supplemental intervention that complements the core instruction all students receive. These interventions take place within the general educational environment in order to preserve the connection to the core curriculum (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Tier 2 interventions are most effective when they are focused on the cause of a student's struggles–a specific deficit skill. Giving students more of what did not work in Tier 1 is not the intention of Tier 2 (Buffum et al., 2010). Ten to 15% of students may require Tier 2 intervention (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Tier 3 intervention addresses needs of students who do not respond to Tier 2 interventions. Tier 3 interventions are more intense and require more time and smaller group or one-to-one instruction to target specific weaknesses. These interventions may be needed by 5-10% of students and are provided by specialists in specific academic content (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Students should receive Tier 3 interventions in addition to core instruction. To remove students from core instruction tracks at-risk students into below-grade-level curriculum. By diligently intervening through the RTI process, a vast majority of students may never need to be referred for special education testing. Students who do not respond to extra intervention support may have a learning disability that may result in the need for special education services (Sornson, Frost, & Burns, 2005).

RTI is not intended to be a process to identify students with special needs nor is it a special education initiative or supplemental intervention program. When properly implemented, RTI is defined as a schoolwide, systemic, collaborative process in which all school resources are integrated and focused to ensure that every student learns at high levels. To successfully implement RTI, staff members must move beyond the cultural and structural barriers that exist between regular education and special education to create a cooperative response in which general education instruction and support through an intervention framework work together to meet the individual needs of every student (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009).

Buffum et al. (2010) believed the only way for an organization to successfully implement RTI was to do so within a professional learning community. Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) identified schools that work within the framework of a professional learning community had a shared mission, vision, values, and goals; collaborative teams that worked interdependently to achieve common goals; and a focus on results was evidenced by a commitment to continuous improvement. Schools doing this work had clarity of purpose and a collaborative culture. Teachers worked together to identify at-risk students, and teams problem solved to intervene for each student.

Statement of Problem

Reading proficiently is a fundamental life skill with the development of reading skills serving as the primary foundation for all school-based learning (Wolfe & Nevells, 2004). Research indicated failure to develop early literacy skills has a negative impact on school performance and success in life. Despite this knowledge, students continue to perform at below acceptable levels in reading. Teachers are tasked with providing educational opportunities that support high levels of learning for all students. RTI

programs, through the use of data and research-based intervention, have been viewed as a means to support a wider range of individual student needs and potentially reduce the number of students who developed reading difficulties. These interventions are designed to address reading weaknesses before gaps in reading achievement occur (Glover & Vaughn, 2010). Test scores in the district represented in this study indicated there are students who are not meeting reading achievement benchmarks. Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, South Carolina Read to Succeed legislation requires third-grade students not reading on grade level be retained. For this reason, it is very important that each student's reading weaknesses and needs are identified early and addressed through effective interventions (Read to Succeed Team, 2015).

The impact of an RTI program was determined by the quality of its implementation (Glover & Vaughn, 2010). Hall (2008) indicated successful implementation of an RTI program took 3-5 years. The school district represented in this study is in the early stages of RTI implementation. Four of 15 elementary schools used in this study were in the third year of implementation after serving as pilot schools for the program. The remaining 11 elementary schools were in the second year of implementation. An evaluation of the program was needed to determine the quality of the RTI implementation in the district and to identify program strengths and weaknesses in order to make recommendations for continuous improvement.

Setting

The school district selected for this study was a county-wide school system with 16 elementary schools, five middle schools, four high schools, and a career and technology center. With an annual enrollment of about 16,600 students, the district was the 12th largest school district in South Carolina. The high school with the largest

enrollment in the district had 1,735 students, and the school with the smallest enrollment was an elementary school with 193 students. The district was composed of five attendance areas and employed approximately 2,000 staff members including 1,250 certified staff and 800 classified staff (Eby, 2014). There were approximately 50 kindergarten teachers and 57 first-grade teachers in the district. Student enrollment in kindergarten was approximately 1,010 students and in first grade, 1,042 students.

This district piloted RTI in five elementary schools during the 2013-2014 school year and implemented the program in the remaining elementary schools the following year. Each school was required to have a school-level RTI team which met monthly. This team was made of general education teachers, special education teachers, school level RTI coordinator, school-level administration, reading interventionist or instructional coach, guidance counselor, and school psychologist. The team met monthly, analyzed data, identified students in need of intervention, developed interventions, and discussed student progress. This program was based on the tiered approach of RTI and included universal screening and interventions with progress monitoring. Universal screening was used to identify students in need of intervention. These benchmark screenings were conducted in the fall, winter, and spring. Students falling in the 33rd percentile or below were required to have interventions through differentiated instruction as part of their core curriculum. A parent contact was required for students having difficulty and had to be documented before a student moved to Tier 2 interventions. Tier 2 interventions were provided by classroom teachers, teaching assistants, reading interventionists, or other trained staff. Progress monitoring was required every 10 days for students receiving Tier 2 intervention. If students failed to make progress in Tier 2, they continued to Tier 3 interventions which might have included one-on-one intervention or more time in the

intervention process. Progress monitoring continued every 10 days at the Tier 3 level. If the student did not show progress with Tier 3 interventions, the school-level RTI team considered a referral for special education evaluation. Kindergarten teachers had access to the My Sidewalks Early Intervention Program by Pearson. Kindergarten assistants delivered small-group instruction to struggling readers using My Sidewalks. First-grade teachers utilized Fountas and Pinnell's (2016) Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) for small-group intervention. In addition, first-grade students had access to a reading recovery/reading interventionist who served students in addition to interventions provided in the regular classroom (J. Harling, personal communication, August 25, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of an RTI program recently implemented in 16 elementary schools in a rural school district in South Carolina. The program was in its third year for five pilot schools and its second year for the other 11. One of the 16 schools, a pilot school was excluded from the study because it was one in which this researcher was employed. The study concentrated on kindergarten and first-grade teachers and students and sought to discover the overall effectiveness of the RTI program by determining progress toward meeting identified program goals, assessing the level of fidelity of program implementation, and identifying the degree to which the program met the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers.

Overview of Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The CIPP Evaluation Model developed by Daniel Stufflebeam (2000a) was

used for this program evaluation. This evaluation model is made up of four interconnected evaluations: context, input, process, and product. One use of this evaluation model is the evaluation of programs within school districts. The CIPP Evaluation Model was chosen for this study because of its use for evaluating school-based programs and the potential uses for information discovered from the evaluation. In addition, methods for collecting data within the CIPP Evaluation Model were varied and included analyzing data, surveying, and interviewing stakeholders. These methods of collecting data were consistent with a mixed-methods study approach (Stufflebeam, 2000b). For this study, data were gathered by analyzing reading achievement test data and special education referral data, conducting interviews, administering a survey, and gathering responses from focus groups.

Research Questions

Research questions were developed based on the four complementary evaluations within the CIPP Evaluation Model.

1. What conditions led to the implementation of an RTI program? (Context)

2. Does the RTI program meet the identified needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers? (Input)

3. To what degree is the RTI program implemented with fidelity? (Process)

4. How effective is the RTI program? (Product)

Definition of Terms

Fidelity of implementation. Classroom instruction at each of the 3 tiers of RTI is implemented and delivered as designed and intended.

Intervention. Additional instructional support provided to students who are not mastering instructional content that goes above and beyond instruction presented to all

students.

Progress monitoring. Regularly assessing student progress to determine if the student is making desired academic gains.

RTI. A framework of evidence-based or research-based reading instruction designed to provide early intervention to students not mastering key reading practices.

Universal screening. Assessing all students in a class or grade level to identify those who may have difficulties and need additional support.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of an RTI program recently implemented in elementary schools in a rural school district in South Carolina. The study concentrated on kindergarten and first-grade teachers and students. The study sought to discover overall effectiveness of the RTI Program by determining progress toward meeting identified program goals, assessing the level of fidelity of program implementation, and identifying the degree to which the program meets the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers.

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of effective reading instruction in the primary grades and factors that may cause students to struggle when learning to read. In addition, this chapter investigates responses to address needs of struggling readers including the RTI program. The tiered-approach of the RTI program is discussed in detail along with guiding principles for effective RTI implementation.

Effective Reading Instruction

Learning to read well is the key to academic success for children. Wolfe and Nevills (2004) indicated learning to read fluently was a long process beginning in infancy. Reading is a highly complex skill with most students becoming fluent readers achieving a basic competency level in middle childhood. Although a small number of children learn to read before entering kindergarten, most learn with effective, formal instruction.

Formal reading instruction begins with an effective core curriculum in the primary grades. This curriculum includes The National Reading Panel's (NRP) five key practices of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency,

comprehension, and vocabulary (David, 2010; Denton & Vaughn, 2010). Teaching students to verbally manipulate small segments of sound (phonemes) had a positive impact on reading and spelling abilities. The panel reported instruction in phonics aided all children and demonstrated the most improvement in reading instruction. Phonics instruction emphasized correlations between letters and sounds and how they work together in spelling and reading. Phonics instruction has been found to particularly benefit students who struggle with reading and those from backgrounds of poverty. Students who read with fluency were able to pronounce words at a sufficient rate with accuracy and expression, increasing their level of understanding. Fluency was often an overlooked skill in reading instruction. The panel found teaching students specific reading comprehension strategies helped students improve their understanding of text. Because readers cannot make meaning of what they read if they do not understand the words they read, the panel indicated the importance of intentional vocabulary instruction to improve reading skills (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, Tarver, & Jungjohann, 2006). Research suggested a link between the size of a child's vocabulary and reading comprehension. The greater the child's vocabulary, the better the child was able to comprehend what was read (David, 2010).

Providing effective reading instruction to insure all students read proficiently is a challenging and complicated process. Students who received this type of instruction were less likely to require specialized instruction to insure acquisition of necessary reading skills. Effective instruction included not only the content of the five key practices identified by NRP (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary) but also a skilled teacher who coordinated resources and worked with students according to individual need in order to create a strong overall reading program.

Students entered classrooms with varying reading strengths and weaknesses. Successful reading teachers had high expectations for all students regardless of reading level (Taylor, 2008). Low teacher expectations may have had a negative impact on student achievement (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Good (1987) defined teacher expectations as assumptions teachers made about a student's performance based on what they know or what they perceive about a student. Through his research, Good found teachers based their expectations of students on a broad range of information including student record information, test data, and comments from former teachers. These expectations changed over time as teachers gathered more information about a student. Good indicated some teachers treated lower and higher achieving students differently resulting in variations in student achievement. Good identified specific teacher behaviors that communicated varying expectations. For example, calling on lower achieving students less often than higher achieving students; providing less academic feedback to lower achieving students; or giving less wait time for lower achieving students to answer questions were examples of varying expectations (Good, 1987). In a study conducted with approximately 1,900 elementary students, McKown and Weinstein (2002) found teacher expectations varied according to students' racial backgrounds. In addition, student perceptions of their teachers' expectations of their ability and performance had an impact on students' overall achievement. These researchers found lower expectations for African-American and Latino students were associated with lower levels of reading achievement (McKown & Weinstein, 2002).

In order to meet the varying needs of students, teachers must differentiate their instruction. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) defined differentiation as "classroom practice with a balanced emphasis on individual students and course content" (p. 14).

Differentiation involved intentional instructional planning designed to continually address variations in students' abilities due to readiness, style of learning, and background. Teachers who effectively differentiated instruction reflected on classroom successes and failures and adjusted their practice (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Based on the work of Dweck (2006), Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) described differentiation as a "growth mind-set endeavor" (p. 33). Dweck indicated teachers demonstrating a growth mindset believed all students had the capacity to learn if the student was willing to learn and had support to do so. Teachers with a growth mindset focused on a student's potential and work ethic rather than past performance. Students who struggled in the past made changes to their success level through hard work and determination. High expectations, a growth mindset, quality learning activities, and teacher instructional support were all necessary to provide effective instruction to students (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012).

Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2002) conducted a study with 14 low-income elementary schools from across the United States. Schools selected for this study implemented a program of reading reform and demonstrated greater than expected reading achievement in the primary grades. Taylor's study sought to identify programs and instructional practices contributing to the effectiveness of these schools. Results of the study indicated impoverished students in kindergarten, first, and second grades made the most progress in reading when a large portion of their reading instruction was presented in small achievement groups and their progress was monitored on a regular basis. In addition, students who demonstrated the most growth have plenty of time to read and apply strategies and skills (Taylor et al., 2002)

The amount of time spent on reading instruction is important. Taylor (2008)

stated, "Effective teachers spend 120-135 minutes per day on reading instruction in the primary grades" (p. 21); however, simply spending time on reading was not enough to make instruction effective. Effective reading instruction required active involvement of both teacher and student. Research has shown a positive relationship to students' reading growth when higher levels of engagement and active responses were presented during reading instruction. Organizational elements of time spent on reading were important to advancing student proficiency. Teachers provided students opportunities to work on reading skills through whole group, small group, and individual activities. Time spent in each of these activities was proportioned in order to successfully present content and provide students with the appropriate amount of time to interact with the teacher and/or material. Research revealed too much time spent in whole group activities resulted in passive student interaction, while too much time spent in small group activities required too much work completed in pairs or individually (Taylor, 2008). Additionally, too much whole-group instruction and independent work interfered with the inclusion of supplemental interventions during instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2010). The activities chosen for student completion during this time should be varied according to student abilities and needs. In addition to grouping, teachers determined the appropriate amount of teacher-directed instruction and teacher-supported instruction. The amount of each was determined by reading content and needs of students and varied according to the lesson. Teacher-directed instruction was teacher-led and included questioning, clarification, and retelling of the story. Teacher-supported instruction allowed students to work with assistance and coaching from the teacher. The level of challenge provided during reading instruction was impacted by use of high-level and low-level questioning and by opportunities allowing student engagement through thought-provoking discussion

about texts at the student's level (Taylor, 2008).

Assessment is a key component to purposeful instruction. It was up to the teacher, through the use of informal and formal assessment data, to determine which instructional materials and strategies were appropriate to meet the needs of each student. Making use of a variety of data sources including teacher observation and diagnostic notes for each student guided teachers as they determined what adjustments were needed in their instruction in order to insure students at any level of reading proficiency continued to advance their reading skills. Teachers should understand the needs of individual students in order to balance time spent working on particular skills. For example, time spent teaching phonics to students who have already mastered these skills, particularly in Grades 2 and 3, hindered reading progress. However, for a second-grade student who struggled with phonics, phonics instruction was appropriate to continue to build this student's reading skills (Taylor, 2008).

Factors Leading to Reading Difficulty

Some children struggled with the acquisition of early literacy skills. Many of these never learned to read fluently enough to derive meaning from what they read. Wolfe and Nevills (2004) suggested two factors, biological and environmental, that led to early difficulty with literacy skills acquisition. Biological factors included difficulties based on structures of the brain; difficult events at birth; genetics, impairments of vision, hearing, or memory; or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Students with these types of biological factors struggled making connections between oral language and printed words (Carnine et al., 2006). Biological factors did not automatically mean that a child would have difficulty learning to read. Because a young child's brain is adaptable and open to change, it is possible to address difficulties caused by biological circumstances

through remediation (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004).

Environmental factors also had an impact on a child's ability to learn to read. One environmental factor involved instruction provided to the child at school. The choice and quality of reading programs had a direct impact on effectiveness of reading instruction as did ability of the teacher who provided the reading instruction. A teacher's ability to select appropriate materials to address student needs was critical. There was evidence suggesting a child who had poor reading instruction in the first year of school continued to struggle with reading in subsequent grades even with adequate instruction in the following years. Another environmental factor dealt with students whose first language is not English. Many students who learn to read in their native language become proficient readers but struggle when learning to read English (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004).

Poverty was an environmental factor that impacted reading achievement. Jensen (2009) defined poverty as "a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects the mind, body, and soul" (p. 6). Several different forms of poverty were found under this definition. Situational poverty occurred when there was a sudden and serious crisis within the family such as death, illness, loss of employment, or divorce. Families in which two or more generations were born into poverty did not have skills to better their situations and were considered to be in generational poverty. Absolute poverty referred to lack of essential resources such as an adequate home, running water, power, and/or food. Families whose income fell below the defined poverty level were considered to be in relative poverty. Some families found themselves in poverty based on where they lived. For example, some who lived in urban areas encountered stress (urban poverty) from overcrowding or violence. People who

lived in rural areas may suffer from rural poverty where there were fewer resources and services to address critical needs. Children whose families struggled with any form of poverty were adversely affected. These children often lived in poorer neighborhoods and had fewer cognitive resources resulting in fewer opportunities to interact with books and/or build background knowledge (Jenson, 2009; Wolfe & Nevills, 2004). Children from poverty began school with underdeveloped skills in the areas of oral language and basic literacy awareness (Carnine et al., 2006). When compared to their middle-class peers, these ill-prepared children appeared not ready for reading instruction (Harry & Klingner, 2007). Often, instruction provided for students from poverty failed to consider these weaknesses resulting in students falling behind from the beginning of their school careers (Carnine et al., 2006). Dweck (2006) discussed Benjamin Bloom's work indicating, with the exception of the 2-3% of children with severe impairments, all students can learn given "appropriate prior and current conditions of learning" (p. 66). Students who struggled to read based on either biological or environmental factors required additional support in order to make satisfactory reading achievement (Carnine et al., 2006).

Students with delays due to biological or environmental factors required targeted support to develop early reading skills in order to learn to read at a rate similar to their peers. Early intervention programs in schools provided these students a systematic reading program including explicit lesson delivery and data-driven instruction. A systematic reading program provided activities for students aligned to key components of reading instruction. These programs included instruction for students who read below, at, or above grade level. Instruction was very specific and designed to be engaging for students. These type of tasks helped students achieve mastery. Information was

introduced at a rate that allowed students time to practice and develop foundational reading skills. Teachers gathered information about student progress through the use of regular assessments. The results of these assessments guided instruction for each student. This type system of reading was sequenced and consistent as it was implemented from one grade to the next (Carnine et al., 2006).

In an effort to get help for a student who struggled with reading, teachers might make a referral for special education services. Students referred by teachers due to academic difficulty represented 73-90% of students who qualified for special education services. Students served through special education numbered 13.5% of all students in K-12 schools (National Education Association [NEA], 2007). Although these students benefitted from special education instruction, often they were added to special education when they had unique learning challenges rather than learning disabilities (Harry & Klinger, 2006). Sailor (2009) cited Lyon (2001) who argued methods for identifying students with learning disabilities seemed to place failure to make expected grade-level progress as a deficiency with the child rather than considering other environmental causes contributing all or part of a lack of success. In addition, Lyon suggested that a learning disability in many cases was the result of a teaching disability. Research into the process of placing African-American and Hispanic students into special education indicated, in some cases, these students received inadequate classroom instruction before the referral for special education (Harry & Klinger, 2006). NEA referred to overidentification/ labeling of certain demographic groups and minorities as "disproportionality in special education" (p. 1). Disproportionality resulted in services that may be supplied but not needed and may have had negative consequences for students because participation in special education limited participation in challenging curriculum (NEA, 2007).

Identifying students for special education when they were not disabled may have other adverse consequences. The self-confidence of these students may be negatively impacted when a socially stigmatizing label was placed on them. Students in special education had less interaction with other academically capable students. In addition, teachers might have had lower expectations of special education students resulting in fewer academic opportunities for them (Harry & Klinger, 2006). Graduation rates for students identified with a disability were lower than those for nondisabled peers. During the 2011-2012 school-year, only 61% of students identified with a disability graduated from high school (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, also known as PL 94-142, provided rights and accommodations for all children with disabilities in public schools. Soon after the law was enacted, concerns arose over the number of students identified with learning disabilities (Brown-Chidsey, 2007). Data from the time of the enactment of PL 94-142 until 2002 indicated the number of students identified with a learning disability increased more than 300%. Approximately 80% of students served during this time were identified because of difficulties in reading and up to 40% of these students had not had adequate instruction in reading (USDE, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2002).

In 1997, NRP was tasked by the U.S. Congress to study research related to best practices for teaching children to read proficiently. The panel released its report in 2000 and identified five key practices of effective reading instruction. These practices included specific instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (David, 2010; Denton & Vaughn, 2010). In 2001, the Reading First Program was enacted by the U.S. Congress with the goal to insure all students read at or

above grade level by third grade. The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 indicated children

cannot be identified for special education service without first having instruction in the

five key practices identified by NRP (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008). In addition, IDEA

2004 directed that students could not be identified for special education service because

of poor classroom instruction, reading deficiencies due to a background of poverty, and

lack of competence in speaking and reading English. These new guidelines for

identification resulted in a drop from 5.7% to 4.7% of all students in public school

identified with a specific learning disability (Haynes, 2015).

Language found in PL 94-142 detailing the process for identifying students as

learning disabled led most states to choose the discrepancy model as a means to

determine if a child met the qualifications for special education service. The discrepancy

model was called the "wait to fail" model because a child had to demonstrate a severe

difference between intellectual ability and academic achievement in order to qualify for

special education services. By the time a severe difference was realized, the child was

well behind peers academically (Brown-Chidsey, 2007). IDEA 2004 allowed "the use of

response to scientific, research-based intervention" as an alternative to the discrepancy

based model (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008, p. 2). Schools determined eligibility for

special education by a student's failure to respond to research-based interventions

(Allington, 2011, p. 40).

RTI

The use of research-based interventions coupled with a student's response to them

is called RTI (Allington, 2011). Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) defined RTI as "a

systematic and data-based method for identifying, defining, and resolving students'

academic and/or behavior difficulties" (p. 2). It represented an observation of cause and

effect results of an academic intervention and a student's response to the intervention. The goal was to plan research-based instructional interventions to allow a student to be successful (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). RTI was viewed as a prevention model because it provides support for struggling students as soon as they need it rather than waiting until achievement levels fall to a point that a discrepancy exists between ability and achievement (Brown-Chidsey, 2007).

RTI had its beginnings in diagnostic teaching, curriculum-based measurement, data-based decision making and formative assessment found in the 1970s (Johnson & Street, 2013). The components of the RTI method have been used in classrooms for a number of years but have come together as a recognized framework or system known as RTI. For example, teachers have used specifically designed instruction to address student academic needs. In addition, students have been assessed to determine academic progress. With RTI, these two practices are integrated with all students screened and monitored for academic growth with interventions provided when a specific weakness is discovered. Monitoring academic success of all students was a core component of RTI and worked to provide access to quality instruction for all students. Because instructional practices used with RTI have been verified through research studies, RTI was considered a scientifically based practice or evidence-based intervention practice. The use of evidence-based interventions increase the probability for positive outcomes for students because the interventions have proven successful through research with other groups of students (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005).

Two USDE policies, NCLB of 2001 and IDEA reauthorized in 2004, called for the use of evidence-based practice to meet the needs of students (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). In addition, the 2015 reauthorization of ESEA known as ESSA also called for the

use of evidence-based instructional practices ("The Every Student," 2015). NCLB

contained many references to the use of evidence-based instructional methods designed

to enhance learning results for all students including those with learning disabilities,

those for whom English was their second language, and those from low socioeconomic

families (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). Language included in NCLB calls for states to

provide proof of use of specific strategies shown to be effective when working with

struggling students. In addition, NCLB required monitoring student progress as

evidence-based strategies were implemented. Reading First, Early Reading First, and

Even Start were subsections of NCLB emphasizing use of a prevention model to pinpoint

instruction for struggling students (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). RTI was a

prevention-minded framework that met the requirements of NCLB including use of

specific instructional strategies and progress monitoring.

　　　IDEA pointed out an increase in the number of students receiving special

education services as students with learning disabilities. According to IDEA, data

revealed the majority of these students were identified for special education due to a

weakness in reading. Because of this, IDEA indicated a need for efforts to address the

weaknesses of students who struggle with reading. IDEA included language calling for

inclusion of three elements of evidence-based methods. These three elements were

scientifically based reading instruction, assessment of how a student responded to

intervention, and use of data for decision making. These elements were core principles

found in RTI (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). Burns, Christ, Boice, and Szadokierski

(2010) indicated research showing RTI programs reduced the number of students

identified with learning disabilities to less than 2% of the student population. NCLB and

IDEA worked together by prescribing a cohesive instructional system with the goal of

meeting the needs of all students (DeRuvo, 2010).

While RTI had its beginnings in special education as one method for eligibility determination, its emphasis on prevention and success for all students placed it, appropriately, in general education (Sailor, 2009). RTI provided all students with high-quality instruction including additional time and instructional support to avoid achievement gaps causing them to fall academically behind their peers. Additional time was needed for students who learned at different speeds, and additional support was needed for students who learned differently (Buffum & Mattos, 2015). RTI was a multi-tiered support system through which students were monitored through use of data and provided immediate intervention when they had academic difficulty. It was a systems approach integrating all resources found within the school: regular instruction, remedial instruction, and special education. All members of a school's staff had to be committed to its implementation (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008).

While there was no set model for RTI, a generally accepted RTI model had three tiers of learning support (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2008). The three tiers were modeled after levels of care found in public health and prevention. The first tier was similar to medical services available to all in order to prevent disease. The second tier was like secondary medical services for patients who, despite prevention efforts, developed an illness requiring specific treatment. The third tier was related to a third level of medical service in which a small number of patients developed complications demanding more in-depth treatment (Johnson & Street, 2013). Within the RTI framework, the first tier involved high-quality core instruction. The second tier provided supplemental interventions to students who fell behind their peers despite effective core instruction. These interventions addressed targeted skill areas and were provided for a short period of

time. The third tier provided students who continued to struggle with more intensive

interventions. These interventions were provided for students who had weaknesses in

multiple skill areas not successfully remediated through Tier 2 interventions. Tier 3

provided more intervention time to students and more intensive interventions than Tier 2

(Hall, 2008).

Assessment plays a key role in an RTI program. Universal screening, assessing

all students in a class or grade level, provided data indicating student strengths and

weaknesses. This type of assessment was part of the core curriculum and ideally occurs

three times a year. Universal screening helped identify students who may have

difficulties and need additional support. Progress monitoring provided regular

assessment of students to determine if a student made academic gains within an

instructional program. Progress monitoring took place in all tiers of RTI but was

typically used in Tiers 2 and 3. The assessments used for progress monitoring were

designed to be easy to use and provided readily available data from which teachers and

other school staff made decisions on how best to assist students and effectiveness of

interventions and/or programs. Progress monitoring assessments were given regularly

and served to guide intervention instruction. Within an RTI program, progress-

monitoring results assisted the teacher in determining a student's response to an

intervention and helped determine which students were in need of additional intervention

(Mellard & Johnson, 2008).

"Fidelity of implementation" (Mellard & Johnson, 2008, p. 118) is important to

the success of an RTI program. There were three areas in which to consider the fidelity

of implementation within an RTI program. The first was the overall school process

which involved the consistency with which the elements of RTI are carried out in the

classroom and across grade levels. The second area related to the quality of selected

interventions. Those interventions with a strong research base had a greater chance of

improving student performance. The third area was found at the teacher level and was

determined by the quality in which a teacher implemented instruction, an intervention,

and/or progress monitoring (Mellard & Johnson, 2008). Failure to implement an RTI

program with fidelity at any of these levels resulted in the program becoming ineffective.

While it was important to preserve fidelity of the RTI model and interventions in order to

realize the student academic gains suggested by research, it was difficult to assess the

degree to which fidelity was maintained (McDougal, Graney, Wright, & Ardoin, 2010).

Glover (2010) agreed that it was difficult to assess fidelity of implementation but

suggested several methods for doing so. Collection and analysis of fidelity monitoring by

a variety of stakeholders including administrators, teachers, and specially trained staff

was a suggested means of monitoring fidelity of the program. This information included

self-reflections by teachers implementing the program and observations of

implementation of the program. Professional development for teachers with regard to the

components of the program and selecting appropriate interventions along with

implementation feedback was another approach recommended to encourage

implementation fidelity (Glover, 2010).

Tier 1–Effective Core Instruction

The first and most essential tier of RTI was initial instruction or core instruction

provided every day in classrooms. Effective core instruction addressed needs of 75-85%

of all students (Fisher & Frey, 2010). A strong core curriculum, as discussed at the

beginning of this chapter, was needed to reduce the number of students who need more

intensive interventions. While RTI involved a student's response to instruction, effective

core instruction was responsive to needs of students (Fisher & Frey, 2012). The most successful Tier 1 instruction provided students with second and third opportunities to master material before moving on to Tier 2 interventions (Huff, 2015). Through additional opportunities for mastery, teachers were able to provide timely, focused interventions and avoided the need for remediation (Harrison, 2015). Too often the instructional practice was to teach the material once and look outside the classroom for additional help if students struggled (Huff, 2015). Providing organized reading instruction filled with challenging opportunities that meet the needs of all students was a difficult task for a teacher to undertake alone. In order to provide the highest level of instruction, teachers needed to collaborate with others to reflect on instructional practices and develop effective curriculum (Taylor, 2008). When teachers worked collaboratively to reflect on classroom practice; maximize resources; share instructional ideas; and brainstorm strategies to address student weaknesses, there was a positive impact on Tier 1 instruction (Huff, 2015). It is important to note that RTI was "undermined when schools relied on Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions to compensate for inadequate, unresponsive, and erratic core classroom instruction" (Fisher & Frey, 2010, p. 25).

Tier 2–Supplemental Interventions

Tier 2 interventions were provided for approximately 10-15% of students who did not make satisfactory progress despite high-quality instruction in the core curriculum (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Sometimes referred to as "secondary prevention," the goal of Tier 2 intervention was to close the gap between struggling readers and their on-level peers (Denton & Vaughn, 2010). This gap was often identified through the universal screening process (Fisher & Frey, 2010). In order to close this gap, interventions were provided in addition to regular classroom instruction. Tier 2 interventions were best delivered

through small-group instruction to directly address specific skill weaknesses (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). Because there was a need to quickly improve the reading skills of these students, interventions had to be highly effective and targeted. These interventions were presented with a high level of intensity to advance students at a greater rate (Denton & Vaughn, 2010). Supplemental interventions that went above and beyond regular classroom instruction provided a smaller setting and more time, occurred more often, and involved more formal interventions. Students receiving Tier 2 interventions went through the progress monitoring process to determine how well the provided interventions were addressing skill weaknesses and how well the student was progressing (Fisher & Frey, 2010).

Tier 3–Intensive Interventions

Tier 3 interventions were provided for the 5-10% of students who continued to lag behind their peers even after Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction. Tier 3 interventions differed from Tier 2 interventions because they were provided in a smaller group setting, many times one-to-one by someone with more specialized training. Interventions were often individualized and targeted to individual student weaknesses (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Tier 3 support was administered in different ways depending on the design of the program. Some programs declared students eligible for special education services at this point, while others had a special education teacher provide intensive interventions although the student was not identified for special education. Other models considered Tier 3 interventions a part of the general education program. Intensive progress monitoring continued in Tier 3 (Denton & Vaughn, 2010). Providing effective interventions at the Tier 3 level required a collaborative problem-solving process through which teachers worked together to identify why students were not succeeding and determined evidence-

based interventions to improve student performance (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).

Implementing RTI for the Right Reasons

While there was evidence that effectively implemented RTI programs result in higher levels of student achievement, there were still schools that struggled with implementation because of beliefs about the purpose of an RTI program. Buffum et al. (2010) indicated some schools saw RTI as a new way to refer students to special education. They provided a few interventions through general education and continued the process to refer students for special education services. Some viewed the implementation of RTI as a compliance issue and worked to follow a perceived directive to put the program in place resulting in little improvement in student achievement. Others viewed RTI as a way to improve test scores which led to instructional practices that undermined RTI's purpose. Finally, some schools sought to blame external factors such as parent support, lack of student effort, lack of student ability, poverty level, or lack of funding to explain poor results through RTI. In these situations, it was often unwillingness to attempt to meet the needs of all students that was the reason behind lack of RTI success.

However, when implemented well, RTI provided learning benefits to students. Burns and Gibbons (2008) pointed out, "The goal of RTI is not to identify children who are 'truly LD' or even to improve the diagnostic procedures, but to enhance the learning of all children" (p. 5). The authors pointed out an RTI program was designed to meet the special needs of certain students without labeling them as learning disabled. Labeling students as learning disabled could have a negative impact on teacher expectations for them and a negative impact on the student's attitude about their own ability to be successful in school. RTI was about student success rather than finding children who

were learning disabled. The authors pointed out the mindset of those creating and implementing the RTI program was important to its success. DeRuvo (2010) indicated one core principle of RTI was that all students, when provided effective instruction including early identification and appropriate intervention, could learn. For there to be successful implementation of an RTI program, there had to be a change of thinking among teachers, instructional staff, and administration. This change of thinking involved developing the belief that all children had the potential to learn at high levels (Buffum et al., 2010). The central premise of RTI is "that all students can reach high levels of achievement if the system is willing (and able) to vary the amount of time students have to learn and the type of instruction they receive" (Fisher & Frey, 2010, p. 15).

Essential Guiding Principles of RTI

Buffum et al. (2012) developed four guiding principles of RTI. Working interdependently, these principles guide educators as they develop structures and programs to insure students learn at high levels. For this purpose, the authors defined "high levels of learning" as insuring a minimum of a high school education. Anything less than a high school education did not provide students with skills necessary to be successful adults. The first of Buffum et al.'s (2012) principles was "collective responsibility" (p. 9). For the steps/tiers of RTI to be successfully implemented, there must be ongoing teacher commitment and a sense of collective responsibility within the school. Collective responsibility referred to a cultural belief that each member of the organization was accountable for making sure all students learn at high levels (Buffum et al., 2012). In addition, DeRuvo (2010) indicated the need for a cultural belief that all students can learn and all students have the right to learn. Buffum et al. (2012) cited Sergiovanni (1996) when explaining two assertions included in the idea of collective

responsibility. The first was educators accepted the premise of being accountable for all students learning at high levels. The second assertion was "all students" means every child. In order for implementation of RTI to be as effective as possible, there had to be a culture aligned to these two assertions. Educators often felt challenged by environmental situations and lack of educational experiences some students brought to the classroom. However, research revealed highly effective schools were able to almost completely overcome the challenges of ill-prepared students (Buffum et al., 2010). Lezotte and McKee (2002) pointed out that in effective schools, the staff believed they had skills and expertise necessary to help all students reach mastery.

In order to insure all students learned at high levels, teachers were no longer able to be solely responsible for all students in their classrooms. Matching resources and developing interventions within all three tiers was challenging for a classroom teacher working alone (Sailor, 2009). One teacher did not have all of the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the learning needs of every child in his or her classroom. In order to insure high levels of learning for all students, teachers had to collaborate and share their individual talents and skills to meet a wide variety of student learning needs. Burns and Gibbons (2008) described collaboration as a critical element in the RTI process. The authors indicated more effective cooperation was built through "sharing the responsibility" (p. 59). Teachers shared the responsibility by providing immediate and ongoing support for students and each other. By working together, teachers shared instructional responsibility, used group problem-solving strategies, and provided encouragement for each other (DeRuvo, 2010).

In order to facilitate the type of collaboration needed to effectively implement RTI, teachers worked together in teams (Buffum et al., 2012). Buffum et al. (2012)

recommended use of professional learning communities (PLCs) to build the needed level of collaboration. PLCs created partnerships among teachers providing emotional and professional support as they worked together to achieve a common goal–in this case, high levels of learning for all students (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). RTI collaborative teams/PLCs allowed teachers to clearly determine what students need to learn. Sailor (2009) pointed out RTI collaborative groups included representation from general education and special education. General education teachers were often able to spot individual student strengths while special education teachers identified strategies to provide remediation. Working together, teachers developed effective Tier 1 instruction based on identified student learning goals. Teams/PLCs assisted individual members as they identified students who struggled and determined ways to differentiate instruction to meet individual student needs. In addition, teams/PLCs designed and provided Tier 2 supplemental instruction for students who failed to master differentiated Tier 1 instruction and Tier 3 interventions for those who continued to struggle despite Tier 2 support (Buffum et al., 2012).

The second guiding principle of an effective RTI program identified by Buffum et al. (2012) was "concentrated instruction" (p. 45). Concentrated instruction provided the roadmap for Tier 1 instruction by clearly identifying the knowledge and skills students must master. It was important for teachers to review curriculum to ensure it provided high-quality instruction for all students. In addition, teachers should plan together to identify materials, resources, and delivery systems (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). Burns and Gibbons (2008) indicated quality instructional planning led to effective instruction. Working collaboratively to identify specific student knowledge and accompanying skills was essential to effective implementation of an RTI program. Having a concentrated

understanding of necessary curriculum allowed teachers to clearly identify interventions for specific curricular needs. Through the collaborative process, teachers developed and monitored Tier 1 instruction and planned when additional time and interventions were provided to specific students. Additionally, teachers developed formative assessments to monitor success of Tier 1 instruction (Buffum et al., 2012).

Buffum et al. (2012) stated the third guiding principle of a successful RTI program was "convergent assessment" (p. 77). Convergent assessment was the process of identifying student needs, providing instructional interventions, monitoring student RTIs, and using data to determine the success of interventions. Support for students was provided systematically and began with identification of student strengths and weaknesses through universal screening. After specific student needs were determined, appropriate strategies and interventions were matched to students according to need. Once interventions were implemented, regular monitoring of student progress took place to determine the student's response to the intervention. School-based teams reflected to determine if interventions provided were successful. If interventions failed to address a student's needs, teachers, working together, revised selected interventions and implemented additional evidence-based interventions in order to ensure student success (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). Convergent assessment "guides instruction, evaluates teaching effectiveness, and identifies specifically which students are struggling and where they need help" (Buffum et al., 2010, p. 159).

The fourth guiding principle of a successful RTI program identified by Buffum et al. (2012) was "certain access" (p. 159). Certain access means there was a school-wide system in place insuring all students received the support needed to successfully learn at high levels. Burns and Gibbons (2008) discussed important elements included in an

effective school-wide RTI system. School-wide organization included a system for continuous measurement of student progress with measures in place to identify struggling students and provide progress monitoring for them. Providing time for teachers to collaborate and problem solve was vital to the success of the RTI program. Effective school-wide organization included creating grade-level schedules to provide flexible student grouping and allow the concentration of resources available to the grade level. The most important piece of this process was the identification of students in need of support. Making sure all students who needed support were identified was the cornerstone of certain access because students with weaknesses who go unidentified will not learn at high levels (Buffum et al., 2012).

Chapter Summary

Although reading is viewed as a skill vital to one's success, research indicated too many students read below expected proficiency levels, resulting in poor academic performance. While there are many factors leading to underachievement in reading, early intervention has the potential to provide students with means to overcome challenges caused by poor reading skills. An RTI program, through the use of early research-based interventions, progress monitoring, and data analysis, can provide instruction necessary to address skill deficits. In addition, an effectively implemented RTI program can provide a schoolwide system designed to address student reading concerns before student achievement is impacted.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Problem Statement

The acquisition of reading skills is a key component to a student's academic progress and success in life. Research indicated, however, a number of students read below expected proficiency levels. NAEP national fourth-grade reading results for 2015 indicated one third of students scoring at the below basic level, one third of students at the basic level, and one third of students scoring at the proficient level. Scores for South Carolina fourth graders were not significantly different from national scores ("The Nation's," 2015). In spring 2015, South Carolina administered ACT Aspire testing to students in Grades 3-8. Scoring benchmarks for this test were "in need of support" (below the lowest cut score); "close" (at or above the lowest cut score, but below the benchmark); "ready" (at or above the benchmark, but below the high cut score); and "exceeding" (at or above the high cut score). Based on the results of the reading subtest, 48.9% of South Carolina's third-grade students scored in need of support; 19.3% scored close; 21.2% scored ready; and 10.6% scored at the exceeding level (South Carolina State Department of Education, 2015a). For third-grade students in the district represented in this study, ACT Aspire reading results were as follows: 49.2% scored in need of support; 19.9% scored close; 20.3% scored ready; and 10.6% scored exceeding (South Carolina State Department of Education, 2015b). Intervention provided to students who struggle with early reading skills can improve reading skills, allowing struggling students to read on grade level. RTI is a systematic program to provide necessary interventions.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of an RTI program implemented in a rural school district in South Carolina. This program was implemented in five pilot elementary schools during the 2013-2014 school year and in the remaining

11 elementary schools in the district in the 2014-2015 school year. The study

concentrated on kindergarten and first-grade teachers and students. This study sought to

discover the overall effectiveness of the RTI program by determining progress toward

meeting program goals, assessing the level of fidelity of program implementation, and

identifying the degree to which the program meets the needs of struggling kindergarten

and first-grade readers.

Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative

measures. The use of mixed methods provided more reliable results due to the range of

approaches used. These approaches included norm-referenced data, rating scales,

interviews, and focus groups. One benefit to the use of a mixed-methods approach was

the way quantitative and qualitative measures worked together. Quantitative measures

provided easily reviewed and summarized standardized data, while qualitative measures

provided a more in-depth look at the program through descriptive information. The use

of both quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for quality control of findings when

the two approaches were integrated (Stufflebeam, 2000a).

"Evaluation is the process of delineating, obtaining, reporting, and applying

descriptive and judgmental information about some object's merit and worth in order to

guide decision making, support accountability, disseminate effective practices, and

increase understanding of the involved phenomena" (Stufflebeam, 2000b, p. 280).

Program evaluation is important for identifying those aspects of a program that are

working and those that are not. Based on the results of a program evaluation, strengths

can be identified and suggestions for improvement can be made (Stufflebeam & Coryn,

2014). The evaluation of the district's RTI program provided information for district and

school leadership and teachers concerning the program's strengths and weaknesses and its impact on student achievement, reading instruction, and teacher collaboration in kindergarten and first grade. This information can be used to refine areas of strength and improve areas of weakness within the program in an effort to improve reading instruction and student reading achievement.

CIPP Evaluation Model

The CIPP Evaluation Model, developed by Daniel Stufflebeam, was used for this program evaluation. This evaluation model included in its uses the evaluation of programs within school districts. The CIPP Evaluation Model was chosen for this study because of its use for evaluating school-based programs and the potential uses for information discovered from the evaluation. In addition, methods for collecting data within the CIPP Evaluation Model were varied and included analyzing data and surveying and interviewing stakeholders. These methods of collecting data were consistent with a mixed-methods study approach (Stufflebeam, 2000b).

The CIPP Evaluation Model is made up of four interconnected evaluations: context, input, process, and product. Context evaluation was used to identify the major elements of the program and served as a program needs assessment. In addition to assessing needs and program goals, context evaluation also sought to discover challenges and assets within the program that hinder or aide in meeting the organization's goals and mission. Input evaluation was used to assess the program to determine if it is the best plan based on other programs or research literature for meeting the needs of the intended group. This evaluation was used to identify processes, procedures, and strategies to meet target population needs. It was utilized to review the program's design to determine if it met identified needs. Process evaluation was used to review the implementation of the

program to determine the degree to which program elements were effectively put into place and to identify implementation problems. Process evaluation allowed for the discovery of how those involved interpreted the quality of the program. Product evaluation was used to determine if the program provided desired results. Product evaluation combined information gathered through context, input, and process evaluations to identify both intended and unintended outcomes. Information gathered through product evaluation provided feedback to aide in determining program success (Stufflebeam, 2000b).

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted in 15 elementary schools in a rural school district in South Carolina. The district has 16 elementary schools participating in the RTI program, but one of the 16 schools was excluded from the study because it is one in which the researcher is an administrator. The RTI program was in its third year for five pilot schools and its second year for the other 11. The school in which the researcher was an administrator was one of the five pilot schools. Participants invited to participate in the study included kindergarten and first-grade teachers in the 15 selected schools. There were approximately 50 kindergarten teachers and 57 first-grade teachers in these schools. Student enrollment in kindergarten was approximately 1,010 students and in first grade, 1,042 students. In addition, two members of district-level administration, the special service coordinator for elementary education and the director of elementary education, and 15 building-level administrators participated in this study.

Research Questions

Research questions were developed based on the four complementary evaluations within the CIPP Evaluation Model. This study sought to answer the following research

questions to conduct a program evaluation of the implementation of an RTI program in a school district.

1. What conditions led to the implementation of an RTI Program? (Context)

2. Does the RTI Program meet the identified needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers? (Input)

3. To what degree is the RTI Program implemented with fidelity? (Process)

4. How effective is the RTI Program? (Product)

Instruments

Quantitative and qualitative study data gathered and analyzed for this study included reading achievement test data, special education referral data, and participant responses from interviews, a teacher survey, and focus groups.

Reading Achievement–Primary Map. Clemens, Shapiro, Hilt-Panahon, and Gischlar (2011) indicated change to overall student achievement was the most important first outcome found after the implementation of an RTI program. In addition, the authors pointed out once there was improvement for all students including targeted interventions for those who struggle, additional RTI program outcomes were realized such as reduction to the number of students referred for special education services. This district administered Primary Map to kindergarten and first-grade students in the spring of each school year. Primary Map is a computer-adaptive assessment designed to measure student growth and assist teachers with curriculum development including instructional differentiation ("Measures of academic," 2015, p.2). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) is an inferential statistic commonly used in educational research to determine if there is a difference between mean scores of more than two groups (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). For this study, an ANOVA was calculated to analyze Primary Map mean percentile scores in

order to determine if there was a difference in student reading achievement between the groups of students tested in the years 2012 through 2015. Results were reported in tables for each grade level and all students in the study.

Special education referrals. Special education referrals were analyzed for the school years 2010-2011 through 2014-2015. Chi square is an inferential statistic used to determine if results from categorical data differ from an expected rate (Gall et al., 2005). For this study, chi square was used to determine if there was a change in referral rates in kindergarten and first grade. An average rate of referrals for 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 was calculated and used as the expected rate for chi-square analysis of referral data for the years 2012-2013, 2013-2014 (pilot year), and 2014-2015. Results were reported in tables of descriptive data and chi-square results.

Survey. A survey, found in Appendix A, was used to gather feedback about the RTI program from kindergarten and first-grade teachers. Five kindergarten and six first-grade teachers at the researcher's school pretested the study survey. Research indicated pretesting the survey allowed the researcher to determine what questions work, determine if the survey was a good length, and ensure questions were understood (Meta Connects-Research, Practice & Social Change, 2015). Feedback from these teachers was used to fine tune the survey. The survey was also reviewed for clarity by the special services coordinator for elementary education and the director of elementary education.

All kindergarten and first-grade teachers in the 15 participating schools were invited to participate in the survey. The survey used a five-point Likert scale including the following options: strongly agree (A); agree (B); neither agree nor disagree (C); disagree (D); and strongly disagree (E). A Likert scale was chosen because participants were familiar with this type of scale, making it easier for them to share their answers

(Chavez, 2013). The survey included a section for comments after each question. Participants were invited to participate in the survey by email. Text of the email invitation is included in Appendix A. The survey was distributed electronically through the use of Survey Monkey. An electronic survey was chosen because all participants had access to complete the survey through the district's email system. Response rates for electronic surveys have been found to be similar to those for mailed surveys. In addition, respondents were more likely to type more thorough answers than they would write on a paper survey. An electronic survey was less expensive and allowed for quicker responses. Also, an electronic survey provided data collection tools that allowed more accurate data reporting and ease of working with data (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). Zheng (2011) indicated 80% of electronic survey responses are collected within 7 days after email invitations are sent, with another 11% collected in the second week. The survey remained open for responses for 2 weeks. An email reminder indicating the survey was still open for responses was sent at the end of the first week.

Survey data compiled for each question were analyzed within the CIPP program evaluation framework to gather information for a formative assessment of the RTI program. Percentages of teachers responding at each level of the Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree) for each question were calculated. Survey question responses were analyzed by kindergarten teacher responses, first-grade teacher responses, and respondents as a whole. A chi-square analysis was used to analyze survey data at three response levels: strongly agree/agree, neither agree nor disagree, and strongly disagree/disagree to determine if teacher responses differed from an expected rate of 100% strongly agree and agree. Because this study was a program evaluation, an expected rate of 100% strongly

agree/agree was chosen to determine the level of teacher identification of the basic elements of the program and the degree to which teachers indicated the program was implemented with fidelity. Tables were created to report survey response data and chi-square results.

     Interviews. Two interviews were conducted–one with the district's special services coordinator for elementary education and one with the director of elementary education. These interviews determined background information that led to the district's decision to implement an RTI program, strengths of the implementation of the program, and challenges to the success of the program. The researcher recorded and transcribed interviews. Transcript-based analysis is considered the most rigorous type of analyzing data (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). Responses were analyzed by coding and categorizing interview responses. To begin the coding process, the researcher read through a hard copy of the interview transcript from beginning to end. During a second reading, the researcher read the transcript, highlighted text, and assigned codes. Coding was the process of breaking down and organizing data by labeling segments of information with words or phrases known as codes. Codes helped the researcher summarize and synthesize data. During a third reading, the researcher reviewed codes and grouped them into categories or themes (Saldana, 2009). Themes were reviewed and applied to the elements found in the CIPP Evaluation Model: context, input, process, and product. Interview data as they relate to the elements of the CIPP Evaluation Model were presented in narrative form. A table was created to report common themes identified from interview responses. Questions for these interviews included

     1. What conditions led to the district's decision to implement an RTI program? (Context)

2. Before the implementation of RTI, what programs were in place to address the needs of struggling kindergarten and first grade readers? (Input)

3. Why was an RTI program selected for use in the district? (Input)

4. What do you feel are the strengths of the program? (Context)

5. What challenges have you observed with the implementation of the program? (Context)

6. How do you monitor the implementation of the program? (Process)

7. How do you measure the level of the fidelity of implementation of the program? (Process)

8. How would you rate the quality of the implementation of the program? (Product)

9. How would you rate the effectiveness of the program? (Product)

Individual interviews were conducted with school-level administrators of the 15 participating elementary schools. These interviews gathered information regarding implementation of the RTI program, strengths of the implementation of the program, and challenges to the success of the program. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. A table was created to report common themes identified from interview responses. Questions for these interviews included

1. Before the implementation of RTI, what programs were in place to address the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers?

2. What do you feel are the strengths of the program?

3. What challenges have you observed with the implementation of the program?

4. How do you monitor the implementation of the program?

5. How would you rate the quality of the implementation of the program?

6. How would you rate the effectiveness of the program?

Focus group. A focus group is a small panel of people chosen based on knowledge and perspective of a common topic. For this study, implementation of the RTI program at a particular grade level was the characteristic for selecting participants for each group. Members of a focus group met face-to-face with a facilitator to discuss important aspects and themes of the topic (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Through the use of focus groups, participants had the opportunity to share ideas with others in the group as they discussed programs based on their own individual experiences. Through their discussions, participants shared their observations and beliefs about the program. They identified program strengths and weaknesses and recommended changes based on their experiences. Focus groups are helpful in need assessments and program evaluations because they can help determine if a program provided desired outcomes (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004).

For this study, two focus groups, one with kindergarten teachers and one with first-grade teachers, were used to gather additional information about the RTI program. Members of two focus groups were randomly selected from kindergarten teachers and first-grade teachers in the participating schools. Randomly selected participants from each of the larger groups of participants allowed for generalization of thoughts and positions of groups as a whole (Trochim, 2006). Focus groups are typically made up of eight to 12 participants based on similar characteristics. For more complex topics, five to seven members were recommended. For this study, each focus group was made up of at least six teachers. Members of each group, kindergarten and first grade, were placed in alphabetical order by last name. A randomized list was generated using Excel to select 20 potential candidates for each focus group. Randomly selected participants were

invited by email to participate in the appropriate grade-level focus group. The text of the invitation email is included in Appendix B. Follow-up phone calls were made to potential participants who failed to respond to the email invitations. Selected focus-group members were given the opportunity to decline the invitation to participate in the focus group.

A focus-group protocol was developed for this study. The protocol served as an agenda for the group by outlining topics to be discussed. In addition, the protocol allowed discussion to flow in a logical manner and set norms for the group by defining member participation guidelines (Rossi et al., 2004). A protocol for this study's focus groups is included in Appendix B. Questions for the focus groups included

1. What are the goals of the RTI program? (Context)

2. What did reading instruction for struggling readers look like in your classrooms before implementing RTI? (Input)

3. In your opinion, what are the strengths of RTI? (Input)

4. In your opinion, what are the challenges of RTI? (Input)

5. How do you insure the program is implemented with fidelity? (Process)

6. In your opinion, how effective is the RTI program? (Product)

A proxy facilitated both focus groups. A proxy was used to avoid a situation in which members of a focus group felt they had to respond in a particular way and to minimize the possibility of bias in participant responses (Latess, 2008). Discussion from each focus group was audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. Transcripts were thoroughly reviewed and coded to identify themes found in focus-group responses. Themes were reviewed and applied to the elements found in the CIPP Evaluation Model: context, input, process, and product. Focus-group data, as they relate to the elements of

the CIPP Evaluation Model, were presented in narrative form. A table was used to record the frequency of themes identified from focus-group responses.

On January 28, 2016, permission was granted by the assistant superintendent for instructional services in the chosen district to conduct this research study. A copy of the letter granting permission is found in Appendix C.

Limitations

Limitations are possible weaknesses in a study that are beyond the researcher's control. Limitations may narrow methodology and conclusions (Baltimore County Schools, 2015). There were limitations to this study. Because the RTI program began with a pilot year for four of the district's elementary schools, the program was implemented at two different time intervals. Some building-level administrators and teachers worked with the program for 3 years and some for 2 years resulting in varying levels of understanding of the program framework. In addition, reading achievement data and special education referral data reflecting full district RTI implementation was only available for 1 year. Finally, participant responses may be impacted because the researcher was an administrator in the district and whose school participated in the pilot year.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher to focus the study and are within the researcher's control (Baltimore County Schools, 2015). This study was designed within the scope of the CIPP Evaluation Model's inter-related evaluations of context, input, process, and product with regard to the implementation of an RTI program. Development of interventions, professional development, special education processes, and the role of building-level administrators as facilitators of the program were

not within the scope of this study.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to conduct a CIPP Program Evaluation of an RTI program recently implemented in elementary schools in a rural school district in South Carolina. The study concentrated on district- and building-level administrators, kindergarten and first-grade teachers, reading achievement test results, and special education referral rates of kindergarten and first-grade students. This study sought to discover the overall effectiveness of the RTI program by determining progress toward meeting program goals, assessing the level of fidelity of program implementation, and identifying the degree to which the program meets the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. Data were collected through the analysis of reading achievement test data, special education referral data, and use of interviews, teacher survey, and focus groups. Data were analyzed within the CIPP framework and results reported in order to provide information as to strengths, weaknesses, and level of success of program implementation.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The acquisition of reading skills is a key component to a student's academic progress and success in life. Reading interventions provided to students who struggle with early reading skills can improve reading progress and allow struggling students to read on grade level. RTI is a systematic program to provide needed interventions. This mixed-methods research study was designed to conduct a program evaluation of an RTI program implemented in a rural school district in South Carolina. The CIPP Program Evaluation Model was used as the framework for this program evaluation because one of the uses of this model is to evaluate programs within school districts. The CIPP Evaluation Model gathered information through four interconnected evaluations: context, input, process, and product in order to provide information as to strengths, weaknesses, and level of success of the RTI program implementation (Stufflebeam, 2000b). This program evaluation identified information to refine areas of strength and improve areas of weakness within the program in an effort to improve reading instruction and student reading achievement.

Research Questions

For this study, the following research questions were written based on the CIPP Evaluation Model:

1. What conditions led to the implementation of an RTI program? (Context)

2. Does the RTI program meet the identified needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers? (Input)

3. To what degree is the RTI program implemented with fidelity? (Process)

4. How effective is the RTI program? (Product)

Setting and Participants

The setting for the research study was a rural school district in South Carolina. Fifteen schools were included in the study. Four of these schools participated in a pilot implementation of the RTI program during the 2013-2014 school year. All 15 schools provided interventions to students through the RTI program during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. This study included two members of district leadership: the special services coordinator for elementary education and the director of elementary education. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers and building-level administrators from the 15 schools included in the study were also participants in the study.

Overview

In this chapter, results from data gathered through the analysis of a reading achievement test and special education referral data, a teacher survey, and interviews with district-level and school-level administrators were reviewed and analyzed as they related to the CIPP Evaluation Model: context, input, process, and product. Context evaluation was used to identify major elements of the program and served as a program needs assessment. In addition to assessing needs and program goals, context evaluation was used to discover challenges and assets within a program that hindered or aided in meeting the organization's goals and mission. Input evaluation was used to assess the program to determine if it was the best plan for meeting needs of–in the case of this study–struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. Process evaluation was utilized to review the implementation of the program to determine the degree to which program elements are effectively put in place and to identify implementation problems. Process evaluation allowed for the discovery of how those involved interpreted the quality of the program. Product evaluation was used to combine information gathered through context,

input, and process evaluations and identified intended and unintended outcomes. This information provided feedback to aide in determining program success (Stufflebeam, 2000b).

Quantitative Data Analysis

Primary MAP. Results from 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 spring administration of Primary Map reading subtests were analyzed. Descriptive statistics including mean percentiles and standard deviation were calculated for each year for all students, kindergarten students, and first-grade students. In addition, an ANOVA using mean spring percentiles was calculated for the same groups and same testing years to determine if there was a difference in test scores between tested groups.

Results for all students indicated a mean percentile score of 55.74 with a standard deviation of 27.541. The highest mean percentile (56.33) was scored in 2014, and the lowest mean percentile (54.98) was found in 2015. Descriptive statistics for Primary Map results for all students are found in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics: Spring Primary Map Reading Subtest – All Students

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
2012	2564	55.77	28.116	.555	54.68	56.86	1	99
2013	2567	55.88	27.461	.542	54.82	56.94	1	99
2014	2604	56.33	26.917	.527	55.29	57.36	1	99
2015	2519	54.98	27.666	.551	53.89	56.06	1	99
Total	10254	55.74	27.541	.272	55.21	56.28	1	99

The one-way ANOVA calculated for Primary Map for all student scores yielded

no significant difference between testing groups in kindergarten and first grade (F

(3,10250)=1.064, *p*>.05). Primary Map scores for all students did not differ significantly

between groups of students tested in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Primary Map ANOVA

results for all students are found in Table 2.

Table 2

ANOVA Results: All Students Primary MAP Reading Scores-Spring Reading Percentiles

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2421.640	3	807.213	1.064	.363
Within Groups	7774312.390	10250	758.470		
Total	7776734.030	10253			

In kindergarten, the mean percentile score for the 4 testing years included in the

study was 55.49 with a standard deviation of 28.059. The highest mean percentile

(56.57) was scored in 2014, and the lowest mean percentile (54.47) was found in 2015.

Descriptive statistics for kindergarten Primary Map results are found in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics: Spring Primary MAP Reading Subtest – Kindergarten Students

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
2012	1287	54.70	28.871	.805	53.12	56.28	1	99
2013	1291	56.12	27.724	.772	54.60	57.63	1	99
2014	1336	56.57	27.456	.751	55.10	58.04	1	99
2015	1192	54.47	28.171	.816	52.87	56.07	1	99
Total	5106	55.49	28.059	.393	54.72	56.26	1	99

The one-way ANOVA calculated for kindergarten Primary Map scores yielded no

significant difference between testing groups in kindergarten (F (3,5102)=1.745, *p*>.05).

Kindergarten Primary Map scores did not differ significantly between groups of students tested in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. ANOVA results for kindergarten Primary Map scores are found in Table 4.

Table 4

ANOVA Results: Kindergarten Primary MAP Reading Scores – Spring Reading Percentiles

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4118.749	3	1372.916	1.745	.156
Within Groups	4014995.537	5102	786.945		
Total	4019114.287	5105			

In first grade, the mean percentile score for the 4 testing years included in the study was 55.99 with a standard deviation of 27.017. The highest mean percentile (56.85) was scored in 2012, and the lowest mean percentile (55.43) was found in 2015. Descriptive statistics for first-grade Primary Map scores are found in Table 5.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics: Spring Primary MAP Reading Subtest–First-Grade Students

					95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
2012	1277	56.85	27.302	.764	55.35	58.35	1	99
2013	1276	55.64	27.202	.762	54.15	57.14	1	99
2014	1268	56.07	26.345	.740	54.62	57.52	1	99
2015	1327	55.43	27.207	.747	53.97	56.90	1	99
Total	5148	55.99	27.017	.377	55.25	56.73	1	99

Primary Map ANOVA results yielded no significant difference between testing groups in first grade ($F (3,5144)=.694$, $p>.05$). First-grade Primary Map scores did not differ significantly between testing groups from the baseline year, 2012, and the

following years–2013, 2014, and 2015. Descriptive statistics for first-grade Primary Map

scores are found in Table 6.

Table 6

ANOVA Results: First-Grade Primary MAP Reading Scores–Spring Reading Percentiles

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1520.652	3	506.884	.694	.555
Within Groups	3755460.082	5144	730.066		
Total	3756980.734	5147			

Special education referral data. Special education referral data for kindergarten

and first grade for 5 school years (2010-2011 through 2014-2015) were analyzed.

Percentages of referrals for all students and each grade level were calculated. The data

indicated for each year, first-grade referrals were greater than kindergarten referrals.

Kindergarten and first-grade students referred for special education during the years

analyzed ranged from 2.02% to 2.81%. Special education referral descriptive data for all

students and each grade level are found in Table 7.

Table 7

Descriptive Data: Special Education Referrals–2010-2011 through 2014-2015

Year	Grade	Referred	Non-Referred	Total	Percentage Students Referred
2010-2011	K	14	1270	1284	1.09
	1	36	1156	1192	3.02
	Total	50	2426	2476	2.02
2011-2012	K	21	1283	1304	1.61
	1	42	1248	1290	3.26
	Total	63	2531	2594	2.43
2012-2013	K	17	1288	1305	1.30
	1	56	1233	1289	4.43
	Total	73	2521	2594	2.81
2013-2014	K	22	1350	1372	1.6
	1	48	1246	1294	3.71
	Total	70	2596	2666	2.63
2014-2015	K	23	1187	1210	1.90
	1	44	1299	1343	3.28
	Total	67	2486	2553	2.62

A chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing special education referral rates to nonreferral rates. The mean referral rate for school years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 was calculated and used as the expected referral rate. Chi square was calculated for all students and for each grade level for school years 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015. No significant relationship was found at any grade or any year. A summary of chi-square results is found in Table 8.

Table 8

Special Education Referral Data–Chi-Square Results

School Year	Referred	Non-Referred	Expected	Chi-Square Statistic	*P* Value
2012-2013					
Kindergarten	17	1288	17.5	0.0163	0.898505
First Grade	56	1233	39	3.5756	0.058635
Total	73	2521	56.5	2.4833	0.115062
2013-2014					
Kindergarten	22	1350	17.5	0.3985	0.527858
First Grade	48	1246	39	0.8472	0.357357
Total	70	2596	56.5	1.1915	0.275031
2014-2015					
Kindergarten	23	1187	17.5	1.6491	0.199081
First Grade	44	1299	39	0.0504	0.822387
Total	67	2486	56.5	1.1524	0.283047

Teacher Survey

Kindergarten and first-grade teachers were invited by email to complete an anonymous online survey. Teachers accessed the survey through a Survey Monkey link. The survey was designed around the CIPP Evaluation Model's complementary evaluations: context, input, process, and product. The survey consisted of 28 questions including four demographic questions and 24 questions to which participants responded using a five-point Likert scale with an opportunity to make comments to each question. The survey was pretested by five kindergarten and six first-grade teachers at the researcher's school. These teachers indicated questions included in the survey were clear and appropriate to gather information for a program evaluation of the district's implementation of the RTI program, with one exception. A recommendation was made to reword question 27 from "Progress monitoring information guides instructional decisions and interventions provided for students" to "Information from progress monitoring guides instructional decisions and interventions provided for students." The

teachers made this recommendation because they felt the change in wording made the question clearer and easier to read. The change was made to this survey question before the survey was sent to teacher participants.

Kindergarten and first-grade participants were sent an email through the district email system inviting them to participate in the survey. The email explained the survey was designed to collect formative assessment data concerning the implementation of the district's RTI program. The teachers were informed the survey was anonymous and part of a dissertation study. The survey remained open for responses for 2 weeks. Teachers received an email reminding them to complete the survey 1 week from the opening of the survey. The invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all 107 potential kindergarten and first-grade teacher participants. Sixty-four teachers or 59.81% completed the survey. Of all the respondents, 34 were kindergarten teachers and 30 were first-grade teachers.

The survey was divided into five sections. The first section was a demographic section to allow teachers to provide information concerning current grade taught, years teaching at current grade level, years of teaching experience, and highest level of degree earned. Demographic data were analyzed. The span of years teaching at the current grade level and years of teaching experience were divided into the following year ranges: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21 years and over. The majority of teachers (kindergarten–41% and first grade–43%) indicated they have been teaching at their current grade level from 1-5 years. Demographic information with regard to years teaching at the current grade level is summarized in Table 9.

Table 9

Years at Current Grade Level
Demographic Responses for All Respondents, Kindergarten Teachers, and First-Grade Teachers

Years of Experience Teaching at Current Grade Level			Number and Percentages of Responses			
	All Respondents		Kindergarten Teachers		First-Grade Teachers	
Years	n=64	%	n=34	%	n=30	%
1-5	27	42	14	41	13	43
6-10	17	27	8	24	9	30
11-15	6	9	3	9	3	10
16-20	10	16	8	8	2	7
21+	4	6	1	1	27	10

Based on responses from all teachers, kindergarten teachers, and first-grade teachers, percentages of years of teaching experience ranged from 15-27% at each year range with the exception of first-grade teachers in the 16-20 year range where there were only 7%. Demographic information with regard to years of teaching experience is summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

Years of Teaching Experience
Demographic Responses for All Respondents, Kindergarten Teachers, and First-Grade Teachers

Years of Teaching Experience	Number and Percentages of Responses					
	All Respondents		Kindergarten Teachers		First-Grade Teachers	
Years	n=64	%	n=34	%	n=30	%
1-5	13	20	5	15	8	27
6-10	12	19	6	18	6	20
11-15	15	23	7	21	8	27
16-20	10	16	8	24	2	7
21+	14	22	8	24	6	20

The majority of teachers at each grade level (kindergarten, 69% and first grade, 67%) reported having earned advanced degrees. One kindergarten teacher and two first-grade teachers indicated National Board Certification. Demographic information with regard to teachers' highest degree earned is summarized in Table 11.

Table 11

Highest Degree Earned
Demographic Responses for All Respondents, Kindergarten Teachers, and First-Grade Teachers

	All Respondents		Kindergarten Teachers		First-Grade Teachers	
Degree Earned	n=64	%	n=34	%	n=30	%
Bachelor's	18	30	10	29	9	30
Master's	44	69	24	71	20	67
Doctorate	1	2	0	0	1	3

Following the demographic section, the remaining 24 survey questions were divided into four sections, one for each of the four CIPP Program evaluations. Survey responses were analyzed. Percentages of teachers who strongly agree/agree, neither agree or disagree, and strongly disagree/disagree to each question were calculated. The

effectiveness of the implementation of the RTI program was measured by comparing teacher response rates in participating schools with an expected response rate of 100% strongly agree/agree (except for question 14, where the response of strongly disagree/disagree was expected). Fisher's Exact Test was used to get the chi-square statistic. In some instances, survey results included a cell frequency of zero or a frequency less than five responses. A cell frequency of zero in a regular chi-square test would render infinity. Fisher's Exact Test is a more accurate test when using a small sample size and when expected values are less than five (McDonald, 2014). Teacher survey data for each of the four CIPP model evaluations are discussed in subsections.

Context evaluation. Questions 5-9 referred to context evaluation. Context evaluation was used to identify the major elements of the program and served as a program needs assessment. In addition to assessing needs and program goals, context evaluation also discovered challenges and assets within a program that hindered or aided in meeting the organization's goals and mission (Stufflebeam, 2000b). For questions 5-9, teachers responded strongly agree or agree at a rate of 85% or higher to all questions with the exception of question 7. Question 7 asked teachers to rate the following statement, "All students have the ability to achieve at high levels." For this question, teachers responded 55.6% strongly agree or agree, 14.3% neither agree nor disagree, and 30.2% strongly disagree or disagree. Teacher comments for question 7 indicated teacher concerns based on the impact of poor student attendance and home life on student performance. In addition, teachers pointed out "all students can learn, but not all children can achieve at high levels." Teachers indicated achieving at high levels was determined by the child's ability.

In additional comments provided for questions 5-9, teachers pointed out a well-

designed core curriculum was key to the RTI program. They also indicated the

"instructor must also be equally effective." One teacher stated RTI "begins by providing

diverse, individualized classroom instruction and then moves to more intensive

instruction for those students who need it." A common theme raised by first-grade

teachers was lack of time to implement intervention reading groups and need for

additional teachers and/or interventionists to assist with the program. First-grade teachers

pointed out a neighboring school district's RTI program included additional personnel to

assist with progress monitoring and providing interventions.

Responses to questions 5-9 from kindergarten teachers and first-grade teachers

yielded similar percentages. A summary of all participant responses to context questions

5-9 is found in Table 12. A summary of kindergarten teacher responses is found in Table

13. A summary of first-grade teacher responses is found in Table 14. Responses are

reported by percentage in three categories: strongly agree and agree, neither agree or

disagree, and strongly disagree and disagree.

Table 12

Survey Responses: All Participant Responses – Questions 5-9 (Context)

CIPP Evaluation Model Context (RQ1)	All Participants Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
5. One goal of the RTI program is to insure all students receive necessary instruction so that they read on grade level.	93.5	0.0	6.5	n=62	n=2
6. The RTI program is a general education initiative.	85.7	9.5	4.8	n=63	n=1
7. All students have the potential to achieve at high levels.	55.6	14.3	30.2	n=63	n=1
8. An effectively designed core curriculum is a key component of RTI.	85.7	9.5	4.8	n=63	n=1
9. RTI is a program designed to provide high-quality instruction and interventions according to individual student needs.	87.3	3.2	9.5	n=63	n=1

Table 13

Survey Responses: Kindergarten Participants - Questions 5-9 (Context)

CIPP Evaluation Model Context (RQ1)	Kindergarten Teachers Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
5. One goal of the RTI program is to insure all students receive necessary instruction so that they read on grade level.	93.9	0.0	6.1	n=33	n=1
6. The RTI program is a general education initiative.	90.9	9.1	0.0	n=33	n=1
7. All students have the potential to achieve at high levels.	54.5	15.2	30.3	n=33	n=1
8. An effectively designed core curriculum is a key component of RTI.	88.2	8.8	2.9	n=34	n=0
9. RTI is a program designed to provide high-quality instruction and interventions according to individual student needs.	79.4	2.9	17.6	n=34	n=0

Table 14

Survey Responses: First-Grade Participants - Questions 5-9 (Context)

CIPP Evaluation Model Context (RQ1)	First-Grade-Teachers Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
5. One goal of the RTI program is to insure all students receive necessary instruction so that they read on grade level.	93.1	0.0	6.9	n=29	n=1
6. The RTI program is a general education initiative.	80.0	10.0	10.0	n=30	n=0
7. All students have the potential to achieve at high levels.	56.7	13.3	30.0	n=30	n=0
8. An effectively designed core curriculum is a key component of RTI.	82.8	10.3	6.9	n=29	n=1
9. RTI is a program designed to provide high-quality instruction and interventions according to individual student needs.	93.3	3.3	3.3	n=30	n=0

Fisher's Exact Test was calculated comparing the frequency of occurrences of teacher responses in the following categories: strongly agree/agree and neither agree nor disagree/strongly disagree/disagree to context evaluation survey items. Because this study was a program evaluation, an expected rate of 100% was chosen. It was hypothesized that all teachers would be in agreement with survey statements indicating key components of an RTI program implemented with fidelity. Results of the calculation indicated significant results for questions 6, 8, and 9 each with a *p* value of 0.0014, $p < .05$. In addition, question 7 yielded significant results with a *p* value of 0.0000, $p < .05$. These results indicate some teachers were in agreement (or identified) with key

components of the RTI Program presented in questions 6, 7, 8, and 9. However, teacher

responses were not at the hypothesized 100% expected rate. Question 5 yielded

nonsignificant results, $p=.0595$, $p>.05$. Teachers identified the goal of the RTI program

is to insure all students receive necessary instruction so they read on grade level. A

summary of Fisher's Exact Test calculated for questions 5-9 is found in Table 15.

Table 15

Fisher's Exact Test Results–Questions 5-9 (Context)

CIPP Evaluation Model Context (RQ1)		Fisher's Exact Test Results		
Question	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neither/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	df	Fisher's Exact Test P< .05
5. One goal of the RTI program is to insure all students receive necessary instruction so that they read on grade level.				
Teacher Responses	58	4	1	0.0595
Expected	62	0		
6. The RTI program is a general education initiative.				
Teacher Responses	54	9	1	0.0014
Expected	63	0		
7. All students have the potential to achieve at high levels.				
Teacher Responses	35	28	1	0.0000
Expected	63	0		
8. An effectively designed core curriculum is a key component of RTI				
RTI Schools	54	9	1	0.0014
Expected	63	0		
9. RTI is a program designed to provide high-quality instruction and interventions according to individual student needs.				
RTI Schools	55	9	1	0.0014
Expected	64	0		

Input. Survey questions 10-14 dealt with input evaluation. Input evaluation was used to assess program design to determine if it was the best plan for meeting the needs of the target population and identified processes, procedures, and strategies to meet target population needs (Stufflebeam, 2000b). In the case of this study, the target population was struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. One-hundred percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed to the statement "Interventions are necessary to address the needs of struggling readers." Additional comments provided for questions 10-14 indicated teachers felt interventions were crucial and help some children overcome economic and environment disadvantages. Teachers shared that support from home was also important to student success. First-grade teachers indicated Reading Recovery was the most effective intervention in the RTI program. They felt Reading Recovery teachers possessed the training and specialized skill to work with struggling readers. Some indicated regular classroom teachers do not have the background and training to address the needs of multiple struggling readers in one classroom. Teachers indicated they were not aware of other programs to assist students with reading difficulties. Teacher comments indicated differing views on the purpose of the RTI program. Some indicated that RTI was designed to give targeted help to struggling students in order to "avoid special education identification." If students fail to make progress, documented RTI interventions provided documentation should a child be referred for special education testing. Others felt RTI was part of the process for identifying students for special education. Teachers expressed concern over students who seemed to need testing for special education, but the testing process seemed delayed by the RTI Program. A summary of all participant responses to input questions 10-14 is found in Table 16. A summary of kindergarten teacher responses is found in Table 17. A summary of first-

grade teacher responses is found in Table 18. Responses are reported by percentage in

three categories: strongly agree and agree, neither agree or disagree, and strongly

disagree and disagree.

Table 16

Survey Responses: All Participants–Questions 10-14 (Input)

CIPP Evaluation Model Input (RQ2)	All Participants Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Input (RQ2)					
10. Interventions are necessary to address the needs of struggling readers	100.0	0.0	0.0	n=63	n=1
11. Interventions provided as soon as students begin to struggle help students overcome economic and environmental disadvantages.	73.0	9.5	17.5	n=63	n=1
12. RTI provides effective reading intervention for all students.	55.6	14.3	30.1	n=63	n=1
13. The RTI Program is more effective than other programs for meeting the reading needs of all students.	35.0	41.2	23.8	n=63	n=1
14. RTI is a system designed to identify students in need of special education service.	60.9	18.7	20.4	n=64	n=0

Table 17

Survey Responses: Kindergarten Participants–Questions 10-14 (Input)

CIPP Evaluation Model Input (RQ2)	Kindergarten Teachers Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Input (RQ2)					
10. Interventions are necessary to address the needs of struggling readers	100.0	0.0	0.0	n=33	n=1
11. Interventions provided as soon as students begin to struggle help students overcome economic and environmental disadvantages.	75.8	12.1	12.1	n=33	n=1
12. RTI provides effective reading intervention for all students.	58.8	11.8	29.4	n=34	n=0
13. The RTI Program is more effective than other programs for meeting the reading needs of all students.	32.4	50.0	17.6	n=34	n=0
14. RTI is a system designed to identify students in need of special education service.	58.8	20.6	20.6	n=34	n=0

Table 18

Survey Responses: First-Grade Participants–Questions 10-14 (Input)

CIPP Evaluation Model Input (RQ2)	First-Grade Teachers Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Input (RQ2)					
10. Interventions are necessary to address the needs of struggling readers	100	0	0	n=30	n=0
11. Interventions provided as soon as students begin to struggle help students overcome economic and environmental disadvantages.	70.0	6.7	23.3	n=29	n=1
12. RTI provides effective reading intervention for all students.	51.7	17.2	31.0	n=29	n=1
13. The RTI Program is more effective than other programs for meeting the reading needs of all students.	37.9	31.0	31.0	n=29	n=1
14. RTI is a system designed to identify students in need of special education service.	63.3	16.7	20.0	n=30	n=0

Fisher's Exact Test was calculated for questions 10-14 at the expected rate of 100% strongly agree and agree with the exception of question 14 where 100% strongly disagree and disagree was the expected rate. Results indicated significant results for questions 11, 12, and 13 each with a *p* value of 0.000, $p<.05$ and question 14 with a *p* value of 0.0014, $p<.05$. These results indicated some teachers were in agreement (or identified) with processes and strategies within the RTI program were designed to meet the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. However, the response rate was less than the hypothesized 100% expected rate. Question 10 yielded nonsignificant results, $p=1.0000$, $p>.05$. This result indicated teachers believe interventions are

necessary to address needs of struggling readers. While teachers noted the importance of providing interventions to struggling readers, they were not in agreement that effective reading intervention for all students was provided through the RTI program, nor the RTI program was more effective than other programs for meeting student reading needs. They were also not in agreement that the RTI program could help students overcome economic and environmental disadvantages. For question 14, it was expected 100% of teachers would disagree or strongly disagree when rating the survey statement, "RTI is a system designed to identify students in need of special education service." However, a significant number of teachers did not disagree with this statement, implying teachers view the RTI Program as a means for identifying students for special education. A summary of Fisher's Exact Test for questions 10-14 is found in Table 19.

Table 19

Fisher's Exact Test Results–Questions 10-14 (Input)

CIPP Evaluation Model Input (RQ2)		Fisher's Exact Test Results			
Question		Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neither/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	df	Fisher's Exact Test P< .05
10. Interventions are necessary to address the needs of struggling readers					
	Teacher Responses	63	0	1	1.0000
	Expected	63	0		
11. Interventions provided as soon as students begin to struggle help students overcome economic and environmental disadvantages.					
	Teacher Responses	46	17	1	0.0000
	Expected	63	0		
12. RTI provides effective reading intervention for all students.					
	Teacher Responses	35	28	1	0.0000
	Expected	63	0		
13. The RTI Program is more effective than other programs for meeting the reading needs of all students.					
	RTI Schools	22	41	1	0.0000
	Expected	63	0		
14. RTI is a system designed to identify students in need of special education service.					
	RTI Schools	13	51	1	0.0001
	Expected	0	64		

Process. Survey questions 15-22 dealt with process evaluation. Process

evaluation was used to review implementation of the program and the degree to which

program elements were effectively implemented. This evaluation also identified

implementation problems. Process evaluation also discovered how those involved

interpreted the quality of the program (Stufflebeam, 2000b). When asked if data from universal screening were analyzed to determine students in need of interventions, kindergarten teachers (90.9%) were in more agreement than first-grade teachers (66.7%). Comments from first-grade teachers revealed a concern about the universal screening process. Changes to this process with regard to the instrument used for universal screening resulted in differences in the process. For 2015-2016, teachers used reading results from Primary Map fall administration to determine students in need of intervention. This process was different from previous years as EasyCBM was used for both universal screening and progress monitoring. First-grade teachers expressed concern that Primary Map was very different from EasyCBM making progress monitoring difficult because there was no baseline data with which to compare. When asked if teachers worked together to identify interventions for students who needed tiered support, kindergarten teachers responded at a rate of 81.8% and first-grade teachers at a rate of 72.4%. Comments from both sets of teachers indicated they met to review student progress but did work together to develop interventions for students.

Only 66.7% of first-grade teachers (compared to 100% of kindergarten teachers) indicated they were confident in their ability to implement tiered interventions for their students. Further investigation of teacher comments found teachers were confident in their overall teaching ability but not as confident when providing interventions. Two common themes were found in first-grade teacher comments: training and time. Some teachers indicated Reading Recovery teachers have specific training and expertise to implement interventions and should provide them. Some teachers responded with a need for more guidance and training. With regard to time, teachers expressed difficulty finding time to provide interventions due to class size, needs of students, and demands of

other subject matter. First-grade teachers expressed a need for additional assistance to implement the program.

As a group, 87.3% of kindergarten and first-grade teachers felt the RTI Program was implemented with fidelity. As individual grade levels, 97.1% of kindergarten teachers and 75.9% of first-grade teachers were in agreement the RTI program was implemented with fidelity. Comments from teachers indicated the program differed from school to school. Kindergarten teachers felt it was implemented with fidelity when their teaching assistants were not pulled for other duties. First-grade teachers indicated implementing the program was difficult for classroom teachers. One teacher commented, "I believe there are systems in place to try and ensure this, but I disagree because so much is dependent on the regular classroom teacher."

Additional comments provided for questions 15-22 indicated teachers use LLI, My Sidewalks, and Reading Recovery as research-based interventions but needed more help finding additional research-based interventions. A summary of all participant responses to process questions 15-22 is found in Table 20. A summary of kindergarten teacher responses is found in Table 21. A summary of first-grade teacher responses is found in Table 22. Responses are reported by percentage in three categories: strongly agree and agree, neither agree or disagree, and strongly disagree and disagree.

Table 20

Survey Responses: All Participants–Questions 15-22 (Process)

CIPP Evaluation Model Process (RQ3)	All Participants Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Process (RQ3)					
15. Data from universal screening is analyzed to determine students in need of interventions.	79.3	9.5	11.2	n=63	n=1
16. Research-based interventions are used to address student needs.	88.9	6.3	4.8	n=63	n=1
17. Progress monitoring is used to determine the effectiveness of individual interventions.	87.1	8.1	4.8	n=62	n=2
18. Teachers work together to address the needs of struggling readers.	85.2	8.2	6.6	n=61	n=3
19. School-based RTI team s work together to identify interventions for students who need tiered instructional support.	77.7	12.9	9.4	n=62	n=2
20. I am confident in my ability to implement tiered interventions for my students.	84.3	6.3	9.4	n=64	n=0
21. All elements of the RTI program– universal screening, tiered intervention, and progress monitoring– are implemented.	83.9	8.1	8.1	n=62	n=2
22. The RTI program is implemented with fidelity.	69.9	17.4	12.7	63	1

Table 21

Survey Responses: Kindergarten Participants–Questions 15-22 (Process)

CIPP Evaluation Model Process (RQ3)	Kindergarten Teachers Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Process (RQ3)					
15. Data from universal screening is analyzed to determine students in need of interventions.	90.9	6.1	3.0	n=33	n=1
16. Research-based interventions are used to address student needs.	90.9	6.1	3.0	n=33	n=1
17. Progress monitoring is used to determine the effectiveness of individual interventions.	96.9	3.1	0.0	n=32	n=2
18. Teachers work together to address the needs of struggling readers.	87.9	9.1	3.0	n=33	n=1
19. School-based RTI team s work together to identify interventions for students who need tiered instructional support.	81.8	15.2	3.0	n=33	n=1
20. I am confident in my ability to implement tiered interventions for my students.	100.0	0.0	0.0	n=34	n=0
21. All elements of the RTI program–universal screening, tiered intervention, and progress monitoring–are implemented.	87.9	6.1	6.1	n=33	n=1
22. The RTI program is implemented with fidelity.	76.5	20.6	2.9	n=34	n=0

Table 22

Survey Responses: First-Grade Participants–Questions 15-22 (Process)

CIPP Evaluation Model Process (RQ3)	First-Grade Teachers Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Process (RQ3)					
15. Data from universal screening is analyzed to determine students in need of interventions.	66.7	13.3	20.0	n=30	n=0
16. Research-based interventions are used to address student needs.	86.6	6.7	6.7	n=30	n=0
17. Progress monitoring is used to determine the effectiveness of individual interventions.	76.7	13.3	10.0	n=30	n=0
18. Teachers work together to address the needs of struggling readers.	82.2	7.1	10.7	n=28	n=2
19. School-based RTI team s work together to identify interventions for students who need tiered instructional support.	72.4	10.3	17.3	n=29	n=1
20. I am confident in my ability to implement tiered interventions for my students.	66.7	13.3	20.0	n=30	n=0
21. All elements of the RTI program– universal screening, tiered intervention, and progress monitoring–are implemented.	79.4	10.3	10.3	n=29	n=1
22. The RTI Program is implemented with fidelity.	62.1	13.8	24.1	n=29	n=1

Fisher's Exact Test was calculated for questions 15-22 at the expected rate of 100% strongly agree and agree. Results indicated significant results for all questions in this section. The range of p values was 0.000- 0.0066, $p<.05$. Responses to questions

fell below the hypothesized expected rate of 100% strongly agree and agree. A summary

of Fisher's Exact Test Results for questions 15-22 is found in Table 23.

Table 23

Fisher's Exact Test Results–Questions 15-22 (Process)

CIPP Evaluation Model Input (RQ3)	Fisher's Exact Test Results			
Question	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neither/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	df	Fisher's Exact Test $P< .05$
15. Data from universal screening is analyzed to determine students in need of interventions.				
Teacher Responses	50	13	1	0.0001
Expected	63	0		
16. Research-based interventions are used to address student needs.				
Teacher Responses	56	7	1	0.0066
Expected	63	0		
17. Progress monitoring is used to determine the effectiveness of individual interventions.				
Teacher Responses	54	8	1	0.0031
Expected	62	0		
18. Teachers work together to address the needs of struggling readers.				
RTI Schools	52	9	1	0.0014
Expected	61	0		
19. School-based RTI teams work together to identify interventions for students who need tiered instructional support.				
RTI Schools	48	14	1	0.0000
Expected	62	0		
20. I am confident in my ability to implement tiered interventions for my students.				
RTI Schools	54	10	1	0.0007
Expected	64	0		

(continued)

Question	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neither/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	df	Fisher's Exact Test P< .05
21. All elements of the RTI program – universal screening, tiered intervention, and progress monitoring – are implemented.				
RTI Schools	52	10	1	0.0007
Expected	62	0		
22. The RTI Program is implemented with fidelity.				
RTI Schools	44	19	1	0.0000
Expected	63	0		

Product. Survey questions 23-28 dealt with product evaluation. Information

gathered through context, input, and process evaluations were used to conduct the

product evaluation. Intended and unintended outcomes were determined through product

evaluation. This information provided feedback to aide in determining program success

(Stufflebeam, 2000b). When asked if universal screening measures effectively identified

struggling students, overall 54.7% of teachers strongly agreed and agreed, with 76.5% of

kindergarten teachers in agreement and 46.7% of first-grade teachers in agreement.

Kindergarten teacher comments revealed they believe younger children may not have the

processing speed necessary to perform at expected levels on universal screening

assessments resulting in some students mistakenly identified for intervention.

Kindergarten teachers reported universal screening was one method for identification for

intervention and teacher judgement should be an identification factor also. First-grade

teachers expressed concerns over the use of Primary Map for universal screening. These

teachers reported some students have difficulty manipulating computers (mouse pads)

during testing and some students did not try their best. In addition, because Primary Map

was read to students, it did not effectively identify struggling readers. First-grade

teachers suggested a combination of EasyCBM and teacher input were more effective universal screeners.

Seventy-seven percent of kindergarten and first-grade teachers agreed that progress monitoring information guided instructional decisions and interventions provided for students with 82.4% of kindergarten teachers in agreement and 70% of first-grade teachers in agreement. Kindergarten teachers indicated progress monitoring helped them make instructional decisions but did "not help guide further interventions." In addition, kindergarten teachers indicated interventions beyond My Sidewalks were needed for some struggling readers. First-grade teachers sited alignment issues with EasyCBM used as a progress monitoring tool. They indicated EasyCBM did not align with LLI or their classroom interventions. Because of this, first-grade teachers indicated they had to develop their own progress monitoring tools which, in addition to progress monitoring, was time consuming.

When asked if the RTI program effectively met the needs of struggling readers, kindergarten and first-grade teachers responded 74.2% in agreement. Kindergarten teachers (72.5%) and first-grade teachers (75.8) response rates were similar. Kindergarten teachers indicated the RTI program met the needs of most struggling readers but not students with more advanced needs. First-grade teachers indicated the RTI program helps in "that it requires teachers to work with struggling readers more often and with research-based materials." Common themes contained in first-grade teacher comments for these survey items can be summarized by the following comment, "I think time and my comfort are low." Teachers expressed concerns over a lack of time to provide interventions while teaching guided reading groups. A need for additional personnel ("RTI interventionists") to pull students and provide interventions was

expressed. Also, teachers indicated Reading Recovery teachers were more prepared due to specialized training to provide interventions. One teacher commented, "We are trying to make specialists out of general practitioners."

A summary of all participant responses to input questions 23-28 is found in Table 24. A summary of kindergarten teacher responses is found in Table 25. A summary of first-grade teacher responses is found in Table 26. Responses are reported by percentage in three categories: strongly agree and agree, neither agree or disagree, and strongly disagree and disagree.

Table 24

Survey Responses: All Participants–Questions 23-28 (Product)

CIPP Evaluation Model Product (RQ4)	All Participants Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Product (RQ4)					
23. Universal screening measures effectively identify struggling readers.	54.7	21.9	23.4	n=64	n=0
24. The core curriculum meets the needs of most students	90.4	4.8	4.8	n=63	n=1
25. Tier 2 interventions address needs of struggling readers.	80.9	14.3	4.8	n=63	n=1
26. Tier 3 interventions address needs of students with the greatest reading weaknesses.	80.9	14.3	4.8	n=63	n=1
27. Information from progress monitoring guides instructional decisions and interventions provided for students.	76.5	9.4	14.1	n=64	n=0
28. The RTI program effectively meets the needs of struggling readers.	74.2	11.3	14.5	n=62	n=2

Table 25

Survey Responses: Kindergarten Participants–Questions 23-28 (Product)

CIPP Evaluation Model Product (RQ4)	Kindergarten Teachers Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Product (RQ4)					
23. Universal screening measures effectively identify struggling readers.	64.8	23.5	14.7	34	0
24. The core curriculum meets the needs of most students	88.2	5.9	5.9	34	0
25. Tier 2 interventions address needs of struggling readers.	82.4	8.8	8.8	34	0
26. Tier 3 interventions address needs of students with the greatest reading weaknesses.	76.5	17.6	5.9	34	0
27. Information from progress monitoring guides instructional decisions and interventions provided for students.	82.4	11.8	5.9	34	0
28. The RTI program effectively meets the needs of struggling readers.	75.8	12.1	12.1	33	1

Table 26

Survey Responses: First-Grade Participants–Questions 23-28 (Product)

CIPP Evaluation Model Product (RQ4)	First-Grade Teachers Response Percentages				
Question	SA-A	N	SD-D	Answered	Skipped
Product (RQ4)					
23. Universal screening measures effectively identify struggling readers.	46.7	20.0	33.3	30	0
24. The core curriculum meets the needs of most students	93.3	3.4	3.4	29	1
25. Tier 2 interventions address needs of struggling readers.	79.3	20.7	0.0	29	1
26. Tier 3 interventions address needs of students with the greatest reading weaknesses.	86.3	10.3	3.4	29	1
27. Information from progress monitoring guides instructional decisions and interventions provided for students.	70.0	6.7	23.3	30	0
28. The RTI program effectively meets the needs of struggling readers.	72.5	10.3	17.2	29	1

Fisher's Exact Test was calculated for questions 23-28 at the expected rate of 100% strongly agree and agree. Results indicated significant results for all questions in this section. The range of p values was 0.000-0.0138, $p < .05$. Teacher responses varied from the hypothesized expected rate of 100% strongly agree and agree with regard to universal screening, progress monitoring, Tier 2 and 3 interventions, and effectiveness of the RTI program to meet needs of struggling readers. A summary of Fisher's Exact Test Results for questions 23-28 is found in Table 27.

Table 27

Fisher's Exact Test Results–Questions 23-28 (Product)

CIPP Evaluation Model   Fisher's Exact Test Results
Input (RQ4)

Question	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neither/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	df	Fisher's Exact Test P< .05
23. Universal screening measures effectively identify struggling readers.				
Teacher Responses	40	24	1	0.0000
Expected	64	0		
24. The core curriculum meets the needs of most students.				
Teacher Responses	57	6	1	0.0138
Expected	63	0		
25. Tier 2 interventions address needs of struggling readers				
Teacher Responses	51	12	1	0.0001
Expected	63	0		
26. Tier 3 interventions address needs of students with the greatest weaknesses.				
RTI Schools	51	12	1	0.0001
Expected	63	0		
27. Progress monitoring information guides instructional decisions and interventions provided for students.				
RTI Schools	49	15	1	0.0000
Expected	64	0		
28. The RTI program effectively meets the needs of struggling readers.				
RTI Schools	46	16	1	0.0000
Expected	62	0		

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with two district-level administrators and 15 school-level administrators. Questions for these interviews were developed based on four evaluations found in the CIPP Evaluation Model: context, input, process, and product. District-level administrator interviews included the special services coordinator for elementary education and the director of elementary education. Questions asked of both

district-level administrators sought to discover background information leading to the district's decision to implement an RTI program, strengths of the implementation of the program, and challenges to the success of the program. The following questions were developed for district-level administrators.

1. What conditions led to the district's decision to implement an RTI program? (Context)

2. Before the implementation of RTI, what programs were in place to address the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers? (Input)

3. Why was an RTI program selected for use in the district? (Input)

4. What do you feel are the strengths of the program? (Context)

5. What challenges have you observed with the implementation of the program? (Context)

6. How do you monitor the implementation of the program? (Process)

7. How do you measure the level of the fidelity of implementation of the program? (Process)

8. How would you rate the quality of the implementation of the program? (Product)

9. How would you rate the effectiveness of the program? (Product)

Interviews with these two administrators were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify common themes.

Interview with the special services coordinator for elementary education.
This administrator indicated the district initially implemented the RTI program because it was a requirement of legislation. As the district continued to research the program, they determined providing interventions to students gave them instructional strategies to use

when they struggled and was best for children. Before the RTI program, schools relied

primarily on the Student Intervention Team (SIT) model. This model was used to

document difficulties of students who were struggling and not meeting grade-level

reading standards. This process varied from school-to-school with interventions provided

to students coming from websites or curriculum packages purchased at individual

schools. The only intervention provided systemically by the district was Reading

Recovery for struggling first-grade students. The coordinator pointed out the RTI

program was selected for implementation because it was considered a problem-solving

process that brings multiple parties together to help struggling young readers. She

indicated one of the strengths of the RTI program is it provides a curriculum intervention

framework for teachers so teachers do not have to spend time seeking interventions on

their own. She also indicated an additional strength of the RTI program was that it has

encouraged conversations between teachers at each school. She felt these conversations

led to teacher understanding that the RTI program was not designed as a system to

evaluate students for special education but was part of good general education or core

instruction. She indicated these conversations marked a beginning to change mindsets

and belief systems about general education as it relates to special education.

This administrator shared the size of the district made it difficult to monitor the

program's implementation and ensure implementation fidelity. A change to district

personnel resulted in the loss of a position to work directly with the RTI program, assist

schools, and monitor the implementation fidelity. She pointed out implementation can

vary from school-to-school. When rating the quality of implementation of the RTI

program, this coordinator indicated the district has dedicated time and great effort to

make sure the program has been implemented with fidelity. These efforts have included

training for personnel and providing progress monitoring and intervention materials. When asked to rate the effectiveness of the RTI program, she indicated progress monitoring data indicated students receiving interventions were making progress. She felt specific curricular resources have helped teachers with the implementation of the program.

Interview with the director of elementary education. This administrator indicated the district was roughly 10 years behind legislated requirements, and the need to fulfill the law and differentiate instruction to meet student needs were conditions leading to the district's decision to implement an RTI program. Before the RTI program, the district was very limited with programs designed to address needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. This administrator indicated the SIT Team Model was in place, but that process was not used a lot for kindergarten and first grade. She shared most often readers who struggled in kindergarten and first grade were monitored and given time to grow developmentally. In kindergarten, they could receive speech therapy, and in first grade, Reading Recovery. She indicated the district chose the RTI program because it was called for in legislation. This administrator felt a challenge was finding the right elements and aligning them to all programs such as RTI, Read to Succeed, and Student Learning Objectives (SLO). An additional challenge was finding and using funding wisely to serve students at the very best levels. This administrator did not feel the RTI program was being monitored well due to changes in personnel and a lack of systemic delivery. She also felt there was room for improvement when monitoring the implementation fidelity. She indicated that the size of the district made the monitoring process difficult. She shared reading interventionists and instructional coaches have been helpful at the school level with assisting teachers and school-level RTI

teams, but it varied from school-to-school. She noted that going forward, interventionists and coaches needed clear direction and expectations with regard to monitoring the implementation fidelity. The director rated implementation quality a five on a scale of one to 10. She felt the district had some elements of the program in place, but continued growth was needed. She mentioned the need to build Tier 2 interventions and include them during core instructional time. She also indicated the need to improve inter-rater reliability for assessments. The director also scored program effectiveness a five on a scale of one to five. She shared she believes the level of effectiveness will improve when the level of fidelity improved.

 Common themes. The researcher identified common themes from these two interview transcripts. Both district administrators indicated legislation was a condition leading the district to implement the RTI program. Prior to the RTI program, only limited programming to assist struggling readers was available except for the SIT Team and Reading Recovery for first grade. Both administrators indicated that the RTI program had benefits for all students. When discussing challenges to the implementation process, administrators identified the large size of the district and variations in implementation from school-to-school. The administrators indicated basic RTI elements are in place. The researcher organized identified common themes according to elements of the CIPP Evaluation Model and research questions. A summary of this information is found in Table 28.

Table 28

Common Themes Identified from Interviews with District-Level Administrators

CIPP Evaluation Model Elements	Common Themes of Participant Responses
Context (RQ1)	Legislation
Input (RQ2)	Limited Programs for Struggling Readers before RTI
	Student Intervention Team (SIT)
	Reading Recovery for First Grade
	Program Benefits for All Students
Process (RQ3)	Implementation Difficult to Monitor–-Large District
	Implementation Varies from School-to-School
Product (RQ4)	Basic RTI Elements in Place

Interviews with school-level administrators. Fifteen school-level elementary administrators were interviewed individually. These interviews gathered information regarding implementation of the RTI program, strengths of the implementation of the program, and challenges to the success of the program. Questions for these interviews were developed within the CIPP Evaluation Model and included

1. Before the implementation of RTI, what programs were in place to address the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers? (Input)

2. What do you feel are the strengths of the program? (Input)

3. What challenges have you observed with the implementation of the program? (Input)

4. How do you monitor the implementation of the program? (Process)

5. How would you rate the quality of the implementation of the program? (Product)

6. How would you rate the effectiveness of the program? (Product)

School-level administrators indicated that before implementation of the district's RTI program, there were no formal programs for assisting struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers other than Reading Recovery for first graders. Schools relied on basal reading programs, small-group instruction, and individual work with students to address struggling readers. School-level administrators pointed out three strengths of the RTI program. The first was the program provided a formal and consistent process to address the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. Monthly meetings were identified as a positive of the program and have led to collaboration and a focus on individual student needs. The third identified strength was progress monitoring which provided data points to study and follow growth of students.

Four common themes were found in school-administrator descriptions of challenges to implementation of the program. The first dealt with time and scheduling interventions for struggling readers in the classroom. Administrators reported teachers expressed concerns with balancing intervention time with activities for students who did not receive interventions. In addition, many students in need of intervention also received additional services such as speech and occupational therapy causing them to be pulled out at varying times during the day. This common theme was related to support to teachers through additional personnel. Administrators indicated a need for additional reading interventionists and support staff to assist with the implementation of the program.

Another related challenge was consistent completion of documentation and paperwork. Administrators indicated teachers benefited from support and assistance with scheduling interventions, progress monitoring, and paperwork completion. Finally, school-level administrators indicated the need for a "change in mindset" as a challenge to

implementation of the RTI program. These administrators expressed a clear definition of the RTI program as it relates to special education being needed. School-level administrators indicated some teachers struggled with mindsets that RTI was a special education initiative ("a gateway to testing") rather than a general education initiative designed provide interventions to students through the core curriculum.

When asked how they monitored implementation fidelity of the RTI program, school-level administrators reported use of RTI teams made up of a combination of school-level administrators, reading coaches, instructional coaches, school psychologists, guidance counselors, and teachers. These teams met regularly, typically monthly. While all school-level administrators reported the use of teams and regular meetings, their responses indicated the process was slightly different from school-to-school. For example, school-level teams were made up of different personnel, and leadership of the school level teams varied. When asked to rate the quality of implementation of the RTI program, school-level administrator responses varied. Gradually implementing the program beginning with kindergarten and first grade was reported to be a point of strength of the implementation. Administrators indicated changes to personnel at district and school levels had a negative impact on implementation. They noted less follow-up from the district level led to less consistency in the program from school-to-school. At four schools, school-level personnel changes have led to slower implementation of school-level RTI teams. School-level administrators rated overall effectiveness of the RTI program using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being outstanding. The administrator's average effectiveness rating was 7.73. Several common themes emerged. The first was the importance and effectiveness of classroom teacher skills to provide interventions to students. Additionally, the administrators indicated the importance of a strong core

curriculum. The second common theme shared by administrators was a feeling the program was effective, although continued growth was needed.

Interviews conducted with school-level administrators were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify common themes. Table 29 presents these common themes.

Table 29

Common Themes Identified from Interviews Conducted with School-Level Administrators

CIPP Evaluation Model Elements	Common Themes–School-Level Administrators
Question 1-Instruction before RTI (Input-RQ2)	No Formal Program Other than Reading Recovery
Question 2-Strengths (Input-RQ2)	Formal and Consistent Process
	Monthly Meetings
	Progress Monitoring
Question 3-Challenges (Input-RQ2)	Time – Scheduling Classroom Interventions
	Support – Need for Additional Personnel
	Documentation and Paperwork
	Mindset Change – Regular Education Initiative
Question 4-Monitor Fidelity (Process-RQ3)	School Level RTI Teams
	Regular (Monthly) Meetings
Question 5-Implementation (Product-RQ4)	Gradual Implementation – Positive
	Variations Due to Changes in District/School Personnel
Question 6-Effectiveness (Product-RQ4)	Skills of Teacher Important
	Quality Core Curriculum Important
	Effective – Continued Growth Needed

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted–one with kindergarten teachers and one with first-grade teachers. Questions were developed based on the CIPP Evaluation Model. After a review of teacher survey results, focus-group questions were reviewed to determine if additional questions were needed. No additional questions were created for focus groups. Members of each focus group were randomly selected using Excel. Twenty invitations to participate in each focus group were emailed to randomly selected

kindergarten and randomly selected first-grade teachers. Eight kindergarten teachers and six first-grade teachers accepted invitations to participate in respective focus groups. A moderator facilitated both focus groups. Focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed for coding and common theme identification. The following questions based on the CIPP Evaluation Model were asked of each focus group.

1. What are the goals of the RTI program? (Context)

2. What did reading instruction for struggling readers look like in your classrooms before implementing RTI? (Input)

3. How does reading instruction for struggling readers look like with RTI? (Input)

4. In your opinion, what are the strengths of RTI? (Input)

5. In your opinion, what are the challenges of RTI? (Input)

6. How do you insure the program is implemented with fidelity? (process)

7. In your opinion, how effective is the RTI program? (product)

In order to analyze data from a focus group, Latess (2008) recommended reading through focus-group transcripts a number of times to identify common themes. Once all possible common themes were identified, the researcher developed a discussion section for questions and common themes.

Kindergarten focus group. Kindergarten teachers indicated goals of the RTI program were to meet needs of lower-performing students to avoid special education identification and/or retention. They also pointed out the RTI process allowed teachers to collect data to share with parents when discussing their child's progress. Before implementation of the RTI program, kindergarten teachers indicated reading instruction for struggling readers consisted of small-group instruction in their classrooms. Since

implementation of RTI, kindergarten teachers pointed out students received additional instructional time. With RTI, teachers indicated struggling students received small-group instruction from their teacher and an additional pull-out group with the kindergarten assistant. These teachers felt extra time and skill repetition have led to growth for struggling students. Kindergarten teachers identified repetition, additional instructional time, and structure as strengths of the RTI program.

In kindergarten, teaching assistants pulled small intervention groups and worked with struggling students using the My Sidewalks Program by Pearson. Kindergarten teachers identified one challenge to RTI program implementation was locating a consistent location for teaching assistants to facilitate small groups. Scheduling intervention time was also regarded as a challenge. Teacher discussion indicated scheduling was handled differently at each of their schools. Lack of training for assistants to facilitate My Sidewalks Curriculum was a concern of each participant. In addition, another reported challenge was the importance of having an instructionally skilled assistant willing to provide quality intervention instruction to struggling students. Kindergarten teachers felt progress monitoring helped insure the program was implemented with fidelity. They pointed out progress monitoring provided information on student progress, and if the program was implemented "as it should be," most students would show growth. When asked to rate the effectiveness of the RTI program, each indicated "very effective." They shared evidence of students who benefitted from interventions and became better readers. The researcher identified and organized common themes according to the elements of the CIPP Evaluation Model elements and research questions. A summary of this information is found in Table 30.

Table 30

Common Themes Identified from Focus Group Conducted with Kindergarten Teachers

CIPP Evaluation Model Elements	Common Themes–Kindergarten Teacher Responses
Question 1–Goals (Context-RQ1)	Meet Needs of Lower Performing Students
	Avoid Special Education Placement
	Avoid Retention
	Collect Data to Share with Parents
Question 2–Instruction before RTI (Input-RQ2)	Meet Struggling Students in Small Classroom Groups
Question 3–Instruction after RTI (Input-RQ2)	Provide Additional Instructional Time for Strugglers
	Provide More Repetition
Question 4–Strengths (Input-RQ2)	Additional Instructional Time
	Structure
Question 5–Challenges (Input-RQ2)	Location for Assistant to Facilitate Small Group
	Training for Assistants
	Skilled and Willing Assistant
Question 6–Insure Fidelity (Process-RQ3)	Progress Monitoring
Question 7–Effectiveness (Product-RQ4)	Effective Program

First-grade focus group. First-grade teachers indicated the goal of the RTI program was to provide early intervention for at-risk students to allow them to read on grade level and not get behind their peers. Teachers reported reading instruction before RTI program implementation was similar to reading instruction after implementation but was not as data driven. Struggling students had access to a Reading Recovery teacher. After implementation, first-grade teachers added Fountas and Pinnell's (2016) LLI for small-group intervention. Additional reading groups were formed to meet the needs of struggling students. In addition, first-grade students continued to have access to a Reading Recovery teacher or reading interventionist who served students in addition to interventions provided in the regular classroom. When asked what they viewed as strengths of the RTI program, first-grade teachers identified data collection and addressing needs of struggling readers as strengths. They indicated data collection

through progress monitoring helped them analyze student strengths and weaknesses and provided individual student information to the RTI team.

First-grade teachers indicated three challenges to RTI program implementation. The first was a need for additional help in the classroom through the help of other teachers, extra reading interventionists, or assistants. They pointed out they felt the RTI program has added more work for them and, because of this, extra help was needed. Scheduling was also identified as a challenge to the program. First-grade teachers indicated their students, particularly their struggling students, received a number of additional services such as speech, occupational therapy, and Reading Recovery or reading intervention making it difficult to schedule intervention time in the regular classroom. The third challenge expressed was lack of consistency from teacher to teacher and from school to school. Examples shared included differences in beginning-of-the-year benchmarking (what assessment was used for benchmarking and time of the year), how regularly interventions were provided, and level of documentation kept from teacher to teacher. These teachers shared students enrolled from other schools may not have received interventions and progress monitoring according to the program outline. First-grade teachers indicated more specific direction from the district could improve this challenge.

To insure the RTI program was implemented with fidelity, first-grade teachers indicated they progress monitor as the program requires. This information was shared during monthly RTI Team Meetings making them more accountable. These teachers indicated participants in RTI Team Meetings seemed to vary from school to school. When asked to rate program effectiveness, they stated struggling students made progress as a result of interventions provided; however, they again expressed the level of program

success was determined by how each teacher implemented it. They feared they did not

spend quality time with their advanced readers because of the time spent providing

interventions for struggling ones. The researcher organized identified common themes

according to the elements of the CIPP Evaluation Model elements and research questions.

A summary of this information is found in Table 31.

Table 31

Common Themes Identified from Focus Group Conducted with First-Grade Teachers

CIPP Evaluation Model Elements	Common Themes–First-Grade Teacher Responses
Question 1–Goals (Context-RQ1)	Provide Early Intervention for At-Risk Students
Question 2–Instruction before RTI (Input-RQ2)	Similar to Reading Instruction with RTI Less Data Driven
Question 3–Instruction after RTI (Input-RQ2)	Additional Reading Groups for Struggling Readers Use of LLI Continued Reading Recovery/Reading Interventionist
Question 4–Strengths (Input-RQ2)	Data Collection Addresses Needs of Struggling Readers
Question 5–Challenges (Input-RQ2)	Need for Additional Classroom Help Scheduling Difficulties Lack of Consistency (Teachers and Schools)
Question 6–Insure Fidelity (Process-RQ3)	Progress Monitoring
Question 7–Effectiveness (Product-RQ4)	Effective Program When Implemented Consistently

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to conduct a CIPP Program Evaluation of an RTI

program implemented in a rural school district in South Carolina. Triangulation is the

process of increasing study strength through use of multiple data collection methods and

data sources. Triangulation reduces bias and increases validity of a study (Gall et al., 2005). Triangulation of data was achieved by including reading achievement and special education referral data, teacher survey data, interviews of district and school-level administrators, and focus groups.

This study utilized mixed methods and included quantitative data (reading achievement data, referral data, and teacher survey) and qualitative data (teacher survey comments, interviews, and focus groups). Reading achievement scores, special education referral data, and Likert scale responses on the teacher survey were analyzed with inferential statistics including ANOVA, chi square, and Fisher's Exact Test. Teacher survey comments, administrator interview data, and focus-group data were coded and analyzed. In addition, descriptive statistics for test scores and referral data (mean, standard deviation) and teacher survey (percentages of Likert Scale Responses) were calculated and analyzed. Quantitative analysis yielded no significant difference between tested groups and special education referrals. The majority of teacher survey responses were significant and did not meet the hypothesized 100% expected rate. Quantitative data provided administrator and teacher perceptions of quality of implementation and effectiveness of the program. Overall, qualitative data results indicated the basic elements of the RTI program are in place, and strengths and weaknesses can be identified.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

The acquisition of early literacy skills in kindergarten and first-grade students is critical to their overall academic success. For students who fall behind and demonstrate poor reading performance, studies show targeted early interventions provided for students as soon as they begin to struggle can improve the likelihood of their success (Neuman, 2007). RTI is a framework for providing tiered interventions to struggling students (Fisher & Frey, 2010). In this chapter, the researcher summarizes results and findings of a CIPP Program Evaluation of an RTI program in a small rural district in South Carolina. In addition, the researcher discusses the implications of four inter-related evaluations within the CIPP Model (context, input, process, and product) in relation to implementation of the RTI program in order to make recommendations based on identified program strengths and weaknesses. Study limitations and delimitations and suggestions for future research are included in this chapter.

Restatement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to conduct a CIPP Program Evaluation of the implementation of an RTI program in a rural school district. The CIPP Model was selected because of its use for evaluating school-based educational programs (Stufflebeam, 2000b). The district on which this study focused implemented an RTI program in five pilot elementary schools during the 2013-2014 school year and in the remaining 11 elementary schools in the district in the 2014-2015 school year. Because the program was relatively new to the district, the researcher sought to discover overall effectiveness of implementation of the RTI program by determining progress toward meeting program goals, assessing the level of fidelity of program implementation, and

identifying the degree to which the program meets the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. This study employed a mixed-methods approach with quantitative and qualitative data gathered and analyzed. Data gathered for this study included reading achievement test data, special education referral data, and participant responses from district- and school-level administrator interviews, a teacher survey with comments, and focus groups.

Research Questions

Research questions were developed based on the four complementary evaluations within the CIPP Evaluation Model. This study sought to answer the following research questions in order to conduct a program evaluation of the implementation of an RTI program in a school district.

1. What conditions led to the implementation of an RTI program? (Context)

2. Does the RTI program meet the identified needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers? (Input)

3. To what degree is the RTI program implemented with fidelity? (Process)

4. How effective is the RTI program? (Product)

Summary of Findings

Findings are discussed and organized by each CIPP Model evaluation and corresponding research question. Data gathered from district-level and school-level administrators, teachers, and members of focus groups were cross-referenced and reviewed for commonalities and differences. Quantitative data were presented under the appropriate evaluation and research question.

Data Collection

The researcher used interviews with district-level and school-level administrators,

a teacher survey including teacher comments, focus groups made up of kindergarten and first-grade teachers, and analysis of reading achievement scores and special education referral numbers to gather data for this study. For each question on the teacher survey, Fisher's Exact Test was calculated to determine the level of significance. The researcher chose an expected rate of 100% strongly agree and agree to demonstrate teacher knowledge of the RTI program. Results indicated all but two questions were significant, falling short of the 100% expected response. An ANOVA was calculated with Primary Map scores of kindergarten and first-grade students to determine if there were achievement differences within groups over a 4-year period. Results indicated Primary Map scores did not differ significantly between groups of students. A chi-square calculation using yearly special education referral data was calculated. Results indicated no significant relationships were found.

Context Evaluation Results

Context evaluation was used to identify major elements of the RTI program: goals, needs, challenges, and assets. Results of context evaluation data collected from district-level administrators and teachers indicated knowledge of key components of the RTI program as implemented in the district. Burns and Gibbons (2008) found one goal of RTI is to plan instructional interventions to allow a student to be successful. District-level administrators and teachers indicated RTI was a general education initiative designed to provide students with high-quality instruction and interventions. Surveyed teachers indicated, at a rate of 85.7%, "RTI was a general education initiative." An identified strength of the program was development of a curriculum intervention framework for teachers allowing them to save time when searching for interventions. Research indicated RTI is not intended to be a process to identify students with special

needs, nor is it a special education initiative or supplemental intervention program (Buffum et al., 2009). Conversations between teachers have led to greater understanding that RTI was not a system for evaluating students for special education but rather a part of good core education instruction. Changing mindsets and belief systems about general education as it relates to special education was noted by school-level administrators as a challenge of the program. Teacher survey results indicated kindergarten and first-grade teachers responded at a rate of 57.8% strongly agree and agree to "RTI is a system designed to identify students in need of special education service." In addition, lack of consistency of implementation from school to school was discussed by all respondents as a challenge to fidelity of implementation. Fidelity of implementation is discussed under Research Question 3. Another identified program challenge was alignment of RTI with other programs such as Read to Succeed and SLO. District- and school-level administrators indicated basic RTI elements were in place which was also evidenced by teacher survey results and focus-group responses.

Research Question 1

What conditions led to the implementation of an RTI program? Conditions leading to implementation of the RTI program were legislative requirements found at the federal and state level (NCLB, IDEA, ESSA, and Read to Succeed). The district determined a need for a structured plan within the instructional program to assist teachers as they worked with struggling reading students. Their research led them to RTI (found in legislation and research) as a defined program to be used systemically in the district. The district viewed RTI as a problem-solving model to bring multiple people together to address student needs and improve academic achievement.

Input Evaluation Results

Input evaluation was used to assess program design in order to determine if the program was the best plan for meeting the needs of the target population and identifying processes, procedures, and strategies to meet target population needs (Stufflebeam, 2000b). The researcher used interviews with district-level and school-level administrators, a teacher survey, and focus groups made up of kindergarten and first-grade teachers to gather data for input evaluation. School-level administrators and teachers agreed with district-level administrators that before implementation of RTI, there were few resources, except Reading Recovery for first graders and student intervention teams, to address needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. Teacher survey questions 10-14 dealt with providing interventions and whether teachers felt the RTI program was an effective program to meet the needs of all students. Although 100% of teachers indicated interventions were necessary to address needs of struggling readers, only 55.6% felt the RTI program provided effective reading interventions for all students. Survey comments from kindergarten teachers and responses from teachers participating in the kindergarten focus group indicated additional interventions beyond the My Sidewalks Intervention Program were needed. Kindergarten teachers expressed concern with use of their assistants to provide interventions through My Sidewalks. They indicated not all assistants were skilled and/or willing to work with students using My Sidewalks. Scheduling My Sidewalks including time and location were also identified as challenges for kindergarten teachers. Survey comments from first-grade teachers and responses from teachers participating in the first grade focus group indicated lack of time, scheduling challenges, and manpower as concerns when providing interventions. Information shared by first-grade teachers

participating in the focus group indicated concerns for lack of consistency teacher to teacher and school to school when implementing the RTI program. They cited variances in benchmarking, progress monitoring, and documentation as examples.

Teacher survey results found 34.9% of kindergarten and first-grade teachers indicated the "RTI Program was more effective than other programs for meeting reading needs of all students." Kindergarten teachers indicated they were not aware of other programs to assist struggling readers. They also expressed concern that My Sidewalks did not meet the needs of all kindergarten struggling readers. First-grade teachers indicated Reading Recovery was a more effective program for meeting the needs of struggling readers. They felt Reading Recovery teachers possessed expertise they lacked when providing interventions. First-grade teachers responded at a rate of 66.7% to the survey item, "I am confident in my ability to implement tiered interventions for my students."

School-level administrators echoed teacher concerns regarding time and scheduling for interventions. They shared a struggling reader typically receives related services such as speech and occupational therapy through a classroom pullout, making it difficult to balance scheduling interventions for teachers and a challenge for students because they receive multiple services. These administrators also indicated the need for additional personnel to assist with implementation of the program. In addition, consistent completion of documentation was also indicated as a challenge for the RTI program.

Input evaluation results indicated challenges within the processes, procedures, and strategies used within the RTI program when meeting the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers. Specific challenges were found within materials used for interventions including the appropriateness of materials used for all students and

a need for additional materials. In addition, time and scheduling of interventions and balancing demands of the RTI program and regular classroom instruction were noted as struggles when working with students in need of intervention. Finally, consistency with regard to implementation of the program from teacher to teacher and school to school was found as a challenge.

Research Question 2

Does the RTI program meet the identified needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers? Clemens et al. (2011) indicated change to overall student achievement was the most important first outcome found after the implementation of an RTI program. An ANOVA was calculated with Primary Map scores of kindergarten and first-grade students to determine if there were achievement differences within groups over a 4-year period. The 4-year period represented 2 testing years prior to the pilot year, the pilot year, and 1 year after the pilot year. Results indicated Primary Map scores did not differ significantly between groups of students. A chi-square calculation using yearly special education referral data was calculated. Results indicated no significant relationships were found. While reading achievement data and special education referral rate data yielded no significant differences in achievement and referral rates since the implementation of the program, when asked to respond to the following survey statement, "The RTI Program effectively meets the needs of struggling readers," 74.2% of kindergarten and first-grade teachers responded strongly agree and agree. Focus-group responses from both kindergarten and first-grade teachers indicated they felt the program was effective when consistently implemented.

Process Evaluation Results

Process evaluation was used to review implementation of the program, the degree

to which program elements were effectively implemented, and implementation concerns. Process evaluation was also used to discover how those involved interpreted the quality of the program (Stufflebeam, 2000b). The researcher used interviews with district-level and school-level administrators, a teacher survey, and focus groups made up of kindergarten and first-grade teachers to gather data for process evaluation. Several challenges to program implementation were identified by district-level administrators. The size of the district made monitoring for program fidelity difficult. Also, these administrators indicated that although basic RTI elements were in place, implementation varied from school to school. School-level administrators monitored program fidelity through the use of school-level teams that met monthly to review progress monitoring information and other concerns for students receiving interventions. Like district-level administrators, school-level administrators indicated implementation fidelity differences from school to school. Examples of differences in implementation between schools included RTI teams led by different staff members, personnel makeup of school-level teams differed, varying expectations for documentation presented at meetings, and differing formats for meetings. Both sets of administrators indicated changes to district-level and school-level personnel impacted fidelity of implementation. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers insured fidelity of implementation by progress monitoring student growth as required by the program and presenting this information during monthly RTI meetings. Teacher survey comments included not only the importance of curriculum implemented for interventions but also "the instructor must also be as equally effective." On the teacher survey, teachers responded affirmatively at a rate of 83.9% to the statement, "All elements of the RTI Program–universal screening, tiered intervention, and progress monitoring–are implemented."

Research indicated three areas in which to consider fidelity of implementation within an RTI program. The first is overall school process which involved the consistency with which the elements of RTI are carried out in the classroom and across grade levels. The second area related to quality of selected interventions. Those interventions with a strong research base have a greater chance of improving student performance. The third area was found at the teacher level and was determined by the quality in which a teacher implements instruction, an intervention, and/or progress monitoring (Mellard & Johnson, 2008). Failure to implement an RTI program with fidelity at any of these levels may result in the program becoming ineffective (McDougal et al., 2010). Results from the teacher survey, interviews with district and school-level administrators, and responses from focus-group members indicated concerns from all participants as to the fidelity of implementation of the RTI program.

Research Question 3

To what degree is the RTI program implemented with fidelity? Administrators and teachers indicated concerns with fidelity of implementation of the RTI program. One district administrator pointed out monitoring fidelity of implementation became more difficult when district-level positions were lost. These positions were tasked with providing oversight of the program and training for teachers. Losing this concentrated and consistent level of program monitoring has resulted in a "mixture of whatever each school decided" for grade levels served, monitoring meetings, and training. A common theme shared by school-level administrators was variations in implementation from school to school. One school-level administrator reported, "The quality of implementation is not as good as it could be and varies from school-to-school." Another commented, "It is mostly up to schools to implement with fidelity." Another shared, "I

would say we started off well, but there has not been quite as much follow-up this year from a district perspective so I think we have lost the fidelity of implementation we had."

Teachers also indicated program implementation differed from school to school. Kindergarten teachers felt it was implemented with fidelity when their teaching assistants were not pulled for other duties. First-grade teachers indicated implementing the program was difficult for classroom teachers because of logistical concerns (time, schedule, and personnel) and how these logistics were handled differently from school to school. Results from the teacher survey indicated 69.9% of kindergarten teachers and first-grade teachers responded strongly agree or agree to the survey statement, "The RTI program is implemented with fidelity." Kindergarten teachers responded at a rate of 76.5% in agreement, and first-grade teachers were in agreement at a rate of 62.1%. Teacher survey comments indicated some teachers responded to this survey statement based on implementation in their individual classrooms.

Administrator and teacher data results indicated varying degrees of fidelity of implementation. Differences in implementation from school to school were reported from all participant groups. One school administrator commented, "We have made great strides, but still have room for improvement."

Product Evaluation Results

Product evaluation was used to combine information gathered through context, input, and process evaluations to identify intended and unintended outcomes. This information provided feedback to aide in determining program success (Stufflebeam, 2000b). The researcher used interviews with district-level and school-level administrators, a teacher survey with comments, and focus groups made up of kindergarten and first-grade teachers to gather data for product evaluation. The RTI

program was implemented to provide assistance for struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers through a district-wide system of providing tiered intervention support. Intended outcomes identified through this study included administrator and teacher identification of the essential elements of the program. Information collected through universal screening and progress monitoring led to instructional planning with use of individual student data. Through the use of school-based RTI teams, multiple staff members (administrators, reading coaches, special education teachers, Reading Recovery teachers, and classroom teachers) collaborated to review student progress and make recommendations for future instruction.

Several unintended outcomes were identified. One was the perceived stress expressed by kindergarten and first-grade teachers. Many shared they felt they had difficulty managing interventions for struggling students and providing quality instruction for the rest of their students. In addition, in some cases, the program increased stress levels of kindergarten assistants as they provided interventions through My Sidewalks and between kindergarten teachers and their assistants due to this added responsibility for assistants. Differences in implementation from school to school were also an unintended outcome. Unforeseeable changes to district-level personnel resulting in less attention to the implementation caused varying levels of fidelity of implementation. The expression of some first-grade teachers who felt they did not have the expertise (when compared to Reading Recovery teachers) to address needs of some struggling readers was an additional unintended outcome. While school-level administrators and teachers indicated the RTI program was part of the core curriculum, some confusion was expressed about the connection of the RTI program and the referral process for special education services. Respondents indicated lack of clear expectations

for the referral process.

Research Question 4

How effective is the RTI program? The director of elementary education rated

the level of effectiveness of the RTI program a five on a scale of one to 10, with 10 being

outstanding. She shared,

> I think it is effective for some students, but can be much more effective for
>
> a greater number once we get some fidelity with it. When everybody is
>
> using the same language and same level of understanding that will change
>
> how effective we see it.

The special services coordinator for elementary education indicated during the first year

when program monitoring was very good, progress monitoring data demonstrated

students receiving interventions were making progress. She reported percentages of

growth played some part in the amount of referrals (fewer) to special education, but with

lack of program monitoring, that correlation was no longer evident. She stated, "I think

that is directly related to the lack of support for each individual school to implement it

well." School-level administrator effectiveness ratings averaged 7.73 on the same one to

10 scale. One administrator commented, "I think if you are implementing and doing it

right with everyone on board, it can be very effective, but we are a far cry from that. We

are above average, but have not arrived, that is for sure." First-grade teachers also

observed students who received interventions demonstrated growth. Kindergarten

teachers participating in a focus group rated the RTI program as "very effective." On the

teacher survey, teachers responded at a rate of 74.2% to the survey statement, "The RTI

Program effectively meets the need of struggling readers." One first-grade teacher

commented, "It helps tremendously in that it requires teachers to work with struggling

readers more often and with research-based materials. However, many struggling readers need more support than just what they get in the classroom." Overall, results indicated the RTI program met the needs of some struggling readers, but implementation difficulties hindered the effectiveness of the program. Participants shared while there are some positive outcomes for students participating in the program, improvement in fidelity of implementation was needed to improve the program so it met the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers.

Conclusions

This study was a formative assessment of the implementation of an RTI program in a school district in order to provide information on the program's strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for program improvement. Strengths found within the program included respondent knowledge of the purpose and basic elements of an RTI program. Respondents indicated RTI was a general education initiative designed to provide struggling students with interventions and support needed to be successful. An additional strength found was administrators and teachers put into practice universal screening and progress monitoring and worked together through school-based RTI teams to review student progress and make recommendations for future intervention and instruction.

With basic elements identified, consistent implementation of these elements was found to be a weakness and to be an area for concentrated improvement. Research indicated the impact of an RTI program was determined by the quality of its implementation (Glover & Vaughn, 2010). In addition, Hall (2008) indicated that successful implementation of an RTI program takes 3-5 years. This program is in its second year of implementation for the majority (11 of 15) of schools in the district, with

the other four schools in their third year of implementation. While participants indicated basic knowledge and understanding of the program, challenges for successful implementation were identified. For example, respondents indicated universal screening instruments have changed and are not aligned with progress monitoring measures. The need to identify additional curriculum and materials to provide interventions was shared by teachers. Participants reported scheduling time to provide interventions and a need for additional classroom assistance as challenges for implementing the program.

Research indicated the most important first outcome found after the implementation of an RTI program was a change to overall student achievement (Clemens et al., 2011). Results from an ANOVA calculated using Primary Map mean reading percentiles for students in all schools included in the study did not indicate any significant differences in test scores during the testing years 2012-2015. However, results from an additional ANOVA calculated using kindergarten Primary Map data from only the pilot schools for the same testing years (2012-2015) indicated significant differences (in a positive direction) in mean reading percentiles between 2012 and 2014 and between 2012 and 2015. There was no significant difference in first grade pilot school Primary Map scores for the same testing years. A chi-square analysis was calculated for special education referral data for the pilot schools. No statistical significance was found.

Varying degrees of fidelity of implementation have resulted because the level of district monitoring has been reduced. Less monitoring has led to a lack of consistency for implementation expectations and differences in implementation from school to school. McDougal et al. (2010) indicated it is difficult to monitor the fidelity of implementation of an RTI program, but failure to do so and insure the program is implemented with

fidelity may result in the program becoming ineffective. School-level administrators indicated making sure the program had accountability through program monitoring and follow-up of the process was needed to ensure the program was being implemented effectively. School-level administrators and a district-level administrator reported the current year's implementation had not been as effective as the previous year because of lack of program monitoring. Continued improvement through clearly defined program goals and fidelity of implementation is needed in order to continue development of the RTI program so it successfully meets its goal to address the needs of struggling kindergarten and first-grade readers.

Recommendations

In its second year of district-wide implementation, the RTI program evaluated in this study is relatively new. This district has the basic structure of an RTI program defined and in place, but results reveal needed review and improvement in the program's implementation. Hall (2008) found successful implementation of an RTI program takes 3-5 years. With this in mind, continual review of implementation weaknesses identified in this study and review of RTI programming as it relates to the district's program is needed. Sparks (2016) discussed concerns that RTI programs were not having the expected positive impact for struggling readers. Screening tools, interventions, and progress monitoring were discussed as possible causes for this observation. Screening tools used to determine student needs should provide a full indication of student weaknesses. Selected interventions should be related to these student weaknesses and progress monitoring methods should assess progress toward improvement in the determined area of weakness (Sparks, 2016).

Concerns expressed by Sparks (2016) were found in this district's RTI

implementation. For example, first-grade teachers revealed specific concerns with the use of Primary Map as a universal screening instrument. The district should investigate going back to the use of EasyCBM or the use of a different universal screening instrument to better align the universal screener with the progress monitoring instrument. Teachers participating in the study indicated a need for more intervention materials in order to effectively provide intervention support to students. Teachers also expressed concern that the universal screening assessment did not match up to the progress monitoring assessments. Careful review, selection, and alignment of screening tools, intervention resources, and progress monitoring measures will assist this district as it continues to work to implement an effective program.

It is recommended that the district continue to build administrator and teacher support for the program by communicating its importance from the district level. Promoting the RTI program as an integral component of both the district literacy model and the state-mandated reading plan will provide greater understanding and relevance of the program to teachers and building-level administrators. In addition, the district can build teacher and building-level administrator support for the program by clearly communicating expectations for program implementation. Building-level administrators can also build teacher support for the program by making it a priority within the instructional program. Assisting teachers with logistical concerns such as facilitating scheduling of universal screening and interventions, creating space for intervention groups, and providing time for RTI teams to meet will demonstrate a commitment to the program and increase its level of effectiveness.

Providing ongoing professional development to support building-level administrators and teachers in the implementation of the RTI program and providing

opportunities for collaboration would strengthen this program. Recommended topics for

professional development include the use of screening tools, development of

interventions, and methods for effective progress monitoring with appropriate

recordkeeping. Burns and Gibbons (2008) described collaboration as a critical element in

the RTI process. Intentionally scheduling learning opportunities for building-level

administrators, general education teachers, and special education teachers would provide

emotional and professional support as these educators work together to achieve the goal

of implementing an effective RTI program that benefits all students (Dufour & Eaker,

1998).

Responses from participants in this study indicated the role of RTI in relationship

to the district's special education referral process was not clear. Burns and Gibbons

(2008) indicated an RTI program was designed to meet the special needs of certain

students without labeling them as learning disabled. Buffum et al. (2009) pointed out that

RTI is not intended to be a process to identify students with special needs, nor is it a

special education initiative. Clear definition of the relationship of the RTI program to

general education, to special education, and to the process for identifying students for

referral for special education evaluation is needed. Making clear these relationships

would provide clarification as to the purpose of the program.

Teachers indicated a need for additional assistance in order to effectively

implement the RTI program. In addition, district-level and building-level administrators

indicated monitoring the implementation of the RTI program was difficult due to the loss

of personnel assigned to the program. A review of staffing is recommended to determine

if redeployment of current staff members or additional personnel to assist with RTI is

feasible.

Buffum et al. (2010) described one guiding principle of an RTI program is the idea of "collective responsibility" (p. 9). These researchers defined collective responsibility as a cultural belief that each member of the organization was accountable for making sure all students learned at high levels. Dweck (2006) indicated teachers demonstrating a growth mindset believed all students had the capacity to learn, if the student was willing to learn and had support to do so. Teachers with a growth mindset focus on a student's potential and work ethic rather than past performance. Teachers responded at a rate of 30% disagree or strongly disagree to the statement, "All students have the potential to achieve at high levels." Examining the mindset of teachers as it relates to all students achieving at high levels may be beneficial in order to increase the success of the district's RTI program.

This study was a formative assessment of the district's RTI program. Feedback from this study provides an opportunity to build on strengths and make adjustments based on challenges discovered through this study. In order to assist with monitoring and increase fidelity of implementation, the district should investigate training and utilizing state-mandated reading coaches found at each school to help with the program. To add an additional level of monitoring support, "lead reading coaches" for each of the four attendance areas could be designated and paid a stipend to assist with program implementation. These lead reading coaches could work with other reading coaches to design professional development based on the needs of the teachers and administrators in their areas, assist with facilitation of monthly RTI team meetings, and provide guidance to teachers. In addition, reading coaches could be tasked with building a bank of research-based interventions from which teachers can pull as needed. Finally, the district can work to break down the wall that separates special education and general education.

As mentioned earlier, clearly defining the RTI program's role in general education and special education is needed. Including special education teachers along with general education teachers in monthly RTI team meetings will allow sharing of ideas from educators who are experts in their own areas. With the key elements of the RTI program in place, building on identified strengths and weaknesses will help improve the overall effectiveness of the program.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to conduct a CIPP Program Evaluation on a recently implemented RTI program. The researcher used reading achievement data, special education referral data, responses from interviews, a teacher survey, and focus groups to conduct this study. The following recommendations for further research based on data collected during this study may be helpful to others who may study this topic.

- This study revealed weaknesses in fidelity of implementation of the RTI program. Further research may be needed to determine how to monitor fidelity of implementation. Glover and Vaughn (2010) indicated it is difficult to determine how to assess the fidelity of implementation but did suggest several methods including collecting and analyzing progress monitoring data and reviewing implementation feedback.

- Conduct a CIPP evaluation of one of the components of the RTI program such as universal screening, selecting interventions, and/or progress monitoring.

- Conduct a study of interventions used by teachers at each tier of an RTI program to determine if the intervention matches universal screening data and is assessed with an effective progress monitoring measure.

- Conduct a study of professional development provided for administrators and teachers to determine its level of effectiveness in contributing to success of an RTI program.

- Conduct a cohort study of students who have participated in the RTI program–tracking them from grade to grade and monitoring their reading achievement levels.

- In order to implement a successful RTI program, research indicated staff members must move beyond cultural and structural barriers existing between regular education and special education to create a cooperative response working together to meet the individual needs of every student (Buffum et al., 2009). Future research may conduct a study to determine the level of collaboration and cooperation between general education and special education teachers within an RTI program.

Limitations

Limitations are possible weaknesses in a study that are beyond the researcher's control. Limitations may narrow methodology and conclusions (Baltimore County Schools, 2015). There were limitations to this study. Because the RTI program began with a pilot year for four of the district's elementary schools, the program was implemented at two different time intervals. Some building-level administrators and teachers worked with the program for 3 years and some for 2 years, resulting in varying levels of understanding of the program framework. In addition, reading achievement data and special education referral data reflecting full district RTI implementation were only available for 1 year. Finally, participant responses may be impacted because the

researcher is an administrator in the district and whose school participated in the pilot year.

Delimitations

Delimitations were boundaries set by the researcher to focus the study and were within the researcher's control (Baltimore County Schools, 2015). This study was designed within the scope of the CIPP Evaluation Model's inter-related evaluations of context, input, process, and product with regard to the implementation of an RTI program. Development of interventions, professional development, special education processes, and the role of building-level administrators as facilitators of the program were not within the scope of this study.

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Appendix A

Teacher Electronic Survey

Email Inviting Teachers to Participate in Research Survey

As a kindergarten or first-grade teacher in the district, you are invited to participate in a survey designed to collect data concerning the implementation of the Response to Intervention Program (RTI) in the district. Information gathered from this survey will be used as part of a formative assessment of the program and is part of a dissertation study. The evaluation of the RTI Program will be conducted using the CIPP Evaluation Model. The survey consists of 28 multiple choice questions and should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. This survey is completely anonymous and responses and comments are not identifiable to a particular respondent. By continuing with the survey, you are giving your consent to participate in this study. You may choose to discontinue the survey at any time. The link to the survey is found below.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and input,

Angie Rodgers

Survey Link

RTI Program Evaluation Survey: Kindergarten and First Grade Teachers

Directions: Please choose one answer to each question in the survey. You may provide additional information under comments at the end of each section of the survey.

Demographics
1. Current Grade Level:

2. Number of years teaching at current grade level:

3. Number of years teaching experience:

4. Highest degree earned:

CIPP – Context (Program Needs, Goals, Basic Elements)
5. One goal of the RTI program is to insure all students receive necessary instruction so that they read on grade level.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

6. The RTI program is a general education initiative.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

7. All students have the potential to achieve at high levels.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

8. An effectively designed core curriculum is a key component of RTI

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

9. RTI is a program designed to provide high-quality instruction and interventions according to individual student needs.

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

CIPP – Input (Program Design)

10. Interventions are necessary to address the needs of struggling readers.

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

11. Interventions provided as soon as students begin to struggle help students overcome economic and environmental disadvantages.

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

12. RTI provides effective reading intervention for all students.

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree

      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

13. The RTI Program is more effective than other programs for meeting the reading needs of all students.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

14. RTI is a system designed to identify students in need of special education service.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

CIPP – Process (Implementation)
15. Data from universal screening is analyzed to determine students in need of interventions.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

16. Research-based interventions are used to address student needs.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

17. Progress monitoring is used to determine the effectiveness of individual interventions.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

18. Teachers work together to address the needs of struggling readers.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

19. School-based RTI team s work together to identify interventions for students who need tiered instructional support.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

20. I am confident in my ability to implement tiered interventions for my students.

      A. Strongly Agree
      B. Agree
      C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
      D. Disagree
      E. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

21. All elements of the RTI program - universal screening, tiered intervention, and progress monitoring - are implemented.

      A. Strongly Agree

B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

22. The RTI program is implemented with fidelity.

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

CIPP – Product (Outcomes)
23. Universal screening measures effectively identify struggling readers.

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

24. The core curriculum meets the needs of most students.

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

25. Tier 2 interventions address needs of struggling readers.

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

26. Tier 3 interventions address needs of students with the greatest reading weaknesses.

    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
    D. Disagree
    E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

27. Information from progress monitoring guides instructional decisions and interventions provided for students.

    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
    D. Disagree
    E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

28. The RTI program effectively meets the needs of struggling readers.

    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
    D. Disagree
    E. Strongly Disagree

Comments

Appendix B

Focus Group

Email Inviting Teachers to Participate in Focus Group

You have been randomly selected to participate with other kindergarten (or first grade) teachers in a focus group to discuss the implementation of the RTI program in the district. This focus group is a follow-up to the RTI research survey teachers were invited to complete. This group provides an opportunity for participants to share their ideas about the RTI program. Information gathered from this focus group will be used as part of a formative assessment of the program and is part of a dissertation study. This study seeks to discover the overall effectiveness of the RTI program by determining progress toward meeting program goals, assessing the level of fidelity of program implementation, and identifying the degree to which the program meets the needs of struggling kindergarten and first grade readers.

The focus group will meet once and participation in the group will require approximately two hours of your time. Your participation in the group is confidential. Your name will never be made public or recorded in data.

Please indicate your willingness to participate or your desire not to participate in the group by responding to this email. By indicating your willingness to be a member of this focus group, you give your consent to participate in this study. The focus group will meet at West End Elementary on (data and time to be determined once data collection begins). This group will be facilitated by Kela Simpson.

Thank you in advance for your consideration,

Angie Rodgers

Focus Group Protocol

Date

Welcome and Introductions
- Facilitator
  - As facilitator, the researcher will encourage discussion within the group
- Participants

Purpose and Assurances
- The purpose of this focus group is to discuss the implementation of the RTI program in the district. Each focus group member will have the opportunity to share his or her thoughts about a series of questions.
- Conducting this focus group is a part of research conducted for a dissertation study designed to complete an evaluation of the implementation of RTI – its strengths, weaknesses, needs, etc.
- Everyone's thoughts and opinions are welcome and respected.
- Discussion will be audio taped in order to analyze the points discussed.
- Participation in the group and thoughts shared are confidential.

Questions
5. What are the goals of the RTI program? (Context)
6. What did reading instruction for struggling readers look like in your classrooms before implementing RTI? (Input)
7. How does reading instruction for struggling readers look like with RTI? (Input)
8. In your opinion, what are the strengths of RTI? (Input)
9. In your opinion, what are the challenges of RTI? (Input)
10. How do you insure the program is implemented with fidelity? (process)
11. In your opinion, how effective is the RTI program? (product)

Appendix C

District Approval Letter

January 28, 2016

Dear Ms. Angie Rodgers:

I have received and reviewed your request to conduct a CIPP Program Evaluation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) Program in the district. I understand that you will examine the overall effectiveness of the RTI program by determining progress toward meeting program goals, assessing the level of fidelity of program implementation, and identifying the degree to which the program meets the needs of struggling kindergarten and first grade readers. You have permission to use assessment data, administer surveys, meet with focus groups, and conduct interviews to gather the information needed for your study. We ask that the confidentiality of all individual student data be maintained. We wish you the best in your endeavors and look forward to a successful outcome. If I can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services