A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE SUCCESS OF RESPONSE TO

INTERVENTION FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

A Doctoral Thesis Proposal Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

by

Teressa J. Voltz

May, 2012

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Morris, who has always believed in me and my dreams and gives me the freedom to pursue them; to my children, Jessica, Chelsea and Jacob, who inspire me to set high goals and work hard to achieve them; and to my parents, Dorothy, James and Helen, who taught me to embrace independence and to value education. Thank you for being my support, my motivation, and my strength.

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Abstract

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) focused districts on early intervention in order to assist struggling students as soon as they entered school to accelerate learning and success. A three-tiered model is used in most districts and involves three tiers of intervention. Tier 1 lays the foundation of quality, rich instruction for all learners with scaffolding and differentiation occurring to ensure success. Tier 2 is targeted to the specific needs of the students and is delivered in small groups. Tier 3 is intensified by lowering the group size and adding intervention time. It is through these tiers that interventions occur to target students' needs. Students may be served for a single year or multiple years depending on their need and sustainability of progress. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of Response to Intervention on students entering kindergarten in a suburban Texas school district during the 2007-2008 school year. This study longitudinally examined if the intervention for students who entered RTI beginning in kindergarten and exited at the end of kindergarten sustained success over time using the 2010-2011 TAKS test scores from third grade. The study investigated if students who entered RTI beginning in kindergarten and remained in intervention for any of their schooling in kindergarten, first, second, and/or third grade sustained success over time using the 2010-2011 TAKS test scores. A mixed methods study was used in order to gauge the perceived success of the RTI program of a large suburban school district. A focus group of randomly selected reading specialists was conducted by the researcher. The focus group concentrated on

how the reading specialists felt about the success of the program based on their experience working with the program. This study also utilized archival data obtained from the 2010-2011 TAKS assessment in reading. This study found that early intervention brings the most success in students longitudinally. The statistically significant difference was in only one year of service occurring in the first year. The number of students served decreased each year with the passing rate by third grade being 90.08%. The commended rate was 33.59%. The focus group findings confirmed the data with results including necessary early intervention for success. Coaching and small group instruction also was prominent in the focus group discussions as well as targeted discussions to continue moving students to success. RTI is a program that supports struggling students.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Texas school districts spend millions of dollars, along with countless hours of time each year, providing intervention services to students who have fallen behind academically. These districts have a moral and ethical responsibility to ensure that all students are provided the opportunity to excel academically. This responsibility includes closing the achievement gap by facilitating the learning of students who struggle academically, particularly in the critical areas of reading and mathematics. Administrators, who serve as the instructional leaders for teachers, must be informed and understand all requirements of federal and state laws. Additionally, they must build a supportive environment on the campus that includes a research-based, quality intervention plan for implementing, monitoring, and supporting intensive instruction to close the achievement gap for all students. The intervention focus should accelerate the students addressing their deficiencies and intensifying instruction to decrease their weaknesses.

Need for the Study

The need for developing, implementing, and maintaining an ongoing plan for helping struggling students achieve academic success in comprehension, fluency and decoding is the focus of this study. While many schools take a "wait and see" attitude towards struggling students at the earliest sign of difficulty, the academic deficiencies of these students increase with each passing year as the students progress upwards through the grade levels (McEneaney, Lose, & Schwartz, 2006). In Texas, with the transition from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to the State of Texas

Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), many of these struggling learners will find themselves unable to master critical skills that indicate academic success.

Without the development of a sound model for identifying student deficiencies, implementing a research-based, quality intervention plan to provide appropriate intervention services in specific areas and ensuring ongoing support for individual students, districts will find that many of these students will fall through the cracks as they travel through their school experiences (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Tomlinson, 2003; VanSciver, 2005). If districts are to fulfill their obligation to provide an appropriate education for all students, it is critical that a successful intervention model be provided to help students achieve their maximum potential and succeed in the college environment or workplace (Lose, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Historically, schools have utilized the "wait until they fail" model to work with children that struggle academically. With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, school districts were given the opportunity to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies, thereby, providing academic and/or behavioral support to students before being identified for special education services (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Shinn, 2007). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 also emphasized early intervention as a key for success with students who are behind academically involving research-based, quality intervention (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). According to Kamps, Abbott, Greenwood, Wills, Veerkamp & Kaufman (2008), working with students in the early grades through intensive intervention can reduce their risk of falling so far behind that success is extremely

difficult.

RTI maximizes student achievement and reduces behavioral problems by promoting the early identification of students who are at risk of experiencing learning difficulties; monitoring students' progress; providing research-based instruction; monitoring and adjusting instruction based on students' progress; and identifying students with disabilities. This process provides opportunities for students to remain in the general education classroom with extra support and intervention rather than having to be placed into a special education setting that may or may not meet the needs of the students.

Through the use of a research-based, quality intervention model, schools are able to serve the students in a more effective and proficient manner (Mellard & Johnson, 2008). RTI includes multi-tiers and is multi-faceted. First, it is designed to universally screen all students in a given grade level for academic delays (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). These delays are based on set criteria of what is expected on a given assessment or outcome measure by the end of the grade level or at a given time (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The next step involves monitoring the students to track their progress, or lack of, in order to make instructional decisions. Lastly, interventions are chosen based on the progress, or lack of, in order to ensure they involve the intensity needed to help the students (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). RTI provides educators the opportunity to identify individual students early and intervene in a timely manner to give them every opportunity for success in the general education curriculum and through interventions that are based on their needs.

RTI was designed to be the answer to assist children who do not obtain the

support they need (e.g., more time and high expectations) instead of experiencing a "watered down" curriculum. While some schools struggle with the concept of RTI by attempting to make it fit into the "traditional" method of special education service delivery, complying with the rules and regulations, and achieving the mark on test scores, RTI is designed to help educators find better ways to serve the students by meeting their individual needs for success (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010). If educators remain focused on what "used to be," faulty decisions may be made that will not help students. RTI is not a static process; rather, it is a dynamic process that helps to increase student achievement and teaching success. It is designed to improve both teaching and learning, which is a win-win situation for all involved (Buffum et al., 2010). With RTI, educators must self-reflect by asking themselves, "What are we not doing correctly that will help students?" In other words, how effective are the teaching practices and interventions being used for success of the students?

As technological advances continue to change and progress, educators must be cognizant that training is occurring for preparation of jobs that do not exist currently and information that has not been revealed. By focusing on students' individual needs, small group intervention, and intensive instruction, RTI can be the catalyst for schools to prepare students to be able to process at the highest level of Bloom's Taxonomy (e.g., analyzing and synthesizing) that will be required for these future unknowns in learning and in careers (Buffum et al., 2010).

A three-tiered approach is the foundation of RTI. Tier 1 lays the foundation of quality, rich instruction that is at a high level for all students. Within this tier, differentiation must occur to meet the needs of all learners. A plethora of resources

should be used based on current research and best practices, not on one set resource that is followed in a strict manner so that everyone is on the same page at the same time. Scaffolding must occur from the teachers to ensure that students are being supported successfully. Tier 2 is targeted to the specific learning needs of the students and is driven by ongoing assessment data through initial assessment as well as continuous progress monitoring. Small group, direct instruction is necessary to focus specifically on the needs of the students. Therefore, fluid flexible grouping must occur to ensure that students are placed in intervention targeting their needs instead of a generic group that isn't specifically focused on the individual student. Tier 3 is designed for students who have not been successful in Tier 2 and require intensive support. This intervention is in addition to their Tier 1 instruction, as it is imperative that these students are not pulled further and further behind by missing initial quality instruction. In Tier 3, the group size becomes smaller, the intervention time lengthens, and the intervention is more targeted and intensive. Multiple interventions may be needed based on a leadership team working to finely pinpoint the needs of each student (Buffum et al., 2010).

Figure 1 illustrates the RTI process as it involves fluidity through three levels of intensity of prevention to improve student outcomes. At all three levels, success focuses on the fidelity of implementation of services. A screening occurs with all students in the grade level to identify students in need of additional support. Progress monitoring must occur to identify a student's rate of improvement or responsiveness to the intervention (National Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.).

Figure 1

The Essential Components of RTI
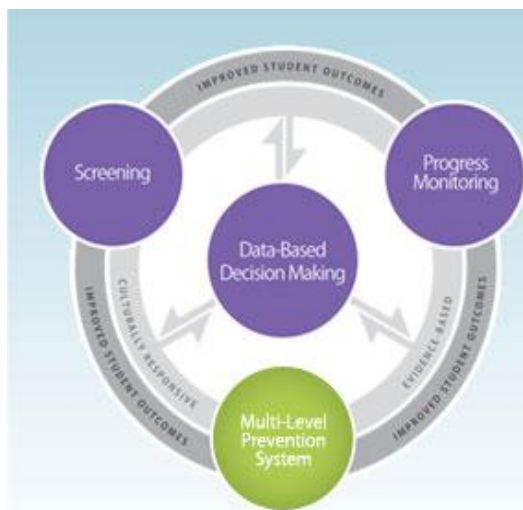
Source: National Center on Response to Intervention

RTI can be a successful framework to support school districts in their efforts to improve instruction and learning for student success. Carefully monitoring the interventions being used to make sure they are on target and what is best for students is critical for the achievement. All too often, students are placed in an initial intervention and are never reassessed and/or regrouped, even if it is found that the intervention is not successful. Data collection, data interpretation, monitoring, and the critical study of each student is necessary to make sure the intervention is the correct one at the time for their individual needs. This ensures success for students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of RTI on students entering school in a suburban Texas school district during the 2007-2008 school year. Data was examined from the 2010-2011 school year of this same group. During the 2010-2011

school year the district had an enrollment of 45,092 student. As Figure 2 illustrates, the

district's student population was comprised of 13.9% African American, 35.9% Hispanic,

38.6% White, 0.4% American Indian, and 8.5% Asian/Pacific Islander. Students

classified as economically disadvantaged were at 39.4%, and students classified with

limited English proficiency comprised 13.0% of the district population. The at-risk

student percentage for the district was 37.2%.

Figure 2

2010-2011 District Student Population by Ethnicity
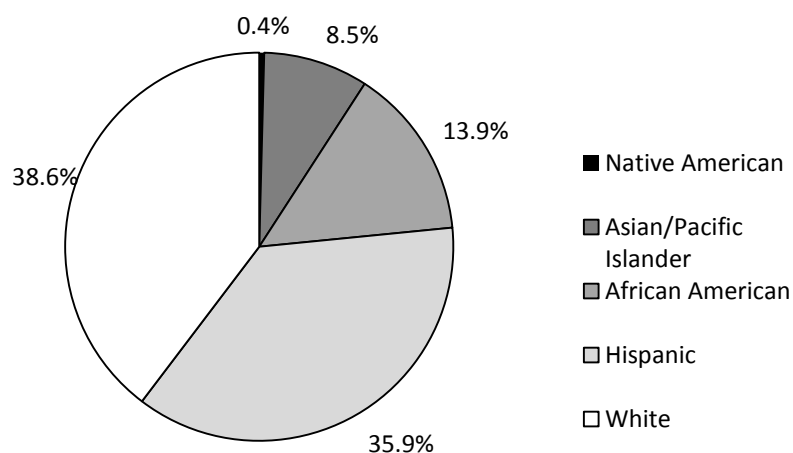
Source: Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System 2010-2011

District Profile.

Figure 3 shows the student population was comprised of 39.4% economically disadvantaged students, 13.0% limited English proficient students, and 37.2% at-risk.

Figure 3

2010-2011 District Student Population by Groups
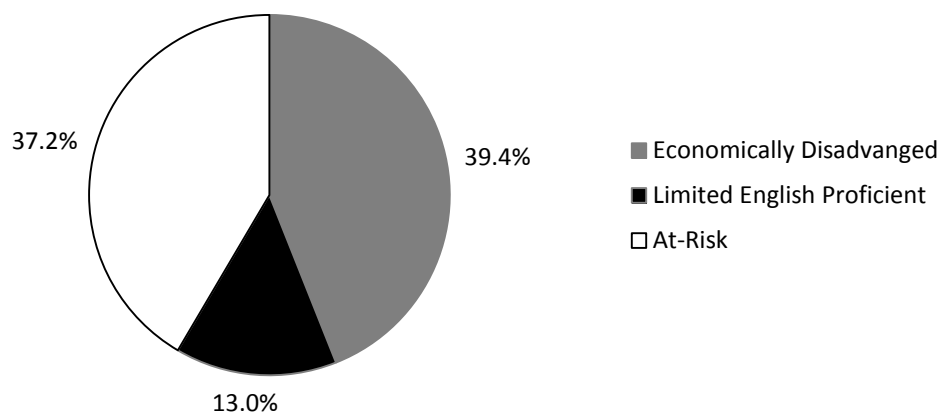
Source: Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System 2010-2011 District Profile.

Figure 4 details the student enrollment by program and indicates 12.3% of students received bilingual/ESL education services, 11.6% of students received special education services, and 70.7% received regular education services during the 2010-2011 school year.

Figure 4

2010-2011 District Student Enrollment by Program
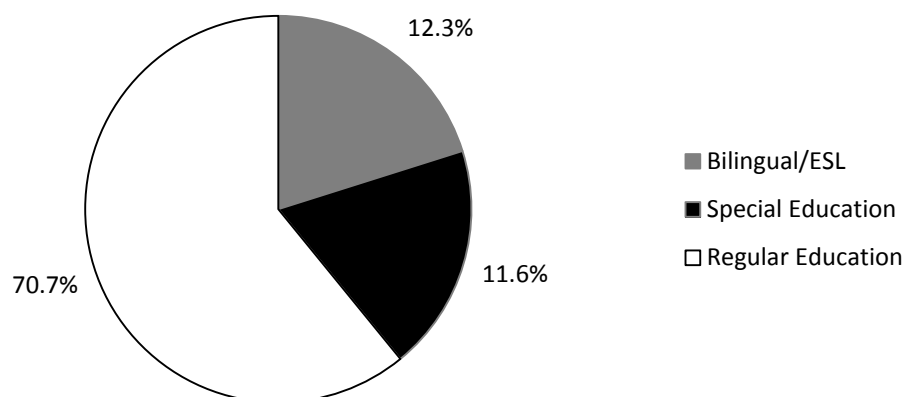
Source: Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System 2010-2011 District Profile.

This study longitudinally examined if the intervention for students who entered RTI beginning in kindergarten and exited at the end of kindergarten sustained success over time using the 2010 TAKS test scores from third grade. The study also investigated if students who entered RTI beginning in kindergarten and remained in intervention for any of their schooling in kindergarten, first, second, and/or third grade sustained success over time using the 2010 TAKS test scores. It was anticipated that the results of this study would demonstrate that there was a higher significance in student achievement in the group of students that entered kindergarten and were only served for one year. Thus, this suggested that intervention was successful with having students score well who were served for only one year in kindergarten and retained that success through the end of third grade. This study also addressed if students needed to be served longer than one year and if that service was successful over time through the TAKS results from their third grade year. The students' report card scores and the retention rates were examined

factors to measure student success. This study focused longitudinally on the success of RTI. There are few studies that focus on the longitudinal success of RTI, and more studies need to be completed in this area.

In the state of Texas, RTI is an unfunded expectation from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). In the past, TEA has provided a non-competitive grant called Student Success Initiative Grant (SSIG) that supported RTI with funds. However, this grant ended at the completion of the 2010-2011 school year. RTI is expected to continue, but there are no state funds allocated for this effort. Local funds, already operating with constrained budgets, must cover this cost.

Research Questions

1. What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI in grades K-3 as measured by TAKS third grade reading assessment?

2. What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as economically disadvantaged in grades K-3 as measured by TAKS third grade reading assessment?

3. What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as African American in grades K-3 as measured by TAKS third grade reading assessment?

4. What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as Hispanic in grades K-3 as measured by TAKS third grade reading assessment?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study. Their definitions provide

clarification of terms for the purpose of the research:

Flexible grouping is a process in which students are grouped according to need but only stay in the group as long as necessary and then are moved to different groups based on their progress.

Intensified intervention is an instructional intervention that provides a highly structured program of instruction to struggling students.

Intervention is an orchestrated attempt to provide targeted services to accelerate instruction for struggling students.

Reading performance (defined by TAKS) defines grade level reading performance by a passing rate of an assigned scale score for third grade in the 2010-2011 school year. This scale score is the reading performance level all students and schools strive to score as a minimum.

Response to Intervention (RTI) refers to how struggling students respond, moving towards success as they are involved in intervention lessons. These could last from 30 to 45 minutes from three to five days per week and could be provided in small groups of one to six. RTI typically consists of three tiers:

- Tier 1. This level of intervention, for the purpose of this study involves all students in the regular classroom with the regular curriculum. It focuses on having a curriculum that is built on best practices and current research and teaching the curriculum to the fidelity that it is meant to be taught. Differentiation occurs within Tier 1 based on the regular curriculum and the students' needs.

- Tier 2. Intervention in Tier 2 in this study is more intensive that Tier 1. It

- is in addition to Tier 1 intervention. Students are placed in small groups of usually three to six based on their area of need. Intervention is delivered by either the classroom teacher or another certified teacher using curriculum that is research based.

- Tier 3. Based on this study, Tier 3 is at a more intensive level than Tier 2. The group usually consists of one to three students, and the time is increased from 30 to usually 45 minutes in length and usually occurs daily. Curriculum at this level is based on research and focused on the specific area of need.

TAKS is the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

Significance of the Study

There are very few studies focusing on the longitudinal effects of RTI on the academic achievement success of students. Studies have shown the historical development of RTI, the components and significance of implementation and process monitoring, the relationship RTI has with special education, and the role the administrator must take in RTI for success. Historically, IDEA (2004) was the birthplace of RTI, and NCLB (2002) stressed the importance of early intervention. For the success of students, differentiation must occur in all three tiers of RTI (Tomlinson, 2003; VanSciver, 2005). According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2006), providing targeted intervention will not only bring success to students, but it will prevent them from having to enter special education for services. Contributing to that success, Lose (2007) believes that choosing the right intervention is critical. The intervention should focus on the specific deficits of the students individually. In addition, progress monitoring is essential to track

success and to drive the intervention (IES, 2009). As a guideline, Lembke, Garman, Deno, and Stecker (2010) stated that generally there should be approximately 80% of students in Tier 1, 15% in Tier 2, and 5% in Tier 3.

For implementation, interventions should occur between 8-30 weeks, as a guideline, with the most occurring between 21-26 weeks (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Dunn, 2010; Torgeson, 2000). Effective progress monitoring occurs at least monthly for Tier 2 students and weekly for Tier 3 students. This progress monitoring is what drives the grouping and intervention decisions (IES, 2009). The data collected are used to lead discussions and decisions as the frequent meetings occur (Lembke et al., 2010).

IDEA (2004) partnered RTI and special education with the intent of immediate intervention. Districts should not wait for students to fail before they intervene (McEneaney et al., 2006). RTI can reduce the numbers of students who are referred for special education services as well as lower the number of students who are actually referred (IES, 2009; Dunn, 2010). RTI can also reduce the number of over identified ethnic groups and low socioeconomic referrals (IES, 2009).

The administrator plays a critical role in the RTI process. According to Good (2006), the leadership team fosters the success of the students as they focus on their needs and their data. The principal should be a member of this team as he/she brings a factor of success and assists teachers in feeling a sense of belonging to that group (Rafoth & Foriska, 2006).

The results of this study provide pertinent information to school districts when determining if their intervention programs are closing the achievement gap with students

and if the students are sustaining the progress over time. If the students are not successful, districts need to closely examine revising and reworking their intervention programs to be more successful for the students.

Summary

RTI is designed to help struggling students early in their school careers close the achievement gap before the divide is too great. Struggling students who qualify for intervention are placed in fluid, flexible groups that deliver the instruction based on the needs of the students. This study examined the success of students placed in intervention in kindergarten as they sustained learning over time based on service in intervention for one or multiple years. Success was measured on the 2010 third grade TAKS, report card scores, and retention rates.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if providing intervention services to students who entered RTI in kindergarten made a difference in student achievement as indicated by their performance on the 2011 TAKS test at grade three. The study also determined longitudinally if students who entered RTI beginning in kindergarten and remained in RTI throughout kindergarten, first, second and third grade had a greater level of academic success as measured by their performance on the 2011 TAKS exam. This chapter of the study contains a review of literature which includes the historical development of RTI in Texas and districts across the United States.

Historical Development of Response to Intervention

With the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) supporting early intervention, RTI is a comprehensive approach to reduce the number of referrals to special education and to increase success in children early in their education (Lose, 2007). While the U.S. Department of Education supports RTI, it does not promote or expect any one particular model. However, the model that is used mostly in schools is the three-tiered model. Tier 1 focuses on the regular curriculum. The fidelity of the delivery of this curriculum must be upheld and contain differentiation. The differentiation must focus on the individual child, and the teacher should focus on the specific needs (Tomlinson, 2003). Research suggests that all students learn differently (Tobin & McInnes, 2008). Students are taught beginning where they are and moved forward with differentiated instruction. The lessons provided are flexible based on the

students' needs and strengths (Levy, 2008; VanSciver, 2005). Through differentiated lessons, students must be active learners and thinking at high levels through engaging lessons (VanSciver, 2005). The goal of differentiated instruction is for students to take charge of their own learning (Tomlinson, 2008). According to Denton, Fletcher, Anthony and Francis (2006), the percent of students who need help due to reading difficulties could be far reduced to a minimal level if Tier 1 was upheld to its intent. Tier 2 consists of additional targeted intervention in a small group of six or less in addition to Tier 1. Teachers use research-based, best practice, top quality interventions with the students based on their weaknesses (Bianco, 2010; Cusumano & Mueller, 2007). Teachers should know their students for successful differentiation (Tomlinson, 2008). The last tier, Tier 3, is a more intense, focused intervention with three or fewer students in a group for a longer period of time. The intervention becomes more explicit, more often for longer periods of time with smaller, targeted groups (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Using the right model, choosing the intervention that matches the needs of each individual student and having the student respond positively with steps toward success is the whole basis of RTI (Lose, 2007). The students must have quality instruction as the central core of their learning (Tomlinson, 2003). The school district in this study supports the three-tiered model of RTI.

The entire focus of RTI is making decisions and modifying those decisions based on how the child responds to the intervention after a given amount of time (Butler, 2009). Progress monitoring is a large focus of the RTI program and guides the decisions of intervention and success as the students progress through the program (IES, 2009). These data are collected through progress monitoring, and decisions are based upon data

for success (Lembke et al., 2010). Lembke et al. (2010) assert that in an ideal situation

approximately 80% of students are in Tier 1, approximately 15% of students are in Tier

2, and approximately 5% of students are in Tier 3. These percentages would vary slightly

among district but not widely overall. These percentages are reflected in the study

district, and progress monitoring occurs regularly as a part of RTI.

RTI focuses on "catching the students before they fail" through research-based

intervention (McEneaney et al., 2006). Research indicates that a child who enters school

in kindergarten as a struggling reader is in danger of never catching up, is on the path to

special education referral, and often drops out of high school (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008).

With RTI in place, a district should not refer a student for special education services

unless the student did not respond with success to RTI (IES, 2009). The possibility exists

that with a strong RTI model in place, the number of special education referrals in a

district will decrease (Fiorello, Hale & Snyder, 2006). This tightening of the

achievement gap "catches" the children before they fail and allows special education

services to focus on the students who truly need that placement (Bursuck & Blanks,

2010). The study district has experienced a decrease in the number of special education

referrals since the implementation of RTI.

According to Murray, Woodruff and Vaughn (2010), the retention rate for young

students can be significantly reduced with a strong RTI model in place. Adults who

struggle in the workplace due to insufficient reading skills can typically be traced back to

students who were low-level readers that lacked positive literacy skills (Torgesen, 2000).

RTI is designed to prevent this struggle and to move students early in elementary school

who lack positive reading skills to being proficient readers. Regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity, intervention can lead to success for all students (Kamps et al., 2008).

Woodward & Talbert-Johnson (2009) state,

The U.S. Department of Education identified at least 10 characteristics of effective reading intervention, including the following: small group size of three to six students who share the same reading difficulties, daily intervention for at least 30 minutes, intervention that addresses all five essential components of reading instruction, instruction that is explicit and direct but engaging and fast paced, feedback for students when errors are made, and many opportunities for students to respond to questions. Most important, intervention decisions are data driven. (p. 192)

Small group instruction has brought more success to the students in the study district, and interventions are becoming more focused-based on student need. This has forced teachers to focus on the specific deficits instead of a global view. Teachers need to adjust their teaching based on students' needs (Tomlinson, 2008). According to Imbeau and Tomlinson (2010), students take multiple avenues on their learning journey. The different routes students travel in differentiated instruction should culminate with the same core understandings (Tobin & McInnes, 2008). RTI provides these varied avenues through small group and individual instruction.

Tier 1

Because the U.S. Department of Education does not require or promote any specific model of RTI, implementation differs extensively across the state and U.S.

(Lembke, McMaster & Stecker, 2010; Lose, 2007). While most districts implement a

three-tiered model, some districts have many tiered models or just two tiers with the third

tier being special education services. For the purpose of this study, the focus was on a

three-tiered model. Within all of the varying models, it is quite clear that the first tier

focuses on quality, research-based foundation curriculum (Dunn, 2010). All students

need and benefit from quality instruction targeted from best practices for reading success.

Districts must complete a thorough examination of their current curriculum to

ensure that it is aligned with the current research and best practices in reading. Dunn

(2010) states that the general education curriculum should contain "phonemic awareness

and phonemic decoding skills, fluency in word recognition and text processing,

construction of meaning, vocabulary, spelling, and writing" (p. 30). Similarly, Wanzek

and Vaughn (2008) recommend five areas of reading curriculum: phonics, fluency,

phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension. If it is lacking in any area, the

curriculum should be revised to solidify the strength of its base (Lembke et al., 2010).

The instruction should be consistent and delivered with the fidelity in which it was

designed (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008;

Glover & DiPerna, 2007). A thorough examination was completed in the study district

by the curriculum office using groups of campus reading specialists. As a result of the

examination, the curriculum was strengthened, and consistency had been a goal.

According to Gettinger and Stoiber (2008), teachers should focus on developing

literacy-rich classrooms that deliver top quality, best practice instruction and should

attend focused staff development. They should also plan collaboratively and seek

assistance through coaching, when necessary. This will ensure the fidelity and quality of

Tier 1 instruction. Implementation of Tier 1 is compromised if the teachers do not deliver the curriculum with the fidelity in which it was written (IEA, 2009). Administrators should also conduct periodic checks on the implementation of the curriculum to ensure the fidelity (Lembke et al., 2010).

Since students come to school with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences, it is up to the school to provide this quality instruction in Tier 1 to meet all of their needs and deficits. "Evidence based on data from the mental health field indicate that a well-implemented, evidence-based core curriculum in reading in Tier 1 would ideally meet the needs of approximately 80% of the students in a given school" (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010, p. 422). The foundation instruction that is necessary in Tier 1 must be delivered by a trained teacher that delivers engaging, systemic instruction (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010). Ensuring the curriculum is research-based, delivered with fidelity and that teachers are highly trained eliminates any concern for insufficient instruction being delivered to the students (Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007).

The instruction in Tier 1 should also be multi-layered. Differentiation can and should occur within Tier 1 as the teachers work with the students for success (Vaughn et al., 2009). This differentiation could include small group instruction, taking in consideration students' learning styles, and intensifying instruction within the small groups based on need (Dunn, 2010). RTI should serve as a model of quality differentiated instruction that successfully meets the needs of all learners (Lembke et al., 2010).

Tier 2

Students that are moved into Tier 2 intervention receive instruction in small

groups that focus on their academic deficit(s). The additional intervention is in addition

to Tier 1 where they receive a strong, research-based foundation curriculum (Daly et al.,

2007; Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Murray, Woodruff, & Vaughn, 2010;

Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). The students receive direct teacher instruction on a daily basis

(Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008; Lembke et al., 2010). Bursuck and Blanks (2010) believe

that direct instruction from a teacher gleans the greatest success of the students. Direct

instruction is the most powerful instructional teaching model for struggling students

because of its direct focus, systematic design, consistent delivery, flexibility, and

expertise of the teacher to make decisions during the process that affects the success of

the students (Daly et al., 2007).

    According to Lose (2007), "Teachers, not programs, teach children to read" (p.

277). The interventions in Tier 2 focus specifically on the critical reading skills students

need for success, and the lessons are more intensive and systematic than in the regular

curriculum (IES, 2009). The interventions are not "cookie cutter" interventions; rather,

they are chosen based on what the students need. Once the students accelerate, the

interventions are changed. The focus is on the students and their needs, not on every

student being given the exact same intervention (O'Connor, Fulmer, Harty, & Bell,

2005). An approved list of strategies is provided to the schools of quality interventions

that can be used with the students in Tier 2 and Tier 3. This helps to ensure the use of

quality and effective interventions.

According to the Institute of Education Sciences through the What Works Clearinghouse

(2009), students in Tier 2 should receive daily instruction, if possible, and at least three

times per week. The intervention should focus on phonemic awareness, phonics,

comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. The interventions should build gradually and provide specific feedback. Skills can be introduced and initially taught in isolation but should be brought into context to help solidify generalizations for the students (IES, 2009; Daly et al., 2007). The interventions should also support and enhance the regular, daily reading curriculum. Depending on the students' needs, daily intervention should be approximately 20-40 minutes. The daily time will vary as the amount of intervention needed will vary (IES, 2009; Glover & DiPerna, 2007). Generally, the students in the study district receive intervention for a minimum of 30 minutes.

It is important that "thinking aloud" be a part of all instructional pieces with the teacher modeling and explaining the thought processes (IES, 2009). The group size varies from four to six, but it can be as small as one-to-one, although this is usually the case in Tier 3 intervention (Dunn, 2010; Murray, Woodruff, & Vaughn, 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011). It is also critical in Tier 2 that the interventions are delivered with the fidelity in which they are intended. Success is clouded and compromised if the interventions are compromised on their delivery (Bianco, 2010; Glover & DiPerna, 2007).

As with the Tier I curriculum, interventions utilized in Tier 2 should be based on sound best practices and current research (Johnston, 2010). The groupings in Tier 2 should be fluid. If students are not responding, changes should be made within the tier with group size, intervention focus, intensity, or increased time during the day (Daly et al., 2007; Lembke, McMaster, & Stecker, 2010). O'Connor et al., (2005) assert that in order to increase intensity for students you have to reduce the group numbers, give more time to the intervention instruction, and focus the instruction more closely to the students'

needs. Schools and teachers must be careful in Tier 2 not to fall into the convenience or trap of using a blanket intervention for all students or ineffective interventions because of convenience. They must be focused, highly successful, research-based interventions that focus on students' needs (Daly et al., 2007).

Tier 3

Small group instruction continues to be the focus of Tier 3. However, the groups may be three-to-one, two-to-one or one-to-one with the most likely grouping being one-to- one. The fewer number of students in the groups allow more individualized explicit teaching and more opportunities for the students to respond (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). The intensity level increases as well as the amount of daily time that the students are served (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008). These services are in addition to Tier 1, possibly in addition to Tier 2, and must be focused, best practice based interventions. Lessons should occur daily or as much as scheduling allows between the teacher and students (IES, 2009).

Because these students have not responded to intense, systematic instruction at the Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels, instruction in Tier 3 should be concentrated. It needs to be data driven and should target a specific set of skills that are the foundation of the students' struggles. Pacing may need to be adjusted to meet the needs of the individual students, and mastery of a skill needs to be demonstrated before proceeding to another skill (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; IES, 2009). A minimum of 45 minutes of intervention with a small group size of three-to-one is the most frequently used model in the study district. Direct, focused feedback is necessary for success (IES, 2009). Teachers need to scaffold students in Tier 3 longer and more intensely, gradually releasing the scaffold as they

move toward success (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010).

Implementation and Progress Monitoring

According to research, implementation of interventions in Tiers 2 and 3 vary from 8-30 weeks to even multiple years with the majority being held for approximately 21-26 weeks (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Dunn, 2010; Glover & DiPerna, 2007; Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006; McEneaney et al., 2006; Murray, Woodruff, & Vaughn, 2010; Simmons et al., 2008; Torgeson, 2000; Vaughn et al., 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008, 2011). While the number of weeks varies in interventions, according to the IES (2009), the time that is spent in actual instruction is more important than the overall total time.

Progress monitoring is an important and critical component of RTI and its success. Placement in Tier 2 occurs with a universal screening process at the beginning of the year before intervention begins (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; Daly et al., 2007; IES, 2009; Lembke et al., 2010; Stepanek, Peixotto, & Regional Educational, 2009; Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). According to Lembke et al., (2010), there are two types of universal screenings. The first screening takes place at the beginning of the school year. Children that score below set criteria are moved into intervention. The second involves screening students that have the potential to be at-risk.

After the screening occurs, the students are given six to eight weeks of Tier 1 intervention that is monitored for progress. If they do not respond positively, they are placed in Tier 2 (Lembke et al., 2010). Jenkins, Hudson, and Johnson (2007) state that it can be an immense challenge to ensure that the universal screening is on target to accurately identify students who need assistance. Cut points have to be set that clearly

define those at-risk and those not at-risk for reading difficulties. To increase the level of

accuracy, universal screenings should contain more than one measure (Jenkins et al.,

2007).

Progress monitoring occurs after the universal screening has been completed.

Research suggests that progress monitoring occurs once a month for Tier 2 students and

once a week for Tier 3 students (IES, 2009; Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). The power of

progress monitoring is that it guides the leadership team in making decisions about the

student. Is the student making progress? Is the student regressing? Does the

intervention need to be changed? Another question to consider: Should the student

remain in Tier 2, move to Tier 3, or return to Tier 1? All of these questions are

addressed, answered, and discussed through the progress monitoring piece (IES, 2009;

Murray et al., 2010).

Progress monitoring is critical to ensure that students receive intervention for only

the length of time necessary for success (O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005). If there is

no response to the interventions after a given period of time, the special education referral

process may need to be initiated (Lembke et al., 2010). According to IES (2009), there

have been no studies discovered that focus specifically on the impact of progress

monitoring. However, it is an important element to observe student growth and to make

necessary changes to grouping (IES, 2009). Assessment is what drives the instruction

(Ankrum & Bean, 2008). While the IES (2009) reports that the level of evidence is low

in this area, it is still stated that progress monitoring does have "a positive effect on the

instructional decisions teachers make" (p. 24).

A tracking form or monitoring system is used by some districts to allow teachers to record progress, to plot the progress monitoring data, and to ensure teacher fidelity to the intervention. Many times, data such as frequency, intervention used, number of minutes, and scores are recorded and used to make decisions (Ardoin, 2006; Bianco, 2010; Lembke et al., 2010). As the students continue through progress monitoring, a leadership or problem-solving team meets to discuss the data. These teams consist of key campus stakeholders, including parents. They meet on a frequent basis and use the data to make decisions and guide discussions (Lembke et al., 2010). Lembke et al. (2010) suggest that a specific progress monitoring assessment, Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM), be used due to its capability to focus on growth and the effectiveness of instruction.

In order to effectively monitor the students and collaboratively make the best decisions based on the data, leadership, child study, school intervention, or problem-solving teams should be formed at the schools. These teams should have key stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, reading specialists, counselors, and/or parents) (Bianco, 2010; Daly et al., 2007; Dunn, 2010; IES, 2009; Lose, 2007). These teams meet regularly to discuss the progress of students in Tiers 2 and 3. They review data and make decisions about continued service in an intervention. Changing services or groups also occur through this team. Data are used to lead the group in their discussions and decisions (Lembke et al., 2010). As these teams meet frequently, students are revisited to ensure that they are progressing or to implement necessary changes (Dunn, 2010). According to Good (2006), students demonstrate academic gains when teachers make changes and strengthen their instructional practices. These teams

 make decisions on change and which interventions should continue. Based on data,

changes in groupings and taught skills should occur often (Ankrum & Bean, 2008).

RTI and Special Education

The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA suggested that states set up RTI to identify

children that are in danger of falling behind in reading. It appears that RTI is a sound

model that gives the children the opportunity to "not wait to fail" (McEneaney et al.,

2006, p. 117). Before the 2004 reauthorization, special education identification was

based on a process-deficit and discrepancy model. Lembke et al. (2010) stated that there

was no differentiation between at-risk readers and on-level readers in intelligence

quotient (IQ), and there was no difference with students who did not respond to

intervention. Because of this, RTI is the most legitimate approach to identifying and

serving students with reading difficulties (Lembke et al., 2010).

It appears that students who once struggled as readers were not given any

intervention early in their elementary years and often did not receive any assistance until

they were identified as learning disabled (IES, 2009). It is suggested that with early

reading instruction, the number of students who struggle in the first grade can be

drastically reduced, which is significant for special education (Denton et al., 2006).

Dunn (2010) also believes that RTI can successfully serve a majority of students

who struggle academically with only a few needing to be referred for special education

services. Gettinger and Stoiber (2008) believe that children who enter kindergarten as

struggling readers have a difficult time closing that gap and catching up to their on-level

peers and are likely to be referred for special education services with no intervention. If a

student is struggling as a reader in second grade, the student has a 25% success rate at

becoming an on-level reader by the time they exit elementary school. Struggling readers in fourth grade tend to continue struggling in high school and are at a high risk of becoming dropouts (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008). Wanzek and Vaughn (2011) identified that some students who have been labeled "learning disabled" and were served in special education may not have been diagnosed with a disability if they would have received early identification and intervention. Research suggests that RTI is a program that should be implemented as it can considerably decrease the number of students who are incorrectly referred for special education services (Bianco, 2010; Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; Fiorello, Hale, & Snyder, 2006; Lembke et al., 2010; McEneaney et al., 2006; Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011).

IES (2009) believes that the minority subgroups of students were over-identified in special education before the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, and RTI can help reduce the number of inappropriate referrals of low socioeconomic students and minority students. According to Butler's (2009) study of Florida schools, the number of referrals for special education testing was decreased from 58 in 2004-2005 to 11 in 2008-2009. Dunn (2010) states that over a 10-year period, RTI decreased the number of students placed in special education services from 4.5% to 2.5%. Additionally, a study conducted by Denton et al. (2006) suggests that 40% of the students who received RTI were able to return to the general education program and no longer required special education services. Special education services should be reserved for students who have the highest need (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010). After implementation of a multi-tiered intervention program, Wanzek and Vaughn (2011) state that there was a decrease in the referrals made for special education services.

Research reassures that if students continue to struggle significantly after moving through Tiers 2 and 3, assessment for special education services should be completed (Daly et al., 2007; Fiorello, Hale, & Snyder, 2006; IES, 2009; Lembke et al., 2010; Vaughn et al., 2009). A special education referral can occur at any point along the RTI pathway, but the intent is to provide students with early and intensive intervention in order to prevent a referral and close the deficit gap in reading skills (Lembke et al., 2010). It appears that RTI has merged special education and general education, thereby, opening the communication channels between the two worlds (IES, 2009).

Many districts use the multi-tiered model as a means to place students into special education (Johnston, 2010; Lembke et al., 2010; Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006; Stepanek, Peixotto, & Regional Educational, 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011). However, the primary purpose of a study conducted by Wanzek and Vaughn (2011) was to prevent reading difficulties in students. While the study did not appear to produce statistically significant declines in special education placement, it did decrease the numbers by 27% which was considered to be a practical significance (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011). Other studies noted a 54% decrease in special education service placement across three years. These results suggest that fewer students are being assessed for special education services (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011). In the study district, the number of students who are referred for special education services has decreased since the implementation of RTI, and those students that are referred for special education services qualify more successfully.

According to Linan-Thompson et al. (2006), implementing RTI with ELL students who are struggling readers using explicit, systematic, and intensive instruction can reduce the risk of referrals to special education services provided that RTI is appropriate and targeted for all students who struggle with reading.

Administrative Role in RTI

Most schools develop problem-solving teams, and they are instrumental in bringing change to the school and structures within the school. These teams have brought a large amount of success to the achievement students through solid strength and collaboration (Good, 2006). The administrator as a positive participant in the problem-solving team brings a factor of success. It appears that teams need the consistency of the principal as a foundation member and leader to solidify their confidence (Rafoth & Foriska, 2006). The strength of leadership is in the shared ideas through a strong collaborative leadership team (Good, 2006).

The leadership or problem-solving teams are critical in the RTI process as the students are brought to these teams in order to study data and make decisions about their interventions and groupings. According to Rafoth and Foriska (2006), teachers were able to make sound decisions regarding interventions when supported by the administrator and made to feel that their decisions mattered. Principals must lead the teams to make the best decisions about interventions through data and research in order to maximize student learning (Good, 2006).

The teams must always ask themselves what an effective teaching intervention is and what is not based on results. Once decisions have been made, principals and teams must make changes based on the data in order to move the students and teachers forward

(Good, 2006). The principals serve an important role on the leadership teams in the study district by knowing and understanding the needs of all of their students and being a part of the decision-making process that affects the success of each student.

Results

Most articles investigated ensured success of RTI over time. Most reflected briefly that RTI did positively affect students by closing the achievement gap, and most retained their progress. There were only two articles located that outlined more in-depth longitudinal success. In these articles, research indicated that students who had been served in RTI made remarkable gains in standardized scores on decoding and comprehension. They maintained these gains two years later, even though they remained slower readers (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006). In addition, it appears that about 40% of the students who were being served in RTI were able to successfully return to a regular classroom (Denton et al., 2006). According to Denton et al. (2006), significant improvement was made by students in as little as eight weeks.

The implications of the studies is that all students, even those that have persistent problems in reading, can benefit from systematic, intensive, focused reading intervention (Denton et al., 2006). Strong evidence for small group instruction that is systematic, intensive, and focused for three to five times a week (Tier 2) demonstrates positive effects. The recommendation is to continue to use this type of intervention with the most struggling students. According to O'Connor, Harty, and Fulmer (2005), of the 31 students served, about half scored at an appropriate level. However, by the next year, half of that group needed to have support again in Tier 2. Overall, a majority of the students were successful with their scores but had to continue with intervention services

in Tier 2 through second grade to maintain the success (O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005). Most could maintain their success but needed support and interventions periodically throughout the early grades. It appears that there are students who will need some type of intensive intervention throughout their school career to maintain success (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Studies suggest that retention rates can be decreased among first graders that receive RTI intervention (Murray, Woodruff, & Vaughn, 2010). Critical to the study of looking at the number of years a student is served matched to their success, it appears that students will be moved out of the at-risk status by the end of first and third grade effectively. However, it is suggested that students will be moved out of the at-risk status by the end of third grade more successfully (Simmons et al., 2008). O'Connor, Fulmer, Harty, and Bell (2005) noted that there are very few studies that have tracked students from kindergarten to third grade following the success of interventions across time. It appears that using direct instruction during the intervention time resulted in large effect sizes and considerable differences in all of the areas of reading (O'Connor et al., 2005).

Summary

Because it appears that RTI is a successful model to close the achievement gap and to move students out of risk of reading failure, is there a difference in success as measured by the number of years a student is served in RTI? If a student enters in kindergarten into Tier 2, responds to the interventions positively, and exits at the end of kindergarten, is that student successful on the state assessment at the end of third grade or is there regression? Do some of the students who exit in kindergarten need to return into

intervention periodically for additional support? What about the child that enters Tier 2 in kindergarten, responds to intervention more slowly, and continues to qualify for intervention in subsequent grades?   Is that child successful on the state assessment at the end of third grade? Does it matter how many years the child is served for success to occur? The research is severely lacking in this area, and there needs to be additional studies conducted to address the effects of the number of years served in RTI.

While the research appears to support the overall success of RTI, there were few studies that focused on the number of years served and retaining that progress over several years. Very few longitudinal studies were found on the success of RTI with struggling readers. If retention of progress is not occurring, the interventions and process need to be changed and revised in order to provide more success to our students. If the students are not being successful after the kindergarten intervention year, the program needs to be intensified and revised in order to promptly identify and close the academic gaps.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic achievement of the students who were in Tier 2 or Tier 3 of RTI longitudinally from kindergarten through third grade. The researcher reviewed their success based on TAKS in reading on the third grade scores of the 2010-2011 school year. This study was conducted with a mixed methods approach. Reading specialists were a part of a focus group in order to solicit their perspective of the RTI process as well as the data collected from the TAKS scores. Chapter three describes the methodology used in the study. This chapter begins with a description of the participants. Next, a discussion of the district and instructional environment is provided to allow the reader to become familiar with the setting. This is followed by a description of the instrumentation, the data collection procedures, and analysis process that were used by the researcher.

Participants

The participants in this study were students who qualified for RTI based on a given criteria in kindergarten and were served for only that year or for subsequent years through the third grade. All students from this cohort entered the district in 2007-2008 and remained in the district through the third grade. The students were from the same district, and all of them qualified for RTI services with the criteria that were used throughout the district's elementary schools. Students were not chosen based on socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity; rather, they were chosen based on set reading criteria. Once the students were chosen, socioeconomic and ethnic data were disaggregated and converted to percentages of students that were in RTI and the

following categories: Hispanic, African-American, socioeconomic, and all others. The cohort of kindergarten students who entered school in 2007-2008 and were identified for this study totaled 262. When that group moved to first grade, 59 students remained in the program; 39 students remained in second grade; and 35 students remained by third grade. The ethnic groups of the cohort consisted of 28 Asian students, 31 African American students, 110 Hispanic students, and 93 White students.

The reading specialists were invited to participate through a random selection of eight. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to the eight that were randomly selected. The size of the group ensured ease of manageability. It also eliminated side conversations that are difficult to follow (Morgan, 1997). The focus group was conducted at the district's Instructional Center. The facilitator reviewed the goals and rules to the participants before the group began to ensure a smooth and focused session (Morgan, 1997). The focus group produced a group response that gave the researcher a better understanding of the perceptions of the RTI program from the reading specialists (Villareal, 2010).

Once the reading specialists were secured for the focus group, the session was guided by open-ended questions. Each participant was provided with the same set of questions in writing and was asked the questions orally. Data were gathered from the participants regarding the number of years they served as reading specialists and the number of years served at their current campus. The primary objective for the facilitator during the focus group was to interpret the information and to keep the group focused on the task (Macias, 2011).

District and Instructional Setting

The district is a suburban school district located north of the Houston area and serves approximately 45,000 students. There were 27 elementary schools that were a part of this study. All of the elementary campuses served students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Each elementary campus also had a full-time reading specialist that oversaw the RTI program in reading and guided the teachers that worked with students who qualified for RTI services.

Students who received RTI were served for at least 30 minutes daily, five days a week. The teachers had to chose from an approved list of interventions that were used with the students. Not all students received the same interventions, but all of them received quality, research-based interventions that had been approved by the district. Teachers chose the interventions based on the needs of the students. Teachers conducting the service of RTI were required to provide weekly lesson plans and attendance logs for all served students.

Instrumentation

One instrument was used to measure student success of those served in the RTI program. The instrument was the TAKS from the 2010-2011 school year with third grade students in reading. The assessment was administered by the students' regular classroom teacher unless the students were allowed accommodations. If they were permitted to access accommodations, another certified teacher in the school administered the TAKS based on the allowable accommodations prescribed. The students had one entire school day for the administration of the TAKS if no accommodations were provided for them. They had two entire school days to complete testing if certain

accommodations were permitted. Once the students were identified as being served in

RTI, delineation was made for those who had accommodations and those who did not

have accommodations.

The TAKS test was found to have internal validity based on the data from TEA.

The data were taken from the 2009-2010 Technical Digest. A Kuder-Richardson

Formula 20 was used since the TAKS is a multiple choice assessment. General level

reliability coefficients that are between 0.80-0.89 are considered good; a number above

0.90 is considered excellent. The 2009-2010 TAKS rated into the high 0.85s to low 0.90s

for the internal consistency reliabilities. A similarly high level of internal consistencies

was found across grade levels and subject areas. TEA's goal was to achieve the highest

level of content validity by carefully aligning TAKS to the curriculum. To help achieve

this goal, TEA included numerous committee members of Texas educators to review the

items.

Data Collection Procedures

Archival data were used for the study. They were collected from the district with

all identifiers removed. The data were not aggregated by campus. The data were

disaggregated by the students who were served in RTI and the number of years served in

the RTI program. The data were also disaggregated by economically disadvantaged,

Hispanic, and African American for the students who qualified for RTI. Confidentiality

was maintained with all data and subjects. Student names were not used in the study.

The focus group discussion was audiotaped. Notes were scribed from the primary

researcher and by an independent, secondary assistant to ensure complete notes. The

focus group participants were given the same questions and participated in the discussion

together. The eight reading specialists that were chosen randomly were invited to

participate in the focus group. The researcher provided the time and location for the

meeting and informed participants that a snack would be provided. A facilitator served to

keep the group focused on-task and to gather information (Morgan, 1997).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis procedures utilized for this study were completed through the use of

an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). An ANOVA is used to study the variance of a

dependent variable. A one-way ANOVA was used to compare the different groups based

on the number of years they were served in RTI. The one-way ANOVA was used as it

looked at one category that had several group samples. The research questions for this

study are:

1. What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI in grades K-3 as
   measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

2. What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students
   identified as economically disadvantaged in grades K-3 as measured by the
   TAKS third grade reading assessment?

3. What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students
   identified as African American in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third
   grade reading assessment?

4. What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students
   identified as Hispanic in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade
   reading assessment?

Interview Questions

The interview questions for the focus group were developed to determine the reading specialists' perceptions of the success of RTI with their students. The design of the questions focused the participants on sharing their educated opinions based on their experiences with RTI and their students. Emphasis was provided to the reading specialists to answer in their own words, and all participants were given ample opportunity to share their perceptions. The following questions were given to the participants:

1. What longitudinal academic achievement effects do you think RTI had on the students in your school during kindergarten, first, second, and third grades?

2. Does it appear to make a difference for the students who were served for only one year or more than one year?

3. What longitudinal academic achievement effects do you think RTI had on the economically disadvantaged students from kindergarten to third grade?

4. What longitudinal academic achievement effects do you think RTI had on the African American students from kindergarten to third grade?

5. What longitudinal academic achievement effects do you think RTI had on the Hispanic students from kindergarten to third grade?

Through these questions, data were gathered to analyze the views of the reading specialists on the success or deficit of the RTI program in the elementary schools for students in kindergarten through third grade.

Focus Group

One focus group was convened by the researcher to solicit the experiences of the reading specialists on the RTI program. The University of Houston's Consent to Participate in Research was reviewed by the researcher with the reading specialists that participated in the focus group. Signatures were secured from the participants that gave permission to participate in the study. Their permission also allowed the researcher to use the data collected from the focus group. Participants were informed of the audiotaping of the session. The audiotape recording of the focus group session was transcribed to provide a hard copy of the discussion.

Ethical Assurances

Permission was obtained to conduct research from the district's Department of Quality Research (refer to Appendix A) and the University of Houston (refer to Appendix B). Participating reading specialists were informed of the purpose and procedures of the study. Written consent was obtained from the reading specialists to participate in the study. Written notification was provided to the participants to indicate that their participation in the study was voluntary.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of RTI on 262 students entering school in a suburban Texas school district during the 2007-2008 school year and remaining in the school district through third grade in 2010-11. Achievement data were examined from the 2010-2011 school year of this same group. The study attempted to answer the following four research questions:

Research Question One: What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

Research Question Two: What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as economically disadvantaged in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

Research Question Three: What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as African American in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

Research Question Four: What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as Hispanic in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

To answer research questions one through four, two sources of information were utilized by the researcher. First, third grade achievement results from the 2011-2012 TAKS assessment were analyzed using an ANOVA to determine if there were any statistically significant differences in the number of years served in the district. Second, the results of a focus group comprised of eight reading specialists, who facilitated RTI at

their campuses, assisted to verify the findings for each research question.

Research Question One: What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

There were 262 kindergarten students who entered school in 2007-2008 and were identified for this study. When the group moved to first grade, 59 remained in the RTI program, 39 remained in second grade, and 35 students remained in third grade. This appeared to indicate that early intervention made a difference across all ethnic groups. Table 1 illustrates the number of students who received RTI services by ethnicity.

Table 1

Students Receiving RTI Services in Kindergarten Through Third Grade by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade
	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Asian	28	7	1	3
Black/African American	31	7	10	5
Hispanic	110	21	17	19
White	93	24	11	8
Total	262	59	39	35

Students who entered RTI in kindergarten in 2007-2008 and were part of this cohort study scored an average of 90.08% on the TAKS test in third grade. Table 2 indicates the percentage passing by ethnic group. The percentages passing by years

served are indicated in Table 3. These data indicated that RTI supported the success of

students who were struggling according to set identification criteria and were successful

on the achievement assessment across all ethnic groups.

Table 2

Percentage of Students Passing 2010-2011 TAKS From 2007-2008 Kindergarten Cohort

Ethnicity	Percentage Passing 2010-2011 TAKS
Asian	96.43%
Black/African American	90.32%
Hispanic	85.45%
White	93.55%
Overall Average	90.08%

Table 3

Percentage of Students by Years Served Meeting Passing Standard on 2010-2011 TAKS

Ethnicity	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	Overall Average by Ethnic Group
Asian	11.05%	10.71%	8.00%	0.00%	10.31%
Black/African American	8.14%	17.86%	12.00%	11.11%	10.69%
Hispanic	37.21%	32.14%	36.00%	33.33%	35.88%
White	35.47%	28.57%	28.00%	33.33%	33.21%
Overall Average by Year Served	91.86%	89.29%	84.00%	77.78%	90.08%

The commended rate for the students in this cohort averaged 33.59%, as reflected in Table 4. The overall commended rate was greater for this group of RTI students entering during the 2007-2008 school year as kindergartners than the overall district commended rate for third grade.

Table 4

Percentage of Students Passing With Commended on 2010-2011 TAKS From 2007-2008 Kindergarten Cohort

Ethnicity	Percentage Passing With Commended 2010-2011 TAKS
Asian	42.86%
Black/African American	25.81%
Hispanic	32.73%
White	34.41%
Overall Average	33.59%

Table 5 illustrates data from students who were served for one year and students who were served for four years. Both groups scored in the 40% range of commended on the TAKS assessment.

Table 5

Percentage of Students by Years Served Receiving Commended on 2010-2011 TAKS

Ethnicity	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	Overall Average by Ethnic Group
Asian	6.40%	1.79%	0.00%	0.00%	4.58%
Black/African American	3.49%	0.00%	4.00%	11.11%	3.05%
Hispanic	16.28%	7.14%	12.00%	11.11%	13.74%
White	15.12%	3.57%	8.00%	22.22%	12.21%
Overall Average by Year Served	41.28%	12.50%	24.00%	44.44%	33.59%

The data depicted in Table 6 shows that the assumption of homogeneity of variance has been met. The Levene's F Statistic has a significance value of 0.13, which is greater than 0.05.

Table 6

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Vrt Scale Score

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.861	3	242	.137

The data in Table 7 depict the output of the ANOVA analysis. It appears from the data that there was a statistically significant difference between the group means. The significance level was 0.000 ($p = .000$), which was below 0.05. Therefore, there was a statistically significant difference in the mean length of time that the students were served in RTI. In order to analyze which of the specific groups differed, a multiple comparisons table was utilized which contains the results of post-hoc tests.

Table 7

One-Way Analysis of Variance Summary for Length of Time Served in RTI

	SS	*df*	*MS*	*F*	Sig.
Between Groups	293227.479	3	97742.493	13.007	.000
Within Groups	1818535.874	242	7514.611		
Total	2111763.354	245			

The results indicated that there were significant differences between the groups as a whole. Using multiple comparisons, Table 8 illustrates which groups differed from each other. The Tukey and the Games-Howell post-hoc were utilized for conducting post-hoc tests on the one-way ANOVA.

Using the Tukey post-hoc and analyzing the comparison of students who were served for one year, there was a significant difference in the students who were served for one year ($p = 0.000$) as compared to year two and also served for one year ($p = 0.000$) as compared to year three. However, there was no significant difference between the group that was served for one year as compared to year four.

According to the data of the student comparisons that were served for two years, there was a significant difference in the students who were served for one year ($p =$

0.000) when compared to those served for two years. There was no significant difference between the groups that were served for three years and four years when compared to those that were served for two years.

Table 9 indicates that when comparing students who were served for three years, there was a significant difference in the students that were served for one year (p = 0.000). There was no significant difference between the groups that were served for two years and four years when compared to those that were served for three years. Upon examination of the students that were served for four years and compared to the students that were served for one, two, and three years, there appeared to be no significant difference.

When analyzing Games-Howell post-hoc data from the comparison of students who were served for one year, there was a significant difference in the students who were served for one year (p = 0.000) as compared to year two and also served for one year (p = 0.002) as compared to year three. However, there was no significant difference between the group that was served for one year as compared to year four.

According to the data of the student comparisons that were served for two years, there was a significant difference in the students who were served for one year (p = 0.000) when compared to those served for two years. There was no significant difference between the groups that were served for three years and four years when compared to those that were served for two years.

Table 9 also indicates that when comparing students who were served for three years, there was a significant difference in the students that were served for one year (p = 0.002). There was no significant difference between the groups that were served for two

years and four years when compared to those that were served for three years. There

appeared to be no significant difference in the group that was served for four years as

compared to the students served for one, two, or three years.

As shown by Table 8 and Table 9, there was a statistically significant difference

between groups as determined by the one-way ANOVA ($df(3,242) = 13.007$, $p = .000$).

A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference for the

students who were served for only one year in kindergarten as compared to two years

(551.6 ± 68.8 min, $p = .000$), for the students who were served for only one year in

kindergarten as compared to three years (509.9 ± 91.5 min, $p = .000$), and for the students

who were served for only one year in kindergarten as compared to four years ($503.2 \pm$

124.3 min, $p = .069$). There was no statistically significant difference between two years,

three years, or four years of service in RTI when compared to each other.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Length of Time Served in RTI

	N	M	SD	SE	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1	172	611.06	90.21	6.87	597.49	624.64	372	833
2	53	551.66	68.82	9.45	532.69	570.63	403	673
3	17	509.94	91.53	22.20	462.88	557.00	337	701
4	4	503.25	124.31	62.15	305.44	701.06	403	659
Total	246	589.52	92.84	5.919	577.87	601.18	337	833

Table 9

Comparison of Number of Years Served in RTI for Kindergarten Students Entering in

2007-2008 With TAKS Scores from 2011-2012

	Yrs. in Program	Yrs. in Program	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
		2	59.40*	13.619	.00	24.17	94.64
	1	3	101.12*	22.03	.00	44.11	158.14
		4	107.81	43.84	.06	-5.61	221.24
		1	-59.40*	13.61	.00	-94.64	-24.17
	2	3	41.71	24.16	.31	-20.79	104.23
		4	48.41	44.94	.70	-67.87	164.69
Tukey HSD		1	-101.12*	22.03	.00	-158.14	-44.11
	3	2	-41.71	24.16	.31	-104.23	20.79
		4	6.69	48.17	.99	-117.93	131.31
		1	-107.81	43.84	.06	-221.24	5.61
	4	2	-48.41	44.94	.70	-164.69	67.87
		3	-6.69	48.17	.99	-131.31	117.93
		2	59.40*	11.69	.00	28.91	89.89
	1	3	101.12*	23.24	.00	35.83	166.41
		4	107.81	62.53	.44	-188.97	404.59
		1	-59.40*	11.69	.00	-89.89	-28.91
	2	3	41.71	24.12	.33	-25.26	108.70
		4	48.41	62.87	.86	-245.74	342.56
Games-Howell		1	-101.12*	23.24	.00	-166.41	-35.83
	3	2	-41.71	24.12	.33	-108.70	25.26
		4	6.69	66.00	1.00	-269.06	282.45
		1	-107.81	62.53	.44	-404.59	188.97
	4	2	-48.41	62.87	.86	-342.56	245.74
		3	-6.69	66.00	1.00	-282.45	269.06

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The focus group consisted of eight members. There were 27 possible participants. The average number of years of combined experience as a reading specialist was eight. All participants were female. According to Table 10, only one was from a Title I campus; however, two others had previously been a reading specialist at a Title I campus.

Table 10

Background Information of Focus Group Members

Reading Specialist by Number	Number of Years Teaching	Number of Years in District	Number of Years as Reading Specialist	Serving Title I School
1	19	15	5	N
2	34	16	14	N*
3	22	6	6	N
4	5	5	3	Y
5	37	26	18	N
6	31	31	7	N
7	32	18	10	N*
8	14	6	2	N

Note: * indicates previously served as a reading specialist at a Title I campus

Focus group discussions emphasized the need to have small group instruction with flexible grouping. Two of the eight participants agreed that flexible grouping was important. Participant number three stated:

> *I… think that the expectation that those struggling readers are seen in a*
>
> *small group and that if they are not making progress there that you make*

the group even smaller because they get that individual attention.

Participant number seven agreed with these comments:

> *I agree the small groups are a big key and they're grouped by their ability*
>
> *and the flexibility to change those groups as needed.*

The discussion centered on coaching as a way to ensure the success of RTI with the teachers and the students. Four of the eight participants discussed coaching and it benefits. Participant number five stated:

> *I feel one of the strongest ways we reach struggling students is by going in*
>
> *in our position as coach and doing model lessons because we are not only*
>
> *helping the students but we are also sharing ideas with the teachers that*
>
> *they can use not just while we are there but after we have left the*
>
> *classroom.*

As discussions continued in the focus group, a common theme emerged with five of the eight participants emphasizing the importance of early intervention and the difference it could make for the success of the students. This was a critical portion of the conversation with identifying the success of RTI. Participant number four stressed:

> *....and so the earlier we can get them the better chance we have of making*
>
> *up those gaps.*

Participant number three shared:

> *I agree that the early intervention is critical.*

Meaningful discussion about struggling students and problem solving together also emerged as an important part of the success of the students in RTI. The importance of having a discussion about the students occurred during two different question

dialogues with two of the eight participating in that discussion for one question and five of the eight for another question. Both discussions focused on the importance of discussions for success. Participant number five indicated:

> *But they [teachers] are also very good at problem solving. If something is not working then they're very willing to come for discussion or problem solve amongst themselves as a team and try and figure out.*

Another participant, number six, stated:

> *...if one teacher has a student that is not responding to the intervention there's a strong discussion as to what can we do to help that student...*

There was overall agreement that there are some students, although it is a smaller number, which will always need RTI and the support the interventions provide them. Three of the eight participants specifically discussed the topic. Participant number two specified:

> *...I think there's going to be some kids that are going to be always in response to intervention. They just need that support.*

Participant number three agreed:

> *...those kids are going to need that help every year...*

As the dialogue continued, five of the eight participants agreed overall that RTI worked for most of the students, and numbers decreased as they moved to each grade level. Participant number eight stated:

> *...you see that they're successful...I can think of several students on my campus where I do think it made a difference because they had intervention for a year in the lower grades.*

Agreeing, participant number seven offered:

> *Yes, we have had some success. Yes, we've had some that are still with us,*
> *but I can see if we catch them early through small group, through*
> *intensive instruction, through good teaching, we can catch them.*

Also, participant number six stated:

> *I do think we have to at my campus—we have to say RTI is working in the*
> *sense that we go from say 40 kids identified in kindergarten/first to 30*
> *identified in second and then generally in third we have a lot less kids*
> *identified…I think a lot of it is we have been laying down that*
> *foundation…and it is finally clicking. Those kids that have been in RTI*
> *and have been in small group K, one, and two it came together. And so*
> *when they get to third grade, a lot of them are ready to tackle it.*

Research Question Two: What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as economically disadvantaged in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

In the cohort, 136 students were identified as economically disadvantaged. According to data in Table 11, it did not appear that the number of years served in RTI made a positive impact on the students who were economically disadvantaged. In fact, it appears that there was an increase in the percentage of students who were economically disadvantaged and remained in the cohort each year.

Table 11

Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students in Cohort

	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	Total Average
	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	
Economically Disadvantaged	48.84%	53.57%	64.00%	66.67%	51.91%

However, examining Table 12 gives the indication that although the economically disadvantaged student percentage served in RTI increased with the years, the actual number served decreased. Therefore, it appears that the RTI intervention supported student achievement and decreased the number of students needing services in RTI. These data indicate that the students who continued to need services were the economically disadvantaged students.

Table 12

Number of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged From Cohort

	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	Total
No	88	26	9	3	126
Yes	84	30	16	6	136
Total	172	56	25	9	262

Although the percentage of students continuing to need services that were economically disadvantaged was higher than non-economically disadvantaged students, the majority of the group met the passing standard on the achievement assessment at

86.03%. These data suggest that RTI was a major positive contributing factor to the success of the students in the cohort.

Changing demographics occurred in two separate discussions for two separate questions. Three of the eight participants for one question and three of the eight participants for another question during the focus group agreed that the demographics at most of the schools are rapidly changing, and it has taken some by surprise.

The advantage of RTI for economically disadvantaged students, according to the focus group, included the relationships that the teacher builds with these students. Four of the eight participants were specific about relationships. Participant number two explained:

> *We currently have a large economically disadvantaged population…The way RTI helps those economically disadvantaged kids is they get to come sit by you and have a little discussion with you every day because it's all about relationships with those kids.*

As indicated by the data, economically disadvantaged students seemed to continue in RTI the longest and required the most support. Participant number eight reinforced:

> *…those students do struggle for a lot longer…*

Research Question Three: What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as African American in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

In the cohort, 53 students were identified as African American. According to Table 13 it did not appear that the number of years served in RTI made a positive impact on the students who were African American. In fact, it appeared that the percentage of

students who were African American and in the cohort each year increased dramatically in second grade.

Table 13

Percentage of Students in Cohort of African American Ethnicity

Ethnicity	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade
African American	11.83%	11.86%	25.64%	14.29%

However, Table 14 indicates that although the African American student percentage being served in RTI increased, particularly in second grade, the actual number served decreased (with a slight increase from first to second grades). Therefore, it appeared that the RTI intervention supported student achievement for African American students and decreased the number of students requiring RTI services.

Table 14

Number of African American Students Identified in Cohort

Ethnicity	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	Total
African American	31	7	10	5	53

According to Table 2, listed previously in this study, the African American students that were served in the RTI program reached success, as determined by the achievement measure, with a passing rate of 90.32%.

The discussion in the focus group centered on African American students responding as well as any of the students to the RTI interventions. Participant number

eight stated:

> *…I don't see any difference in the response. They respond the same*
>
> *way…*

Even with the support of RTI, motivation appears to be difficult for these students.

Agreeing, participant number one offered:

> *…our big key with these children is motivating them.*

Three of the eight participants also focused on relationship building as important with

these students.

Research Question Four: What are the longitudinal academic achievement effects of RTI on students identified as Hispanic in grades K-3 as measured by the TAKS third grade reading assessment?

In the cohort, 167 students were identified as Hispanic. According to Table 15, it did not appear that the number of years served in RTI made a positive impact on the students who were Hispanic. In fact, it appeared that the percentage of students who were Hispanic and still in the cohort each year remained steady with an increase in the 4th year of intervention.

Table 15

Percentage of Students in Cohort of Hispanic Ethnicity

Ethnicity	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade
Hispanic	42.98%	35.59%	43.59%	54.29%

However, Table 15 indicates that the Hispanic student percentage being served remained steady, with an increase in the 4th year of service, the actual number served decreased (with a slight increase from second to third). Therefore, it appeared that the RTI intervention supported student achievement for Hispanic students and decreased the number of students requiring RTI services. However, the data in Table 16 indicate that the students requiring services, even though the number decreased, were Hispanic students as the majority ethnic group. The achievement test data indicated that despite the Hispanic group continuing to need support and intervention, the majority served in RTI were successful on the achievement test with an 85.45% passing rate.

Table 16

Number of Hispanic Students Identified in Cohort

Ethnicity	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	Total
Hispanic	110	21	17	19	167

While all participants of the focus group agreed that RTI was worthwhile and provided needed support, they also agreed that the Hispanic population tended to be more of a challenge. Participant number four commented:

> *I think our biggest challenge is for those students who are non-native*
> *English speakers…*

Agreeing was participant number eight:

> *I agree—LEP is a challenge.*

Three of the eight participants agreed that the majority of Hispanic RTI students also seem to be economically disadvantaged.

Tables 17-21 summarize frequent themes (in descending order) that emerged from the focus group discussion.

Table 17

Themes From the Focus Group Discussion: Most Frequent #1

Question	Most Frequent Answers #1	# of answers same #1
How do we reach struggling students in district?	Coaching (4/8)	4 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on our students in K, 1, 2, and 3?	Early intervention (5/8)	5 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on economically disadvantaged students across the grades K-3?	Building relationships is important (4/8)	4 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on African American students across the grades K-3?	Emotional baggage is a hindrance (3/8)	3 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on Hispanic students across the grades K-3?	Usually economically disadvantaged as well (3/8)	3 out of 8

Table 18

Themes From the Focus Group Discussion: Most Frequent #2

Question	Most Frequent Answers #2	# of answers same #2
How do we reach struggling students in district?	Small group instruction (3/8)	3 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on our students in K, 1, 2, and 3?	Strong Tier I teaching (4/8)	4 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on economically disadvantaged students across the grades K-3?	Many economically disadvantaged students are LEP (3/8)	3 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on African American students across the grades K-3?	Building relationships (3/8)	3 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on Hispanic students across the grades K-3?	Struggle a lot longer than other groups (2/8)	2 out of 8

Table 19

Themes From the Focus Group Discussion: Most Frequent #3

Question	Most Frequent Answers #3	# of answers same #3
How do we reach struggling students in district?	Discussions about students (2/8)	2 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on our students in K, 1, 2, and 3?	Discussions about students (5/8)	5 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on economically disadvantaged students across the grades K-3?	Demographics have changed and many not ready for it (3/8)	3 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on African American students across the grades K-3?		
What effect does RTI have on Hispanic students across the grades K-3?		

Table 20

Themes From the Focus Group Discussion: Most Frequent #4

Questions	Most Frequent Answers #4	# of answers same #4
How do we reach struggling students in district?		
What effect does RTI have on our students in K, 1, 2, and 3?	Some students will always need the support (3/8)	3 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on economically disadvantaged students across the grades K-3?	Demographics have changed – getting more economically disadvantaged (3/8)	3 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on African American students across the grades K-3?		
What effect does RTI have on Hispanic students across the grades K-3?		

Table 21

Themes From the Focus Group Discussion: Most Frequent #5

Questions	Most Frequent Answers #5	# of answers same #5
How do we reach struggling students in district?		
What effect does RTI have on our students in K, 1, 2, and 3?	RTI is working, numbers are decreasing in each grade (4/8)	4 out of 8
What effect does RTI have on economically disadvantaged students across the grades K-3?		
What effect does RTI have on African American students across the grades K-3?		
What effect does RTI have on Hispanic students across the grades K-3?		

Summary

Results suggested that RTI is an intervention program that was successful at decreasing the number of students who required continued support and was the most successful after the first year of service in kindergarten. Data suggested that the students who were economically disadvantaged and the students who were Hispanic were the groups that continued to struggle the most from year-to-year. However, data also indicated that the majority of students who were in the cohort, across all sub-groups, were successful on the achievement assessment at a passing rate of approximately 90%. This was a significant achievement. Based on the focus group themes, participants

concentrated on the importance of coaching teachers to strengthen RTI and to teach in small groups. The strength of early intervention for success was indicated, as well as collaboration, through discussion of students. All focus group participants agreed that RTI was a positive and necessary part of the success for their students.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the number of years
served in the RTI program for students who entered in kindergarten in the 2007-2008
school year. The researcher conducted a mixed methods study to determine the success
of RTI and to identify any revisions to the program. An achievement test was used to
measure the success of the students during their third grade year in 2010-2011. The
purpose of this final chapter is to discuss the results of this study. This chapter also
provides a review of implications for practice and future research. First, it assessed the
longitudinal effects of the RTI program in grades K-3, examining a cohort of students
who entered kindergarten in 2007-2008 and remained in the district through third grade.
Next, the study examined the longitudinal effects of RTI with three distinct sub-
populations: economically disadvantaged, African American and Hispanic. Lastly, a
focus group discussion was moderated by the researcher to gain insight into the reading
specialists' perceptions of the RTI program at their schools.

Longitudinal Effects of RTI

The longitudinal effects of RTI were determined by calculating the passing rate of
students entering kindergarten in 2007-2008 and using the third grade achievement test
scores for that cohort. The number of kindergarten students identified in the 2007-2008
school year was 262. Of the group that remained in the study district for four years and
completed the achievement test in 2010-2011, over 90% passed in all ethnic groups and
86% in the economically disadvantaged group. The significant results of the success of
students after the initial year of service support the achievement that early intervention

provides students (Lose, 2007). These students were served for one year in kindergarten and maintained that success through third grade. However, no statistically significant differences (p > .05) were found with any of the other numbers of years served.

The focus group's results produced supportive information of the one-way ANOVA. A majority of the participants agreed that early intervention was successful in helping students "catch up" and maintain that status. Another theme focused on the importance of coaching as a means to promote quality interventions (Bianco, 2010; Cusumano & Mueller, 2007). A discussion on small group instruction confirmed its importance for successful RTI interventions (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Participants also unanimously agreed that early intervention was the most successful, although some students will need annual intervention, albeit a small number.

Longitudinal Effects of RTI on Economically Disadvantaged Students

Students from the cohort that were economically disadvantaged scored well on the achievement test in third grade. There were 136 students that qualified for RTI in kindergarten during the 2007-2008 school year. Even though the group's numbers decreased each year, it had the highest percentage served every year. In fact, the percentage served increased each year, although the overall numbers decreased. According to the achievement test given in third grade for this cohort, 86% of economically disadvantaged students successfully met the standard.

Relationships became a dominant theme during the focus group discussion concerning the economically disadvantaged students in RTI. The majority of the participants agreed that building positive relationships during RTI sessions with the economically disadvantaged students was a critical element to the students' success

(Tomlinson, 2008). Another focal point of the discussion included that this group of students seemed to require the services longer than any other group. This was supported by the data—as the number of students decreased, the percentage of students requiring RTI services increased.

Longitudinal Effects of RTI on African American Students

In the African American ethnic group, 53 students were identified in the cohort. While the number of students decreased each year in RTI, there was an increase in second grade from first grade. Third grade, while less than second grade, had an increase from the original cohort. While the number of students served decreased overall from kindergarten to third grade, the percentage of students continuing to require services in the African American ethnic group concluded at a higher number compared to the beginning of the cohort. The percent passing was 90% on the third grade achievement test, indicating positive success for students in this group.

Two of the participants in the focus group remarked that they saw no differences in the way the interventions were delivered for RTI or in the way the students in this group responded to the intervention (O'Connor, Fulmer, Harty, & Bell, 2005). A majority of the participants discussed the difficulty the group's students had with motivation, even in the small groups. Motivation seemed to be the primary factor that prevented the students from experiencing success.

Longitudinal Effects of RTI on Hispanic Students

In this cohort, 167 students were initially identified for RTI. The highest number of students who qualified for RTI was in this group. The overall percentage of Hispanic students in RTI did not decrease by year. It decreased from kindergarten to first grade,

increased from first grade to second grade, and again increased from second grade to third grade. However, even with the increase in percentage by third grade, the total number of students served in RTI decreased by third grade. The success for the Hispanic group was evident with the decrease in numbers of students served in RTI. The percentage meeting the standard on the third grade achievement test was 85%. While the "met standard" rate indicated success for the Hispanic student group, it was the lowest passing standard of the ethnic groups.

Focus group dialogues were parallel with the passing standard being the lowest of the ethnic groups. Discourse concentrated on the idea that this group tended to be the most challenging to serve; however, despite the difficulty of service, all focus group participants agreed that the students made progress (Daly et al., 2007).

Study Limitations

This study was limited by different demographics per school, differences in interventions used for RTI services, interventionists with diverse backgrounds and training, implementation variances by school, under-representation of an ethnic group, and the representation of the focus group members. Due to the wide variety of demographics per school in this study, its results may not be representative of other school districts' RTI programs based on ethnicity.

Although the district provided a strict list of interventions used for RTI in reading, schools had the option to choose which ones to implement based on their personal preferences and the students' needs (Daly et al., 2007). Therefore, the implementations of certain interventions varied across the district and across the grade levels. It may, however, provide valuable information to other districts that success is obtainable with

RTI, regardless of the type of intervention (IES, 2009).

The district permitted individual schools to utilize current teachers as interventionists or to employ outside, part-time certified teachers as interventionists. Therefore, this may be problematic because the experience and training varies widely for the teachers that are delivering the interventions. Due to this variance, caution should be taken to provide consistent training for all personnel, part-time or full-time, for delivery of service (Bianco, 2010; Glover & DiPerna, 2007).

Although all interventions provided on the static district list had been attached to training, individual schools chose how they delivered that training to their interventionists and how the interventionists were required to deliver the service to the students. Due to the district's inconsistency with the delivery of service to the students, caution should be taken when attempting to generalize the results of RTI's success in order to plan for consistency of delivery.

According to the data on the number of students identified in the African American ethnic group, the students were under-represented in relationship to the district's enrollment in that group. Because of this under-representation, district and campus leaders should exercise caution when generalizing the results of RTI's success with the African American population.

Finally, due to the results of the randomization of the selection of the focus group, the majority of the schools represented in the eight member focus group were not from Title I campuses. It was possible that this could have skewed the discussion's responses due to the variance of the focus group participants' backgrounds and experiences. Although the majority of participants were not currently serving at a Title I campus, most

of the group served at a Title I campus in the past either as a teacher or reading specialist.

Implications for Educational Practice

Based on the review of the literature, data obtained from the one-way ANOVA, and the focus group discussion, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. The district should utilize the first year the students are in RTI to the fullest extent. It is the year that the most significant progress is achieved with the students who qualify, and their progress is sustained over time.

2. A tracking system for interventions should be implemented for the district. This would allow evidence of which interventions were creating the most change in students in the RTI program by year and by grade level. Interventions that are not effective could be eliminated to better serve the struggling students (Daly et al., 2007; Johnston, 2010).

3. Focus group participants indicated that interventionists did not receive ample training. Therefore, training should be consistent throughout the district and focused on how to implement each intervention. The training needs to be specific and should be delivered to all interventionists to ensure consistency among the schools and grades (Bianco, 2010; Glover & DiPerna, 2007). Motivation is another area that training needs to target. The focus groups specifically centered on motivation for African American students, however, motivation is helpful for any student. The final training that should be implemented is training on building relationships. Focus group participants specified that one of the critical elements of intervention with economically disadvantaged students was building relationships. Again, this training

would benefit all students, especially the students that are economically

disadvantaged. While the suggested training should occur district-wide,

principals should also be cognizant of their campus-specific training needs

for a more successful RTI program.

4. The district should collaborate with the campus leadership to ensure the

   implementation of the interventions in RTI is held to the fidelity in which it

   was intended (Bianco, 2010; Glover & DiPerna, 2007).

5. The campus leadership should implement a parent involvement component

   of RTI to include parent progress reports, parent nights, and parent help

   guides. The parent progress reports should be sent home weekly to keep

   parents informed. Parent nights should be held periodically throughout the

   year to include hands-on activities and games that parents can use with their

   children to reinforce and support the deficits in the students' learning as

   indicated in the initial screening and progress reports. Parent help guides and

   parent training sessions should be provided in order to assist parents as they

   work with their students.

6. Regardless of the intervention that is being utilized, the campus leadership

   should focus on small group, differentiated instruction in order for students to

   receive individualized, intensive support (Daly et al, 2007; Denton et al.,

   2006; Murray et al., 2010; Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009).

7. The campus leadership should collaborate with the district curriculum and

   instruction leaders in examining the interventions used for students who

continue in RTI at years three and four. During this dissection, the leaders

should focus on ways to optimize service delivery to the students that

continually remain in RTI, identify the students that initially respond to the

intervention but also need ongoing assistance, and identify students that

may be better served through a different intervention type, group setting, or

interventionist (Daly et al., 2007; Lembke et al., 2010).

8. The district should examine its current qualification criteria in relationship to

the under-representation of African American students in the RTI program.

While the African American students who were identified and served were

successful overall, it was a very small number compared to the overall

enrollment of African American students throughout the district.

9. The district should examine its current qualification criteria in relationship to

the under-representation of African American students in the RTI program.

While the African American students who were identified and served were

successful overall, it was a very small number compared to the overall

enrollment of African American students throughout the district.

Implications for Future Research

The study's findings may serve as a beneficial structure for school districts

using the RTI framework. Since there were few studies focusing on the longitudinal

effects of RTI, further studies of the longitudinal effects of RTI are needed. Replication

of this study from several different suburban school districts would provide additional

information concerning the effectiveness of the longitudinal effects of RTI. Future

research might include different school districts examining the longitudinal effects from

kindergarten to third grade.

Another suggestion for future research is to determine the most successful types of interventions being used in RTI. Because this study gave a statistically significant result for early intervention, especially within the first year of service, future research is needed to examine the individual interventions being used to maximize student success and teacher efficiency. This research should focus on the different interventions and the success of students based on the certain set of utilized interventions.

Lastly, an additional suggestion for future research is to determine the age of the students who qualify for RTI based on their birthdates and if there is a difference in the successful response of the students by year served and by birthdate. This would focus the researcher on the correlation of the years served with the age of the child and if the age influences the success of response.

Conclusion

This study investigated the longitudinal effects of RTI with a given set of students in a large suburban school district located north of Houston. The researcher conducted a mixed methods study in order to examine the success of a cohort of students on the state mandated achievement test that were first served in an RTI intervention program. Although RTI is an unfunded mandate from TEA, the district had not documented the success of their RTI program at any grade level or examined the longitudinal effects for achievement. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze archival data obtained from the 2010-2011 TAKS reading achievement assessment. To gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the reading specialists at each elementary school, a focus group of eight randomly selected reading specialists was conducted by the researcher. Ultimately,

data comparison analysis provided the researcher with the information needed to emphasize the importance and overwhelming success of early intervention, especially after the first year of service in RTI. Additionally, it provided the researcher with evidence that the district should provide more training for RTI to better serve the Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students. Lastly, it provided information necessary to focus on the under-representation of African American students in the initial identification for RTI services.

The key findings for this study in the data are as follows:

- The passing rate for the students in the RTI program for any length of time from kindergarten to third grade was 90.08%.

- The commended rate for the students in the RTI program for any length of time from kindergarten to third grade was 33.59%.

- There was a statistically significant difference in the mean length of time that the students were served in RTI.

- There was a statistically significant difference in one year; the first year of service.

- There was a decrease in the number of students needing service each year.

The key findings from the focus group are as follows:

- Coaching is a required element of a successful RTI program.

- Small group instruction must occur for student success with flexible groups based on student needs.

- A leadership team should be conducting ongoing, consistent discussions about students.

- Interventions must occur early in the students' schooling.

- RTI is working, and the numbers of students in need of intervention are decreasing.

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APPENDIX A

APPROVAL OF APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN A SUBURBAN

SCHOOL DISTRICT

Appendix A

Approval of Application to Conduct Research in a Suburban School District

Independent School District

March 7, 2012

Teressa Voltz
822 Weeping Willow Way
Magnolia, TX 77354

Dear Ms. Voltz:

The !   is pleased to inform you of their approval for you to conduct your study "The Success of Students Served in Response to Intervention Program". It is our understanding that this is a mixed methods study requiring TAKS and RTI data of third grade students in the

Approval to conduct the study in the   is contingent on you meeting the following conditions:
- District nor campus personnel are not identified in the study.
- Data remains confidential.
- The study remains quantitative in nature.
- The   ELA program coordinator will be the district's research assistant who will randomly select participants for the focus group.
- Approval to conduct the study is granted only for fulfillment of the Ed.D. in Executive Leadership at the University of Houston.
- The district receives copies of the completed final report within 30 days after its completion.

Any changes or modifications to the current proposal must be submitted for approval to the   Department of Accountability and School Improvement. The district reserves the right to forego its participation in the study at any time without reason. Should you need additional information or have any questions concerning the process, please contact Stanley D. Hall, Ph.D. at :

Sincerely,

Susan Borg, Ed.D

Cc: Angie Anderson, Ph.D.

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL BY THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE

PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Appendix B

Approval by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of

Human Subjects to Conduct Research

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

March 1, 2012

Ms. Teressa Voltz
c/o Dr. Angus MacNeil
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Ms. Teressa Voltz,

The University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "A Longitudinal Study of the Success of Response to Intervention for Educational Leaders" on February 17, 2012, according to institutional guidelines.

The Committee has given your project approval pending clarification of the stipulations listed below:

1. A letter of approval from _____ must be submitted to the CPHS. This letter should indicate the school's role in recruitment.

2. The (school district) research sponsor will be part of the recruitment process by sending emails and consent document to potential subjects. This person should be listed under key personnel in the application.

3. The consent document should be revised using the "Sample Informed Consent -Confidential Research" template found on the Division of Research website.

4. The consent document should include admonition that all responses remain confidential.

5. The consent document should refer to research as "confidential" instead of "anonymous."

6. The consent document must include a check box for explicit permission to audio record the focus group.

7. The response to question 11 of the application indicates that data will be shredded upon completion of the study, however data must be kept for at least 3 years after completion of the study per federal regulations and UH's data retention policy.

8. The response to question 11 of the application must clarify what data, specifically, you are receiving. The protocol refers to TAKS data but the ethnicity and economic status data for the participating students also seems necessary.

9. The response to question 25 should pertain to the research data, not the data owned by the school district. Specify also where tapes will be stored.

10. The response to question 8 of the application indicates "interview" although no interview is indicated in the description of the study. Please clarify.

11. The response to questions 6.04, 6.05, and 6.06 of the application are in past tense. The investigator must confirm that recruitment/randomization has not already occurred.

316 E. Cullen Building   Houston, TX 77204-2015   (713) 743-9204   Fax: (713) 743-9577

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

UNIVERSITYof **HOUSTON**
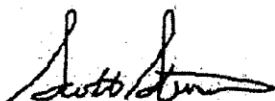
DIVISION OF RESEARCH

You must submit evidence of compliance with the above stipulations online via the Research Administration Management Portal (RAMP), by March 19, 2012. The material you submit to meet these contingencies must be certified by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects as acceptable before you may begin data collection. If you fail to respond by this date, your approval may be revoked. This would necessitate your reapplying to the Committee prior to initiation of your research project. Research without the Committee's sanction could result in an administrative block to the receipt of your degree.

In order to expedite review, please prepare a cover letter that explains the response to each item. Once you met these requirements, this project must be reviewed annually, or prior to any change approved procedures.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Scott B. Stevenson, Chair
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

Protocol Number: 12259-01   Full Review __X__   Expedited Review_____

March 5, 2012

Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects;
Dr. Scott B. Stevenson, Chair
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects

Dear Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and Dr. Scott B. Stevenson;

This letter discusses the response to each item sent to me in a letter approving my project pending clarification of the stipulations listed in the letter.

Item one; a letter of approval from   is attached in RAMP that includes that the ELA Program Coordinator will be the one to complete the random selection of participants in the Focus Group. This letter of approval has been posted as an attachment in the IRB under Consent.

Item two; Pamela Breaux has been added under key personnel in the application.

Item three; the consent document was revised using the "Sample Informed Consent –Confidential Research" template found on the Division of Research website. It has been posted as an attachment in the IRB under Consent.

Item four; the consent document now contains the admonition that all responses will remain confidential.

Item five; the consent document now refers to research as "confidential" and not "anonymous."

Item six; the consent document now contains a check box for explicit permission to audio record the focus group.

Item seven; item 11 now indicates that the data will be stored for three years.

Item eight; item 11 now clarifies that the data I am receiving is TAKS reading data that will include scores, ethnicity and economically disadvantaged data.

Item nine; Question 25 now says the research data instead of just the data leading to believe it was owned by the district. The location of storage for the audio tape was also added.

Item ten; the term "interview" that was marked on item eight has been removed. An interview will not occur in this research. That was mistakenly marked in the original application. A focus group only will occur.

Item 11; questions 6.04, 6.05 and 6.06 have been changed to future tense, i.e. "The reading specialists will be chosen." Recruitment/randomization has not already occurred and the past tense was just mistakenly typed on the original. This now reflects future tense in the IRB application.

I hope this is in full fulfillment of the requirements sent in the pending clarification letter from the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. Please let me know if you have any further questions. I will await your pending approval.

Sincerely,

Teressa Voltz
Doctoral Student, University of Houston

University of Houston

Division of Research

UNIVERSITYof **HOUSTON**

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

March 21, 2012

Ms. Teressa Voltz
c/o Dr. Angus MacNeil
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Ms. Teressa Voltz,

The University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "A Longitudinal Study of the Success of Response to Intervention for Educational Leaders" on February 17, 2012, according to institutional guidelines.

At that time, your project was granted approval contingent upon your agreement to modify your proposal protocol as stipulated by the Committee. The changes you have made adequately respond to those contingencies made by the Committee, and your project has been approved. However reapplication will be required:

  1. Annually
  2. Prior to any change in the approved protocol
  3. Upon development of the unexpected problems or unusual complications

Thus, if you will be still collecting data under this project on **January 1, 2013,** you must reapply to this Committee for approval before this date if you wish to prevent an interruption of your data collection procedures.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

.for

Dr. Scott B. Stevenson, Chair
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

PLEASE NOTE: (1) All subjects must receive a copy of the informed consent document. If you are using a consent document that requires subject signatures, remember that signed copies must be retained for a minimum of 3 years, or 5 years for externally supported projects. Signed consents from student projects will be retained by the faculty sponsor. Faculty is responsible for retaining signed consents for their own projects; however, if the faculty leaves the university, access must be possible for UH in the event of an agency audit. (2) Research investigators will promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects and others.

Protocol Number: 12259-01   Full Review __X__   Expedited Review_____

APPENDIX C

EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP

Appendix C

Email Invitation to Participate in a Focus Group

To continually improve in the education of the district, many individuals conduct research each year through approved research applications. The applicant, Teressa Voltz, has been approved to conduct research in the suburban school district north of Houston. She is a doctoral student at the University of Houston focusing on student achievement.

We respectfully request you read the attached consent form and determine if you would like to participate in this research. It is our hope that the results of this research study can be used to improve the overall educational achievement for all students.

This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subject (713) 743-9204.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to call the Department of Campus Improvement and Research at 281-517-2693.

APPENDIX D

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF INTEREST TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOCUS GROUP

Appendix D

Acknowledgement of Interest to Participate in the Focus Group

Consent to Participate in Research

CONFIDENTIAL RESEARCH

Teressa Voltz is a researcher currently pursuing her doctoral degree at the University of Houston and she is soliciting your participation in a study she is conducting. As a teacher/campus or district reading specialist serving or who has served in the ███ ████████████████, she is requesting your participation in this study. This research study has been approved by ██████████████████

PROJECT TITLE: A Longitudinal Study of the Success of Response to Intervention for Educational Leaders

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The Purpose of this study is to examine the Response to Intervention program beginning with students who entered Kindergarten in 2007-2008 and were served in RTI for one or more years observing student achievement as measured on the third grade TAKS. The duration of the study will be one session for the focus group that will last approximately one to one and one half hours.

PARTICIPATION STATEMENT: Your participation is voluntary and will only take about an hour to an hour and a half of your time. The focus group will be conducted by Teressa Voltz during the spring semester of 2012.

If you agree to participate in this study, please indicate your willingness to participate by returning this form with your electronic signature via email to _____.

I am interested in participating in this study.

_____

Electronic Signature (type your name)

Email:

Phone:

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX E

CONFIRMATION EMAIL TO ATTEND AND

PARTICIPATE IN THE FOCUS GROUP

Appendix E

Confirmation Email to Attend and Participate in the Focus Group

Subject: Focus Group – Research on RTI

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus group regarding research on RTI. The focus group meeting will be held on February 20, 2012 at 2:00 p.m. in my office. I hope you are available to participate on that day.

Thank you,

APPENDIX F

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Appendix F

University of Houston Consent to Participate in Research

CONFIDENTIAL RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: A Longitudinal Study of the Success of Response to Intervention for Educational Leaders

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Teressa Voltz from the Department of Education at the University of Houston. Teressa Voltz is a researcher currently pursuing her doctoral degree at the University of Houston and this focus group is a part of her thesis work. This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Angus MacNeil from the University of Houston.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Purpose of this study is to examine the Response to Intervention program beginning with students who entered Kindergarten in 2007-2008 and were served in RTI for one or more years observing student achievement as measured on the third grade TAKS. The duration of the study will be one session for the focus group that will last approximately one to one and one half hours. The entire study will be conducted during the Spring 2012 semester only.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately eight subjects to be asked to participate in this project.

The research project will study the information that the focus group gives and look for any trends in the information presented as to the feelings of the success or non-success of the RTI program.   The participants will attend one session for approximately one hour to one and one half hours where the researcher will serve as the facilitator and ask questions to the group. Each member will be assigned a number by a random draw and the member will answer using that number as identification, not her specific name. The session will be audio taped in order for the researcher to be able to transcribe effectively the answers of the focus group. The group will have no other commitments but to meet for this one session and give answers to the questions based on their feelings and experience. The total time commitment for the participants is one session that will last 1 to 1 ½ hours in length.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All subject's identity will be held in confidence.

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number by the principal investigator. This code number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences associated with this study.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand RTI and how it can be used to improve the overall educational achievement for all students.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO TAPES

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio tape can be used for publication/presentations.

☐ <u>I agree</u> to be audio taped during the interview.
   ☐ I agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
   ☐ I do not agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
☐ <u>I do not agree</u> to be audio taped during the interview.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.

2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.

4. Any benefits have been explained to me.

5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Teressa Voltz at 832-249-4455. I may also contact Dr. Angus MacNeil, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-5038.

6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.

7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigator and her faculty sponsor. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name):_____

Signature of Study Subject:_____

Date:_____

I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION.   IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): Teressa Voltz, Principal Investigator and Doctoral Student, University of Houston

Signature of Principal Investigator:_____

Date:_____

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

ANONYMOUS RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: A Longitudinal Study of the Success of Response to Intervention for Educational Leaders

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Teressa Voltz from the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the University of Houston. This project is a part of the doctoral thesis. This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Angus MacNeil.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the Response to Intervention (RTI) program beginning with students who entered kindergarten in 2007-2008 and were served in RTI for one or more years observing student achievement as measured on the third grade TAKS. The duration of the study will be one session for the focus group that will last approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately eight subjects to be asked to participate in this project.

Participants will be asked five questions and will give responses to each of the questions. All questions will be asked in one session that will last approximately one to one and one half hours. The requirements of the participants will be to answer each of the five questions to the best of their ability. There will be no follow-up sessions with the total time commitment being one to one and one half hours in one session.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation in this project is anonymous. Please do not write your name on any of the research materials to be returned to the principal investigator.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks involved with this study.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand Response to Intervention and its benefits to student achievement.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

If you have any questions, you may contact Teressa Voltz at 832.249.4455. You may also contact Dr. Angus MacNeil, faculty sponsor, at 713.743.5038.

ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204).

Principal Investigator's Name: Teressa Voltz

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

1. Greetings and thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of this focus group. I will serve as your facilitator and will ask the questions. Pamela Breaux will be the scribe. The session, as stated in the consent form will be audio taped.

2. You will be assigned a number. Please state the number each time before you speak. Please speak clearly. Please take turns and try not to talk over each other. While the questions will drive the conversation, please make sure to discuss each topic as you feel necessary. We wish to have all participants to share on each question even if you do not think you have anything new to add, please give your answers so we have representation from the whole group. You do not have to answer in number order but we do need all participants to answer.

3. Please state your name and number and tell the group how many years you have been in this district and then in your current position. Try not to use the district name or school name.

4. In your position as reading specialist, you serve struggling readers on a daily basis. Talk about what you feel has been one of the strongest ways that we reach struggling students in this district.

5. What longitudinal academic achievement effects do you think RTI has had on the students in your school during kindergarten, first, second, and third grades?

6. Does it appear to make a difference for the students who are served for only one year or more than one year?

7. What longitudinal academic achievement effects do you think RTI has had on the economically disadvantaged students from kindergarten to third grade?

8. What longitudinal academic achievement effects do you think RTI has had on the African American students from kindergarten to third grade?

9. What longitudinal academic achievement effects do you think RTI has had on the Hispanic students from kindergarten to third grade?

10. In your opinion what do you think we could do better to serve our struggling readers?

11. You all work very hard with our struggling readers. Thank you for what you do every day to support our students and to help move them to success. Do you have any closing comments that you can give to the group about working with struggling students?

APPENDIX H

READING SPECIALIST FOCUS GROUP ABRIDGED TRANSCRIPT

Appendix H

Reading Specialist Focus Group Abridged Transcript

In your position as reading specialists you serve struggling readers on a daily basis. Talk about what you feel has been one of the strongest ways that we reach struggling students in this district.

5 – I feel like one of the strongest ways we reach struggling students is by going in in our position as coach and doing model lessons because we are not only helping the students, but we are also sharing ideas with the teachers that they can use not just while we are there but after we have left the classroom.

4- I agree with number five in that you get to make a lot of impact when you are doing model lessons in the classroom and working as a literacy coach because you are not just working with a group of five or six kids but a group of 20 or 30 and you are changing teaching practices hopefully so that all of those students and future students are impacted.

8- The flexibility in our schedule though also allows us to support those students who might otherwise be overlooked in a larger group.

1 – When you are doing modeling lessons you can see how the struggling readers that maybe the teacher hasn't totally identified, you see how they interact with the other children and you can see how they interact with you, and maybe you can help the teacher identify their problems by being in the classroom doing the modeling lessons.

6- I also think that we have good programs put in place. For example, LLI and different programs that we can work with the teachers to help them identify their struggling students and then learn how to work with those students, and so I think professional development also helps us help the struggling students.

3 – I agree with all that has been said so far, but I also think that the expectation that those struggling readers are seen in a small group and that if they are not making progress there that you make the group even smaller because they get that individual attention.

7 – I agree the small groups are a big key and they're grouped by their ability and the flexibility to change those groups as needed.

2 – I feel one of the most powerful things that our district has in place for struggling readers is the PLC. I've often feel that when I go into model a lesson that things I do go way over the teacher's head and they don't pay, they don't understand why I am even doing it. But when I have a discussion with the teacher and they tell me what, how I was doing what their behaviors are and we can talk about LLI, how are you doing it how are you doing small group. I think discussion is the most important part.

Do you have any other comments about this particular question? Anything else anybody feels about this one?

Ok, so you know that we do response to intervention in our district with our struggling readers. What effect do you think RTI has had on the students in your school specifically in kindergarten? What do you think the success of RTI is with our kids, specifically in kindergarten and then after we discuss that then first grade, then second grade and the last grade we will discuss is third grade. How do you feel the success of the RTI program is individually or across all of those? I hope that makes sense.

4 – In kindergarten, I feel like RTI has been very successful at my school because we are doing a lot of early intervention, but we have also got strong Tier I teaching going on and so the earlier we can get them the better chance we have of making up those gaps.

5 – I agree with that. I think the kindergarten teachers in our building have a very strong or build a very strong foundation for our students. But they are also very good at problem solving. If something is not working then they're very willing to come for discussion or problem solve amongst themselves as a team and try and figure out. They not only own their own children but they feel like every child in their grade level is, belongs to them.

6 – I agree with that. The discussions we have during RTI meetings show the collaboration. For example, if one teacher has a student that is not responding to the intervention there's a strong discussion as to what can we do to help that student and generally that goes on for all other students that are struggling in that manner.

7 – We have a very strong kinder with very high expectations. RTI has been successful. We're trying to catch them before they fall, and yes, the key is collaboration among all interested parties from administration down to the classroom teacher.

1 – I totally agree. We have a very strong kindergarten group as well and we have a couple of students who are really struggling, and it is so cool to see all the teachers come together to help those two little babies out of all those kids. It is really neat.

3 – I agree that the early intervention is critical. However, at our school I don't see that it has helped those kids from being struggling in first grade. I am not sure why.

8 – Thinking about what number three just said, the discussion, I think we spend a lot of time, at least on my campus, in discussion about kindergarten because while we want to intervene, we also want to give those kids time to develop and the spectrum for development in kindergarten is so enormous that you want to target kids but at the same time respecting the fact that they also need to develop at their own pace.

2 – I kind of agree with what well number three—sorry, what number three said. I don't feel that kindergarten is our strongest grade level, and I think that there is a need for more staff

development. I think that the teachers when they look at the kids, they, they don't always look at that big spectrum. I find that either they overreact and think that the kid is way further behind what they are just because they're immature or whatever or some of the kids that they think are fine, really I see that there is a big problem. So, I just think that there needs to be more staff development in the kindergarten grade level.

Would you all agree that more staff development would be something that would be beneficial?

6 – I think it needs to be targeted because one of the things that I agree with number 8 is that we lose the sense of development in kindergarten. We forget about where they are developmentally and I think that really needs to be honed in on. I think the SEs the expectations of the SEs are kind of high for kindergarten and so how do we help teachers understand their development. You know a lot of teachers I think end up getting moved to kindergarten and it wasn't their first choice and so they don't know about the development of literacy and even the development of the kindergarten student.

4 – I agree with what was just said. However, I think it is not just about knowledge. I think it is helping the teachers to work within the expectations of the TEKS and work with what we can control and what we can change. I mean as a district we don't have any say in the TEKS. We just have to figure out how to implement them and you know I think professional development is a way to get there but also through active listening and reflecting the teachers' feelings and you know helping them to feel successful.

3 – I also sometimes think our interventions are focused a lot on third, fourth, and fifth grade and not K, 1 and 2 and so we are not focusing on that early intervention and we need to be and we wouldn't have to focus on third, fourth, and fifth.

7 – I have asked to work with K, 1, and 2 and so we have worked very collaboratively, excuse me with first grade and it has been a struggle in the past before but I can see us all coming together for one goal and that has not happened before. So, it is evolving.

Do you see it has brought more success to your school?

7- At first grade?

At the younger grades because you have done that.

7 – We have a very strong kinder. First, not so much. But I see a change evolving. I see people thinking yes they are all ours, yes we can do flexible grouping, yes, they don't have to, we don't have to have them necessarily in this room. Maybe we can switch around. We can think out of the box. But I asked to be in the lower grade levels and she agreed. And not everybody's on board but a lot of people are and hopefully next year more will become on board.

2 – Number seven when you say on board, what are you referring to as far as the teachers agreeing with you being in the lower grades or...?

7 – Just small groups.

2 – OK

7 – Starting a child from where they are to where they need to be. I hear so many times they can't read. Really? And when I work with them when I talk to them and the teachers, they are reading. They may not be at Level I but they're reading. They're doing the best they can. And so we're working together to work with the high but also to work with the low because they are reading. They do have some strengths. They're just not as evident as the others.

1 – That goes back to professional development. I think they just don't know. They just don't know. They just, they can't read, but they can.

5 – I think it depends upon the level of the professional development because some people have had a lot of professional development and have better background so that they can do more diagnosis and hone in on the specifics where there, and then other teachers they know that the child doesn't know something but they're not sure where to go and what to do with that child to help them be successful.

4 – Number five, I agree with what you are saying but I also think that sometimes it's just not a matter of not knowing what to do but not having the time to do what they know they need to do because they are overwhelmed and they are being asked to do so many other things. I think if we could just cut down to the essentials of what every teacher needs to do I think we would see more quality instruction instead of spreading everyone so thin that they can't do anything well or as well as they would like to.

3 – I agree with you number four. I think that sometimes our teachers, our teachers are busy planning their intervention lessons, they're busy planning their lessons so the kids could recover now that they're not having enough time to focus on that very first instruction and so we are getting more and more kids that don't have a strong first instruction so they're ending up in some kind of intervention because the teachers are spread too thin.

8 – Agreeing with three I think we have lost something in the power of whole group instruction either by way of RTI which is also important and the focus on differentiation which is also important. But in the focus on those things I see the strength in the initial whole group teaching in the quality of the lesson and questioning has been lost somewhat.

So what about first, second, and third grade? You talked a lot about primary grades and then you talked a lot about kindergarten. What are your thoughts about RTI in first, second, and third grade as the kids move through those grades?

6 – I think that when we were put into an artificial regulation by the state where we had to do a

half hour for reading intervention and a half hour for math intervention it took away a lot of teachers' ability to make professional decisions for their students. It also took away students necessarily having in small group reinforcement of what was happening in the whole group because you had to switch kids around in order to make sure that they were covered. And so I think that in a way to help with the RTI process in some ways I think it has taken away from the achievement of students because it also has taken away from the amount of time that is allotted for Tier I teaching for good Tier I teaching.

2 – I think that in the lower grades there are way too many kids identified for RTI. There's no physical way you can service as many kids as what we are identifying. And so it goes back to if we have strong Tier I instruction why do we have to have so many of these kids labeled.

4 – At my campus like I mentioned earlier, kindergarten is very strong but then when you get to first and second grade the teachers have kind of lost their sense of responsibility for their students. And it becomes oh, well you're going to pull out this group of struggling readers. I'm not responsible for them. And because you're a reading specialist you're going to wave your magic wand and they're going to be ok and I don't have to take responsibility.

5 – Our teachers used to feel more that way but I think through our PLCs and through more discussions and we've done more problem solving where again they, they're not looking for someone else to try and fix those kids. They're beginning to go ok, what can I do, what can I do differently. Yes, I know that you know that time factor definitely does play a major factor whereas if we weren't locked into that 30 minute time frame there are some struggling readers that maybe they only need 15 minutes or 10 minutes to work on a specific thing and because of that time, time frame therefore they may not always do their best job with all of those struggling readers.

8 – Thinking back to number two's comment about the number of students that are identified in the lower grades, even though I think it seems that there are sometimes over-identification, I see more progress through first grade moving into second and then talking about then somehow second going into third. Then I wonder what in the world happened because students were making progress and now they're just seeming to crumble under the pressure from second to third where they may have been identified as a struggler targeted and started to make progress and somehow it seems they get to third grade and we start the RTI process all the way over again for some of those students that had been showing success at least on my campus. I know that differs.

2 – I think number eight that it might have something to do with the fact that at third grade it kind of shifts to comprehension as opposed to just learning how to read and they show progress on oh either their levels keep increasing but are there, is there comprehension really increasing. If they're going to have trouble in comprehension, number two that is who is speaking, if they're going to have trouble in comprehension that's not going to probably show up until the later grades. I mean some does but...

8 – That's, that's valid.

1 – On my campus we also it used to be would you please take these kids and fix them. But through my administrator I think it has been key for my school. The teacher has to own those kids and she backs me 100%, does not let me take R uh, AI groups at all. I'm forbidden. So she makes those kids own their own data and the teacher has to own the kids. I am there as a resource person. If they can't figure out what to do help me figure out this data. So I am able to help that way. And I have identified a lot of professional development that needs to be done.

3 – I think the teachers at our school do own their kids but we only have one teacher that has 14 AI kids in their class. They can't serve all those kids. And so you know I do see some of that you take them because they can't, there's no possible way they can serve 14 kids a half hour you know that would be their entire day.

2 – It makes it even harder too when it's because of the demands of math and science and social studies now it's becoming more popular to team teach. Therefore you're even strapped even further as far as your time if you're a language arts teacher as far as how much time you have to service those children. Another thing I wanted to say about RTI K-3 is that when we have RTI meetings, often times when we talk about all the students in the grade level it almost becomes white noise because you don't know really which children are the lowest because every teacher says their problems of these children and at the end of the time I look at my notes and I'm like ok really which ones are the lowest because they all you know have needs it appears.

7 – We have a strong kinder but not a strong first and it has been an issue. They did not get along among themselves and not necessarily with some of their students. But because I do have a presence in there this year and it is not me. It is all about building relationships like we've learned; and talking to them, and discussing, and PLC. All of that put together but I think the key is relationship because they can talk to you and we can collaborate and we can discuss and that wasn't there before and for some of the teachers it took three years to form that relationship. It doesn't happen overnight. And I was pleasantly surprised because it was a struggle even at the beginning of this year – a definite struggle but I've seen growth within probably, probably December on and because I, we were sinking big time.

6 – One other struggle we're having at my campus with RTI is that we have so many kids in Tier II. Again I agree with number two about the over-identification is that we don't have the personnel to really do a good job at Tier III. So we do a good job at Tier II I believe, we do a fairly good job at Tier II and then when we identify through the RTI process those children that need even more, we are struggling to find the time, one and the personnel, two to really help those kids that need that extra help.

3 – I agree with number six and not only the time but the knowledge in Tier III because those kids moving from Tier II to Tier III need somebody who really knows reading and how to teach reading and I don't know that we have a lot of those people on our campus.

5 – I agree with number three and number six. As we do make those decisions to move those kids up into Tier III, we don't have the people either. It's ending up falling back a lot of times on a classroom teacher and that just adds more and more to their plate. And if they were already struggling and that teacher's been working with them, we can change that intervention but between the time and the knowledge, it doesn't often make a big effect.

8 – It's almost like when you have done everything in your knowledge store and then everybody's done everything they know how to do and there's still a problem, then everybody's just kind of looking at each other going ok, what next. If a referral to special education program is inevitable, I don't often see that that has a great impact. With modifications, yeah, I think that's helpful but as far as the actual learning, I don't really see that it ever goes any further after on my campus after those initial RTI meetings, after everybody's done everything they can do. Luckily it's such a small number of students. It's not a large number of students but for those small handful, some of them still remain a puzzle.

2 – I think also response to intervention is what we are supposed to be doing and I think there's going to be some kids that are going to be always in response to intervention. They just need that support. It's not like we are going to say they're fixed because they've been intervened with. That's just and at my campus, and I know that it happens at other campuses, we just don't identify Tier III, because let's be realistic, you're not going to have the time to do anything more so you just intensify Tier II and just call it good. That's the best you can do.   So I mean you know if it's great that we say we have a Tier III program but we really don't I mean if you're going to be honest about it. So I, I just, I'm real hesitant to say oh, we're going to put them on Tier III because we're not. So don't even say you're going to do that.

3 – I agree with you. When special ed. pulled out of being able to serve Tier III kids because that's usually who would serve our Tier III kids because they do have more knowledge about struggling learners, we don't have the personnel to serve the Tier III. So our Tier III interventions would be making a smaller group out of it or changing whatever we were doing but we don't have very many things to change to that are better than what we are using at Tier II because why not use the best at Tier II to get them fixed to begin with.

8 – I agree. Why do we have a delineation of materials? Why do we separate those materials? There are so few things that really as soon as they're identified for intervention and you've gone through the process and you know there's going to be some intensive intervention let's not save the good stuff. Let's go ahead and use it.

I'd like to go back to number two's comment about how some kids are just in every year and that's just how it is. So, does it appear, do you think does it appear to make a difference for the students who are served for only one year or for those that have to be served for multiple years? Does it appear to make a difference, as far as and what I am looking at is does it appear to make a difference as far as when we reach third grade because our first benchmark is TAKS? Does it appear to make a difference and also in in each year that they are served as far as their

reading levels and their fluency is concerned? Do you think that one year, get them in get them out. Supposedly they're fixed or at least you've intervened and you've caught them up or do you see it doesn't really make a difference if they're just served one year or if they're served multiple years? The success is there or not there.

3 – I see some success with those kids that we've started with in first grade that serving them that year and getting them out. Once they've moved past third grade, we have some success with second graders who maybe have moved in from another district that haven't had that intervention in their old district. They're making progress but then once you get some of those kids in second grade into third grade if you're, the same names keep coming up year after year and yes it's hard to tell if not doing response to intervention would not help I mean would help at all because you're not going to not help those kids. You know you're not going to have a group that say oh let's keep these out of response to intervention and keep these in to see if it makes a difference between, it's just so hard to tell that because those kids are going to need that help every year and but it is, the same names coming up year after year, third, fourth, fifth grade. None of the names are new.

But do you see that in the early grades or more in the older grades?

3 – More in the older grades.

8 – Though like I was saying earlier, if you can get them past where you see that they're successful through second, and then they continue to be strong in third then I know it made a difference. I can think of several students on my campus where I do think it made a difference because they had intervention for a year in the lower grades. Now some keep popping up. Others it really did, I can think of a third grader in particular who is doing great.

4 – Number eight do you think that part of that student success is also related to quality first teaching and not just necessarily the intervention or would you say it is more about the intervention?

8 – I do think that it is a combination of things and there was an additional component of support at home. They did everything that we asked them to do. It was not just us.

2 – I think that when I've seen a big difference in these kids that we have year after year usually it's around third grade where, when I don't think it is the response to intervention that triggered the kid. I think it is what number four said. They got a different teacher this year and that teacher has some expectations for that child and all of a sudden some of their reading problems disappear and you say what happened? They are no longer on the list because they are getting strong Tier I instruction.

6 – I have to say I think….number six yielding to number seven.

7 – Thank you very much number six. We were in a new school and I did not know any of the

students and we had some students come in at kinder that didn't know their letters or sounds. So it took a strong kinder and I did help a bit. But I have to smile as I walk through the halls and as I look at the Tier II students and realize they're not on there. Yes, we have had some successes; yes we've had some that are still with us but I can see if we catch them early through small group, through intensive instruction, through good teaching, we can catch them.

8 – It is a combination though. And then when you have the extra support at home. It can't just be RTI, it can't just be small group by itself. It is a combination of all of those things that will get someone off of that list.

1 – I totally agree. I have a very mobile, very, very mobile school and the same kids who keep popping up from kinder to fifth are the kids who have no support at home. Bottom line, and the kids who do are usually off.

5 – I agree with you very much so because we also have a mobile population. I see our numbers increase often times in first and second because we have new kids coming in and so it takes a little while to figure out what, what they need but the kids that are succeeding definitely have that parent, parent support as well. Those parents are willing to do whatever it takes. You just need to have that conversation with them to help them know what to do.

1 – You also need to show them sometimes. I have had many conversations showing a primary parent how to read to their child appropriately. They just don't know that. You just assume since we did that with our children that it is the second nature but it's not. They need to be shown sometimes how to do that and all the kids on our RTI, or AI list from third to fifth about 90% of them are brand new kids to our school. If they've been with us, they're off so that shows for good teaching I think.

5 – I am number five. I agree with you. Because we have even had some parent nights where we've had the parents bring their kids and we've done some modeling of different strategies and then given the time, provided the materials right then and there for the parent to sit and use different books and ok, you've seen this modeled not it's your turn to practice and they can take that home.

6 – I do think we have to at my campus we have to say RTI is working in the sense that we go from say 40 kids identified in kindergarten/first to 30 identified in second and then generally in third we have a lot less kids identified and I don't think it is just because of our instruments. I think again I am a big developmental person. I think a lot of it is we have been lying down that foundation laying down that foundation and it is finally clicking. Those kids that have been in RTI and have been in small group K, 1, and 2 it came together. And so when they get to third grade, a lot of them are ready to tackle it. I see that a lot and I have to agree with everyone that said a lot of our third, fourth, and fifth graders are the move-ins. We still have the "perpetuals" but generally a lot of them are the move-ins when the numbers are higher but I have to say those that stay in our building it is working because you do see by third grade in the discussions and

PLCs. It's not that we are missing kids it's that there's just less kids that need the interventions.

8 – I think some of that goes back to what numbers one and seven said about building relationships. So when you own those kids and they've been with you for a long time, you know the families then all those pieces fall into place better we were talking about earlier.

2 – I think though that we need to look at the difference in the instruments that we use for third grade to identify the students because if you look at Burns & Roe, the children are not reading those questions on their own. Ok, so they all generally score pretty high on Burns & Roe, and so I think that that keeps a lot of those kids that normally were identified in K, 1, and 2 out. That's just being honest. I don't think that we identify maybe enough in third.

3 – I agree with you. We had two kids qualify in third grade this year and the teachers said there is no way. There are several kids who need it but that were not identified and they feel like it was Burns & Roe. Interesting enough when they tested mid-year Burn & Roe was too hard. So I don't know, I don't know.

6 – I agree with that but I still say because we have discussions about we do have less much, many less that qualify in third grade but then in PLC we discuss who else needs to be a visitor or whatever and it is still a far less number of children than we have in K, 1, and 2. Even with everybody making sure we're getting all those kids that they're concerned about.

So, you've all kind of talked about this a little bit already but specifically what affect, if any do you think that RTI has on economically disadvantaged students longitudinally from kinder to third. Just looking at the economically disadvantaged group – if any.

4 – My campus is a very high, has a very high eco dis population and for those kids whose native language is English I think our RTI process works very well. I think our biggest challenge is for those students who are non-native English speakers, especially because we are using the dual language model of bilingual instruction and there's a huge difference between being able to speak a language and then being able to read and think in that language and having to go back and forth between the Spanish and English for academics. Our problem is with RTI seems not to be working for as many of those bilingual children because we are trying to overcome their Spanish. While they may be able to speak it, their academic Spanish is not very strong in terms of reading, writing and thinking. They may be able to speak it so we've got the language hurdle and then we've got the difficulties learning to read that come from not having as many opportunities with print at home and things like that so for us it's a double hurdle.

2 – I have in the past worked in schools that have been Title I. We currently have a large eco dis population and I feel getting back to the discussion about relationships. The way RTI helps those eco dis kids is they get to come sit by you and have a little discussion with you every day because it's all about relationships with those kids. So I mean you can call it RTI and say it's about academics but it's really about getting that child to feel good about you and where they're at.

1 – I completely agree. Some of those kids just don't have anybody to care about them and love on them and if you do that they will do anything for you and if you can get the parents involved too. That really that's oh, someone cares because usually a lot of times I've found that these parents had horrible experiences in school themselves so they have like a taboo about school and you're going to call, every time you call something's wrong so they just have this negative thing going on to begin with . So if you can get past that and get to the heart of things, they will help you help their kid. But it's about relationships and it's hard sometimes.

8 – Going on what number four said about the economically disadvantaged population that is specifically economically disadvantaged for at least being LEP. Our population is not huge for eco dis about 26% of our campus. Our LEP kids end up being just a very small four or five students per grade level but those students do struggle for a lot longer, then the kids that you can really build relationships with who take off academically then also it seems like if English is their first language and not just Spanish you know. In bilingual campuses, their instruction continues to be supported through their first language but our other language speakers don't have that opportunity at all. So, I agree LEP is a challenge.

6 – I'm going to piggyback and I know she was talking about RTI but a lot of our RTI economically disadvantaged kids are LEP kids. I mean that just ends up happening. And I think I'm going to go back to a lot of professional development. We have more and more teachers in the classroom who are ESL certified but yet they don't have a lot of training and so I am going to go back, I think that Tier I teaching that beginning Tier I teaching to help those kids before they get in the RTI process is really important and a lot of professional development for those kids, those teachers that have those students for language development and all the kinds of things they need to help them on their way.

7 – In our building we do have some eco dis and we do have a lot of second language learners but as I work with the teachers and as we do testing and what we have found are the foundational issues of the English language. It's not so much comprehension but what sound does AI say, which is the same as AY which is the same as EIGH. They don't know that and I think that's hindering them moving up when somewhere especially if they are in the bilingual program they are very strong in the Spanish but the English is the phonetic component is not always taught to the degree it needs to be taught to make them successful.

8 – I found that actually to be opposite. What I've found especially by the time if you've had them for a while if they hit past third grade is that they can decode pretty well. Like they actually get some of the rules. It's the comprehension still in all because maybe they have had to work so very hard to overcome that part of it or to be successful with the decoding, that that's really that's really all that they're good at which you know doesn't help them a lick once they start to you know testing situation and that's reflective.

7 - Number eight, I am coming from a bilingual campus, not necessarily the...

8 – ESL population, yeah.

6 – One other thing about the economically disadvantaged. I think that a lot of campuses are facing challenges because their demographics have changed. In our district I would say more on the northern end and so the teachers didn't have a lot of training for how to work with economically disadvantaged. They didn't get the Ruby Payne and certain kinds of trainings that really were helpful and I think that is partly what that some campuses are facing is how do you work with those students because we really didn't have to work with them before and so I think, I think it is getting much better. I think we're all, but I think that was a through RTI, that was some of the things we had to look at.

3 – I agree with you number six. That would be my school. The demographics are changing. We're getting a lot more economically disadvantaged kids, a lot more ESL kids and not only that but our kids who speak native English are coming in with language issues, expressive language, receptive language. Their syntax is still not good. It might be that of a three year old when they come into kindergarten or first grade so it's not only those kids who are, who have English as their second language. It's more and more kids are going into speech not for articulation but for language. It's a problem.

5 – I totally agree with you number three because we too are, are, our population is continuing to increase with the economically disadvantaged and I hear almost daily that the teachers are not complaining about the second language learners that are eco dis but it's the kids that are coming from the homes that they're not being talked to, they don't have a lot of the basics that children used to have. They don't get the nursery rhymes and the good foundational things. They and there's a lot of vocabulary that you would think that the kids would know but they just don't and so that's what I hear the teachers talk about you know it's like they are not able to read and comprehend this because they don't know what these words mean in different contexts. They have one meaning maybe if maybe and sometimes that first meaning isn't there so...

3 – Getting back to RTI our RTI focuses on getting them to read in those lower grades and not necessarily on language and I know we've got some kids who could benefit from an RTI of just language at the beginning. Of course then you're putting them in another 30 minutes of language and reading and math so that's a hard thing. You know and our ESL specialist is working more on getting them to read than getting them to learn language and so I don't know it's hard to know where to focus when there are so many issues. It's a catch 22.

2 – I think that is where we have to use our professional judgment and decide because some of these economically disadvantaged RTI kids are going to need every, they qualify for dyslexia, they qualify for AI. Ok, where are you going to get the biggest bang for your buck? They can't be pulled all day long so I mean sometimes we might have to say let's not qualify them for dyslexia because they need to be getting LLI or something like that. So I mean it just goes down to it can't be black and white. It has to be what is your gut telling you this kid needs at this time and you know just ignore the rest for now and focus on like when we were trained in reading recovery, one teaching point. Ok well that's what you're going to do with this kid. We're going

to put this kid in, I won't even say program even because if you say program you are tied to that. No, use everything you've got. Like you said use our best guns when they're struggling early instead of waiting. So I think that sometimes these programs keep us from being flexible enough to meet all their needs.

8 – Number two—though the type of professional call that you're talking about takes a lot of knowledge and a lot of experience and a lot of background so I guess it is a good thing, I guess the RTI process in that respect because we have to meet to share those thoughts and make that decision collaboratively is a positive of having a process in place anyway whether you adhere to it you know by the letter at least to collaboratively make those kinds of decisions.

2 – Again, I would just also some of these kids we know perfectly well if we test them for dyslexia they would qualify. It comes down to, are you going to choose to do this are you going to want this child in this program? For some kids the answer's yes, for some it's definitely no. We need them in something else.

4 – I think a lot of it comes down to theory vs. practice in terms of all of us sitting in this room know that helping a kid learn to read is about following a systematic process that is different for each child or individualized for each child but that takes time and unfortunately power is out of our control. State testing, state mandates, federal government whatever, whatever. I think the teachers and I certainly feel this way myself. We don't have the luxury of time. It's like you've got to get in and you've got to put on the band aid instead of putting the cast on and helping the kid's broken leg. You need to put this band aid you need to put this quick fix because we don't have time and unfortunately we don't have any control over that so we have to do the best we can to navigate between what's best for children vs. what we are being told to do.

3 – I agree with that. I have some kids that I'm working with right now and some others in first grade that just now we're starting to see oh they're starting to move up and we're so close to the end of the year and we've just gotten them to make this progress and it's going to be the end of the year and then they're going to go backwards. I want to keep going with them. I still want to see them every day in the summer because I think that we could get them to where they don't need it anymore but it's going to be the end and sadly.

So along the same lines as the economically disadvantaged students what about the African American students? Do you see that RTI has a positive effect on them in any capacity from Kindergarten through third grade?

3 – We don't have a huge African American population so it would be hard for me to answer that question.

8 – We don't either but I don't see any difference in the response. They respond the same way as well or if they truly have a disability as limited a capacity as everyone else, I don't really see a difference.

2 – We're doing something wrong in this district because our African American scores are horrible and at my school it's low. It's the lowest subgroup so I think we need to keep trying if it's not RTI we need to keep trying different things, different approaches because for some reason we're not reaching a lot of these kids So I'm not saying I have the answer but we need to continue to look for a better approach.

4 – I completely agree with you number two. You know at our school it seems even though it is a Title I school we have a majority of Hispanic population but then our next largest group is African American and I 'm not sure if it's a cultural difference or maybe we just don't know enough how to respond to them but we are seeing that they not only have difficulties with learning to read but there's also a lot of emotional things going on in their lives. We have students whose parents are in jail or something traumatic has happened to them like they witnessed the death of a parent and so I think we need to do a better job of ministering to their social emotional needs before we can get to their reading and academic needs.

2 – Again, I think it is a matter though, it's a community. They need to feel a part of the school. Otherwise they're not going to, the parents are not going to buy in and you know as well as I do that if they parents don't buy in then that's going to have an attitude for the child. Ok, so it's just a matter of building those relationships with the parents.

5 – That's exactly what I was going to say because we don't have a huge number but our population our African American population is beginning to increase as well and it's getting in and building those relationships first I think before we can even begin to figure out how to help them otherwise academically. We definitely need to continue to do that but there are so many other factors that are keeping them from making the progress they could make if their lives were in different situations.

1 – We have a rather large African American population and our big key with these children is motivating them. They just don't seem to care no matter what you do. The parents aren't involved. They don't seem to care. And that's been something we've all struggled with at my school, how to get these kids motivated to do anything and there is so much baggage attached with them it's just hard to get past all that to get to the heart. A lot of them have seen some pretty traumatic stuff that I can't even imagine having seen. How they survive, and no wonder school is not on their top priority. They're just trying to survive.

8 – So do you think that it is more and I have worked at schools that have had high African American populations, so what do you think the difference is between the African American families at my school and the African American families at yours? Is it the eco dis correlation because the African American families at my school they are not economically disadvantaged? They respond to intervention the same way all our other students do. They're not our lowest pop. So is that it's not so much the color of your skin, absolutely but your culture or the how comfortably you are financially your needs being met. Is that the bottom line?

1 – A lot of these children, I'm thinking of one in particular, 13 schools and he's a third grader. So see ya, I'm going somewhere else. He'll be there a few months and he'll go somewhere else.

3 – I agree with what you are saying number 8 because we don't have the huge African American population but when you were talking about the kids who have the parents in jail or they have seen things, those are our socio economic kids that are eco dis. They're not African American and they're having the same issues that you're talking about. So I don't think it's a question of race. I think it's their socio economic status.

2 – I think it's a combination of all of it. For one thing I think that a socio, a disadvantaged, a poor kid up north just because they qualify for free or reduced lunch they're far different than an African American down south that's eco dis. You're talking generational poverty down south. You're talking the trailer that is unlivable. That's a whole lot different than your mom makes 14,000 a year so you qualify for free and reduced lunch up north. So you have to think, it's not all equal, it's not equal as far as those labels.

4 – I completely agree number two and I think this district honestly needs to do a better job supporting the Title I schools and I don't mean financially, because I know that we are blessed to have a lot more money in terms of financial resources than a lot of the other schools but in because Title I schools are more difficult to work in in terms of population wise with huge eco dis and everything. You get really great teachers and then they spend a few years kind of serving their time in Title I schools and then their first opportunity they're wanting to leave. For example this year we have 20 teachers who have put in a transfer. Some of them are phenomenal teachers and they're burnt out and there are many other mitigating factors. I think this district needs to realize we're only as strong as our weakest link and if we continue to perpetuate this great divide along 1960 between the Title I schools and what we call the north side that we're never going to be exemplary or where we'd like to be as a district because we are only attending or paying the most attention to the schools that are doing well and we're not doing enough to help the schools that are struggling.

6 – It sounds like there's, it sounds and I've had this experience that it is a huge difference and you'll hear the teacher the people say that we don't have a lot of African Americans because really that's that same thing. Our African Americans aren't to that extent. We actually have to look at eco dis at our building as opposed to African American. That's the bigger issue whereas you're talking about the generational and all that and the support that's needed. Because I do think it is real different depending on your population what the needs are.

2 – I agree with number four that the district to focus more on the Title I schools and send in more, not I don't want to say, send in more like reading specialists. How fair is it that they only have one reading specialist at their schools when they have such a needy, needy population. I think it needs to be more equitable that how we used to be half a day at the northern schools when we back when we first started this reading specialist whole thing. I know that would be a stretch but you have to think about your needs. I mean and I think that's one area that needs to be

addressed. I have been a teacher at a Title I school before and I know it's tough you go home at night totally drained and it's not the same. I go home at night tired but I'm not tired like I was when I taught at _____.

8 – Exactly, I know exactly what you are saying.

4 – This is number four again. I think another thing, not necessarily related to RTI or anything but I think the district looks at test scores and focuses on test scores and so then when south side schools or Title I schools aren't doing as well on the tests and things it's about oh, well there's not, we've got to go in and fix them. There's nothing, not nothing, oh my gosh, they're broken we need to go fix them. It's no, come in and see the good things that we are attempting to do and help us build on those good things. Don't just come in and say oh well we're going to send in this team or that team and we're going to fix you. It's you've got to work with us to build those good relationships.

7 – I worked at both sides of the district with a couple of people here and I've been on both sides and the school I was at was the south side. I was there 16 years. If the opportunity hadn't come up for me to make the move I would've stayed there but part of my heart is still there and I love the idea of putting more personnel there because it is a burden to carry and my heart goes out to them. Yes we have issues on the north side but nothing like what they have and somebody asked me a few years ago, what's the difference, what's the difference in what you did and what you are doing now. When I was on the south side I was a fire chief. I put out fires daily everywhere in the building and now I'm understanding what it means to be an instructional leader at our school because now I can be one. Before I couldn't be because I was running, gotta take care of this gotta take care of that and somebody even brought a fire hat for me to wear and so I see the discrepancy. I see the difference but how can we change it? How can we support them because they work just as hard if not harder than we do?

3 – I've worked at a school like that for a long time. One of the things I saw that helped when I was there, smaller class sizes. We had a grant where we could have some smaller class sizes because you tend to have more kids in special ed, more kids in ESL where you have all the paperwork that goes with it, all the ARDS that go with that, that burns a lot of teachers out. If you have the smaller class sizes you wouldn't have as many of those. You wouldn't have as many kids that you are emotionally concerned about and kids would get more individualized attention. I mean I just think that is huge if you can lower those class sizes.

2 – I think that a lot of those classes in Title I schools every kid in the class qualifies for RTI so why don't we just call it an RTI school and say ok you get 20 minutes, you get 10 you get, and like I said be more flexible about it because RTI is not going on like it is supposed to be going on because there's way too many kids.

8 – Your just putting out fires.

6 – Then we aren't really responding to intervention if you think about it. That's what my thought is when we are making this conversation. Maybe in a Title I school Response to Intervention is that support of more personnel because really you can't respond to intervention to move them up because you don't have the personnel, you don't have the personnel so maybe that really is the response to intervention is we have these kids we need more people.

Well you all have already mostly answered the next question which was the same as I asked about eco dis and African American. It was about Hispanic. So you've pretty much answered that question already when we were talking about economically disadvantaged. So I'll move on unless anybody else has any other comments about the Hispanic population and the service to them.

3 – The only comment I would have with Hispanic and I don't know if it's going to change since we have moved to the traditional, from the traditional bilingual model to the dual. We have a lot of kids in third, fourth and fifth grades who are stuck between languages and we don't know where to move forward with those kids. Which way is best to continue because you have it seems until fourth grade. Fifth grade is the expectation where everybody's in English whether they're ready or not and that's a problem.

6 – I would just like to reiterate I think as we're moving to more teachers with ESL certification that just took a test I think it's just, we have to do a lot more professional development and training and even like what number three said—information. How do you deal with a child that doesn't have a language? I mean what is the best way to do that. I just think we need a lot more information and a lot more help with those students.

7 – I used to be a former English language learner and we're living in America. It's wonderful to have your language but they need to be extremely fluent in the English language and we have children here who were born here and are in the bilingual program in the fifth grade and can barely speak the language. That is an issue, but I don't want to be political but America's been great, but you know, learn the language.

4 – I think that what was just said is so true. You know because they are preserving their language by speaking it at home and whether they watch it on TV or whatever but when it comes to academics they need to be expected to perform in English and I think some of them like I mentioned earlier, they have the conversational ability in their native language but not the strong background in academic so it would make.

3 – I see both of yall's points and I almost tend to agree with you accept that our world is becoming more international. So when they get to the jobs there's a whole lot of benefit to being bilingual. And so if we're pushing them into English and they don't really have that second language background are we doing them a disservice than bringing them both up together. I don't know the answer to that but it would be an interesting research project because there are a lot of people now who are expected to speak more than one language.

2 – I agree with that number three 100% but I would also want to say that I think some of these kids in RTI, the really, really low ones in RTI have no business being in bilingual because they can only handle one language. They cannot so if they're going to have the rest of their schooling in English then maybe we just need to switch them over to English because there are certain kids that just cannot, they can barely learn one let alone try to get two.

5 – My concern is the kids that are coming from a bilingual program. So many of the kids that we're seeing move in from bilingual programs are not strong in either so the quality of what's happening in some of the bilingual programs I have a real concern for.

7 – And you know they can have a dominate language. They can be bilingual but they need a dominate language. Like number two said they are going to flounder in each one. Let's find a language that we can teach them in and go for it so they can be productive citizens.

6 – I totally agree. When I was at another campus we saw that a lot and we wanted to kind of track that and we never did. Those that come in without a strong language, those are the ones we're going to have trouble with all the way up and so I think number two's idea of we should test them at kindergarten and if they don't have a strong language at that point then we just put them in English and help them all along instead of the, what you are saying. I think that is a really good point.

4 – It doesn't mean they can't continue to develop orally their other language, their home language, their native language but you gotta pick one.

2 – Something positive I think the district is trying to step their foot into is I know that at one campus the school board approved that the, they're going to start in kindergarten I believe where they're having both not Hispanic kids, English kids and Hispanic kids to make up a bilingual class and that same class stays together through I think 12th grade I think, I don't know or whenever bilingual ends. So I think that that support that they each could give I think that would be wonderful. I think that's a model we need to kind of look into.

3 – We tried that with some kids at our school putting some of them that were not I guess they were native Spanish speakers but they were fluent in English so they were in regular classes. We wanted them in the bilingual and their parents did so they could continue in the bilingual but once our numbers in bilingual got too large we had to take them out of that class.

2 – I wonder why they couldn't just say I'm sorry we're filled up or we'll have to make another class.

So in your opinion what do you think we could do to better serve our struggling readers? You've given lots of that throughout this whole conversation but kind of starting to wrap up our conversation is there anything else in your opinion that you think we could do to better serve our struggling students?

3 – In an ideal world, smaller class sizes.

6 – I totally agree. Smaller class sizes and to harp on my point, a lot of professional development to help the Tier I teaching.

1 – Completely agree – focused instruction for the teachers.

5 – I agree. I can think back when I was split between two schools and when I had to go to the second school because they had to add another section and I had 13 kindergarten children in my class half a day and it was amazing the amount of things that you could accomplish with that smaller number of students and one was slightly more capable than the other but still just the amount of things that you could do with those kids and the experiences you could give those kids in a smaller class was terrific.

8 – I agree. Everything that we've talked about if you had a smaller class size you can put all those pieces together. You can get to know the families. You can pull them in. You can really get to know the kids and focus on their needs. Along with additional professional development you've got a very targeted focus for how to apply that. I agree with everything that was said about that.

2 – I know a certain amount of testing is necessary. We have to have it but nine weeks out of the school year we spend testing the students. That means nine less weeks of RTI because you have to be realistic; the teacher is not doing RTI while they're doing testing. So that's a whole, that's a fourth of the year that we're taking assessing.

4 – I completely agree with you number two. I think we've gotten to the point where we are assessing so much that there is no time for good quality Tier I instruction and then there's no time to reteach concepts to help kids stay out of RTI and so then they fall further and further behind. So then they get in RTI and then the gaps just get bigger and bigger and bigger.

6 – The other thing along with that is I think we really need to look at if we have any kind of freedom to do this, how we do our interventions because we're taking away in some buildings an hour out of people's day to do interventions so that takes an hour out of Tier I teaching.

4 – Kind of going along with number six, then that doesn't factor in all the assemblies and PE and music and lunch and recess. I mean when you take count up the actual minutes of the day, you know you're probably left with about three hours of teaching and then you've got an hour of intervention. So where is that good quality Tier I instruction when you have no time.

3 – I agree. In the smaller class sizes you would have more time because you don't have as many kids and even when we sat down to put schedules on paper; it doesn't even work on paper anymore. So how can, and that frustrates the teachers that they can't even make it work on paper.

2 – I think also it's just a matter of the scheduling is not working anymore so I think that the teachers need to, they've become so frustrated with the curriculum because there's so much to teach. I understand that and there's no answer to that but they need to realize that they need to be looking at the student expectations and that is my curriculum. If you can get to nothing else you better make sure you get those student expectations and if you don't teach it exactly the way that it's in the curriculum oh well. You've got as long as you cover that SE I think that's important to help those kids.