Teacher perception of and experience with state mandated implementation of multi-tiered systems of support/response to intervention

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Teacher perception of and experience with state mandated implementation of multi-tiered systems of support/response to intervention

by

Marcy R. Hahn

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Education Leadership)

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Ames, Iowa

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ABSTRACT

Background/context: Until recently, the use of Multi-tiered Systems of Support/Response to Intervention (MTSS/RtI) in Iowa has been limited to identifying students who need special education services. In December 2011, the Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) released a document announcing the timeline for mandatory implementation of MTSS/RtI in all classrooms in all public Pre-K-12 schools. The IDOE document outlined an initial sequence of steps that schools would follow. The sequence began with providing evidence-based instruction in math and reading for kindergarten through sixth grade. Based on the IDOE timeline, this study examines the early implementation process as it applies to elementary schools.

Purpose: To explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers in one Iowa public elementary school as they worked through initial implementation of multi-tiered systems of support/response to intervention (MTSS/RtI) using Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) guidelines.

Participants/setting: 9 teachers, 1 principal in a small, rural Iowa elementary school.

Intervention: Teachers were given a Pre-Fieldwork Survey, were interviewed pre- and post-implementation over the course of one school year, and were observed in their classrooms. The principal was also interviewed.

Research Design: Qualitative case study

Data Collection and Analysis: Data was collected that related to teacher perception of, and experience with the initial implementation of MTSS/RtI. Data included Pre-fieldwork Survey responses, interviews with faculty at the start and the end of the school year, and observations of classrooms with an instrument designed in accordance with, and based on guidelines from the Response to Intervention: Blueprints for Implementation published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE, 2008). The data was analyzed using QSR
International’s NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. In addition, analysis was done to detect patterns for teacher response comparisons and to match patterns with existing research findings (Esterberg, 2002). Next, the researcher coded the one-on-one interview responses and field observation checklists, and finally, analyzed the coded data for patterns.

Findings: Five themes emerged which were interconnected through the literature and in the teachers’ perceptions and experiences of MTSS/RtI implementation. The results of this study demonstrate that teachers are more positive about change when they feel they have been consulted and involved in the process of implementation.

At the beginning of the study in the fall, teachers were aware of MTSS/RtI, but they were not aware that implementation was mandated. At the conclusion of the study in the spring, teachers understood the MTSS/RtI policy and what their responsibility was in relation to the mandate. Understanding teacher perceptions of the change process related to the mandated implementation of MTSS/RtI, and understanding the knowledge and skills needed for implementation of MTSS/RtI should help inform teachers in other Iowa schools who have not yet begun the implementation process.

Conclusions: This study demonstrates that informed, empowered teachers are essential in the initial and ongoing stages of MTSS/RtI policy implementation. The analysis also suggests that another key to successful implementation is an administrator with both a vision for implementation and a plan for sharing the vision.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In response to public demand for improved schools, Iowa policymakers have mandated change. Educators have recently come under increased pressure to meet higher levels of accountability. The demand for improved school performance has put the spotlight on general education teachers because they hold the key to success in student learning (Haller & Sharon, 1981). As part of the focus on higher levels of accountability, teachers are being asked to incorporate research-based methods into their classroom instruction, one of which—a multi-tiered system of supports/response to intervention (MTSS/RtI)—is the focus of this research study.

According to Bender and Shores (2007), “RtI [MTSS] is a process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and adjusting instruction depending on the student’s response” (p. 7). Students are said to benefit in two significant ways: (a) they receive academic assistance early before prolonged failure occurs, and (b) the process delineates those who have true disabilities from those who were simply not successful under prior instruction (Edl, Humphrey & Martinez, 2009).

MTSS/RtI was initially used to identify students with learning disabilities but practitioners soon discovered that all children could benefit from the use of RtI methods, and when federal policymakers were made aware of MTSS/RtI’s potential to improve all students’ progress, they recommended mandating implementation in classrooms across the United States.

Iowa Governor Terry Branstad took this federal recommendation seriously and challenged educators: “The academic achievement and career preparation of all Iowa students will be the best in the United States and on par with most competitive countries in the world” (https://www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/standards-and-curriculum/iowas-multi-tiered-system-supports). To that end, the governor directed the Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) to create
and implement statewide initiatives that would ensure achievement of this goal. According to a posting on the IDOE website in December 2011, one response to the Governor stated, “to address our challenge, Iowa has mobilized our entire educational system to support a comprehensive system to address each and every student’s need. Response to Intervention (RtI)” (www.educateiowa.gov/rti). According to a statement on the IDOE website (2013), “Many Iowa schools are successfully implementing components of RtI. Together, we will move RtI to consistent statewide implementation in every Iowa classroom.”

At the same time, then IDOE director Jason Glass designated two staff members to monitor and direct statewide implementation of RtI. The department staff was charged with creating a strategic plan and a timeline. Within the Iowa implementation plan, RtI is defined as “an every-education decision-making framework of evidence-based practices in instruction and assessment that addresses the needs of all students starting in general education” (Iowa Department of Education, 2013).

RtI represents a paradigm shift in both the form of instruction and educational decision-making. This perspective is a revival of the original idea for RtI implementation in Iowa introduced in the early 1990s. The label for the process has also changed since its inception. In Iowa, Department of Education officials renamed RtI to Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS). MTSS is described as an every-education process that allows educators to judge the overall health of their educational system by examining data on all students (general and special education), and to identify students who need additional support. Support is provided for both small group and individual settings, and measured to determine if they are making a difference—ensuring that all students demonstrate proficiency in the Iowa Core standards and leave school ready for life.
Many Iowa schools are successfully implementing components of MTSS. Through the state mandate, education officials plan to move MTSS to consistent statewide implementation in every Iowa classroom.

To understand how MTSS/RtI came to be the current mandate, the context for this revival or reform will be explained. Even though MTSS/RtI has begun to be implemented in some Iowa classrooms and eventually will be implemented in all general education classrooms in Iowa, its origins are in special education. In order to better clarify the mandatory implementation of MTSS/RtI in Iowa, the context for this reform will be explained in Chapter 2.

**Problem Statement**

In general, MTSS/RtI involves using four levels or tiers of interventions for students, whether they are in general education or special education settings. These interventions involve increasingly intensive and individualized instruction, combined with careful, frequent monitoring of student progress. This process, originally referred to as response to intervention (RtI), is now labeled Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS/RtI). Research shows that MTSS/RtI has the highest probability for student achievement when implemented as designed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). The gap between the MTSS/RtI teaching model and current teaching practices in general education classrooms is what Iowa educators hope to bridge with MTSS/RtI. However, not all Iowa general education classroom teachers have been trained to use MTSS/RtI. If general education teachers are expected to implement MTSS/RtI they must not only understand the process, they must have necessary supports for implementation (Reeves, et al., 2010).

Research also indicates that if educational change at the grassroots level is implemented and sustained, teachers must want change to happen. Because teachers are the key to student success through implementation of MTSS/RTI, their perspectives and experiences must be understood.
**Purpose of the Study**

All Iowa Pre-K-12 public schools will be required to meet the timeline for MTSS/RtI implementation by 2016. Since every school district and building is at a different stage of readiness for implementation, some might reach full implementation sooner than the deadline, while others might need the duration to implement it fully.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to discover and understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers in one elementary pre-K-12 Iowa public school as they work through implementation of MTSS/RtI using Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) guidelines.

**Research Questions**

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of and experiences with MTSS/RtI?
2. What patterns emerge in teachers’ experiences and perceptions during implementation of MTSS/RtI?

Without evidence of how to implement a mandatory policy such as MTSS/RtI, schools are left to wade through the complex and not altogether coherent body of research to determine which practices to implement (Leithwood et al., 1999). It is one thing to self-assess based on a rubric of preparedness, but determining readiness for implementation based on a similar school’s experiences could have even more value for those beginning the process.

**Methodology**

This study used a qualitative case study approach in order to gain an understanding of teachers’ points of view in implementing MTSS/RtI. This method was adopted for the study of teachers’ experiences because every teacher has a unique perspective on the process. Prior research concerning teacher experiences is generally quantitative and one-sided, with a focus on
the generation or production of programs and policies (Smit, 2003). The qualitative process requires this research to take place in the field—in this study, the classroom. Qualitative inquiry also allows the researcher to investigate the issues teachers are facing in the place where they feel most comfortable, again, the classroom.

Previous quantitative research paid little attention to what happens at the individual school level where the new programs are translated into practice. An understanding of experiences at the teachers’ level can narrow the gap between program and theoretical text, and between program and practice. RtI cannot be completely understood by both administrators and teachers until they experience it in the classroom. Observing, understanding, and analyzing teachers’ experiences at the classroom level can provide valuable information for a more seamless implementation in other similar settings.

**Conceptual Framework**

The review of a number of other states’ conceptual frameworks for implementation of RtI (known as MTSS/RtI in Iowa), including Nebraska, Missouri, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and New Hampshire, leads to a consensus on the following foundational elements: 1) leadership; 2) collaborative culture; 3) parent, family, and community partnerships; and, 4) systemic implementation. These four points are further elaborated in the study and offer a rationale for their inclusion in the conceptual framework.

First, leadership is described as key because district and building administrators provide guidance, manage practice, ensure appropriate professional development, and plan for sustainability. One facet of this study will be to examine teachers’ perspectives on the role of leadership in the process of implementing MTSS/RtI.

The second element, collaborative culture, is described as the foundation for an “effective data-based decision-making and problem-solving process” (Missouri Response to Intervention
Conceptual Framework, 2013). Staff in schools with a truly collaborative culture should communicate effectively, work collectively, and make joint decisions. This study examines teachers’ perspectives on the degree of collaboration within their school.

The third element in the conceptual framework that guides implementation of MTSS/RtI in many states asserts that parent, family, and community partnerships must exist in a successful MTSS/RtI model. The rationale is that these partnerships demonstrate that all are valued members of the educational community. It is believed that these partners must be knowledgeable about the educational practices at the school. This study examines teachers’ perspectives on these partnerships, their role in the MTSS/RtI model, and the degree of knowledge they believe the parents, families, and community have about MTSS/RtI.

Implementation was the fourth and final element. The consensus demonstrated in several states’ conceptual frameworks for MTSS/RtI is corroborated by the Response to Intervention: Blueprints for Implementation published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE, 2008). The NASDSE (2008) framework endorses three stages of the conceptual framework: 1) Consensus building, 2) Infrastructure building, and 3) Implementation (p. 2). They recommend that “schools assess these components in the context of their own structures and relationships” (p. 2). This study investigates the context of MTSS/RtI in one Iowa elementary school after the state Department of Education mandated implementation.

Stake and Trumbull (1982) maintain that planned change “should rely upon the experiences and intuitions of the practitioners involved” (p. 1). They contend that studies should be conducted “in such a way as to provide a maximum of vicarious experience” (p. 1). (“Research can evoke Vicarious Experience which leads to Improved Practice” [Stake & Trumbull, 1982,] p. 3). The role of the researcher would be to assist in reaching new understandings, new naturalistic
generalizations. The naturalistic researcher is a person who is in a position to observe and document what an actor in the context of implementation cannot see for oneself.

**Significance**

This study examines the intersection of the change process as teachers experienced the implementation of MTSS/RtI, and the impact teachers had on the success or failure of the mandated policy. The MTSS/RtI phase-in timeline in Iowa focuses first on reading in early elementary. Hence, this study explored teacher experiences in implementing MTSS/RtI as they attended to concerns about reading.

The first phase of MTSS/RtI implementation in Iowa focused on early literacy. In Iowa, students are expected to be proficient in literacy by the end of third grade. The goal of the Iowa Department of Education is to reach a statewide, third-grade reading proficiency level that puts all students at grade level; however, the timeline for this goal has not been determined.

Interventions for reading must begin early before students experience failure, and they must be part of everyday classroom practice. As Torgesen (2002) stated, “[RtI] is a proven practice to help schools identify and intervene with struggling readers, as well as students who are on track to read proficiently early on. This is accomplished by setting up an early warning system, adapting instruction to fit students’ individual needs, and then monitoring their progress.” Although early reading progress was not to be measured in this study, it was noted because it is the initial focus of MTSS/RtI implementation in Iowa.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover and understand the experiences and perceptions of teachers in one elementary pre-K-12 Iowa public school as they worked through implementation of Multi-tiered System of Supports using Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) guidelines. The IDOE mandated the implementation of MTSS/RtI in 2005. This research looked at teacher perspectives at the local level in response to the state mandate.

The first three sections of the literature review follow the same pattern: first, a general description of the topic is presented; second, a national perspective of the topic is discussed; and third, an analysis of the topic in Iowa is included. It is important to understand the evolution of MTSS/RtI both nationally and in Iowa in order to comprehend the impetus for mandating implementation statewide.

The first section of this chapter defines RtI and provides a description of the method of utilization. Even though the concept of RtI has been in practice since the 1960s, it has only recently been more concisely defined and operationalized.

The second section traces the history of why RtI became policy and how it came to be implemented in the United States, and more specifically, in Iowa. The rationale describes how the national movement was spurred by special education stakeholders’ dissatisfaction with the process for identifying learning-disabled students. Evidence presented will illustrate that Iowa educators have long practiced the RtI model under different labels in special education even though it was only in 2005 that the IDOE mandated implementation in all public school general education classrooms.

The third section provides an overview of educational change theory, which is a cyclic process of initiation, implementation, and outcomes review. Because the educational change process is complex and is comprised of many factors, this study focuses on the change agents
and their relationship to the change. Researchers have determined that within this cycle, understanding change agents (i.e., teachers) and their perspectives is the key to achieving successful outcomes. This section of the literature review describes the change agents who have had nationwide influence on the implementation of RtI. It also describes those in Iowa with the potential of having influence over, or of being influenced by the mandate to implement RtI.

The fourth section defines the role of the teachers as change agents in the implementation process. It elaborates on their part, or lack thereof, in the evolution of RtI nationally and in Iowa.

The fifth section explains the conceptual framework for this study. It is based in the *Blueprint for Implementation* (NASDSE, 2005) that many states, including Iowa, have adopted for implementation of RtI. The conceptual framework is also based in the theory of naturalistic generalizations. This theory guides the researcher through data collecting in a way that “attends to the issues which emerge from the situation studied” (Stake & Trumbull, 1982, p.6). This section will provide the rationale for this non-traditional method of research.

The concluding portion of this literature review explains the importance of this research to other studies of RtI, to educational change, and to the teachers engaged in the process. The conclusion also outlines the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

**Definition of Response to Intervention (RtI)**

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a process by which schools use data to identify the academic and behavioral supports each student needs to be successful in school. The process provides students with evidence-based instruction and interventions matched to their needs. It also monitors student progress to improve their educational outcomes. Along with specific solutions for each student’s learning needs, RtI allows educators to evaluate the systemic or overall health of their school. It targets resources by providing the necessary data needed to
determine which elements of the education system are performing adequately and which ones require further development.

Batsche, et al. (2006), say RtI has three general characteristics: (1) it is a logical structure for allocating precious instructional resources efficiently and targeting them specifically to student needs—all student needs; (2) it is a commitment to use the best findings from our current and emerging knowledge base (scientific research) as we go about our instruction; and (3) it is a commitment to use a logical, decision-making framework to guide our instruction, variously referred to as data-based decision making or the problem-solving method (p. 1).

RtI is not a packaged program or a set of assessments or curriculum that can be purchased. It is a decision-making framework composed of evidence-based practices in assessment and instruction. Simply stated, RtI asks, “What do we do when kids don’t learn?”

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2013) defines RtI as a “multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. Student progress is closely monitored at each stage of instruction and intervention to determine the need for further research-based instruction and/or intervention in general education, in special education, or both” (http://www.rtinetwork.org).

The process of response to intervention begins when general education teachers use a variety of research-based methods to present their curriculum (math, reading, science, etc.) to all of their students. They should do this with “fidelity” and “integrity” (Bender & Shores, 2007, p.26). In other words, they should present and implement the methods as closely to the prescribed practice as possible. Assuming teachers implement content according to plan, all students would receive
the same, initial quality instruction. During the initial phase of the process, general education teachers would regularly assess and monitor students for mastery of the curriculum.

Students who do not demonstrate mastery of a particular curriculum, or in other words, respond to these initial, general teaching methods, would be taught the non-mastered content through a different method of instruction or through an intervention. Based on their response, they would receive an instructional intervention from the general education teacher.

If after the alternative instruction, the teacher would assess the student, and if he/she still does not show mastery or a positive response to this alternative method of teaching or intervention, the general education teacher would call on a multi-disciplinary team of experts outside the classroom to help problem-solve the situation. These experts could include peer content teachers, special education teachers, and/or the student’s parents. The teacher and experts would assess the student’s current situation and devise a plan for the next level of intervention. If, after intervention and assessment, the student still does not show mastery in learning given content, the general education teacher and team of experts may recommend that the school consider the student for special education eligibility. In other words, the general education teacher should have tried a number of approaches to help the student learn before deciding that school officials may need to assess the child for a learning disability.

Although numerous models of RtI exist, they are all similar in that they contain a tiered process of narrowing the scope of interventions toward the individual student’s needs. Figure 1 depicts RtI as “a framework for educating all children to high levels of proficiency” (IDOE Guidance Document, 2011).
RtI models are frameworks to be used by educators to move children toward curriculum mastery. Core concepts of RtI include high-quality classroom instruction, universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, research-based interventions, and fidelity of instructional interventions (Bradley et al., 2005). Proponents of the RtI model see its potential to help all students, academically or behaviorally, and to intervene much earlier than previous models such as IQ discrepancy have done.

The Iowa Department of Education (2011) states that five essential components must be in place to ensure IDM/RtI are implemented effectively. These are:

a) Robust Universal instruction in the Iowa Core: the State adopted standards outlining what educators are expected to teach and students are expected to learn—the day to day instruction that is generally provided to all students.
b) Universal screening: a step in the method of delivering RtI that periodically collects data and uses it to monitor the educational “health” of a student or system and to help determine if more support/instruction is needed.

c) Evidence-based instructional interventions at the targeted and intensive levels: additional general education support/instruction that is provided to individuals whose needs are not being satisfactorily met by Universal Instruction only—interventions for which data from scientific, rigorous research designs have demonstrated the efficacy of the intervention.

d) Progress monitoring: the use of data to assess students’ academic performance, to quantify a student’s rate of improvement, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the targeted or intensive instruction

e) Data based decision-making: the use of a systematic process of data analysis and not just opinion to arrive at conclusions regarding student progress and performance.

A common understanding or definition of RtI is a recent occurrence. Researchers and practitioners have long disagreed about the model or process, how it should be used, and who should primarily implement it. Since renewal of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004 (IDEA04), more alignment in defining and implementing RtI has occurred because much more research has been compiled on the efficacy of RtI and on systemic implementation. Most practitioners now agree that RtI is “a process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and adjusting instruction based on the student’s response” (Bender & Shores, 2007). It is a systematic method of instruction and progress monitoring that helps determine which students need additional or different instruction. RtI formalizes the process of teaching and re-teaching.
RtI’s origins can be traced to special education. Policymakers interested in addressing the high numbers of children identified for special education support the idea that all teachers in every classroom should use RtI. More recently, RtI has been intended for use in general education classrooms. According to Tilly (2006), “RtI has been described as a systems structure that is designed to allow the optimally efficient delivery of effective practice in schools” (p. 1). In other words, RtI provides teachers with a means to determine what a student knows or is capable of mastering. From this, the teacher can design curriculum suited to each student’s needs. Bailey (2010) asserts that, “Teachers are encouraged to utilize scientifically-based teaching methods to promote academic success for all learners” (p. 73).

Teachers have always been able to identify struggling students in classrooms. However, their reactionary responses to these struggling students are what researchers and policymakers have begun to question. In other words, the methods or practices teachers employed to help struggling students have come under scrutiny. In the search for solutions to random and various practices, response to intervention has emerged as a universally applicable practice.

In RtI, student performance data are gathered and are made available to teachers, psychologists and others. The data provide information to those delivering instruction regarding the effectiveness of that instruction. Based on these data, instruction is modified or changed when students are not demonstrating growth. Students do not continue in programs or under curriculum that are not working for them. Teachers do not continue doing the same thing they were doing.

Authors of Response to Intervention: Blueprints for Implementation (2008) refer to RtI as “the practice of providing high quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals and
applying student response data to important educational decisions” (p. 1). The Blueprint’s authors (2008) promote application of these practices in all classrooms, including remedial, special education, and general education.

Designers of RtI use suggest frequent data collection. Frequency of data collection in RtI is dependent on the context. The amount of time required to identify and verify effective interventions varies by the academic or behavioral skill being taught, as well as the student’s age and grade level. Baseline performance is established for the particular skill or behavior and an intervention plan follows. Data collection frequency and review is determined once the plan is described. For example, in the study school, common formative assessments (CFA) were given in math every Wednesday morning. The particular skill being assessed on the CFA was determined during Professional Learning Community (PLC) time the previous week. Data from the CFA was analyzed during the Wednesday afternoon PLC, and plans for each student were made according to their performance on the CFA. This cycle repeated itself weekly.

Although RtI models are new to many school systems, districts in several states (e.g., Iowa, Minnesota, Florida, Idaho, Ohio, Illinois) have been using RtI models for several years with positive results in assisting struggling learners (Jimerson, Burns & VanDerHeyden, 2007). Since the 1980’s in Iowa, a number of districts have utilized a problem-solving model that evolved into RtI. Even though Iowa has an established history of RtI use, the continuity of delivery is not often recognized because the process has been renamed a number of times. The evolution will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Iowa Department of Education (2011) defines RtI as, “a process by which schools use data to identify the academic and behavioral supports each and every student needs to be successful in school and to leave school ready for life.” IDOE (2011) further describes RtI as a
process for teachers/building teams to produce the most efficient and effective outcomes for student learning. Teachers will use research-based reading programs to ensure that every child has access to a high-quality universal curriculum. Teachers will assess all students at least three times a year, using a valid screener, to determine which students need more targeted instruction. Teachers then provide the instruction through evidence-based interventions.

Supporters of RtI in Iowa see it as useful in all classrooms because of its universal construct. In Iowa, “RtI is viewed as a model to meet the learning needs of all students. For this reason, the model is depicted by a circle that contains cycles of interventions, as opposed to the more typical pyramid that implies directionality toward special education” (Berkeley, et al., 2011). The circle implies an ongoing process without linear structure and is called Instructional Decision Making (IDM). At times, the terms IDM and RtI are used interchangeably because they both have the same key feature about them—the use of frequently collected progress data to determine instruction.

Core instruction is provided to all students in the class. Part of the instruction is provided to the class as a whole, and part is provided during the small-group, differentiated instruction period. Although instruction is differentiated by student-need during the small group period, materials and lesson procedures from the core program can frequently be used to provide re-teaching, or additional teaching to students according to their needs.

Supplemental instruction goes beyond that provided by core instruction when the core program does not provide enough instruction or practice in a key area to meet the needs of the students in a particular classroom or school. For example, teachers in a school may observe that their comprehensive core program does not provide enough instruction in vocabulary or in phonics to meet the needs of the majority of their students. They could then select a
supplemental program in these areas to strengthen the initial instruction and provide additional practice for all students.

The intensive cycle of this approach provides support that goes beyond core and supplemental instruction. This could be used for students who are less proficient than standards require and, therefore, need additional instruction. For the less-than-proficient student, a plan is written and performance is monitored and charted. Highly proficient students may require advanced levels of instruction or enrichment. For these students, commensurate expectations are written.

Evolution of RtI—Nationwide

An understanding of what we do today and of how we came to be in a particular place at a particular time is often best gained in the context of history. In this case, looking briefly and with broad strokes at aspects of our special education history since 1975 provides much of the context to help answer the question, “Why adopt an RtI model?”

RtI has a long and convoluted history. It grew out of frustration with the method by which children were identified for special education. The advocates for change to special education identification drew on the fact that federal legislators periodically review, revise, and reauthorize IDEA. By 1990, the advocates for children with learning disabilities lobbied Congress who had earlier passed legislation known as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, to reauthorize and rename it the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Of significance in this reauthorization is the language that recognized the child as an “individual” rather than a “handicapped” person (PL 101-476).

IDEA’s most recent review and revision came in 2004. The reauthorized IDEA04 brought significant changes to the methods of identifying the learning disabled eligible for special
education. It is important to understand the background of the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 and the changes it created in order to understand the relevance of this study.

The momentum for the changes made in 2004 began in 1982 when a National Research Council (NRC) Study (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982) examined the criteria used to determine special education identification. The NRC study found that when specific criteria were in place, educators had a better understanding of whether the child was eligible for special education. The recognition and use of these criteria was a significant departure from the IQ discrepancy model. These criteria clearly established the student’s problem/need, set measurable goals based on the student’s functioning level, and mandated a written intervention plan unique to that student. The student’s progress could then be measured, and decisions regarding continuation of interventions or services could be made.

The NRC study pitted the intervention model against the IQ discrepancy model. Though it was heavily researched and routinely practiced in many schools across the country for the next twenty years, the intervention model did not gain legislative support, and educators continued to identify students for special education using the IQ discrepancy model.

According to Bender and Shores (2007), “the exploration of RtI as an approach to LD eligibility determination resulted from general dissatisfaction with the . . . discrepancy procedure that documents a disability by demonstrating a large difference between a child’s cognitive level (using IQ scores) and his or her achievement” (p. 1).

Despite heightened awareness about the abuses of over-identification of students with learning disabilities during these two decades, schools continued to over-identify students for special education. Between the mid1970s and 2000, the number of students identified as learning disabled doubled. More than 2.8 million students were identified as learning disabled, which
represented just over half of all students with disabilities (USOE, 2000). Although some researchers argued that there might have been good reasons for some of this growth, most other researchers countered that more likely many of those children were misdiagnosed as learning disabled (Hallahan, 1992). More students were being identified as having a learning disability than many felt there should have been, not because the students actually had one, but because they had not achieved success in general education.

Over those twenty years, many policymakers, too, thought that the discrepancy model lead to over-identification of students with learning disabilities. From 1977 to 2005, the number of students identified for specific learning disabilities increased 200 percent (Berkeley, et al, 2009), costing taxpayers billions of dollars. In an effort to reduce this budgetary item, federal legislators commissioned numerous experts to study the phenomenon and make recommendations for policy changes. One recommendation from these experts was to change eligibility criteria from a discrepancy model to a response to intervention model (Bender & Shores, 2007).

To further understand RtI’s history, in 2001 President George W. Bush established the Commission on Excellence in Special Education and ordered officials to examine how students with special needs are served. Previous eligibility processes created over-identification of special needs students and gaps in achievement between special education students and their non-identified peers. Researchers recognized this trend. “For too long, children who appeared disabled but were not were wrongly educated. That was because teachers were not using ‘generally effective’ instruction in their classrooms” (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, et al, 2003). These authors suggested that the effects of teacher instruction had much more impact on student achievement than educators previously acknowledged. The shift or change moved the locus of problem solving from the child to the teacher and the classroom environment. Fuchs, Mock,
Morgan, et al, (2003) asserted that the goal of implementing response to intervention was to better align classroom practices to individual student needs for both regular and special education students, in order to reduce redundancy of instruction and to raise achievement levels for all students.

The culmination of twenty years of research and practice with an intervention model had a profound effect on federal policy regarding special education identification. When Congress reauthorized IDEA in 2004, they changed the law about identifying children with specific learning disabilities. “In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures (20 USC §§ 1,400). Advocates felt that RtI promised sweeping reform to both general education and special education. To this end, stakeholders and policymakers in Iowa seized the opportunity to mandate implementation of RtI.

The new federal policy stated that schools would “not be required to take into consideration whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability” (Section 1414(b)). Instead, the federal government recommended that states’ departments of education design early intervention and assessment practices closely linked to instruction (Bender & Shores, 2007). This new policy resulted from numerous studies showing that the practice of early intervention and assessment resulted in greater student achievement than the practice of discrepancy determination did.

Following enactment of IDEA04 legislation, there began a rather random and spontaneous explosion of RtI use to determine special education eligibility throughout the United States. In 2009, Berkely et al. described how the state interpreted the new federal law in light of their own
regulations, and how to put RtI models in place. IDEA04 recommended, but did not mandate, the use of RtI to determine eligibility. Some states (e.g., Iowa, Pennsylvania) adopted RtI as their model for special education eligibility, replacing their discrepancy model. Some states (e.g., California, Illinois) gave that decision-making authority to area education agencies or local school districts (www.rti4success.org). Some states continued in a “wait and see” mode, letting other states test the practice before implementing it themselves.

For many states with RtI legislation, the process is quite new. Federal reauthorization of IDEA occurred in 2004 and regulatory guidance was published in 2006. Although some states’ departments of education anticipated the regulations, none enacted their own legislation until 2006, waiting for the regulations to be published. Although nine years have transpired since RtI legislation went into effect in most states, limited studies on scaled-out models of RtI have been conducted.

There are now published studies assessing the efficacy of RTI at the classroom, building, or district level. However, few studies have been published regarding the effectiveness of statewide implementation of RTI. Berkely, et al, (2009) outlined state progress of implementation of response to intervention in a Snapshot of Progress. They state that, “Although some states, such as Kansas and Iowa, have been implementing basic RtI models well before changes were made to federal regulations, other states are at varying stages of readiness to begin making a change” (p. 93).

**Evolution of RtI—Iowa**

The history of trends must be traced to their convergence as the current model of Multi-tiered System Supports in order to understand how Iowa educators view RtI. These trends include the
Renewed Services Delivery System initiated in the 1990’s, the problem-solving model, and the Instructional Decision Model initiated in 2007.

A description of the organizational chart for education in Iowa sets the context for evolution of RtI in Iowa. The Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) is at the top of the chart and is responsible for local schools and Area Education Agencies (AEA). The state is divided into nine area education agencies (AEA’s) whose mandate is to operate in the best interest of the district’s students in accordance with state law. These agencies provide a number of services to educational stakeholders in their regions. One essential service is training in methods and models of instruction deemed best practice by the IDOE, and one best practice advocated by the IDOE is RtI.

Teachers in Iowa were trained by their AEAs in the use of IDM, and IDOE officials used this knowledge base as a foundation to RtI. In June 2011, Iowa Area Education Agency (AEA) staff conducted one-day overview sessions for district administrators and AEA consultants to begin the changeover process from labeling the process as IDM to RtI. This also gave them an opportunity to move toward statewide implementation of RtI in general education classrooms.

The origins of RtI can be traced to one AEA in particular. In central Iowa, the Heartland Area Education Association’s Problem-Solving Model began in 1988 when the Iowa Renewed Service Delivery System (RSDS) was developed to improve educational services in local schools by planning and implementing educational innovations across the state (R. Allison, personal communication, July 28, 2011).

Tilly (2006) states that RtI’s origin is multifaceted. “Many of the practices used as a part of RtI implementation (e.g., curriculum-based measurement, formative evaluation, learning strategies, peer tutoring, direct instruction, behavior analysis, lots of research-validated reading
strategies, etc.) have their longstanding and rich foundation in research—in many cases, over 30 years’ worth that has occurred since the passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act in 1975” (p. 3). Tilly (2006) further states, “RtI is likely the single best opportunity we have had to improve education for all students with disabilities—and students without them—that has occurred since the passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act in 1975” (p. 3). Researchers and policymakers continued to recognize the potential of RtI to provide all students with improved opportunities for learning. The primary impetus was to remediate learning issues for students without the need for special education identification. The momentum for change induced action by the Iowa Department of Education.

On July 1, 2007, the Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) instituted its Response to Intervention (RtI) model: a model designed for general education in a school-wide system. The purpose of RtI is to identify interventions that result in improved individual performance. In this model, special education services are provided within the context of the overall system, not as separate programming. RtI establishes an individual’s educational needs, and it provides the framework for initiating special education eligibility.

A historical view of State reading and math achievement trend lines from 1992 through 2010 was examined so the evolution of RtI in Iowa could be better understood. These content proficiency trends remained essentially flat, and achievement gaps for special education students, poor, minority, and English Language Learners had not been closing. According to the Iowa Department of Education (2012) reporting data from 2011:

- 61 percent of our schools have not reached the point where 80 percent of students are proficient in reading at the levels.
- 35 percent of our children in grades 4 and 8 have not made at least one-years’ worth of progress in reading in a year’s time.
- All students who did not make a year’s worth of growth should receive targeted intervention, but we lack a way to verify that students received the support they needed.
These findings prompted Iowa Governor Branstad to initiate the mandate for RtI implementation.

*Blueprint for Implementation of RTI*

Published research about statewide implementation of RtI is limited. In the few reports available, experts generally recommend a phased introduction over a number of years to allow sufficient time for educators and administrators to accommodate new practices (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007). The most mature examples of wide-scale adoption of RtI are Iowa’s Heartland AEA model, Minneapolis’s PSM model, and Florida’s Problem Solving and Response to Intervention project.

Using implementation science and lessons learned from working with states and districts, the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) presents RtI implementation through four stages: 1) Exploring and adopting, 2) Planning, 3) Implementing, and 4) Continuously improving. These stages are described in training modules for use by districts and schools.

In 2008, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) organized a think-tank of RtI experts and charged them with designing a *Blueprint for Implementation* of response to intervention. The purpose of the Blueprint is to provide a framework around which implementation of RtI can be built. The resulting documents were directed to district-level and building-level implementation.

In this Blueprint, these key points are made:

- There are critical components of RtI implementation that if not attended to can render otherwise acceptable implementations ineffective.
- The school building is the unit of change in RtI.
- District-level supports must be systematically built in to support building-level implementation. State-level supports must be systematically built to support district- and building-level implementation.
- Building change should be guided by answers to key questions.
The structure of the Blueprint allows sites to “tailor their applications by selecting practices consistent with principles, maintaining the integrity of the model and building buy-in and ownership as they implement” (NASDSE, 2008). Much like the process of RtI, the Blueprint assesses need and makes decisions about change accordingly.

The timeline for implementation in this Blueprint follows three stages: 1) consensus building, 2) infrastructure building, and 3) implementation. Districts are then advised to “assess these components in the context of their own . . . make up” (NASDSE, 2008). Again, parallel to RtI, the Blueprint follows a framework into which the individual make-up of the district is placed and adjusted.

Finally, the authors of the Blueprint make recommendations for its use. They suggest that those undertaking the process first complete a thorough reading of the entire document to get a “holistic overview” of the steps needed to implement RtI in practice. Second, they provide a self-assessment to review the current state of practices and to identify gaps in implementation in district buildings.

It is of interest to this study that the lead authors of the Blueprint are from Iowa. In addition, two of the writing team members, all four of the review team members, and three of the reviewers are from Iowa. Some of these individuals helped draft the mandated Iowa policy regarding RtI implementation. These same Iowa stakeholders have been integral to the perpetuation of RtI since its inception as a problem-solving model. Iowa would seem to be an advantageous place for implementation considering the many experts involved in its development. The study will use portions of this Blueprint to complement the study’s conceptual framework and elements of the educational change process involving teachers. The conceptual framework is discussed in a later portion of this chapter.
RtI and the Rationale for Change

Originally, the goal of RtI was to reduce the numbers of students identified for special education, primarily in reading (Mellard et al. 2004). Because of its purported effectiveness, the use of RtI was extended to general education. The expanded idea of RtI attempts to provide instruction and intervention before students have experienced multiple years of failure and are subsequently identified for special education (Fletcher, et al. 1992).

A number of benefits are offered as reasons to implement RtI in general education classrooms. Among these are fewer students identified as learning disabled, early intervention for struggling readers, and the elimination of teacher bias in special education referrals (Hollenbeck, 2007). Researchers believe that uniform delivery of RtI can remove subjective interpretations of student learning.

The purpose of an RtI system is to prevent academic failure, ensure student success, identify academic and behavioral problems, and properly deal with those problems. Guided by student outcome data, RtI can be used to make decisions about general, compensatory and special education, as well as assist in the creation of a well-integrated and seamless system of instruction and intervention (Ehren & Whitmire, 2005). Any student struggling to succeed would receive effective interventions, and RtI is said to stimulate more communication and consistency among a student’s teachers. One reported major benefit of RtI is the provision of early intervening services (EIS). EIS are preventive in nature; they provide immediate support to students who are beginning to struggle. However, EIS depend on the provision of high-quality instruction in the general education classroom setting.

Even though RtI has been mainstreamed in general education classrooms, it is still used to identify students with learning disabilities. It ensures that students receive high-quality instruction, so a lack of adequate instruction is not the cause for poor learning.
RtI uses data based decision-making rather than subjective observations to determine whether students require intensive supports or should be referred for special education evaluations. RtI allows for the early identification of students’ learning disabilities, and does not require significant academic lags to develop in order for students to qualify for special education services.

**Educational Change Theory**

Whether people are conscious of it or not, they are change theorists. That is, they create ideas that explain events and why events occur (Turner, 1982). These personal narratives of how and why life is the way it is help manage the “uncertainty of everyday living” (Connolly & Seymour, 2009, p. 1). In other words, “If I do x, then I expect y to occur, and for these reasons” (Connolly & Seymour, 2009, p. 1). People do not generally reason like this consciously, rather it is a tacit function of human behavior. These personal life-explaining theories are then extrapolated to a moment or context that demands an explanation.

Change creates disequilibrium that for some can be uncomfortable. People have to make sense of a process for themselves. Understanding personal theories of change matters: unless people state their beliefs openly, beliefs cannot be questioned. Chances for implementing change are limited without the power to question and analyze thinking. Waks (1998) states that the meaning of educational change in the educational literature is shaped by unspoken background assumptions. Evaluators and grant-making organizations are especially interested in why changes do or do not occur as planned, and they have found that a powerful way to improve the chances that a set of activities or program of action will succeed is to help the organizers specify the reasoning that serves as their theory of change.
Most teachers and administrators have little use for most research. They are less likely to give time and attention to a practice or policy if a rationale for change is not offered. Time-starved teachers and administrators who are pressured to improve student performance want reforms directly addressing practice.

Gold and Miles (1981) describe educational change as innovations in schools. These innovations range from basic curriculum revisions to radical social change in school culture. The desired outcomes of educational change are wide-ranging as well. At one end of a continuum, an outcome might be improved student performance in reading; on the other end an outcome might include schools becoming catalysts for large-scale social transformation (Gold & Miles, 1981). This educational change would result in significant change in the greater society. Fullan (2001) devotes chapter 3 of his book *The New Meaning of Educational Change* to defining educational change. Here he outlines the “general problem of the meaning of change,” and the “subjective” and “objective” views of change. An example of the subjective meaning of “educational change” includes the ever-changing conditions under which teachers must operate and make decisions, knowing that the conditions under which they make decisions one day are not likely the conditions under which they will make decisions the next day. Identifying the objective “reality” of educational change makes it possible to “clarify the meaning of an educational change by identifying and describing its main separate dimensions” (Fullan, 2001, p.38). However, this “objectivity” remains subject to individual and group interpretation of the reality. Acknowledging this understanding of “reality” sets the background for defining educational change.

Fullan (2001) concludes the chapter with his understanding of how “shared meaning” evolves. “Acquiring meaning, of course, is an individual act but its real value for student learning
is when shared meaning is achieved across a group of people working in concert” (Fullan, 2001, p. 46). When faculty members are informed of mandated change, they immediately begin to make meaning of it relative to their daily practices. They judge the fit of that change with their own thinking and practice. Even when all parties agree that the intention of the change is worthy, that may not be enough impetus to change teachers. Culture and common values are often the substances that hold an organization together. According to Fullan (2001), it matters that through their relationships with one another, the stakeholders (teachers) create shared meaning and coherence. It is the moral commitment to growth and shared responsibility that compels teachers to change.

Yet, the process of education reform has been to disseminate new knowledge about best or current practices to schools in the hope that, even when mandated, change will result. The plan is that old ways of knowing and doing will be replaced with new ways of knowing and doing. In the case of RtI in Iowa, change was mandated, and although the “organizers” or education policy makers specified their reasons for change, this research explored the degree to which teachers understood and accepted the reasons for mandating RtI.

**Education Change Agents**

Policy effectiveness is determined by those who accept and implement it. Districts, boards and community, principals, and teachers are critically important to the achievement of desired change. In order for RtI to be implemented and, more importantly, sustained, each of these factors will need to be assessed and subsequent professional development activities will need to occur (Datnow, 2006). In the case of public schools, agents or stakeholders have been identified and their part in carrying out change has been described. Many stakeholders make up the complex system of school change: students, families, administrators, teachers, and governments.
Fullan (1993) identifies three primary stakeholders: governments, principals, and teachers. The government can mandate action and provide or withhold support. The principal is positioned to set the climate for change in the school—however, the teacher has the most direct control over what happens in the classroom and, thusly, the growth of students.

**Government**

By government, this study means the Iowa state government and the United States federal government. Since these two entities have the greatest influence on scaling out MTSS/RtI, this section will examine the related research.

Fullan (2001) asks, “What is the importance of external assistance and policy for school capacity?” (p. 224). Fullan (2001) describes “capacity,” as readiness for policy change. He includes such factors as teacher skill and knowledge, resource availability, and degree of principal leadership as considerations in this capacity or readiness.

In order for state and federally mandated policies to be received by districts and schools, well-intentioned governments must strike a balance between blind trust and sheer force. On the one hand, blind trust could lead to few schools administering the policy. On the other hand, sheer force could lead to fostering “cultures of superficial dependence” (Fullan, 2001). Educators are skeptical of change for change sake, and even more so when the change comes from a source unfamiliar with the culture and values of the schools that are being directed to change.

**Principals**

Donaldson (2001) claims that effective school leadership fosters “open, trusting, affirmative relationships.” Principals build leadership through relationships with staff; leadership directly affects school climate, and school climate sets the stage for change.

When principals provide active support of teachers in learning and implementing change, the likelihood of sustaining the change is high. When principals do not push their teachers beyond
the minimum requirements, the likelihood of sustaining the change is low (Hall & Hord, 2006). At the same time though, Leithwood (2010) suggests that principals encourage teachers to try new experiences, ease teachers toward change, support teachers through the change process, and put teachers in low-risk situations where they can practice the knowledge and skills necessary to make the change (p. 7). The present study explored teacher perceptions of being supported and encouraged by their administrators to take the risks necessary to implement MTSS/RtI.

**Teachers**

Although there are exceptions, teachers often report feeling misperceived, misunderstood, misled, and powerless in relation to administrators, parents, students, and the general public. Ultimately, these feelings can affect their openness to change (Sarason, 1995). Change will affect staff regardless of the change theory chosen or the changes proposed. Bueker (2005) stated, “One of the most difficult aspects of implementing a whole school reform is striking a balance between proper program implementation and individual teacher flexibility” (p. 411). Bueker (2005) noted that empowering teachers, treating teachers with professional respect, and providing structured and continuing support for staff could minimize the negative effects of school change.

Change happens in schools when teachers accept and act on the idea. Teachers perceptions of their own knowledge and skills relative to the change, and their perceptions about available support effect whether change will occur. Within schools, the primary stakeholder—the teacher—must accept and value the change in order for it to be successful. This is especially important when the change is initiated from outside the school setting (i.e., a state mandate).
Educational Change Agents in the Evolution of RtI—Iowa

According to the Iowa Department of Education (IDOE, December 2011 report on RtI, “All stakeholders will have opportunities to provide input on decisions made by the IDOE and will have their own space within which to implement RtI.” In order to achieve systemic change and implement RtI successfully across the state, a decision-making framework has been established by the IDOE. Some stakeholder/change agent roles have been defined.

a) The role of the IDOE in RtI implementation includes:

- Setting the timeline for the implementation of RtI statewide.
- Determining the criteria by which the health of the RtI system will be evaluated.
- Establishing the method by which the implementation of RtI statewide will be evaluated.
- Directing state and federal funds to implement RtI.
- Deciding which data will be required in the statewide RtI data system.
- Establishing criteria that will be used to determine the technical adequacy of universal screening and progress monitoring tools, and research-based and evidence-based interventions at the Targeted and Intensive levels of support.
- Establishing the criteria that will be used to determine the adequacy of Universal instruction in the Iowa Core Curriculum.

b) Area Education Administrators and Consultants charged by the Department of Education with supporting schools in:

- The implementation of the Iowa Core (curriculum) with fidelity at the Universal level.
- The implementation of universal screening and progress monitoring.
- The directing of funds to support RtI implementation.
- The implementation of evidence-based interventions at the Targeted level.

c) Local Education Agencies (school districts including Administrators and Teachers)

- Arranging schedules to accommodate the needs of students in an RtI system.
- Directing local funds to support the implementation of RtI.

Determining which evidence-based interventions to employ with specific students in need of support at the Targeted level. These are the change agents responsible for establishing the rationale for mandating RtI in Iowa. This study examined whether the IDOE, AEA and local district administrators have directly informed the classroom teachers who will be implementing
RtI of the rationale for change. As stated earlier in this literature review, the success of change depends upon how well the reasons for change are understood.

**Educational Change Models**

Educational change models are the practical application of educational change theory. Many models have been developed since the 1970s in order to explain the change process including “Havelock’s linkage model (1973), Rand’s model (1973), Kanter’s innovation model (1988), ACOT model (1991), the Rogers’ diffusion model (1995), Chambers’s model (1997) and Kotter’s eight-stage model (1996)” (Wong, 1987).

Although these change models vary in many ways, they share some common elements including the four phases of discovery, design, development, and implementation (Duke, 2004). Although a myriad of theoretical models related to educational change exist (e.g., Professional Learning Community Model, Learning Organization Model), Fullan’s three-phase model of educational change has been formative in shaping educational change research and has provided direction to researchers, policymakers, and educators over multiple decades (Datnow, 2006). Datnow (2006) further asserts, “Fullan’s model appears to have direct applicability to the current practice of RtI” (p. 134). This is because Fullan’s model and the RtI process have similar phases or tiers that seem to follow the same pattern of actualization for those going through the change process.

In Fullan’s (2001) model, three phases of the change process are described. Phase I: Variously labeled initiation, mobilization, or adoption, the first phase consists of the process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change.

Phase II: Implementation or initial use, usually the first two or three years of use, involves the first experiences of attempts to put an idea or reform into practice. Whether a policy becomes
practice depends upon a number of factors. Fullan (2001) asserts that the implementation stage is far more “intricate” than initiation because it involves people. “Many attempts at policy and program change have concentrated on product development, legislation, and other on-paper changes in a way that ignored the fact that what people did and did not do was the crucial variable” (Fullan, 2001, p. 70).

Phase III: Called continuation, incorporation, or institutionalization, the third phase refers to whether the change is built in as an ongoing part of the system or whether it disappears (Fullan, 2001).

Fullan (2001) uses a series of graphic organizers to describe the “detailed and snarled [change] process” (p. 50). Figure 2 shows a simplified overview of this change process. According to Fullan (2001), “the number and dynamics of factors that interact and affect the process of educational change are too overwhelming to compute” (p. 49). This simplified overview demonstrates the relationship of each phase of the process with every other phase while, at the same time, generating constant influence on the outcomes. The overview implies that events at each stage of the process can feed back to and alter previous decisions.
Fullan’s (2001) overview might also be configured in a linear structure because each process follows the previous in construct. Figure 3 depicts the linear view that will guide this study because the process will only be examined through one cycle, not through a repetitive or recurring cycle, and student outcomes will not be studied.

**Conceptual Framework**

This research is a study of teacher perceptions of, and experiences with the implementation of MTSS/RtI in one Iowa elementary school. The approach is within the context of educational
change theory. More specifically, it utilizes the theories of Fullan’s (2001) New Meaning of Educational Change. Fullan’s three-phase model of educational change has been formative in shaping educational change research and has provided direction to researchers, policymakers, and educators over multiple decades (Datnow, 2006).

The conceptual framework of a qualitative study can be either a written or a visual presentation that “explains either graphically, or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts or variables—and the presumed relationship among them” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, P18). Miles and Huberman (1994) note that researchers generally have some idea of what they will feature in a study, a tentative rudimentary conceptual framework, and some idea of what to study even if that idea changes over time. This is particularly true for inexperienced and/or time constrained researchers.

Conceptual frameworks provide researchers with the ability to move beyond descriptions of “what” to explanations of “why” and “how.” Conceptual frameworks are the means to an explanation that might be used to define and make sense of data that flow from research questions (Vaughn, 2008). Conceptual frameworks may have problems in that the framework can be influenced by researcher bias; the researcher may knowingly or unknowingly highlight some aspects of the research while ignoring other aspects. Vaughn (2008) suggests that to address bias, the conceptual framework should be revisited at the end of the study.

To understand further the place for this study, Figure 4 depicts the conceptual framework that denotes the convergence space of the elements considered. The center zone is marked Dissertation Research Area. The goal of examining the intersection of teacher perceptions and experiences to MTSS/RtI implementation within the context of educational change theory was to
shed new light on previously explored issues—in this case, to follow the path of MTSS/RtI as it grows from an innovative practice to wide-scale implementation.

The Dissertation Research Area represents the lens through which the researcher viewed the process of implementing MTSS/RtI in one Iowa elementary school. Each of these areas has been studied in their own light. What is known about teacher perception of change, response to intervention, and educational change theory helped inform the study about what is not known about teacher perception of MTSS/RtI implementation.

Teacher perception of change has been studied within the context of a myriad of innovations, both when mandated and when voluntary. It has been studied systemically and as a singular case. Researchers have evaluated teacher perception of administrative hierarchy, of peer relations, and even of applications of MTSS/RtI. The significance of this study was that it was grounded in a long history of MTSS/RtI in Iowa. Teachers in Iowa are familiar with the problem-solving model even if they are not aware of the changing monikers for the process.

Multi-tiered System of Supports/response to intervention has gained momentum on a number of fronts in the past ten years, and many studies have been published about MTSS/RtI. For
example, the federal government has recognized it as a process for identifying students for special education. Furthermore, when policymakers are mandating implementation, schools are utilizing the process in a multitude of capacities to improve student learning.

Educational change theory, too, has an established research base and it has been researched and written about extensively. Grasping the complexities of the change process can be daunting. Fullan (2001) managed to dissect educational change and make it approachable to the beginning researcher. Fullan’s (2001) most recent edition, The Meaning of Education Change, promises to make sense of the complexity of change. The model outlined in Fullan’s (2001) work guided and helped simplify the present research.

**Chapter Summary**

As stated in Chapter One, consensus for a framework of RtI implementation seems to be based on the following foundational elements: 1) leadership; 2) collaborative culture; 3) parent, family, and community partnerships; and, 4) systemic implementation. This is what underlies the area depicted in Figure 4 as MTSS/RtI. The area in Figure 4 where MTSS/RtI intersects with teacher perceptions of implementation and educational change theory represents the focus for this study. The goal was to understand how teachers perceived the mandated MTSS/RtI implementation because the role of the classroom teacher is vital to the implementation of MTSS/RtI. However, there is very little published research on implementation. Gauging teachers’ experiences and perceptions provides new levels of awareness about the process. Since teachers are the key to the success or failure of MTSS/RtI implementation, their viewpoint is worthy of consideration. Their perspectives indicate what additional leadership, training, and resources are needed to implement MTSS/RtI successfully.
CHAPTER 3. METHODS

Iowa educators have utilized interventions in various forms for nearly thirty years under various labels. It is only recently that the intervention process has been operationalized and labeled as a multi-tiered system of supports/response to intervention (MTSS/RtI). In 2007, the Iowa Department of Education adopted MTSS/RtI as one method for identifying special education students and as a means to reduce the overall population of students identified for special education. Next, in 2011, MTSS/RtI was mandated for implementation in all Iowa schools, not only to reduce the numbers of students identified for special education services, but also to help address reading deficiencies.

Teachers were not the decision makers in satisfying this mandate; politicians and education administrators took the initiative as well. Yet, teachers are the ones most affected by it. They are the ones who will be held primarily responsible for implementation of MTSS/RtI, and, therefore, responsible for its failure or success.

The purpose of this case study is to collect teacher experiences and perceptions of the implementation of MTSS/RtI and then to examine the significance of the teachers’ perceptions. Teacher experiences and perceptions of implementation of MTSS/RtI are studied through interviews and observations. This data is supplemented by information from administrators.

Research Design

The researcher conducted a qualitative study. The qualitative approach best suited the research questions for a number of reasons. First, qualitative data is rich in description of people, places, and conversations, which are not easily handled by statistical procedures. Second, qualitative research questions are formulated to investigate topics in context and are concerned with understanding behavior from the participants’ own frame of reference rather than through
hypothesis formulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Third, qualitative methods are utilized because they are more adaptable to dealing with multiple realities; they provide insights into how and why change may or may not take place in a particular setting. Various viewpoints help determine patterns, and from these patterns generalizations can be made.

Qualitative methods expose the interaction between the researcher and the respondent and make it easier to assess the extent to which the phenomenon is described in terms of the researcher’s own stance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained that “qualitative methods are also more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered” (p. 40). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), the best-known types of qualitative research are participant observation and in-depth interviewing. In this study, in-depth interviewing was the dominant strategy for data collection. Interviewing most closely aligns with the study’s questions about teacher perceptions of the implementation of MTSS/RtI.

McMillan (1996) states that qualitative researchers want to know how and why behavior occurs. Qualitative methods look for the process through which behavior occurs, and qualitative researchers gather data and then synthesize it inductively to formulate generalizations. Theory is subsequently developed from the “ground up” employing the detailed particulars. Qualitative researchers try to reconstruct reality as the participants they are studying see it. The goal in qualitative research is to understand participants from their point of view.

The researcher in the current study gathered data about behaviors from field observations. These included time spent at the study school in the participant teachers’ classrooms. This data helped validate the other methods of data collection and was used to substantiate what the teachers said in their interviews.
Once all permissions were given, the researcher began the project at the school by explaining the scope, anticipated timeline, and expectations to the participants. The data was collected, coded, and analyzed. Finally, the results were discussed and recommendations were made.

**DATA COLLECTION**

The first phase of data collection involved asking the teachers to complete a Pre-fieldwork Survey. The Pre-fieldwork Survey consisted of demographics, perceptions, and short-answer questions. Demographics included the respondent’s completed years of classroom experience, highest level of academic training, and certification (general or special education, and whether they knew the school had a designated person responsible for carrying out or facilitating MTSS frameworks. Perceptions were ranked using a Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The short answer section asked two questions: 1) In your opinion, what modifications, if any, could be made to increase the effectiveness of Multi-tier Systems of Support (MTSS) framework? (Select up to 3 responses out of 8); and, 2) If you have recently chosen not to refer a student for MTSS, please explain your reasons and/or concerns. (Select up to 3 responses of 8).

The survey was then emailed to participating teachers. Once completed, they emailed their responses to the researcher. The survey data was downloaded into a spreadsheet so that no identifying information could be associated with the responses. Data was saved on a password protected, external memory drive and on the investigator’s computer. The originals and hard copies were stored separately in a locked file cabinet for security.

Research questions (a) need to be suited to the study, (b) require detailed answers, and (c) should be guided by the literature about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2002). In this study, teacher experiences and perceptions of implementation of MTSS/RtI were documented.
The study relied on further in-depth questioning through interviews. The researcher also conducted field observations.

Guidance for creating interview questions for individuals, focus groups, and for field observations was provided by key components described in the Response to Intervention: Blueprints for Implementation (NASDSE, 2008). Sample interview questions for individuals and focus groups can be found in Appendix C.

Through the research design, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of, and experiences with response to intervention?
2. What patterns emerge in teachers’ experiences and perceptions during implementation of MTSS/RtI?

The interview questions should closely align with the research questions (Creswell, 2002).

Table 1 contains sample questions that demonstrate how interview questions aligned with the research questions. Other interview questions are provided in Appendix C.

Table 1.

*Demonstration That Interview Questions were Suited to the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Sample Interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What are teachers’ perceptions of response to intervention? | What does MTSS/RtI mean to you?  
               | When did you first learn about MTSS/RtI?  
               | Are you supportive of the implementation of MTSS/RtI? |
| What patterns emerge in teachers’ experiences and perceptions during implementation of MTSS/RtI? | What MTSS/RtI training have you had to prepare you for implementing it in your classroom?  
               | Tell me about your classroom experiences with MTSS/RtI.  
               | What paperwork is required with MTSS/RtI?  
               | What kind of time commitment is there to using MTSS/RtI in your classroom? |
Research also should be guided by pertinent literature (Creswell, 2002). During a preliminary search for recent studies on the implementation of MTSS/RtI, the researcher found similar case studies in school districts across the United States. Each was unique to its setting and historical context for the evolution of MTSS/RtI, however, only a few directly studied teacher perspective during implementation. This study, too, was unique to the setting and historical context for the evolution of MTSS/RtI in Iowa, but utilized methods of inquiry found in other studies. This may support reliability and validity of findings, although the results of this study were not compared to any other study. These questions were adapted from the Bailey-Tarver RtI/SST Survey. Permission to use the questions was sought from and granted by Dr. Lynn Bailey, Principal, East Lake Elementary, East Lake, Georgia (Appendix E).

**Researcher’s Role**

The researcher must be able to communicate clearly, to investigate thoroughly, to sense prejudice, and to possess subject matter knowledge (Merriam, 1998). To maintain an ethical position during the study, the researcher maintained an awareness of her own experiences as an educator and former administrator who, like so many other participants, had been through a number of mandated policy changes.

Maxwell (2005) reported, “Bias refers to ways in which data collection or analysis are distorted by the researcher’s theory, values, or preconceptions” (243). Understanding how a particular researcher’s values influence the study is the goal when considering bias. The researcher monitored for potential bias throughout the study. This was done in a number of ways
including establishing an early relationship of trust, member checking, and frequent debriefing with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher in this study has completed all coursework for a doctorate in educational leadership and policy studies, and she has completed a master’s degree in administration. She currently possesses teacher and administrator licensure in Iowa and Nebraska. She has taught in high schools and is currently teaching at the college level. In addition, the researcher’s capstone work was on the topic response to intervention. The researcher has presented her findings to AEA administrators and at national conferences. As per Merriam’s (1998) criteria for qualitative research, this researcher’s educational and professional experience in public institutions qualifies her to conduct this research.

The researcher observed the ethical guidelines outlined in the human subjects training completed in 2007, including promoting the rights and safety of the participants in this dissertation, and frequently reiterated that at any time they could end participation. Access to the data during the course of the study was limited to the participants and the researcher.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study complied with institutional ethical standards in conducting research. All information or labels that could identify a district, an administrator, or a teacher were removed from collected data. The researcher requested and received consent for the study from the Iowa State University Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix F). The researcher followed the direction of the university advisor to ensure all applicable methods were taken to ensure ethical implementation. Voluntary participation, strict confidentiality, and removal of all identifying information or labels were maintained to ensure compliance with University and IRB standards.
Participants were permitted the right to refuse answering any questions without penalty. Data was stored on a password-protected computer.

Trustworthiness was built into the study through use of clear connections between the study, the data collection, and the findings. The researcher directly quoted participants and provided detailed descriptions to replicate situations authentically for the reader. Yin (2009) suggests ensuring validity and reliability through memoing, member checks, and an audit trail.

Memoing requires the researcher to offer personal reflections in the margins of the field notes. This aids in establishing, recognizing, and separating researcher bias and adds to the validity of the study. Member checks help establish construct validity (Yin, 2009) and require the researcher to conduct verifications with each teacher so that the notes taken during interviews and observations as well as the findings are accurate and complete. Thorough, chronological data collection, organization, and storage allowed the findings to be traced to the initial raw data.

Limitations

The researcher maintained awareness of her influence on the people she interviewed and observed. The researcher interacted as much as possible with people in the study in an unobtrusive and natural manner, attempting to act in a way that the participants’ behaviors did not significantly differ from those that occurred in her absence. The researcher took time to build trust and rapport so that discussions and requests for feedback were as authentic as possible.

This study was framed by literature specifically selected for this research. This entire research was a single researcher’s experience, which means the researcher was solely responsible for data collection and analysis.
Study Setting

Creswell (2002) stated that case study research examines a topic by exploring cases in bound systems. The present study employs the qualitative case study approach in order to have an in-depth investigation into RtI implementation. Case study is “the in-depth study of one or more instances of a phenomenon in its real-life context reflecting the perspective of the participants involved” (Gall, et al, 2007, p. 44).

For this study, the researcher established the criteria used for site selection based on knowledge of the Iowa Department of Education’s plan for scaling out MTSS/RtI and Iowa’s Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) model (Iowa Department of Education, 2013). The researcher’s goal while exploring schools for the study was to identify schools demonstrating indicators for initial implementation of MTSS/RtI, but not full-scale knowledge and use. Finding one with limited knowledge of MTSS/RtI implementation established a baseline for the study. The study then followed the school through the early stages of the implementation process.

The researcher’s prior work on MTSS/RtI in Iowa created relationships with IDOE and AEA personnel. These personnel were in a position to know what stage of readiness each Iowa school district was in for implementation of MTSS/RtI. In fall 2013, district administrators were asked to complete a survey demonstrating the school’s readiness for implementing the MTSS/RtI Model. The survey asked for self-assessment on: (a) Robust Universal instruction in the Iowa Core, (b) Universal screening, (c) Evidence-based instructional interventions at the targeted and intensive levels, (d) Progress monitoring, and (e) Data-based decision-making (Iowa Department of Education, 2013).

In the search for school districts that met these criteria, conversations with personnel from the IDOE took place through face-to-face meetings and phone calls. The selection process was
discussed and considered with the researcher. The researcher worked with an IDOE consultant to determine each school’s suitability for the study based upon where they were in the MTSS/RtI implementation process. In addition to selections patterned on the IDOE survey process, a number of schools within a fifty-mile radius of the researcher were identified whose proximity facilitated opportunities to conduct interviews and observations.

The researcher focused the case study on a district where the administration and staff were described in the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) as using professional development addressing improvement in instructional planning, but not mentioning MTSS/RtI. A district’s CSIP details the strategic plans for a period of five years. Once the school district was identified in the initial phase of the research study, the district administration was contacted to determine terms of agreement for the study and the participants. Criteria for inclusion in the study were explained in writing. As noted, these criteria were based on the district’s response to the AEA survey of readiness for the scale-up of MTSS/RtI. The researcher asked study school administration to affirm that these criteria were being met, and the study school administration agreed to have the district considered for participation in the study. Following this, participants for the study were notified.

**Data Collection Methods**

Over the course of three months, various methods of data collection were used. Triangulation of data was achieved with a Pre-fieldwork Survey, interviews, and classroom observations. Interviews and observations provided the main data, while the Pre-fieldwork Survey helped to assure participants of the nature of the study and their part in it. It also provided the researcher a baseline of general knowledge about MTSS/RtI among the participants.
The Pre-fieldwork Survey was used with permission from Dr. Lynn Bailey, who had conducted a study of teacher perceptions of student support teams and response to intervention effectiveness. Although the primary focus of Dr. Bailey’s study differed from this study, the framework for implementation was a similar model to the one the Iowa Department of Education promoted. The intent in using a pre-existing instrument was to create continuity between studies, and in so doing, generate a pool of data that in future studies may show patterns worth repeating.

The design of the interview questions was guided by the “Wisdom” portion of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) *Blueprint for Implementation* (2008) hereafter, referred as “Blueprint.” As indicated in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the Blueprint (2008) was a guiding instrument used to examine the implementation process at the study school. The Blueprint (2008) was created to provide “concrete guidance” to implementation sites; it assumes the guidance should be followed whether implementation is mandated or voluntary. It specifies Steps, Resources, and Wisdom from the Field for school districts to follow. The observation checklist was created from both the Pre-fieldwork Survey and the Blueprint (2008).

Once all data were collected, transcribed, and organized, the researcher used QSR International’s NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software to analyze it for word frequencies, specific terms and phrases, and themes of understanding.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Interviews and direct observations are the most common methods of data collection because they yield the most evidence for the case study (Yin, 2009). Creswell (2002) concurs and further declares that the most important type of case study data is interviews—the primary method of data collection for this study. The number of interviews was dependent upon the number of
volunteers who offered to participate in the study. The researcher set a minimum threshold of three teacher volunteers. Nine teachers volunteered.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview method. Teachers were interviewed one-on-one in their classrooms during periods when there would be no interruptions and the meetings would be private. The intent of the study was to gather as much authentic information as possible.

The openness of a semi-structured interview created a freer exchange between the researcher and the subject (Esterberg, 2002). “It can be hard to dismiss the actual words of participants which convey their powerful emotions” (Patton, 1990). The hope in using a semi-structured interview was to allow the participants to talk about what was meaningful or important to them using their own words rather than being limited to set categories; consequently, participants might feel more comfortable and sincere.

Interviews were conducted at the beginning of the school year just as MTSS/RtI implementation began, and again at the end of the school year after focused professional development had taken place and teachers had instigated change. Interviews varied in length from 20-40 minutes.

The researcher also conducted observations in the study school. Observations should be conducted to understand the study setting and to see how people behave in that setting (Esterberg, 2002). The researcher took field notes describing the setting, participants, and events. The observation followed a checklist described by the Blueprints for Implementation (2008). The researcher’s extensive experience as an administrator/evaluator, and a clinical supervisor was an asset in documenting observations.
Each of the nine study participants was observed at least once with four participants observed more than once. The observation length was determined by length of the class period and the content being taught. Observations were made using the following guidelines:

- Instruction is differentiated to meet student readiness levels, learning profiles, and interests.
- Instruction and tasks reinforce students’ understanding of the purpose for what they are learning and its connection to the world beyond the classroom.
- Instructional goals, activities, interactions, and classroom environment convey high expectations for student achievement.
- Formative assessments by teachers during instruction provide immediate evidence of student learning and to provide specific feedback to students.

During the observation process, the researcher drew on her knowledge and experiences as an educator and administrator to identify observations of interest. Following the observation, the researcher and the participant teacher reviewed the field notes for accuracy of documentation and agreement about evidence.

Analysis is a process of meaning making (Esterberg, 2002). In a case study, analysis requires creating a thorough and accurate description of the case and the setting. Direct interpretation was used in this study. Direct interpretation is a process of unpacking data, looking at it as a single instance, drawing meaning from it, and putting the data back in a meaningful way (Creswell, 2002). The data was coded before any conclusions could be drawn. According to Creswell (2002), "codes:

- represent information researchers expect to find before they conduct the study;
- represent information researchers did not anticipate finding; and,
- represent information interesting to researcher, participants, and audiences” (p. 153).

Initially, open coding was used to make sense of the researcher’s data (Esterberg, 2002). The data was analyzed using QSR International’s NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. In addition, analysis was done that looks for patterns, that compares teacher responses, and that matches patterns to existing research (Esterberg, 2002). The researcher then coded the one-on-
one interview responses and field observation notes. Finally, the researcher analyzed the coded data for patterns.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with a description of the research design and questions for this study. The chapter then described the researcher’s and the participants’ roles. Data collection and analysis methods were outlined. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study also were addressed in this chapter. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study’s analysis that uses a case study design. Chapter 5 discusses in further detail the results of the analysis and their implications for future research and practice.
CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results and findings of the research project beginning with a restatement of the problem and purpose for the study, followed by discussions of the organization of the data, participants, and instrumentation. The subsequent sections discuss results from the first round of interviews, observations, the second round of interviews, and an interview with the principal. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the themes identified in the analysis followed by a chapter summary.

Restatement of the Problem and Purpose

Teachers are not always consulted prior to program or mandate implementation in their classrooms even though decades of research investigating the effect of teacher empowerment on the efficacy of program implementation have been conducted. Whether teachers endorse and put new programs and mandates into practice is important to the sustainability of a program or mandate.

Although this study does not examine the degree of teacher empowerment during implementation of multi-tiered system of supports/response to intervention (MTSS/RtI), it does examine their perceptions and experiences during such. Teachers are expected to implement MTSS/RtI, a complicated model of teaching, while performing all the other duties necessary to guarantee student success. It is important to look at how they manage these new expectations along with a demanding workload.

The purpose of this study was to examine what general educators know and what they understand about MTSS/RtI policy in Iowa, how they implement MTSS/RtI in their classrooms, and how they feel it will influence their work in the classroom. As elaborated in the literature
review, the problem is that teachers are not consulted prior to policy mandates, and that teacher input about implementation of MTSS/RtI is nearly nonexistent.

**Study Setting**

The researcher decided to focus this case study on an Iowa school district where the administration and staff were described in the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan as using professional development that addressed improvement in instructional planning, but did not mention MTSS/RtI. Once the school district was identified, the district administration was contacted to determine terms of agreement for the study and the participants. Criteria for inclusion in the study were explained in writing. As noted, these criteria were based on the district’s response to the Area Education Association (AEA) survey of readiness for the scale-up of MTSS/RtI. The researcher asked the study school administration to affirm that these criteria were being met; the study school administration agreed to have the district considered for participation in the study. Next, the administration gave permission for the participants in the study to be notified.

The study school was considered rural and had a certified enrollment of 850 students in a community of 5,224. A review of Iowa schools’ certified enrollment showed that the study school fell within the mid-range of total student population in Iowa. About 62 other Iowa schools had similar enrollment as the study school. Of that count, nearly 90% of them planned to begin implementation in the next one to two years.

The study school had:

- 15% minority population
- 36% free and reduced meal eligibility
- 90.5% graduation rate
- 10.5 students to 1 teacher ratio
- 8.9 years per teacher of district service
The study school served students through a variety of support programs including Title I Reading, Special Education Services, English Language Learning, and Talented & Gifted education. Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports consistently guides the study school’s efforts to create lifelong, respectful, and safe citizens (Iowa Department of Education, 2015). The study-school principal provided information about the Professional Learning Community and how they use it, utilizing the Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting format. It uses the Dufour Model of PLCs (Dufour & Dufour, 2010). Characteristics of the Dufour (2010) PLC include:

- Shared mission, vision, and goals
- Collective inquiry
- Collaborative teams
- An orientation toward action and a willingness to experiment
- Commitment to continuous improvement
- Focus on results

During PLC time, the study school teams share, discuss and analyze teaching and learning. The study school scheduled 16 PLC meetings throughout the year the study was conducted. To begin, all teachers were trained in START, which is a process for teachers to analyze the PLC and to examine lessons and student work using:

- S – Student Centered Classrooms
- T – Teaching for Understanding
- A – Assessment for Learning
- R – Rigor and Relevance
- T – Teaching for Learner Differences (https://iowacore.gov/)

The responsibilities of the teachers during PLC included:

- Collecting data from common formative assessments.
- Implementing strategies with integrity.
- Bringing concerns to the table.
- Utilizing problem-solving meetings to address issues for implementation.
The responsibilities of the principal included:

- Providing data from district/building summative assessments.
- Supporting professional development.
- Leading the focus for PK-5 work.
- Working with Area Education Agency (AEA) staff to provide needed support for teachers.
- Utilizing funds to support building needs for implementation.

The MTSS/RtI as described by the Iowa Department of Education and the PLCs used in the study school have parallel components (Table 2).

Table 2.

**Common Components of MTSS/RtI and PLCs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi-tiered System of Supports</th>
<th>Professional Learning Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-Based Curriculum and Instruction shall be provided at the Universal level.</td>
<td>Identify effective instructional approaches and interventions to improve teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Screening shall be used three times per year.</td>
<td>Identify current student performance across the PLC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-based, instructional interventions at the Targeted and Intensive levels shall be provided to each student who needs them.</td>
<td>Identify strategies to meet goals or targets for improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Monitoring Data shall be collected and used to guide instruction.</td>
<td>Development of a system for measuring student performance as measured against national, state, or local standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data-Based Decision Making.</td>
<td>Improvement of student learning is accomplished through groups of teachers utilizing current, actionable data in collaborative and professional discussions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both systems expect teachers to know the curriculum, the standards to be met, their students’ current level of performance, methods for progress monitoring, and how to evaluate the data from the monitoring system.
Participants

Only certified teaching staff at the study school were invited to participate in the study because MTSS/RtI implementation and student progress are primarily their responsibility. The researcher was invited by the building principal to attend a staff meeting. At that meeting, the study was described including participant expectations and the timeline within which it would be conducted. Potential participants were given assurance of anonymity and the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The principal researcher left email contact information and again invited anyone interested to make contact.

The first undertaking of the study was to collect informed consent for participation once commitments were made, including a written guarantee of anonymity (see Appendix A). Of the 20 eligible teachers, 9 female teachers agreed to participate. Grades represented by these teachers included first, second, third, and fifth. Participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, and they would not be compensated for their participation.

Participants were asked to complete a Pre-Fieldwork Survey consisting of three portions. The first section collected demographics including each participant’s level of academic training, years of experience, and area of certification (general or special education). Of the total number of teachers who qualified to participate, 50% consented. The overall breakdown of teacher experience at the study school shows that half the teachers have been in the district for fewer than 10 years. Responses to the survey showed that 60% of the teachers participating had fewer than 5 years of experience in the district; the remaining 40% had 6–12 years of experience. The researcher wondered what might cause the turnover and asked the principal to elaborate. He felt that many start their career with the study school and when they have sufficient experience they transfer to schools in large metropolitan areas nearby because of salary differences.
The second section asked the certified teachers to use a Likert scale to register their
knowledge of and perceptions about MTSS. The following are some of the statements on the
Pre-Fieldwork Survey:

- I am familiar with the tiered intervention model, which provides interventions that are
  more intensive for students based on responses to previous interventions.
- I received adequate training prior to implementing MTSS/RtI.
- I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.
- I received adequate training prior to the implementation of MTSS/RtI.
- I am supportive of the MTSS/RtI process and framework and believe it to be effective for
  helping struggling students.

**Interviews: Round 1, Fall**

Participants completed the Pre-Fieldwork Survey that asked them to think about their
understanding of MTSS/RtI. The interviews followed completion of the survey and offered
additional narrative of MTSS/RtI policy implementation, how teachers came to know what they
did, and how they operationalized the MTSS/RtI policy. Further scrutiny compared teacher
descriptions of MTSS/RtI to the language used in the policy as it was described by the Iowa
Department of Education and in the *Blueprint for Implementation: School Building Level*
(2008). The use of particular policy language in the teachers’ descriptions confirmed teacher
knowledge and understanding of MTSS/RtI.

According to Bernard (1988), when conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher
“should develop a ‘loose’ guide with general questions designed to open up conversation about
the topic. The interviewer maintains discretion to follow leads, but the interview guide is a set of
clear instructions (p. 212).

Interview questions for this study were designed to guide the conversation, and at the same
time focus on specific issues of MTSS/RtI implementation. This semi-structured format allowed
for spontaneous turns during the conversation, and provided an opportunity to identify new ways
of seeing and understand the topic at hand. It also allowed teachers the freedom to express their views in their own terms.

**Teacher understandings of MTSS/RtI**

The first interview question sought to gather how each teacher understands the MTSS/RtI and what it means to him or her. Their answers revealed that one common understanding among the participants was that MTSS/RtI has three tiers or levels of intervention.

Judy stated, "It means all students get regular core instruction; the second tier is those who need extra help. And applying that to my program would have an extra level of intervention and then at the very top you’d have those who need more intervention or more extension and have more intensive services.” Patty described it this way: “Tier 1 is what I was doing in the classroom. I had to make sure that that was research-based and best practice and the kids were getting what they needed. If our district assessments were showing that they weren’t, then they would get to Tier 2 interventions—we have a reading intervention teacher and a math intervention support teacher for that.”

Terry replied, “There are basically three levels,” and Erika stated, “You have three different tiers of students that you are going to be looking at, you have your highs, your mediums, your lows.”

Also consistent among the participants was the understanding that they were responsible for implementing the general curriculum (first tier or level) and most likely interventions that met the needs of students at level two. However, a number described collaborating with peers who teach the same grade level, the Title teachers, or the special education teachers for interventions at level two. All agreed that students at level three required interventions from expertise outside the classroom. For the study school, that meant Title math or reading specialists taking students from their regular classrooms daily or weekly.
Teacher beliefs about source of MTSS/RtI

The teachers felt that the MTSS/RtI mandate was just that—a mandate. However, no teacher indicated it as a directive coming from the Iowa Department of Education. Most felt it originated from the district administration and building principal. Susan stated, “A lot of times we have to do what we’re told.” In this, she meant that the building principal had given the directive. She further explained, “The experience I’ve had with him is that he is willing to listen. He does understand because he’s been in the classroom, but he’ll make the final decisions according to, probably, data.”

Patty was not sure about the source: “I think our principal. We haven’t talked about it a whole bunch.” Erika, on the other hand was more confident: “The administration is asking us to start implementing that into our classrooms. He [principal] has been doing this in the past, and he believes highly in it, that it works and is a good way of making things work around here.”

The NASDSE Blueprint for Implementation: School Building Level (2008) is organized into Steps for implementation. Step 1 of the Blueprint (2008) recommends that implementers establish a rationale for adopting MTSS/RtI practices. The Blueprint (2008) authors’ collective wisdom on this issue is that it is foundational to consensus building. In order to build consensus, stakeholders must be given adequate information on which to make decisions. The Blueprint (2008) recommends discussing why a building would choose to implement MTSS/RtI.

Based on their feedback, the study-school teachers do not have a consistent understanding of the source of the mandate, which may indicate other areas of misunderstanding that could undermine consensus building. Even so, at the time of this study, participant teachers seemed to know about MTSS/RtI, but their knowledge seemed to be gained serendipitously rather than in a planned way.
The primary stakeholder—the teacher—must accept and value a change in order for it to be successful. This is especially important when the change is initiated from outside the school setting (i.e., a state mandate). Whether teachers change their classroom practices and teaching strategies to meet policy demands hinges on whether teachers approach tasks individually or collectively, participate in focused discussions about the meaning of reform policies, and work with support materials and resources (Fullan, 2001, Spillane & Thompson, 1997). During this study in both formal data collection and informal chatting, no teacher spoke of being resentful or unaccepting of the directive. Evidence that teachers were open to and not hostile to the mandate is elaborated in the section on collaboration.

When principals provide active support of teachers in learning and implementing change, the likelihood of sustaining the change is high. When principals do not push their teachers beyond the minimum requirements, the likelihood of sustaining the change is low (Hall & Hord, 2006). Both the teachers interviewed and the principal suggested in their responses that they understand that the principal should, and did “push,” and they agreed that he had found an optimal position of pushing the teachers while allowing them freedom to make decisions.

The *Blueprint for Implementation: School Building Level* (2008) provides this Wisdom regarding the principal’s role.

Building principals have a central role in establishing and maintaining consensus in a building. Strategies and practices helpful to establishing and maintaining consensus often includes focusing on data as the way the success of the initiative will be judged, using data to align supports as opposed to evaluating teachers, and setting and holding teachers to high expectations for practice. (p. 7)
Indications from the teachers at the study school suggest that they believe their principal practices this wisdom. The principal seemed to have outlined a sketch for implementation and teachers understood their responsibilities in creating a system of using a tiered model. Teachers were certain that the principal held them accountable for student progress, especially that students met academic targets before moving ahead in the curriculum.

**Teacher source of knowledge about MTSS/RtI**

Similar to asking about a mandate’s source, participants were asked to describe how they learned about MTSS/RtI. The *Blueprint for Implementation: School Building Level (2008)* suggests that schools provide presentations, study groups, discussions, webcasts, and visits by teachers, staff, and administrators to schools implementing MTSS/RtI.

Terry was on a team that a year earlier had attended a conference hosted by the Iowa Department of Education. When asked what she recalled of the conference, she said, “They called it are you something ready… are you ready…are you ready to Implement this Three Tier System, basically.” She also remembered being given a thumb drive with “8,000 files” but that she had not done anything with it since. She had connected the use of “tiers” at the conference to the use of “tiered interventions” being discussed at her school.

Jan, who was a recent graduate, felt her teacher preparation education courses had covered the topic somewhat, and that a building team who had attended a conference “brought a little back.” She went on to say that she tried to be proactive and had done some of her “own investigation . . . to get ahead of the ball before the ball comes down on us.” Susan said she was introduced to it a few years earlier while teaching preschool, but in changing positions, she did not receive the training anticipated at her previous school.

At the time of this study, the teachers seemed to know that changes were in the works, that these were directed by the district administration, and that they would be collaborating in
different ways soon. They stated that the principal had mentioned it at the beginning of the school year. At that time, he laid out a timeline for professional development that included periodic attention to MTSS/RtI among a number of other initiatives. According to the Blueprint (2008), it is important to have a long-term outlook on consensus building as it can take several years to achieve. In that regard, the study school may be at an advantage. Again, this can be better understood through examining collaboration among the staff at the study school.

**Teacher awareness of a student assistance/leadership team**

The *Blueprint for Implementation: School Building Level* (2008) advises that schools organize a leadership team. Roles for volunteers who serve on the team should include facilitator, coach, content specialist, data mentor, and staff liaison. One person may serve more than one function. During the study school interviews, no one was able to identify a specific team with these roles. Rather, it seemed the roles were assumed as part of the process of collaborating with one another. Each teacher was able to describe how he/she managed data, presented content, and collaborated with their peers to facilitate implementation of intervention tiers.

Perhaps because of the size of the study school, the possibility of a dedicated staff or additional roles is not practical, but the study-school teachers did not say that it put them at a disadvantage. Jan described her experiences at a large school compared to the mid-size study school.

The small, smaller size is I think at an advantage in the sense that we have title math and reading teachers, and in the bigger district that I taught they did not. So, it was a special end teacher and an ELP teacher. Our school did not have reading or math title teacher so I felt, feel like those two extra bodies are bigger, are a bigger deal. With the ELP, the district that I was in had to share
one ELP teacher for three different buildings, so you didn’t always have one in the building that day. So, it was, you know, Day 1 she’s in this building and Day 2, you know, so I feel like that’s an advantage that we have over the bigger districts.

It might be that the study school did have a “team.” It may not have been organized in the manner described by The Blueprint (2008), but roles were taken and students were identified who needed additional supports.

**Teacher perceptions about collaboration**

MTSS/RtI decisions are made using a team-based approach. Collaboration is a fundamental element of MTSS/RtI. As a student’s need for more intense interventions grows, so does the teacher’s need for more assistance from peers and specialists to determine or design interventions. According to the Blueprint (2008), successful MTSS/RtI implementation is a highly complex process that involves:

- Gathering data.
- Interpreting the data.
- Using the data to make instructional changes for the student.
- Managing increasingly intensive tiers of support.

In MTSS/RtI, teachers use a problem-solving process. They may use an approach that asks what the problem is, why the problem is occurring, what should be done about the problem, and did the solution work?

Although studies in initial implementation are limited, some who have focused on the topic have indicated fears teachers have about changes the process will bring about including fear of the unknown, fear of making mistakes, and fear of an increased workload. At the time of this
study, the school and teachers being examined did not indicate that they were afraid of any consequences of implementation of MTSS/RtI. The opposite might be true for them. They seemed to embrace the aspect of collaboration without hesitation.

Enthusiasm and a sense of pride about collaboration emerged when interviewing the study-school teachers about their perceptions of collaboration, despite the challenges and complexity of the system. Susan excitedly declared, “There’s a lot of team work this year, which is fabulous.” Terry asserted, “One of the reasons I chose this school even to apply was because of the strong collaborative feeling that I had.”

The study-school teachers collaborate with peers teaching the same grade. Each grade-level team is assigned an extra member. This could be a special education teacher, a Title math consultant, or the Extended Learning instructor. Most Wednesdays, when they are not expected to work on other professional development, the teams meet in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The principal directed the staff to design PLC time around MTSS/RtI data analysis. It was left to the staff to decide which content goal they would focus on each week. From content goals, common formative assessments (CFAs) were created. The CFA is used to assess students each Wednesday morning. Each teacher organizes the CFA data, and PLC time is spent analyzing it. Once students’ levels of proficiency on the weekly CFA are identified, the team groups students according to whether or how much more instruction they need. The team then decides which group each of them will teach.

Patty’s comments illustrate the study-school teachers’ attitudes about team teaching. Patty said, “My grade level, we share things like what are you doing? This is what I’m thinking, but I’m having problems with this student, do you have any ideas? Were your kids getting this? This is what I tried.” Erika talked about PLCs as well.
We kind of reformatted the way that our PLCs are looking now. Before, our PLC groups were [sigh] they were very administration directed. We had to have a certain topic or we had to have a protocol that we didn’t feel was very necessary, and it wasn’t, it didn’t help us or it didn’t get us anywhere. It wasn’t helping us get anything done, We were running through the protocol so we were following orders. It was silly. That’s been nixed and now we’re restarting PLCs. They are all grade level, and each grade level usually has an additional person whether it’s special ed or Title or ELP. Right now, our PLC group is going to be the MTSS work for math. We are going to write our CFAs and drive our instruction from there, and how we’re going to break them [students] up.

Collaboration has been identified in numerous studies as essential to the process of implementing MTSS/RtI because MTSS/RtI relies on a model of co-teaching (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Co-teaching and collaboration provide a means of achieving the goals of MTSS/RtI. Teachers provide each other with instructional options they might not otherwise have considered. In the end, students benefit from consistent expectations from teachers who work together regularly.

Teacher knowledge about student need for increased interventions

The wisdom encapsulated in Blueprint (2008) proposes that teachers practice “sorting students according to specific needs” (p. 32), and further states that to achieve this accurate and timely data are crucial to effective problem solving. MTSS/RtI is a framework within which schools and teachers have some flexibility to design the process. The study-school teachers made decisions based on student performance data that established benchmarks. Some of the study-school teachers felt it was left to them to decide the process for determining how to pace students based on classroom and individual needs. All were certain that benchmarks for progress were
determined collaboratively. However, the study-school teachers knew that these benchmarks must meet expectations set by state standards, for example in math and reading.

The Blueprint (2008) advises using progress-monitoring assessments that are brief, simple to administer and score, administered frequently, and measure specific and observable behaviors. The study-school teachers collaborated and came to consensus about using common formative assessments (CFA) on a weekly basis. They feel CFAs provide consistent, comparative data on which to make decisions about intervention type and intensity.

Patty said, “We’re doing a lot of work using common formative assessments to see what students are learning, see how to help those that need it, and also push those further that already have the material.” Terry’s interpretation was, “We’ll do CFA and divide them [students] up based on that. Then they’ll be in that intervention group for a week, then we’ll do another one [CFA], and then switch them. That’s the way I’m understanding it.”

Teachers may or may not use a deliberate decision-making process driven by data, but even if they do, a variety of factors such as lack of consensus, building schedule restrictions, skills of available interventionists, and amount of resources available to meet student needs can distract the team from its task. Ideas about how and where to group like-performing students at the study school were discussed. Concerns were raised about whether time would be too fragmented if they allowed students to move from their home classroom to another based on their level groupings.

Erika shared, “I think for my understanding we are going to break it so I may have high one time, mid will be with another one of my teammates, and low will be with another. So they were talking about moving from one classroom to another, moving kids around based on what we found out from our data.”
Susan wasn’t sure what her team would do to meet the needs of different groups of students. “I don’t think we’re quite into that conversation yet. First, we’ve got to set up the questions to determine the need. Then I think there will be more discussions of logistics, like, are we actually going to move them around, are we going to do things different in our classrooms, how’s that going to look?”

The early round of interviews revealed that teachers were willing to collaborate in teams to analyze and plan for student growth. They were concerned, though, that they did not have enough skills, ideas, or resources to meet the students’ needs.

**Observations: Winter**

Observations should be conducted to understand the study setting and to see how people behave in that setting (Esterberg, 2002). In Bogdan and Biklen’s (1992) words, “you are not putting together a puzzle, whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture as you collect and examine the parts” (p. 29). The picture that this study was framing through observation was whether what the teachers said during the interviews about their knowledge of MTSS/RtI implementation was consistent with how they were practicing it. According to Patton (1990),

Observation can lead to deeper understandings than interviews alone, because it provides a knowledge of the context in which events occur, and may enable the researcher to see things that participants themselves are not aware of, or that they are unwilling to discuss.

(http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JTE/v9n1/hoepfl.html)

A researcher interacts and builds rapport with research participants (Angrosino, 2005). The researcher’s extensive experience as an administrator/evaluator and as a clinical supervisor was
an asset in documenting observations. The researcher has studied and been trained to observe and evaluate teachers and their impact on students.

The observations followed a checklist designed using Steps and Wisdom detailed in the *Blueprint for Implementation* (2008). Included on the checklist were such items as:

- Sequencing of instructional period is predictable and logical.
- Lesson begins with clearly defined opening to strengthen learning.
- Instruction is differentiated to meet student readiness level, learning profile, and interest.
- Students demonstrate efficacy and responsibility.

Formative assessments are utilized during instruction to provide immediate evidence of student learning and to provide specific feedback to students.

The *Blueprint for Implementation* (2008) provided many resources that describe research supporting the checklist items. The Blueprint (2008) rationale stated that knowledge about core curriculum and its presentation are vital to the efficiency and effectiveness of MTSS/RtI (p. 18). The researcher conducted observations mindful that MTSS/RtI is a cycle that mimics instructional design. The instructional cycle (Table 2) is a perpetual one in which, at any given time, the teacher is applying it to the whole class, a small group, and to individual students.

Instruction is a teaching and learning activities plan in which learning is organized—a plan that motivates students to learn. The aim of instruction is to facilitate the learning process. According to Gustafson (1993), instructional design is:

1. analyzing what is to be taught/learned;
2. determining how it is to be taught/learned;
3. conducting tryout and revision; and
4. assessing whether learners do learn.
Interviews and observations with the study-school teachers confirmed their belief in, and practice of this instructional cycle at all levels. Each study-school teacher was observed during a regular class session. Field notes were taken following the checklist known as the Observation Instrument (Appendix D). Classroom demographics recorded included time of day, content, grade level, number of students, and number and specialization of teachers and staff. Staff specialization was added when it was apparent that each frequently observed classroom had more staff in the room than just the classroom teacher. The significance of this addition to the study is discussed later in this section.

After each observation, the study-school teacher and the researcher met to debrief so any follow-up questions could be asked and so both the observer and teacher could resolve unclear issues. Data collected during each observed class session was summarized, and an analysis of the observation data was done using QSR International’s Nvivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. Subjects of significance emerged including instructional sequencing, differentiation of instruction, and formative assessments.
**Observation Checklist Description and Sample Interview Responses**

Examples of observations related to the observation checklist items and selected interview responses are included in the following sections.

*Sequencing of the instructional period is predictable and logical.*

Research indicates that the more engaged time students have, the higher they achieve. The amount of time students spend actively working on appropriately difficult tasks also affects success level. Time on task depends on good classroom management processes and highly interactive teaching styles. Four significant classroom management processes promote time-on-task:

- Room arrangement—Well-organized room arrangements provide easy student movement and good teacher-student eye contact.
- Rules and procedures—Effective rules and procedures reduce the time spent on disruptions and disciplinary situations.
- Transitions—Efficiently practiced transitions help students move around the room smoothly and get to work quickly at the beginning of class or on the next learning activity.
- Preparation and pacing—Doing the hard work of pre-planning and preparing ample activities and materials allows educators to focus on lesson momentum. Good pacing reduces dead time and keeps students involved and on task (AFT Educational Research and Dissemination, Foundations in Effective Teaching I).

Study-school observations began after all Pre-fieldwork Surveys and interviews were conducted. Observations were conducted a third of the way into the school year. Having been in the particular classroom for over three months may have accounted for the students’ familiarity with routine classroom operations. During each classroom observation there was little or no time to review expectations about how the class period would flow. Students did not ask for a description or clarification of classroom operations. However, teachers took time at the beginning of the lesson to discuss what would be covered and what students were expected to do.

For example in Susan’s classroom, 18 first grade students were instructed to go to their respective reading centers. Five students were called to join the teacher at a kidney-shaped table
for small-group work; the remainder of the students then dispersed to four different areas of the room. No student asked where he or she should go. Four students went to a listening center with headsets connected to iPads, four students were at a center creating their own books, two students began independent reading in the classroom library that was furnished with carpet, beanbags, and shelves of books, and three students played a game on the floor identifying letter blends. Once the students were at their centers, they engaged in the tasks without direction.

The researcher observed the same pattern of reading center activity and student response in a second grade classroom. The teachers in both classrooms closely monitored the time and, periodically, students were directed to switch to the “next” group—, which they knew without reminder. All classrooms demonstrated “efficient practiced transitions” (AFT Educational Research and Dissemination, Foundations in Effective Teaching I).

Observation of instructional sequencing in a third grade classroom found the teacher using group work for math instruction. Upon instruction, one-third of the class retrieved iPads and worked with Sumdog (an online, interactive skill-building site), one-third worked independently at their desks on math problems specific to their progress level, and one-third met with the teacher at a kidney-shaped table for small-group instruction.

When noise levels were unacceptable, teachers reminded students of classroom expectations by saying, “Friends, voices should be at 0 or 1.” Rules appeared to be clear and expectations consistent.

*Instruction is differentiated to meet student readiness levels, learning profiles, and interests.*

MTSS/RtI and differentiation share a common goal: to modify instruction until it meets the needs of all learners. The origins for both MTSS/RtI and differentiation can be found in both
gifted education and special education. Emerging research demonstrates that differentiated instruction, when fully implemented, can significantly improve student achievement (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). Differentiated instruction was clearly evident during classroom observations. Flexible grouping and individualized supports were utilized, and students were grouped by readiness level or learning style. In one small-group math session led by the classroom teacher, a student exclaimed, “I got all the right answers; I just did it a different way.” The teacher affirmed this as appropriate and acceptable.

Further breakdowns of the previously mentioned observations indicated that at each reading center students were guided to work at reading levels or work on tasks at an appropriately difficult level. This means the work they were given challenged them while giving them a chance to achieve. During independent reading, the researcher asked a number of students why they had changed books. The response was that they either wanted a more challenging or less challenging one. One student had originally chosen a chapter book with few illustrations. After several attempts to read a sentence, he exchanged the book for one that had rhyming text with illustrations of the content.

During three observations, the Extended Learning Program (ELP) teacher joined the classroom to work with a small group of students identified as in the top 20% proficiency level in either math or reading. During four different observations, either a Title I math or reading or special education teacher came to withdraw a student for one-on-one instruction; on four occasions an additional parent volunteer assisted. In an operative MTSS/RtI school, education is most effective when students are treated as individuals with different levels of readiness, learning profiles, and interests, and when teachers believe they have a professional obligation to help all students succeed. The fluid movement of students and staff throughout the classrooms and
throughout the school day is evidence that the study school is willing to provide systems of support for every student.

*Formative assessments are utilized during instruction to provide immediate evidence of student learning and to provide specific feedback to students.*

The major component that makes a classroom not just differentiated, but also an MTSS/RtI classroom is that in addition to typical classroom assessment, the teacher keeps detailed records to monitor the progress of students who are struggling and may need more intensive support. Thorough monitoring and documentation enables teachers to keep a constant watch on students’ progress and design differentiated lessons accordingly (Allan & Goddard, 2010).

Jan described this process in relation to working with the ELP teacher, “Any decision we make in our instruction is data driven. If the data shows they are getting the skill, they are going and getting some extension of that lesson. If they are showing me that they’ve got it on Tuesday, by Thursday, I should really be sending them over. Or, if it is in my room, back to the back table” [indicating they would work with ELP teacher]. Judy described a co-teaching situation this way:

What ends up happening usually is that there is a whole-group lesson day one of chapter, 4.3 or whatever. And then, usually on the second day she’ll do some re-teaching and the kids that don’t need to be retaught will come back to my table and on the third day, I’ll have even more. This has not been going on for that long, so we do need to get a more well-oiled machine, refine it a bit, yeah, but what’s going on now is working all right, and my contribution is often in practice games, or, that kind of extension lesson sort of thing.

Judy also displayed and explained the documentation instrument shared by all teachers.
Each teacher has access to student progress in each content area. So, we are looking at the listing of students from fifth grade and they are ranked. I just picked a composite score from the Iowa assessment. You can write them according to different things. Green is an advanced score, so everybody who has got green has an advanced category in Iowa assessment. So this kid who’s way down, number 26 on the list, is in the ELP program, and all these kids here are not. All these yellows are kids who were not chosen to have the CogAT administrated to. [CogAT measures learned reasoning and problem-solving skills in three different areas: verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal.]

Patty also described the process:

First of all, I look at whatever the standard is that we are working on for that day or those few days and then I think about how I can scaffold the learning and how can I model it for them first. Then I want us to be able to do it together whether it is math or reading, you know. I want them to see how I do it. Then we do it together, and then they are asked do it on their own. At the end of most lessons, I try to have an exit slip, especially with math. “All right, our lesson is over, can you do these two problems on your own?” That’s kind of what I use to plan for the next day. These students got it or these students have no idea, or oh my goodness, these guys are ready for something else! They already have it, you know. Progress monitoring and formative assessment are intended to form instruction and not just inform. Together, progress monitoring and formative assessment provide the information and guide the decision-making processes of instruction at the study school.
Because Action Step 4 in the Blueprint (2008) recommends that school “determine next steps”, once they have established consensus, at the end of each interview the researcher asked teachers to comment on next steps, as they understood them. Terry’s view was,

I would assume we’d get more direction. Our next PLC is supposed to be developing the norms for how the assessments will be created and how those meetings will run. We’ve kind of played around, on our own time, what we think those assessments may look like, and we brought some examples to show each other within our grade level. That’s as far as we’ve gotten.

Jan took her cue from the principal, “He’s really pushing to do more of our PLC work, which affects MTSS.” Sherry seemed to feel the same as Jan in that the directives would be “thrown at us from here and there.” She went on to say that, “What we’re doing with the kids is kind of on us, but then the structure of it is more set up for us.” Susan said, “I know next week we’re meeting as an entire district to talk about some norms. I don’t know that we are really going to be discussing MTSS. Its more the fluidity between all of the grades clear up through high school as opposed to what we are doing grade-level wise.”

Round 2 of interviews in the spring addressed this topic to compare how much more information had been given to the teachers about the plan. Those views are at the conclusion of the next section.

**Interviews: Round 2, Spring**

Near the end of the school year, a second series of interviews was conducted with the participants. Conducting follow-up interviews enhanced the researcher’s understanding of the context, and thus the meaning, of the participants’ experiences. It also clarified issues that may
have been roused by the first interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009). The goal was to determine how knowledge and perceptions changed over the course of the year.

In the Round 1 interviews, teachers explained why they felt they were being directed to implement MTSS/RtI. The participating teachers described their understanding of the timeline for implementation of MTSS/RtI and shared what they understood their roles and responsibilities to be. The Round 2 interviews raised the same topics as in Round 1, but the responses demonstrated a different and richer understanding of MTSS/RtI.

**Teacher understanding of multi-tiered systems of support/response to intervention**

The interviewed teachers were not hesitant to give answers the second time around when asked what they understood about MTSS/RtI. It was clear they were fully knowledgeable about MTSS/RtI. However, the context and terminology they used to illustrate the process of MTSS/RtI should be clarified. The context for the process of MTSS/RtI in the study school happened through their PLCs. The same elements of MTSS/RtI as described by researchers and policymakers were evident in the process and work during PLC at the study school. Teachers interviewed in Round 2 described teaching, assessing, collecting, and analyzing data, and evaluating that data vital to determining what interventions might be needed to help each student progress toward proficiency. Although they rarely used the term multi-tiered, they did describe organizing groups in ways synonymous with tiers. For example, Susan shared that she and her grade-level team organized students according to the results on the weekly CFA. Depending on those results, students were grouped by those who demonstrated mastery, those who showed signs of comprehension but were still below 80% mastery, and those who had not connected to the concept. Over a two-month period in the process of testing and shifting student groups, the students had begun to accept the model. Susan reported:
I think they like moving around to the different classrooms and seeing the different groups of kids and having a different teacher. I think it’s nice that they can name what they need to work on. Rather than saying, “I’m no good at math,” they say, “I’m working on adding fractions” or “I’m working on common denominators” or “I’m in this group to work on finding the degrees of a triangle” or whatever the skill. I think that’s better that more and more of them are knowing what they are working on and that they can see the growth that they are making.

Jan explained it to her fourth graders in an analogy. She equated them to swimmers. She told them,

This is my way of doing math now and are you going to sink or swim. I won’t let you completely sink. I may force you to sink just a little bit until you learn to swim on your own but that’s kind of what this is. Some of you, I’m going to keep you back at my table for a while and we do math back here and then I’ll push you into the deep end. Some of you, I’m just throwing you in because I think you can do it.

Judy recounted, “All of our weekly PD [professional development] is to set up this multi-tiered education intervention that we do with these kids, and, we actually divide them into, throughout the grade level, um, different tiers. If you’re 80% successful, you’re going here. If you’re one that’s above and beyond, you’re going here, and the low ones then we’ll spend time re-teaching and adding new things with the ones that don’t get it yet. As far as I understand. And then, we evaluate once a week to see who goes into what group.”
Whether or not it is important to the implementation process, the teachers’ use of language associated with MTSS/RtI might be something for future study or for schools in the initial stages of implementation to consider. In this study school, language used did not appear to impede the implementation process.

**Teacher belief about source of MTSS/RtI**

In Round 1 of interviews in the fall, teachers generally believed, but were not sure, that the MTSS/RtI directive was something their principal wanted them to do, and that throughout the coming school year the details for the plan would be revealed. At that time, they had been unclear about what was exactly expected of them in implementing MTSS/RtI.

In Round 2 in the spring, interview reactions to this question clearly indicated teachers felt the principal was the MTSS/RtI implementation source. For example, responses included, “Our principal talked a lot about the expectations for PLCs and we had a couple all-district meetings about expectations”; “The principal gave us a guideline on how he wanted this to look”; and “I think specifically our principal.” Again, whether or not it is important to the implementation process that teachers know that MTSS/RtI is a state mandate, it might be something for future study or for consideration by schools in the initial stages of implementation. In this study school, it did not appear to impede the implementation process.

**Teacher sources of knowledge about MTSS/RtI**

Rosenholtz (1989) described teachers’ subjective construction of reality as part of their everyday undertakings. Her study showed that schools in which teachers have a shared consensus about the goals and organization of their work are more likely to integrate new ideas focused on student learning. The teachers at the study school seemed to have learned about MTSS/RtI from varying sources as illustrated in these responses:
Susan said, “I came from a district [out of state] where the Dufours had come several years back and we were already working with PLCs so I had some background,” and Jan responded, “He [principal] had us sit down as a whole building and he said what are the three things you want the incoming (fill in the grade) to know, we are just focusing on math in our PLC.” Patty said, “I was on a team last year that went to two conference days that we went to learn about that,” and Terry claimed, “Just through our meetings here at school.”

Learning about MTSS/RtI from divergent sources seemed to have little to no bearing on their common understanding of MTSS/RtI, and what their responsibility was in implementing it.

According to Jan,

    We CFA on Wednesday and by Wednesday PLC 2:00 you have to have those checked. Then, we group them. Our groups have changed so much. We had the low and the high group and medium group. Now we have “just don’t get how to reduce fractions.” Or, students who are “just not getting the concept of equivalent fractions.” We titled them differently every week. One week, they were just a hot mess.

Susan’s view was,

    I think the bottom line expectation is just to meet kids where they’re at. It doesn’t matter whose class they’re in, they’re all our kids, and it’s our job. The PLC is a way to help us get that job done of helping each student…well, first of all to know what the students are supposed to learn in each grade level for each topic and to be able to help them when they don’t get it, but also be able to extend them when they do get it. Just being able to know exactly what
that means, able to differentiate, just make sure each student is making progress wherever they’re starting from.

Terry’s description was, “We do the CFA, and divide them up based on that, and then they’ll be in that intervention group for a week. Then we’ll do another one, and then switch them.”

All teachers interviewed in Round 2 were able to describe the process of MTSS/RtI as it evolved at the study school, and were unambiguous about their personal and collective responsibilities. The teachers knew they were expected to come to PLC prepared with current data, to actively engage with their peers, and to implement the new plan during the coming week.

**Teacher perception about collaboration**

The study-school principal directed the grade-level teams to create norms for PLC time. In PLCs, norms represent procedures and obligations agreed upon by the team members to clarify expectations and to guide working together toward shared goals. Jan described norms this way,

> When we first began this, we wrote the norms. My group said, “Norms? What do you mean?” The principal said, “I want you to write classroom rules for your PLC,” and we laughed and said, “We’re all adults.” But, sometimes as teachers we can get off topic. So, we put in our norms that discussion will remain around topics we can affect and change. If we’re not liking what’s happening to a student at home or we’re not liking a call our administrator makes, we can’t change that, so that needs to cut. We’ll just point to it on our norms sheet and go. “Hey, oh yeah, let’s go back on topic.”

Others did not directly use the term norms, but they were certain about the use of PLC time. The teachers were united in understanding that if the principal asked how a student was
performing on a particular CFA, the teachers could provide current information backed by analyzed data from the most recent PLC meeting.

**Interview: The Principal**

According to the Blueprint (2008), “for RtI implementation to be effective, the principal must be the instructional leader. Principals must attend to the change process, support staff by emphasizing communication, and create order by providing specific routines and procedures” (p. 17). Principals are expected to stay informed about regulatory changes, communicate those to the school staff, and lead the change process. How they communicate changes sets the tone for effective change. “Almost every single study of school effectiveness has shown both primary and secondary leadership to be a factor” (Sammons, 1999). At the study school, the principal was the primary source of MTSS/RtI implementation. When asked what the staff already knew when he arrived, he said,

> Very little. I think this district . . . . which surprised me a little because I did not think we were that far ahead in [former school] but apparently we were. I had to introduce it, basically even to our curriculum coordinator the proper steps and the way to get it going. We were right at the infancy stages here so I had to explain to them what PLCs were because how they were doing them before it was a different version of a PLC without the data piece, without the assessment piece.

The researcher asked the principal whether the teachers had initially reacted as though they were insulted and untrustworthy and asked how the principal convinced them to change their methods and strategies to a system of greater accountability. The principal said he told them, “Data doesn’t lie. I’m not questioning your teaching style. I’m not questioning your approach
and how you do things. But, if you are truly doing it, then show me the numbers. That’s how the world works.”

Principals stand between teachers and reform; they are the gatekeepers of change. The study-school principal put it this way, “The district is still trying from a district stand point to get part of that Wednesday stuff, and we’re pushing back saying that we’re doing the work, it’s valuable to kids, keep the latest bouncing ball out of it, please, and give us time to do this.” He went on to add, “As long as it doesn’t become initiative overload where somebody else is trying to . . . just let them do the work.” The notion of MTSS/RtI adding to an already overtaxed system was at the forefront of both the principal’s and the teachers’ thoughts. The principal reported,

It’s their fear and my fear too because I’m constantly getting approached by people. There are people very passionate about what they do–their reading, their math, their technology–and if we had an open-door policy to everybody and say yes, we’ll pilot this, we’ll pilot that, my teachers will fight back. If they find something they believe in and value, that’s what they’ll want to protect.

At the time of this study, the teachers seemed to value the PLC time and work, and the hope it offered their students. The principal concurred, “If the teachers didn’t find value in it, it lost its integrity, and it wasn’t implemented with fidelity at all. It was a hoop that they were jumping through every Wednesday.” The researcher examined the principal’s view of collaboration among teachers at the study school. His response paralleled the teachers’ responses: that they had evolved into a culture of collaboration.

For lack of a better term, at the beginning, it’s a forced collaboration. I talked to them at some of our initial PDs that a level of trust needs to be built. It’s not
a “What are you doing better than me? Why is that? You must be a fantastic teacher. I must be a crappy teacher.” It’s just a paradigm shift of borrowing good ideas. Everybody has weaknesses; everybody has strengths. They need to as a team lean on each other. Nobody is exempt from this process either.

Our special education teachers, our Title teachers are all included.

The researcher then asked whether teachers were holding each other accountable. The principal answered without hesitation:

Absolutely. There’s a level of peer pressure now. You get the right people on the bus, if the other ones don’t step on, they’ll get left behind. The expectation whether they believe in it or don’t want to participate in it, they still have to participate in it every Wednesday. Those teachers at least from 2:30 to 4:00, the expectation is that I as a colleague am expecting the rest of my team to be sitting around with me engaged in the conversation. If they’re not, that’s my job to get them engaged or to politely coach them out the door.

The researcher concluded the principal’s interview by asking what he saw as the most dramatic difference from fall to spring. He replied:

It has been a shift in thinking from how they had traditionally done things. It’s not my kids, your kids, it’s our kids. We are collectively responsible for how our kids do in math now. I’ve insisted that not one teacher take the high kids all the time. There’s a misconception that they must be the best teacher because they have the advanced, high flyers, and I’ve got the low kids all the time. They have to rotate that all the time. This is good for kids. The one
common thing I’ve heard from my teachers this year is that “I know my kids better in math than what I’ve known before.”

Next Steps for the Study School

The Blueprint (2008) recommends that the principal and teams attend professional development activities designed to provide multiple opportunities for modeling, practice of the monitoring and decision-making process with feedback, and the opportunity to ask questions. The researcher concluded the study by asking the teachers to describe what they understood the next steps in their process to be. They shared that the district had set up three days of in-service about MTSS/RtI in the fall of the coming school year. The study school had arranged for nationally recognized experts on the topic to conduct the sessions. The principal said:

I’m looking forward to next August and September when we start again from the ground. I’m expecting a fluidity now with Wednesdays. Our problem is going to be and challenge is going to be that this year was just math. When we start moving the literacy piece in there, that’s the question I’m getting from teachers, how are we going to get this done in such a short amount of time.

I’ve told them, that’s where the technology piece comes in to where you can pre-load your data in there, have a quick conversation, move kids around, here’s our intervention, here’s how the kids have performed on assessments, talk about that in half the time. Then you move on and start talking about the literacy piece and what you’re going to do with that.

The participants seemed anxious about the work on MTSS/RtI implementation that was ahead of them, but they also seemed eager to build on the progress they had made by the end of the school year. One factor that added to their willingness to continue the improvement process was that the principal was
staying with the school district. A history of administration turnover had made the teachers wary of beginning new programs without knowing if the leadership was going to continue to promote that particular program or not.

**Themes Identified in the Analysis**

Previous research reports that, when creating codebooks for qualitative analyses, in content analysis for example, researchers can be both inductive (allowing themes, patterns, and categories to emerge from the data) and deductive (relying on previous analytical categories, obtained from a theory of reference or even an interview guide). On the other hand, they can be both at the same time (especially in mixed research designs; Creswell, 2008). The coding procedure develops as researchers identify themes and patterns in their data. (Bendassolli, 2013).

The themes from interviews and observations of this study included:

- Teachers perceptions about the source of MTSS/RtI policy.
- The multiple ways teachers had learned about MTSS/RtI
- Teachers perceptions about peer collaboration.

**Source of MTSS/RtI policy** – Only one participant teacher knew that MTSS/RtI had been mandated by the Iowa Department of Education. She knew about it because of her experience with special education. All the other teachers believed it to be a decision by the local administration. The teachers seemed to take this as a matter of being an educator. That is, often decisions directly affecting their work were made by someone else.

**Multiple sources of knowledge about MTSS/RtI** - The study-school teachers had learned about MTSS/RtI in a number of seemingly random ways. Some brought the knowledge with them from previous employment, some from conferences and workshops, and some knew what it was, but they weren’t sure
where they learned about it. As the study proceeded, this did not seem to be an issue for them because they believed the principal had a plan and timeline for implementation and the details would be sorted out during implementation.

Peer collaboration – Collaboration was the most mentioned topic when interviewing the participants. The Response to Intervention: Blueprints for Implementation published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE, 2008) describes collaboration as integral to the successful implementation of MTSS/RtI. The study-school participants were not familiar with the Blueprint (2008), yet they came to realize the impact working together, supporting each other, teaching each other had on their daily work and on student progress.

Unexpected Themes

A number of other issues worth noting from the study may provide alternative perspectives on the MTSS/RtI implementation process and guidance for future research.

*Did the leadership change from the previous year create a climate change that made the study-school teachers ready for implementation?*

It was evident from data analysis that the study-school teachers were mindful of the administrator change from the previous year. A number of them described their relationship with the previous principal as one that would not have created a culture of teacher empowerment during implementation of the MTSS/RtI model. Many teachers described an increased level of trust in the new principal because he had been a classroom teacher, and because he had previous experience with the MTSS/RtI model. Day et al. (2006) assert that identifying teachers’ mental models, both cognitively and emotionally, is central to understanding variations in teacher
effectiveness; particularly when organizational structures and teacher assumptions are “perceived to be in dynamic tension” (p. 602).

Were previous program implementations responsible for the collaborative climate, or did the study-school teachers have dispositions suited to collaboration?

A plan for addressing struggling readers in Iowa during in the early years of learning had been in place prior to implementation of the MTSS/RtI model. Iowa teachers had been trained in the Instructional Decision Making (IDM) model, and they had used it in their classrooms for a number of years. Both of these programs were designed as precursors to the MTSS/RtI implementation. Although the study-school teachers were not asked about their direct knowledge of the reading initiative or IDM, teachers made mention in their interviews of a school-wide focus on literacy, and they were versed in the tiered model of intervention.

Would the study-school teachers have collaborated and designed a process that mimics MTSS/RtI without the mandate?

Whether the study-school teachers would have collaborated and designed a process that mimics MTSS/RtI without the mandate came into question because of the prevalence of collaboration occurring, even though implementation was in the initial stages. A closer look at how the momentum of excitement around collaboration affects implementation could reveal this.

The teachers were also well into progress monitoring and documenting student progress. This could have been a result of IDM implementation, but would not explain how the new teachers knew to use the process. Each of these issues may serve to guide subsequent studies, or even highlight areas that should be considered when MTSS/RtI implementation is undertaken by other Iowa schools.
Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- What are teachers’ perceptions of and experiences with MTSS/RtI?
- What patterns emerge in teachers’ experiences and perceptions during implementation of MTSS/RtI?

Answers to the questions from this study showed that the participants’ perceptions of MTSS/RtI at the beginning of the school year altered significantly from those given at the end of the school year. Although this may seem obvious, the significance is that the perceptions changed from skepticism about the purpose of implementing MTSS/RtI to enthusiasm for implementing MTSS/RtI. The reason for this is that the study-school teachers began to see the potential for student help and growth, to appreciate the power of collaboration, and to recognize their fears did not become reality.

This study adds to the current research about teacher perception of MTSS/RtI implementation. It also contributes to further studies about how those perceptions connect to success of education change and to the ultimate goal of student growth.

Summary

This chapter discusses results of the qualitative case study of teacher perceptions and experiences related to the mandated implementation of MTSS/RtI in Iowa. One way for readers to determine the comparability of the context of one study setting to another is through thick description (Gall et al., 2007). Employment of various types of data collection including direct quotes from the participants and detailed descriptions of classroom practices provided rich, thick description of the context for implementation of MTSS/RtI in the study school. Thick description
also contributes to transferability. Many Iowa schools will find themselves going through the same process of implementation. Suggestions for optimizing the process of implementing MTSS/RtI in a mid-size Iowa school and pitfalls to avoid are detailed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bailey (2000) suggested that research on education mandates demonstrates a lack of information on teachers’ perspectives of required change processes. The purpose of this study was to examine what teachers know and understand about MTSS/RtI policy in one Iowa elementary school, how they implement MTSS/RtI in their classrooms, and how they feel it will impact their work.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss findings and offer recommendations pursuant to the results. Applicable literature about mandated policy, teacher perception of change, and MTSS/RtI implementation support the findings. The recommendations from these findings could provide guidance to other similar size schools in Iowa when implementing MTSS/RtI. The following section discusses the conclusions from the survey, interviews, and observations. Suggestions for future research and concluding remarks are included.

**The Effects of a Mandated Policy**

According the Iowa Department of Education website (IDOE) (2015), the initial focus of RtI in Iowa will be on providing evidence-based instruction in reading for kindergarten through sixth grades, and on selection of universal screening and progress monitoring tools to be used in Iowa. Under the leadership and direction of the IDOE, the education system began training Area Education Agency (AEA) and district personnel on the screening and progress monitoring tools in the spring of 2012. After elementary reading strategies have been successfully implemented, the education system will integrate mathematics and behavior into the MTSS/RtI system as well, and will eventually span grades K-12. According to the IDOE, the reason for this innovation is that the research and lessons learned from the field will have focused on the elementary level,
and how best to support students’ needs related to reading, math, and behavior. It is the intent of this study to provide some “lessons learned.”

Policy mandates place controls over teaching practices by dictating the use of “scientifically research-based methods thus reducing the craft of teaching to a set of routine technical processes” (Apple & Jungck, 1996). A report to the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (2011) stated that the Iowa plan for implementation allows districts flexibility in implementing response to intervention to meet their unique needs and available resources. Yet, the Iowa Department of Education published requirements for assessment tools MTSS/RtI.

Despite the potential for “reducing the craft of teaching” or the mixed message of “flexibility” in the face of requirements, the study-school teachers did not mention that any of these mandate requirements influenced their choices when deciding what is best for their students. Therefore, we might infer that regardless of external expectations, classroom teachers’ regard for student needs supersedes stated recommendations.

**Teacher Perceptions of Change**

Fullan (2001) purports that “teachers are in a better position to know whether they should accept, modify, or reject change” (p. 124). This holds for both externally mandated ideas or for internally innovated ones. Change, whether collective or individual, is both a cognitive and psychological process (Schein, 1996). Changing classroom practices can be difficult for teachers. It requires reflection on current practices, and, if change is to occur, replacement of those current practices with new or different ones. This most often happens within the context of mandated change.

Substantive curricular change only occurs when it begins with the teacher (Huberman, 1993) and is fundamentally concerned with the immediate needs of children. Mandated change directs

There is little evidence to suggest that teachers in the study school feel marginalized. Rather, they repeatedly expressed feelings of empowerment and trust, especially from their building principal. This is significant because they believe the principal and district administration are the mandate sources.

According to Fullan (2001), “purposeful interaction is essential for continuous improvement” (p. 124). Over the past decade, research has provided a specific model of “purposeful interaction” in schools that is known as “professional learning communities” (PLCs) (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). Prior research suggests the development of professional learning communities can alleviate conditions counterproductive to policy implementation and encourage teacher learning for policy implementation (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

PLCs seemed to be the primary setting for the study-school teachers to collaborate about what was working in their teaching, and how they planned to assess and document student progress. They seemed to be looking forward to determining which common formative assessments (CFAs) they were going to use. The teachers expressed frustration when PLC time was directed to an initiative or topic other than MTSS/RtI.

Researchers and policymakers agree that teachers need to work together to make sense of policy implementation. A professional learning community fits this need. PLCs have the potential to promote collaboration and, in this case, to embed MTSS/RtI into the routines of teaching and learning. Sharing the goal also promotes teacher buy in. Subsequently, all teachers believe they are making a meaningful contribution to the success of policy implementation and,
ultimately, to student learning. The implication for PLCs is that the work of MTSS/RtI is built on a foundation of established PLC protocol and norms.

For the study school, PLCs were given priority because the principal set them as such. He had experience with PLCs and knew they could provide the opportunity for collaboration to establish and grow. He knew this to be central to implementing the changes needed for MTSS/RtI to become part of the teachers’ routine. The principal’s intent was to get the teachers to see the value of PLC, to advocate for the time in the weekly schedule, and to protect this time from being used for anything other than its intended purpose. The administrator’s role in collaboration seemed to be balanced between directing and listening. On the one hand, he was uncompromising about PLC time and how teachers were to use the time. On the other hand, he checked in frequently to hear their concerns and to encourage good work. He has created a culture of inclusion, involvement, and communication.

**MTSS/RtI implementation**

Teachers in the study school seemed to take it for granted that the responsibility for implementation is theirs. The Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) has published a document describing the Key Components of MTSS/RtI. These include:

- Schools provide evidence-based curriculum and instruction to all learners in the general classroom.
- Schools use universal screening assessments to determine if universal instruction is sufficient for the school and for whom it is sufficient.
- Schools provide additional, evidence-based instruction and support to those learners for whom universal instruction alone is insufficient.
- Schools shall use progress-monitoring procedures for all students.
- Schools shall make informed decisions about students’ instruction and curriculum needs based on the collection and analysis of data.

Data analysis from the study school indicates evidence of each of these components as part of teacher instructional practices, and as part of a systemic approach to meeting students’ needs.
The IDOE also made available a Ten-Question Response to Intervention (RtI) School Improvement Framework. This framework asks schools to use the following ten questions to self-assess MTSS/RtI:

- Is our Universal program sufficient?
- If the Universal program is not sufficient, why isn’t it sufficient?
- How will needs identified in the Universal program be addressed?
- How will the sufficiency and effectiveness of the Universal program be monitored over time?
- Have improvements to the Universal program been effective?
- For which students is Universal instruction sufficient and not sufficient, and why?
- What specific Targeted and Intensive instruction is needed?
- How will specific Targeted and Intensive instruction be delivered?
- How will the effectiveness of Targeted and Intensive instruction be monitored?
- Which students need to move to a different level of instruction?

Again, data analysis from the study school indicates that for meaningful intervention they are using screening tools, monitoring progress, identifying students for more intensive instruction, and providing a mechanism to secure an appropriate teacher and place.

**Implications for Future Research**

The research questions yielded answers despite the small sample size, but inferences and applications to future studies should be made with caution. Patton (2002) suggests findings from small diverse samples have the potential to identify emerging themes based on shared contexts.
Certainly, a comparison could be made of existing factors including degree of collaboration, level of teacher empowerment, and administrative support.

**Practical Significance**

Practical significance is concerned with whether the results of a study are useful in the real world. The practical significance of this study lies in the rich, thick descriptions from the observations and interviews, taking the reader to the setting and providing a shared experience. It may be that educators from other small schools who are anxious about implementing MTSS/RtI will find some reassurance from this study. If they have concerns about how to structure time, how to establish norms for the use of time, whether they will be supported and provided resources, this study could provide some level of assurance that even in a small school, change, and thus, MTSS/RtI implementation, is possible.

The goal of MTSS/RtI is student growth. Student growth happens when teachers, who feel competent in their knowledge and skills, improve classroom instruction. Teachers feel confident in their knowledge and skills when administrators empower them with opportunities to share their knowledge, skills, experiences, and perceptions with each other. When teachers and administrators work together, change efforts are more easily implemented because the level of commitment and motivation are likely to be higher.

For administrators, the practical significance is that rather than focusing their energy and attention solely on accountability measures, they can achieve more by focusing on both capacity building and accountability. Administrators who foster collaboration with specific ends in mind (i.e. MTSS/RtI implementation), “generate greater lateral accountability” (Fullan, 2011, p.8). As Fullan (2011) states, “When this works gets underway it actually causes greater
moral purpose—what we call the ‘moral imperative realized’” (p. 8). Teachers working closely with teachers provides support and pressure, and this level of internal accountability makes for a better education system.

The study also reinforces the leadership traits necessary for effective change to take place. Purposefully building trust, promoting teamwork and collaboration, sharing responsibility for improvements are all requisite to bringing about educational change.

Another beneficial consequence of collaboration is that administrators who cultivate collaboration among teachers can improve teacher retention and teacher satisfaction, according to studies conducted by Susan Kardos and Susan Moore Johnson (2007). They have found that new teachers seem more likely to stay in schools that have an “integrated professional culture” in which new teachers’ needs are recognized and all teachers share responsibility for student success.

**Theoretical Significance**

As stated in Chapter 2, Literature Review, identifying the objective “reality” of educational change makes it possible to “clarify the meaning of an educational change by identifying and describing its main separate dimensions” (Fullan, 2001, p. 38). Acknowledging this understanding of “reality” sets the background for defining educational change. According to Fullan (2001), it matters that through their relationships with one another, the stakeholders (teachers) create shared meaning and coherence. This study looked at the “reality” or the perceptions and experiences of the stakeholders in one Iowa elementary school. This study adds to previous work that shows that when teachers focus on improving their practice through learning from each other, and when they are led and supported by administrators, change happens.
The researcher re-examined the simplified overview of Fullan’s change process (Fullan, 2001, p. 51), (Figure 5), provides perspective of the process documented during the school year in which this study was conducted.

![Figure 5. Researcher Design of Simplified Liner Overview of the Change Process (from Fullan 2001, p. 51).](image)

*Initiation* — The researcher began the study at the same time the study school initiated the process of MTSS/RtI implementation. According to Fullan (2001), “Initiation is the process leading up to and including the decision to proceed with implementation” (p. 53). Fullan (2001) further assumes that the initiated change “meets a need better than existing practices” (p. 53). In the case of MTSS/RtI, the “decision to proceed with implementation” was not one for the study school to make. It was mandated by the Iowa Department of Education. However, MTSS/RtI did meet a need better than existing practice, which was the reason for the mandate.

*Implementation* — According to Fullan (2001) “evidence points to a small number of key variables” that lead to successful change (p.71). These variables are need, clarity, and complexity of the change project.

Whether mandated or chosen by education stakeholders, the *need* for a particular change (MTSS/RtI) must become a priority among all the other programs and improvements. Educators must decide how important the need for change is compared to all other demands. This is not
always clear during initiation, but may become evident during implementation. In this study, the principal frequently reminded the teachers reflect whether the MTSS/RtI process was improving student learning. He let the data prove to teachers the need for implementation, the need for change.

Even though there may be agreement that change is needed, clarity about the goals and means may be a problem (Fullan, 2001, p.76). The problem of clarity intensifies when the reform is complex. Often, teachers are unsure of the essential features of the innovation. At the study school, in the fall, teachers were certain they were going to implement MTSS/RtI and changes were ahead. However, they were not clear about what they would do differently.

Complexity of the change process depends on the starting point for a group. How difficult is the change, what skills are required, how will the group’s beliefs alter are some of the many issues creating complexity during change (Fullan, 2001, p.78). At the study school, the principal had been through the MTSS/RtI implementation process at another district. The knowledge and experience from the previous school helped him design a master plan for implementation at the study school. He presented this plan early and often to the teachers. As the process began to unfold, the teachers began to understand and to trust the process, even though they knew it would mean dramatic, complex change.

Institutionalization — When the innovation becomes routine and members of the education organization use the change at the routine level, institutionalization has occurred. Institutionalization means major issues are resolved regarding resources including time and materials.

Actions that support institutionalization include: 1) sustaining commitment to implementation over time; 2) creating a space to explore and challenge assumptions so that
dissonance, disruption, or dissatisfaction do not derail implementation and success; and 3) telling the truth about what is really going on to invite efforts toward continuous improvement.

At the time of the conclusion of this study, the researcher felt the study school was still in the early stages of implementation. The principal had shared that working through the MTSS/RtI implementation process at his previous school took about four years to institutionalization. It might be worthwhile to revisit the study school after two to three years to observe whether MTSS/RtI had been institutionalized.

**Concluding Remarks**

This study was limited to participants at one Iowa elementary school. The Pre-fieldwork Survey helped elucidate current knowledge about MTSS/RtI and the sources of that information. Schools that begin implementation should do likewise and survey their staff for degree of understanding. The Blueprint (2008) suggests this step as well. This is an application of the instructional cycle on a systemic process.

Study results suggest that the teachers and the school are further along in the implementation process than anticipated. Effective implementation relies on trust and communication and the study school has established this kind of professional climate. Future research of MTSS/RtI should explore how collaboration in professional learning communities supports implementation. In conjunction with this suggestion, researchers might study correlations between years of teaching service and degree of willingness to participate in change.

The literature review for this study suggested that most studies about MTSS/RtI implementation have focused primarily on quantitative evaluation of intervention efficacy. Although more qualitative studies are being conducted, additional research directed at teacher perception would add to the understanding of how they manage MTSS/RtI implementation.
expectations. Perhaps a longitudinal study on MTSS/RtI might build sustainable practices and unchanged policies allowing all stakeholders to grasp the process.

Finally, researchers may also be interested in studying whether students feel empowered through MTSS/RtI. After all, the student is supposed to experience the most benefits from MTSS/RtI. Beyond the data that demonstrates proficiency, we might study how empowerment influences growth. In addition, broad surveys have been conducted collecting anecdotal information about how states are implementing MTSS/RtI. However, the study of variations in school culture and climate could add to the understanding of MTSS/RtI’s power to help all children learn.

The present study could have compared schools, it could have evaluated degrees of teacher knowledge and practice, or it could have investigated whether the IDOE’s plan for implementation was being met. However, it utilized a basic qualitative approach designed to examine participants’ perceptions of, and experiences with MTSS/RtI and uncover the meaning they assigned to those perceptions and experiences, as well as explore the process the study school was putting in place to implement MTSS/RtI. Merriam (2009) describes a basic qualitative research study as having been derived philosophically from constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interaction, and as being used by researchers who are interested in “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). The aim of a basic study is to improve practice. “The utility of this case study is that it encourages educators to consider additional steps in a caring educational curriculum that emphasizes communication and relationships between human beings” (Scott, 2005 in Zucker, 2009, p. 14).
Educators are fond of saying, “If I can help just one student learn, I’ve done my job.” The promise of MTSS/RtI is that it makes it possible for teachers to help all children learn. Stake and Trumbull (1982) maintain that planned change “should rely upon the experiences and intuitions of the practitioners involved” (p. 1). Schools that in the future will begin the process of implementing MTSS/RtI can rely upon the perceptions and experiences of the study-school teachers to guide them to success.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT  

Title of Study: Teacher Experience and Perceptions of State Mandated Policy and Implementation of Response to Intervention  

Principal Investigator: Marcy Hahn  

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction  
The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers in one Iowa public elementary school as they work through implementation of response to intervention (RtI) using Iowa Department of Education (IDE) guidelines.  

This study seeks information directly from teachers about their perceptions of the RtI model in the early stages of implementation.  

RtI is a classroom instructional process. In Iowa, it has four phases of implementation. The phases range from initial implementation in the general education classroom to full evaluation for special education services.  

You are being invited to participate in this study because you teach at a school that is in early stages of implementation of response to intervention.

Description of Procedures  
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a pre-study survey, participate in at least two one-on-one interviews, participate in a focus group, and allow principal investigator to observe you in your classroom.  

You will be asked to take part in at least two in-depth, one-on-one interviews, lasting approximately 1–2 hours each. The interviews will contain broad, open-ended questions that will encourage the participants to express their perceptions and experiences as a teacher.
implementing response to intervention. Attached you will find sample interview questions and protocol.

You will also be asked to participate in a focus group interview lasting approximately 1–2 hours. Attached you will find sample focus group questions and protocol.

Your responses during interviews and the focus group will be audio recorded to allow for spontaneous flow of conversation.

You will also be asked to allow the principal investigator to observe you in your classroom at times that specifically relate to implementation of response to intervention. During observation, principal investigator will complete an observation instrument aligned with procedures for implementation of response to intervention. Attached you will find a copy of the observation instrument.

Overall participation will last for approximately six months from onset of study.

Principal investigator will provide the participants the option to review transcripts from their interviews and focus groups and to redact anything that they do not want to be part of data. Principal investigator will also provide participants with a copy of the dissertation. This will become a part of public record.

**Risks or Discomforts**

Risks for participants are considered to be minimal. However, you could feel some emotional discomfort during the interview, focus group or observation.

**Benefits**

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you. However, your participation may help the principal investigator gain a better understanding of teacher perception and experience of state mandated policy and implementation of response to intervention. Prior to publication, the principal investigator will verify with you that notes taken
during interviews, focus groups, and observations are accurate and complete. The principal investigator will offer to make the final report available to you.

**Costs and Compensation**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Rights**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. While participating in the survey, interviews, focus groups, or similar methods, you can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research–related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294–4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294–3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

**Confidentiality**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- Names and emails of participants will be used solely by the principal investigator.
- Unique Participant ID Number – Every participant will be assigned an ID Number. Principal investigator will use this ID number to label surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations. Unique ID key will be kept in locked firebox in principal investigator’s home. Once data is collected, Unique ID numbers will be removed from data.
• All files, documents, and data collected for this study will be maintained on a password protected, private computer. These files, documents, and data will independently encrypted using Microsoft Office encryption system.

Although your identity will be protected to the best extent possible, the principal investigator cannot assure complete confidentiality. Someone may be able to infer your identity, as the study is with a small group of people at your school.

Questions
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study, contact Marcy Hahn, 515-954-8526 or Iowa State Faculty Advisor Joanne Marshall, 515-294-9995.

Consent and Authorization Provisions
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) _______________________

Participant’s Signature _________________________

Date ____________
APPENDIX B. PRE–FIELDWORK TEACHER PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Dear Educator:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of “Teacher Perceptions of MTSS/RtI Implementation.” The purpose of this study is to investigate general education teacher perceptions of Multi–tier Support Services (MTSS) [formerly Response to Intervention]. It is vital that the teachers and specialists who implement MTSS be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Their perceptions and opinions can help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures.

This survey will use the following terms for consistency:

- **General education**: Students are afforded an education based on the Iowa Core Standards without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for accommodations.

- **Special education**: Students are afforded an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for academic or behavioral modifications due to the presence of a diagnosed disability that negatively impacts his/her education.

- **Tiered intervention**: Struggling students are provided research–based interventions with graduating levels of intensity based on data collected over time. A student’s failure to respond appropriately to academic and/or behavioral interventions would call for changing or increasing the intensity of research–based interventions on his/her behalf.

- **Student Support Team (SST)** is a collaboration of experts and interventionists to systematically problem solve and provide research–based interventions on behalf of struggling learners. The team may be known by a variety of names or acronyms, but their common function is to document interventions and the data collected for the purpose of monitoring a student’s achievement or lack thereof.

- **Multi–tier Support Services (MTSS)** is defined by providing research–based interventions over time while progress monitoring the students’ response to those interventions. The state of Iowa recommends both duration and increased intensity of interventions to help ascertain whether a student needs further evaluation by a psychologist and/or an individualized education plan.

*Thank you for taking the time to respond to these statements.*
Directions: Please consider carefully and HIGHLIGHT ONE response to each of the following statements. Then SAVE AS your last name and email it back to marcy.hahn@simpson.edu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent’s Completed Years of Classroom Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–5 years 6–12 years 13–19 years 20+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent’s Highest Level of Academic Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science (B.S.)  Master of Education (M.Ed.)  Education Specialist (Ed.S.)  Doctor of Education (Ed.D. or Ph.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent’s Certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education  Special Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| A designated person whose sole responsibility is to carry out or facilitate SST and/or MTSS frameworks (i.e., Student Support Specialists or MTSS coach or leader) for the school.  
A contact person for SST and/or MTSS who has numerous other duties assigned (i.e., Assistant Principal, ILT, counselor, and/or grade level lead teacher) within the school. |
| Respondent’s School Has:                                                     |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am familiar with the tiered intervention model that provides more intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (MTSS).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I received adequate training prior to serving on the Student Support Team (SST).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I received adequate training prior to the implementation of Multi-tier Support Services (MTSS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I understand the purpose and operation of the Student Support Team (SST).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I consider the paperwork and documentation required for the Student Support Team (SST) as part of my intervention on behalf of the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree  Agree  No  Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I remain actively involved in the SST process when I refer a struggling student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common classroom practices for struggling learners in the general education setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Careful attention to paperwork and documentation are critical parts of the intervention process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The Student Support Team (SST) meetings are useful to me as I seek to help the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. It is my responsibility to provide the interventions for students in Student Support Team (SST).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. It should be the responsibility of others to provide the interventions and document the Multi-tier Support Services (MTSS).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting is vital for bringing parental input into the intervention plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting should produce ideas for research-based interventions for struggling learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. My input at Student Support Team (SST) meetings is both valued and desired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Most general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and the MTSS framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The Student Support Team’s (SST) primary purpose is to move students toward special education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. When I refer a student to the Student Support Team (SST), I expect that he/she will be evaluated for special education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The Student Support Team (SST) is valuable for monitoring the transition from Special Education back to the general education classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Answer Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| In your opinion, what modifications, if any, could be made to increase the effectiveness of the Student Support Team (SST) and/or Multi-tier Support Services (MTSS) framework? (Select up to THREE (3) responses) | More time to meet  
Less paperwork  
Accelerated process SST/MTSS  
Staff in-service  
In-service for intervention strategies  
More input from specialists  
Specially trained facilitators of the process  
Better team communication  
Observations of the learner by others |
| If you have recently chosen not to refer a student for SST/MTSS, please explain your reasons and/or concerns. (Select up to THREE (3) responses) | No students experiencing problems  
Have been able to deal with concerns on my own  
Do not know enough about SST/MTSS  
Not aware of how/when to facilitate SST/MTSS  
Process is too time consuming  
Results may negatively affect expectations for student  
Problem is not serious enough to document MTSS and meet with SST  
SST/MTSS often produces little improvement |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bailey Survey Questions</th>
<th>Hahn Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What is your name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Respondent’s completed years of classroom experience.</td>
<td>How many years of classroom experience have you completed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Respondent’s certification</td>
<td>What is your current certification?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am familiar with the tiered intervention model which provides more intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (RtI).</td>
<td>Tell me about your experiences with RtI in your classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 3. I received adequate training prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI).</td>
<td>What training have you had in preparation for RtI?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 6. I consider the paperwork and documentation required for the Student Support Team (SST) as part of my intervention on behalf of the student.</td>
<td>How do you manage the paperwork for SST that is associated with the tiers in RtI?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 9. Careful attention to paperwork and documentation are critical parts of the intervention process. 11. It is my responsibility to provide the interventions for students in Student Support Team (SST).</td>
<td>How do you find the time to plan for the interventions and the paperwork for the different tiers in RtI?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 5. I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education. 20. The Response to Intervention (RtI) framework prolongs the Student Support team (SST) process unnecessarily.</td>
<td>How has RtI affected students you work with getting placed in special education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 21. I am supportive of the SST process and the RtI framework and believe it to be effective for helping struggling students.</td>
<td>Have the students that you have worked with in RtI made academic progress? Using data, what is the ratio of those students who have made progress to those who have not made progress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. If you have recently chosen not to refer a student for SST/RtI please explain your reasons and/or concerns.</td>
<td>What are the main reasons that you have had for not referring a student to the RtI process for reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey Survey Questions</td>
<td>Hahn Interview Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11.</strong> In your opinion what modifications, if any, could be made to increase the</td>
<td>Since beginning this RtI project, do you feel that you are part of the RtI team at your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectiveness of the Student Support Team (SST) and/or Response to Intervention (RtI)</td>
<td>school? Please explain why or why not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>framework?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.</strong> In your opinion what modifications, if any, could be made to increase the</td>
<td>As part of the RtI team at your school, has the process changed in anyway? If so please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectiveness of the Student Support Team (SST) and/or Response to Intervention (RtI)</td>
<td>explain the changes and be specific. If not, please give some suggestions that you have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>framework?</td>
<td>for improving the process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX D. OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sequencing of the instructional period is predictable and logical.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lesson begins with a clearly defined opening to strengthen learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content specific vocabulary is developed in context.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher order thinking skills and processes are utilized in instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher order thinking skills and processes are evident in student work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction is differentiated to meet student readiness levels, learning profiles, and interests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction and tasks reinforce students’ understanding of the purpose for what they are learning and its connection to the world beyond the classroom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional goals, activities, interactions, and classroom environment convey high expectations for student achievement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students demonstrate personal efficacy and responsibility.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessments are utilized during instruction to provide immediate evidence of student learning and to provide specific feedback to students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials and resources are effectively allocated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management is conducive to student learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction is provided in a safe and orderly environment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction time is maximized.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E. PERMISSION TO USE DR. LYNN R. BAILEY’S SURVEY

CyMail

Permission to use survey questions

Bailey, Lynn <Lynn.Bailey@henry.k12.ga.us>
To: Marcy Hahn <mhhahn@iastate.edu>
Tue, Mar 25, 2014 at 9:02 AM

Hi Marcy

I would be honored for you to use my survey in your study.
You may consider this email permission to use the survey and
modify items as you deem appropriate for your study. My
reliability validation of my survey items is included in the
text of my dissertation (support from research), that may
prove helpful to you as you shape your questions.

My only request is that you please consider emailing me your
final results. I would very much enjoy reading about your
findings. All the best to you in your educational endeavors.

Lb

Dr. Lynn Bailey
lnbailey@henry.k12.ga.us
East Lake Elementary
EIP/ELA/MTSS

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=a50c847a8c&view=pt&search=inbox&msg=1... 4/16/2014
APPENDIX F. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Date: 9/11/2014
To: Marcy R. Hahn
2015 Andrews Drive
Pleasant Hill, IA 50327

From: Office for Responsible Research
Title: Teacher Experience and Perception of State Mandated Policy and Implementation of Response to Intervention
IRB ID: 14-349

Approval Date: 9/10/2014
Date for Continuing Review: 8/18/2016
Submission Type: New
Review Type: Full Committee

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans

Title of Project: TEACHER EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION OF STATE MANDATED POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Principal Investigator: Marcy R. Hahn
Degrees: B.A., M.Ed.
University ID: 55472715225
Phone: 315-934-8526
Email Address: mhahn@iastate.edu
Correspondence Address: 2015 Andrews Dr
Department: School of Education
College/Center/Institute: Human Sciences

Pl Level: Tenured, Tenure-Track, & NT Faculty
Visiting Faculty/Student
Extension to Families/Youth Specialist
Field Specialist III

FOR STUDENT PROJECTS (required when the principal investigator is a student)
Name of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty: James Marshall
University ID: 90921430613
Phone: 294-9995
Email Address: jmars@iastate.edu
Campus Address: N147 Lagonaceno
Department: CHS-SOE-Education Administration

Type of Project (check all that apply):
☐ Thesis/Dissertation
☐ Course Project
☐ Other (specify:)

Alternate Contact Person:
Email Address:
Correspondence Address:
Phone:

ASSURANCE

I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and accurate and consistent with any proposal(s) submitted to external funding agencies. Misrepresentation of the research described in this or any other IRB application may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations or/and academic misconduct.

I agree to provide proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any problems to the IRB. See Reporting Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems for details.

I agree that modifications to the approved project will not take place without prior review and approval by the IRB.

I agree that the research will not take place without the receipt of permission from any cooperating institutions, when applicable.

I agree to obtain approval from other appropriate committees as needed for this project, such as the IACUC (if the research includes animals), the IBC (if the research involves biohazards), the Radiation Safety Committee (if the research involves x-rays or other radiation producing devices or procedures), etc.

I understand that approval of this project does not grant access to any facilities, materials, or data on which this research may depend. Such access must be granted by the unit with the relevant custodial authority.

I agree that all activities will be performed in accordance with all applicable federal, state, local, and Iowa State University policies.

Signature of Principal Investigator
Date

Signature of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty
Date

I have reviewed this application and determined that departmental requirements are met, the investigator(s) has/have adequate resources to conduct the research, and the research design is scientifically sound and has scientific merit.

Signature of Department Chair
Date

For IRB
Use Only

Full Committee Review:
Category
Letter
Review Date: 8 September, 2014
Approval/Determination Date: September 16, 2014
Approval Expiration Date: August 11, 2016

RISK
Minimal
More than Minimal

Exempt per 45 CFR 46.101(b): Exempted
Not Approved:

Office for Responsible Research
Revised: 07/08/22

IRB Reviewer's Signature
Date: September 16, 2014
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)**

**Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans**

**Title of Project:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator (PI):</th>
<th>Marcy R. Hahn</th>
<th>Degrees: B.A., M.Ed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University ID:</td>
<td>55472715225</td>
<td>Phone: 515-954-8526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence Address:</td>
<td>2015 Andrews Dr, Pleasant Hill, IA 50327</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Division/Department:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College/Center/Institute:</th>
<th>Human Sciences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI Level:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visting Faculty/Scientist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Lecturer/Clinician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer/Clinician, w/Ph.D.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.S. Employee, P3 &amp; above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FOR STUDENT PROJECTS (Required when the principal investigator is a student):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty:</th>
<th>Joanne Marshall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University ID:</td>
<td>90921430613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>294-9995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jmarn@iastate.edu">jmarn@iastate.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Address:</td>
<td>N147 Lagomarcino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department:</td>
<td>CHS-SOE-Education Administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Type of Project (check all that apply):**

- Thesis/Dissertation
- Class Project
- Other (specify:)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternate Contact Person:</th>
<th>Monty Hahn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email Address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:montymarcy@gmail.com">montymarcy@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence Address:</td>
<td>2015 Andrews Dr, Pleasant Hill, IA 50327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>712-490-2992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ASSURANCE**

- I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and accurate and consistent with any proposal(s) submitted to external funding agencies. Misrepresentation of the research described in this or any other IRB application may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct.
- I agree to provide proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any problems to the IRB. See Reporting Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems for details.
- I agree that modifications to the approved project will not take place without prior review and approval by the IRB.
- I agree that the research will not take place without the receipt of permission from any cooperating institutions when applicable.
- I agree to obtain approval from other appropriate committees as needed for this project, such as the IACUC (if the research includes animals), the IBC (if the research involves biohazards), the Radiation Safety Committee (if the research involves x-rays or other radiation producing devices or procedures), etc., and to obtain background checks for staff when necessary.
- I understand that IRB approval of this project does not grant access to any facilities, materials, or data on which this research may depend. Such access must be granted by the unit with the relevant custodial authority.
- I agree that all activities will be performed in accordance with all applicable federal, state, local, and Iowa State University policies.

**Signature of Principal Investigator:**

[Signature]

Date: 5/20/2014

**Signature of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty:**

Date: (Required when the principal investigator is a student)

**Printed Name of Department Chair/Head/Director:**

[Signature]

Date:

**For IRB Use Only:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Committee Review:</th>
<th>EXPEDITED per 45 CFR 46.110(b):</th>
<th>Approval Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval Not Required:</td>
<td>Category Letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Research:</td>
<td>EXEMPT per 45 CFR 46.101(b):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Human Subjects:</td>
<td>Not Approved:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IRB Reviewer’s Signature:**

[Signature]

Office for Responsible Research
Revised: 8/15/13
Attachment #1
Email to administrators of potential schools
Dear ______

I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University, and my advisor is Dr. Joanne Marshall. My thesis is focused on implementation of RtI.

I am looking for a study school in the early phases of MTSS/RtI implementation. I wonder if you would review my proposal and consider partnering with me on my study.

I've attached an outline of my study.

I am also a professor at Simpson College. If you would like to speak to someone about my work and credibility, you are welcome to call Dr. Barb Ramos, Department Chair. I'm sure she would be willing to answer any questions you may have about me.

I, too, would welcome a conversation with you. Please feel free to call me.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy day,

Marcy Hahn
515-954-8526
Hahn IRB Application SP14

Attachment #2
Study Outline
HAHN PROPOSAL OUTLINE

What am I going to study?
This study seeks information directly from teachers about their perceptions and experiences with the RtI model in the early stages of implementation.
1. What are teachers’ perceptions of and experiences with response to intervention?
2. What patterns emerge in teachers’ experiences and perceptions during implementation of RtI?

How will I study this topic?

- Identify study school
- Enlist teacher volunteers (option to withdraw from study participation at any time)
- Conduct field work
- Analyze data
- Write up findings

Data Collection
The study will employ various types of data collection and attempt to capture authentic perceptions through the words and actions of the participants.

- Pre-fieldwork survey of teacher baseline knowledge
- Interviews with teacher participants
- Observations of teacher participants
- Exit focus interviews with teacher participants

Data Analysis
The data collected during this study will be analyzed using open coding of collected data. This process will allow the researcher to determine the emerging themes from all interviews and observations by reading transcripts numerous times. The emerging themes and their significance will be described in the final write up of this research.

What might I contribute as a consequence of this study?

- Understand the impact of change reforms on teachers
- Incorporate teacher voice in the further implementation of RtI
- Inform policy makers regarding impact of change reforms on teachers
- Allow participants opportunity to critically examine own perceptions and experiences
- Focus further studies on unique needs of middle and high school teachers when implementing RtI
Hahn IRB Application SP14

Attachment #3
Email to potential participants
Dear (teacher),

I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University, and my advisor is Dr. Joanne Marshall.
My thesis is focused on the process of implementation of response to intervention, also known as MTSS (multi-tiered support services). I am looking for study participants. If you choose to volunteer, I will ask you to complete a survey, allow me to interview on two occasions, participate in a focus group with fellow teachers at your school, and allow me to observe RtI implementation in your classroom.
As a classroom teacher, you are in a position to know best how well the implementation process is working. Your responses may be able to identify strengths and weak points with regard to the process of implementation.
Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no recourse for not participating, nor is there any compensation. Your identity will be protected. Study data will only report on the process, not on you as an individual.
I am also a professor at Simpson College. If you would like to speak to someone about my work and credibility, you are welcome to call Dr. Barb Ramos, Department Chair. I am sure she would be willing to answer any questions you may have about me.
I have attached the Informed Consent Agreement. If you choose to participate, please sign and return a pdf of this form by email.
Thank you for considering my request.

Marcy Hahn
Hahn IRB Application SP14

Attachment #4
Informed Consent Agreement
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: TEACHER EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION OF STATE MANDATED POLICY AND IMPLEMENTAION OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Principal Investigator: Marcy Hahn

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers in one Iowa public elementary school as they work through implementation of response to intervention (RtI) using Iowa Department of Education (IDE) guidelines. This study seeks information directly from teachers about their perceptions of the RtI model in the early stages of implementation.

RtI is a classroom instructional process. In Iowa, it has four phases of implementation. The phases range from initial implementation in the general education classroom to full evaluation for special education services.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you teach at a school that is in early stages of implementation of response to intervention.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a pre-study survey, participate in at least two one-on-one interviews, participate in a focus group, and allow principal investigator to observe you in your classroom.

You will be asked to take part in at least two in-depth, one-on-one interviews, lasting approximately 1-2 hours each. The interviews will contain broad, open-ended questions that will encourage the participants to express their perceptions and experiences as a teacher implementing response to intervention. Attached, you will find sample interview questions and protocol.

You will also be asked to participate in a focus group interview lasting approximately 1-2 hours. Attached you will find sample focus group questions and protocol.

Your responses during interviews and the focus group will be audio recorded to allow for spontaneous flow of conversation.

You will also be asked to allow the principal investigator to observe you in your classroom at times that specifically relate to implementation of response to intervention.
During observation, principal investigator will complete an observation instrument aligned with procedures for implementation of response to intervention. Attached you will find a copy of the observation instrument.

Overall participation will last for approximately six months from onset of study.

Principal investigator will provide the participants the option to review transcripts from their interviews and focus groups and to redact anything that they do not want to be part of data.

Once completed, a copy of the report will be shared with the study school. This will become a part of public record.

**Risks or Discomforts**

Risks for participants are considered to be minimal. However, you could feel some emotional discomfort during the interview, focus group or observation.

**Benefits**

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you. However, your participation may help the principal investigator gain a better understanding of teacher perception and experience of state mandated policy and implementation of response to intervention. Prior to publication, the principal investigator will verify with you that notes taken during interviews, focus groups, and observations are accurate and complete. The principal investigator will offer to make the final report available to you.

**Costs and Compensation**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Rights**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. While participating in the survey, interviews, focus groups, or similar methods, you can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

**Confidentiality**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However,
federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information. To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- Names and emails of participants will be used solely by the principal investigator.
- Unique Participant ID Number - Every participant will be assigned an ID Number. Principal investigator will use this ID number to label surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations. Unique ID key will be kept in locked firebox in principal investigator’s home. Once data is collected, Unique ID numbers will be removed from data.
- All files, documents, and data collected for this study will be maintained on a password protected, private computer. These files, documents, and data will independently encrypted using Microsoft Office encryption system.
- Although your identity will be protected to the best extent possible, the principal investigator cannot assure complete confidentiality. Someone may be able to infer your identity, as the study is with a small group of people at your school.

Questions
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study, contact Marcy Hahn, 515-954-8526 or Iowa State Faculty Advisor Joann Marshall, 515-294-9995.

Consent and Authorization Provisions
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) __________________________

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date __________________________
Hahn IRB Application SP14

Attachment #5
Pre-fieldwork Participant Survey
Pre-Fieldwork TEACHER PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Dear Educator:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of “Teacher Perceptions of RTI Implementation”. The purpose of this study is to investigate general education teacher perceptions of Response to Intervention (RTI). It is vital that the teachers and specialists who implement RTI be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Their perceptions and opinions can help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures.

This survey will use the following terms for consistency:

- **General education**: Students are afforded an education based on the Iowa Core Standards without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for accommodations.

- **Special education**: Students are afforded an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for academic or behavioral modifications due to the presence of a diagnosed disability that negatively impacts his/her education.

- **Tiered intervention**: Struggling students are provided research-based interventions with graduating levels of intensity based on data collected over time. A student’s failure to respond appropriately to academic and/or behavioral interventions would call for changing or increasing the intensity of research-based interventions on his/her behalf.

- **Student Support Team (SST)** is a collaboration of experts and interventionists to systematically problem solve and provide research-based interventions on behalf of struggling learners. The team may be known by a variety of names or acronyms, but their common function is to document interventions and the data collected for the purpose of monitoring a student’s achievement or lack thereof.

- **Response to Intervention (RTI)** is defined by providing for research-based interventions over time while progress monitoring the students response to those interventions. The state of Iowa recommends both duration and increased intensity of interventions to help ascertain whether a student needs further evaluation by a psychologist and/or an individualized education plan.

*Thank you for taking the time to respond to these statements.*
### Perception Survey

**Directions:** Please consider carefully and circle ONE response to each of the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am familiar with the tiered intervention model which provides more intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (RTI).</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I received adequate training prior to serving on the Student Support Team (SST).</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I received adequate training prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I understand the purpose and operation of Student Support Team (SST).</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I consider the paperwork and documentation</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirement</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I remain actively involved in the SST process when I refer a struggling student.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common classroom practices for struggling learners in the general education setting.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Careful attention to paperwork and documentation are critical parts of the intervention process.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The Student Support Team (SST) meetings are useful to me as I seek to help the student.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. It is my responsibility to provide the interventions for students in Student Support Team (SST).</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. It should be the responsibility of others to provide the interventions and document the Response to Interventions (RTI).</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting is vital for bringing parental input into the intervention plan.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting should produce ideas for research-based interventions for struggling learners.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. My input at Student Support Team (SST) meetings is both valued and desired.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Most general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The Student Support Team's (SST) primary purpose is to move students toward special education.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. When I refer a student to Student Support Team (SST), I expect that he/she will be evaluated for special education.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The Student Support Team (SST) is valuable for monitoring the transition from Special Education back to the general education classroom.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Disagree Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Answer Response</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, what modifications, if any, could be made to increase the effectiveness of the Student Support Team (SST) and/or Response to Intervention (RTI) framework? (Select up to THREE (3) responses)</td>
<td>◇ More time to meet</td>
<td>◇ SST/RTI Staff in-service</td>
<td>◇ More input from specialists</td>
<td>◇ Better team communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◇ Less paperwork</td>
<td>◇ In-service for intervention strategies</td>
<td>◇ Specially trained facilitators of the process</td>
<td>◇ Observations of the learner by others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you have recently chosen not to refer a student for SST/RTI, please explain your reasons and/or concerns. (Select up to THREE (3) responses)</td>
<td>◇ No students experiencing problems</td>
<td>◇ Do not know enough about SST/RTI</td>
<td>◇ Process is too time consuming</td>
<td>◇ Problem is not serious enough to document RTI and meet with SST</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◇ Have been able to deal with concerns on my own</td>
<td>◇ Not aware of how/when to facilitate SST/RTI</td>
<td>◇ Results may negatively affect expectations for student</td>
<td>◇ SST/RTI often produce little improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hahn IRB Application SP14

Attachment #6
Teacher Interview
# INTERVIEW FOR TEACHERS

Date: ______________________

Interviewee (Unique ID): ______________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bailey Tarver Survey Question</th>
<th>Hahn Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am familiar with the tiered intervention model which provides more intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (RtI).</td>
<td>What does RtI mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 5. I understand the purpose and operation of Student Support Team (SST).</td>
<td>What does SST mean to you?  What is its purpose?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Respondent’s School has a designated person whose sole responsibility is to carry out or facilitate SST and/or RtI frameworks.</td>
<td>Who in responsible for RtI in your school?  Is this their only job in the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Respondent School has a designated person whose sole responsibility is to carry out or facilitate SST and/or RtI frameworks.</td>
<td>How do you contact and meet with this person?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 5. I understand the purpose and operation of Student Support Team (SST). 6. I consider the paperwork and documentation required for the Student Support Team (SST) as part of my intervention on behalf of the students.</td>
<td>How do SST and RtI work together?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 8. Research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common classroom practices for struggling learners in the general education setting.</td>
<td>What reading interventions are you familiar with for struggling learners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 8. Research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common classroom practices for struggling learners in the general education</td>
<td>How do you progress monitor for struggling readers?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>11. It is my responsibility to provide the interventions for students in Student Support Team (SST).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>13. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting is vital for bringing parental input into the intervention plan. 14. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting should produce ideas for research-based interventions or struggling learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>16. Most general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and the RtI framework. 21. I am supportive of the SST process and the RtI framework and believe it to be effective for helping struggling students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>16. Most general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and the RtI framework. 21. I am supportive of the SST process and the RtI framework and believe it to be effective for helping struggling students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>18. When I refer a student to SST, I expect that he/she will be evaluated for special education. 20. The Response to intervention (RTI) framework prolongs the Student Support Team process unnecessarily.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attachment #7
Consent to Participate in Focus Group Study
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: TEACHER EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION OF STATE MANDATED POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Principal Investigator: Marcy Hahn

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not to participate in a focus group discussion. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers in one Iowa public elementary school as they work through implementation of response to intervention (RtI) using Iowa Department of Education (IDE) guidelines. This study seeks information directly from teachers about their perceptions of the RtI model in the early stages of implementation. RtI is a classroom instructional process. In Iowa, it has four phases of implementation. The phases range from initial implementation in the general education classroom to full evaluation for special education services.

You are being invited to participate in this focus group because you teach at a school that is in early stages of implementation of response to intervention.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in a group discussion with other teachers at your school. This focus group is expected to take 1-2 hours. The questions will be about your school’s implementation of response to intervention. Following are some examples of the questions we will discuss during the group.

QUESTIONS
How is the RtI process in the schools in your school district managed?
How are teachers trained for RtI?
Explain the paperwork required for your school district’s RtI process.
How does SST, RtI, and special education work together? Do you believe that teachers understand this connection?
What do you perceive to a strength and weakness of the RtI implementation in your school district? What do you feel are some next steps for modifying the RtI process implementation in your school in order to increase its effectiveness?
This will be a group discussion and others present will know what you say. However, because your confidentiality is something we are committed to protecting, we will use only first names during the discussion, and each participant will be asked to not reveal the identity of anyone else or to discuss our conversation with others. Once completed, a copy of the report will be shared with the study school.

**Risks or Discomforts**

Risks for participants are considered to be minimal. However, you could feel some emotional discomfort while discussing the questions during the focus group.

**Benefits**

If you decide to participate in this focus group, there may be no direct benefit to you. However, your participation may help the principal investigator gain a better understanding of teacher perception and experience of state mandated policy and implementation of response to intervention. Prior to publication, the principal investigator will verify with you that notes taken from the focus groups are accurate and complete. The principal investigator will offer to make the final report available to you.

**Costs and Compensation**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Rights**

Participating in this focus group is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the focus group or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. While participating in the focus groups, you can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

**Confidentiality**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.
To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- Names and emails of participants will be used solely by the principal investigator.
- Unique Participant ID Number - Every participant will be assigned an ID Number. Principal investigator will use this ID number to label surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations. Unique ID key will be kept in locked firebox in principal investigator’s home. Once data is collected, Unique ID numbers will be removed from data.
- All files, documents, and data collected for this study will be maintained on a password protected, private computer. These files, documents, and data will independently encrypted using Microsoft Office encryption system.
- Participant identities will remain confidential in the final report and principal investigator will make every effort to refrain from use of any details that might identify the participants or the study school. *Although we are protecting your identity to the best extent possible, we cannot assure complete confidentiality. Someone may be able to infer your identity, as the study is with a small group of people at your school.*

Questions

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information *about the study*, contact Marcy Hahn, 515-954-8526 or Iowa State Faculty Advisor Joann Marshall, 515-294-9995.

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this focus group, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the focus group.

Participant’s Name (printed) ____________________________________________

__________________________________________

Participant’s Signature  Date
Hahn IRB Application SP14

Attachment #8
Observation Instrument
OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

Date:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sequencing of the instructional period is predictable and logical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lesson begins with a clearly defined opening to strengthen learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content specific vocabulary is developed in context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher order thinking skills and processes are utilized in instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher order thinking skills and processes are evident in student work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction is differentiated to meet student readiness levels, learning profiles, and interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction and tasks reinforce students’ understanding of the purpose for what they are learning and its connection to the world beyond the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional goals, activities, interactions, and classroom environment convey high expectations for student achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students demonstrate personal efficacy and responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessments are utilized during instruction to provide immediate evidence of student learning and to provide specific feedback to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials and resources are effectively allocated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management is conducive to student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction is provided in a safe and orderly environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction time is maximized.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>