Assessing Response To Intervention By The Extent To Which Tier II Supports Impacted Student Growth: The Story Of Response To Intervention (RtI) Practices In One Urban School District

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ASSESSING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION BY THE EXTENT TO WHICH TIER II SUPPORTS IMPACTED STUDENT GROWTH: THE STORY OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) PRACTICES IN ONE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

A PROGRAM EVALUATION

Tammy Saleem

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

In the Foster G. McGraw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University
A THREE-PART DISSERTATION

ASSESSING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION TIER II BY THE EXTENT TO WHICH TIER II SUPPORTS IMPACTED STUDENT GROWTH: THE STORY OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) PRACTICES IN ONE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

ELEVATING THE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION FRAMEWORK: POSITIONING DATA TO FORGE CHANGE NEEDED FOR STRONGER RTI PRACTICES

DISTRICT SOLUTIONS FOR RESOURCE EFFECTIVENESS: A LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of Education

Tammy Saleem
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to evaluate Response to Intervention (RtI) Tier II data and to determine its impact on student growth. Following the Patton (2008) utilization focused program evaluation model, information learned about staff practices with data in Tier II became available to users. A staff survey, statistical analysis of Tier II data, and an RtI form evaluation informed the program evaluation. Based on the evaluation of Tier II data concerns for this level of support were raised around its impact on student growth. Finally, Tier II data may not have been attended to sufficiently with implications for its future ability to safeguard against disproportionality. Recommendations to improve Tier II as an organizational tool were identified and shared with the district superintendent.
Dissertation Organization Statement for Binding

This document is organized to meet the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement with a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

**Works Cited**


6.20.16
Preface

I began my doctoral studies in Educational Leadership at National Louis University in January 2015. By this time in my career I had worked extensively with a range of data used in educational decision making activities and purposed to facilitate special education supports for students. In addition, I had just completed 1 year as the Teacher Coordinator administrator over a team of special education providers (i.e., special education teachers, paraprofessionals, behavior analyst, speech and language pathologist, and physical therapist) at a private school educational facility. Overall, this position allowed me to work closely with teaching staff as they planned lessons and activities for students and paraprofessionals based on data entries notating student growth trajectories.

As Teacher Coordinator I assisted teams to develop Individual Education Programs (IEPs) for annual and triennially evaluation intervals and to conduct numerous activities that impacted instruction for students. For example I supported teacher efforts of monitoring data entries, assisted staff to develop instructional experiences for students, directed teacher attention to specific data noted in IEPs on student strengths and weaknesses, and directed teachers to use graphing as a means of illustrating progress toward Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. Finally, I trained classroom teams on writing parent friendly narratives in IEP documents using multiple data sources including the Illinois Learning Standard, and reports provided by special education providers including school psychologist, speech pathologist, school social worker, and any other related service providers what framed their evaluations of student learning and needs.
Another professional experience which also highlighted my experiences with data included the position of Program Supervisor over special education services. While in this position, one expectation included fulfilling the role of special education team representative on the RtI team. As the special education RtI team representative I was one of multiple RtI team members with the shared responsibility of reviewing student data, providing feedback on student responsiveness to interventions, and contributing to next step activities within the context of the Tier III framework of supports.

The data experiences that followed with my new position were as notable as the three supervisory responsibilities that I assumed while working as the new school administrator and district representative over special education service. Extended responsibilities included principal over fourth and fifth grade levels, and RtI administrator. Data used in decision making activities were consistent special education as special education rules and regulations of are informed by state and federal special education policies. I also learned that individual school districts chose their RtI model of service delivery.

RtI provided by the Progressive School District included three tiers of support. Tier I and Tier II supports were provided by the general education teacher. Tier III supports were influenced by special education teachers, yet provided by reading specialist. Tier II supports were provided via supplemental instruction given to small groups of students taught in general education settings. Supplemental support experiences, often led by paraprofessionals, were provided under the supervision of the general education classroom teachers. Tier II supports documented in lesson plans and observed in small group activities during formal classroom observations provided insight
into data generating activities. Serving the multiple administrator roles including the overseer of RtI required more information about its overall data and framework processes to support district overall goals on student academic success. Yet, although the extent of my data skill sets were acquired from years of experiences as special education professional guided by special education mandated procedures with data, I had already developed a lens for data use consistent from special education roles. Less established when taking on the position of RtI administrator was the understanding of data used to facilitate RtI processes.

In closing, the value of the dissertation study experience increased my knowledge and skills for leading RtI in a public education institution framed by the struggles of historically marginalized students. By understanding the dual role of RtI Tier II data to characterize student needs and to draw attention to concerns within RtI operation a new pathway for success was possible. I believed that staff capacity to provide supports was contingent upon their skills with data within an RtI construct and the value district leadership held for RtI as a key factor in student growth. The value of the dissertation research also provided clarity in the difference between the roles of administrator and district leader with the latter expected to hold a macro level view of district needs in order to forge solutions when faced with challenges to its success. While RtI provided the construct for student and staff success, its experiences would not necessarily lead to success without strong leadership capacity to understand RtI, particularly Tier II supports.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I am grateful to God the most high for sustaining me and for keeping my spirits high throughout this research journey. To Ra’oof, my husband I appreciate your listening to my “ah ha” moments about the research outcomes and being supportive in moments of frustration. To Aisha, Ahmad and Jannah, my adult children- I appreciate that each of you understood my need to complete this journey. I also have to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Harrington Gibson, my dissertation chair, for assuring me the difficult was doable and to trust the process. I am also appreciative of the hard work done by my dissertation chair and committee to ensure I received valuable feedback and guidance throughout this journey. Lastly, I am sincerely thankful to Dr. A. Rice for taking interest and dedicating time to work with me through the action research activities. Your efforts allowed me to deepen my experiences with RtI and for that I appreciate your care and support.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Response to Intervention (RtI) Overview

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 was authorized in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Significant with this reauthorization was the introduction of Response to Intervention (RtI). As explained by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 2005), federal education policy makers introduced RtI to support increased learning and “appropriate progress” (NJCLD, 2005, p 249) from instructional experiences provided for students who attended public schools. Manifestations of RtI in general education emerged in practices that increased learning such as, “quality instruction, good teaching practices, differentiated instruction, and tiered intervention experiences” (NJCLD, 2005, p 251). Equally important, NJCLD (2005) pointed out that policy makers intended that RtI include a process to judge its success. Based on acceptable measures of progress identified for students as set by RtI providers the means for judgment was met. Per the intended role for RtI in educational experiences, student growth was influenced by RtI from its position as an embedded educational experience. Two areas of importance drove my interest for this conducting a study on RtI: to determine if its experiences were sensitive to the needs of district students and to determine if its experiences were aligned to district goals for student academic achievement.

Before delving into the research proper, a thorough understanding of how districts conceptualized their individual RtI processes was important to this study. Metcalf (n.d.), RTI Action Network author, explained that planning of RtI tier processes were determined by schools. The NJCLD (2005) explained that districts conceptualized RtI
through various components: a few key components included, the structure of tiered supports, the model of service delivery, the extent that supports align to individual student needs, criteria that mobilizes student movement between tiers, resources and designated time to conduct decision making activities. By focusing on the needs of students, schools used RtI supports including Tier II supports to address deficient reading skills. District responsibility for conceptualizing RtI was central to its success in supporting the individual needs of its students. The relationship between Tier components and decision making activities were two components that districts use to conceptualize their model of RtI.

In addition districts have access to resources for planning and developing RtI on individual state education agency (SEA) websites to support in developing their conceptualization of RtI. For example, the SEA that governs education in Illinois, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) included information about the Illinois Response to Intervention (I-RtI) Network on its website. The I-RTI information identified three essential components of RtI, including: (a) a multi-tiered system of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and interventions; (b)a problem-solving method for decision-making at each tier, and (c) use of data to inform instruction at each tier. The SEA recognized RtI as a framework of processes that were both systemized to support a variety of stakeholders (e.g., teachers and students) and intermittently linked by critical data based decision activities.

Many RtI researcher scholars, including VanderHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson (2007), Shapiro and Clemens (2009), and the NJCLD (2005) drew attention to the data based decision component of RtI noting the choice of data used influenced decision
making activities. For example, “student performance data” and “curriculum-based measurement” (CBM) were individual data sources used to evaluate intervention effects on identified areas of need for individual students. VanderHeyden et al. (2007) explained that, “In theory, if the components are effective, then the overall process would be expected to produce results; however, the question of whether the overall process is effective must also be addressed” (p. 226). VanderHeyden et al., (2007 also pointed out the effects of the RtI individual components were not sufficient to judge the whole effect of RtI processes. Also worth noting, VanderHeyden et al., (2007) drew attention to RtI as a system of supports that individually contributed to the final outcome by emphasizing that one component was insufficient to represent the whole of its impact. I would also add the human element operating RtI was an area to explore when the effect of RtI processes fell short of achieving intended goals for students.

In conclusion, the conceptualization of RtI in school districts and their decisions involving the use of RtI components manifest in its system of supports and patterns of subsequent student outcomes. According to Searle (2010) and Hughes and Dexter (2011), and the NLCLD (2005) assessment outcomes used to inform instructional decisions and the adjustment of interventions also provided insight into RtI practices. RtI experts, Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez and Moore (2014) explained the educational reform cultivated by RtI, influenced teacher pedagogy practices, yet the extent had not been studied prior to this study. This study examined the Tier II component of RtI per its impact on student outcomes and the human element of engagement with its components to gain a better understanding of the extent of its impact on student needs.
My Connection to the RtI Evaluation

I am evaluating the RtI at the school where I once served as the RtI administrator while also serving in other administrative roles as discussed earlier in this study. Before taking the role as RtI administrator, the district superintendent and I engaged in a brief discussion concerning my familiarity with RtI. Prior to working in the Progressive School District (Progressive School District (a pseudonym used to protect confidentiality of study participants) I recalled my experience with RtI gained from working in another school district and shared it with the superintendent.

My new experience with RtI, comparatively speaking, was substantively different from my previous experiences with RtI. In my new experience I was the second administrator to oversee RtI since its inception and my access to early inception paperwork was limited to a few documents. Equally significant was the division of my administrative responsibilities during the time that I served as RtI administrator in the new district. More specifically, my administrative responsibilities were divided between the RtI leadership role and the Special Education District Representative role. As the special education administrator I had responsibility over all special education services and subsequent interrelated processes.

From my understanding of RtI, it introduced and supported the norming of new teacher practices as a result of its framework processes. As such, I believed learning more about RtI and its overall utility to advance student achievement would support school administrator efforts to forge successful RtI practices, as it was their role to make decisions about building level RtI framework processes.
Purpose

The purpose of this program evaluation study was to increase awareness of Tier II supports, learn about its impact on student growth and to empower school leadership with increased knowledge about RtI and its capacity to support district goals for student success. During my initial interview with the district superintendent expressed was a concern centered on district ability to meet specific State Performance Plan Indicators that addressed disproportionate practices. When seeking support from the superintendent in the following school year to conduct a program evaluation, I proposed that since RtI impacted student learning it was indirectly a factor to consider in disproportionate practices. The question that needed to be addressed centered on whether or not current RtI processes in the district safeguarded against disproportionality. By examining Tier II RtI operations and data, I proposed that more would be learned about processes that facilitated student growth from data already generated from RtI processes.

In their policy brief, RtI scholars, Reschly and Garnett (2009), distinguished the driver of student growth in RtI from interventions. Put another way, Reschly and Garnett (2009) argued that RtI was not the intervention; rather, it was a strategy for improvement reliant on data and evaluation of outcomes, which informed intervention selections for all students and certain student subgroups. As a school leader, it is, therefore, important for me to be aware of how RtI operates purposely to support district goals with particular attention to its compliance with state indicators of disproportionality.

As the majority of my professional educator experiences were framed by special education roles and practices around data analysis, I understood RtI from a broader
perspective in terms of how data was the insightful output of its operations and processes. I believed that many leaders tasked to supervise RtI are unevenly versed in RtI Tiered processes and, as such had the potential to inadvertently fuel conditions of disproportionality. Finally, I believed the shift away from intuitive practices to data-informed practices—promoted by RtI—to inform instruction in education was an adaptation that educators were slow to embrace after previously using data for the purpose of predicting student performances. Evaluating educator practices and knowledge about RtI determined the extent of its success and targeted areas for future improvement.

**Rationale**

I believed that by examining a critical area of RtI generated by Tier II data, it was probable that I would gain a greater understanding about its influence on student growth. Equally important, without a greater understanding for RtI less was known about the degree that existent weaknesses shaped its practices. The need to learn more about RtI provided insight into its risks and successes as a district operation. A review of RtI operations also presented the opportunity to evaluate Tier II data with implications for future leadership actions.

RtI Action Network research scholar, Matthew Burns (n.d.), drew attention to the ethical dilemma faced by researchers if control groups were used to study the value of RtI to student success. The research scholar pointed out the problem of withholding supports from a control group while comparing the impact of RtI on students who had received its supports. The alternative to studying the effects of RtI, according to Burns (n.d.), was to conduct a study on the sum of its components as an indicator of the effect of the whole.
For this study a focus on the Tier II component of supports was deemed sufficient to gain greater insight into its impact on student growth.

In consideration of concerns raised around disproportionality, an examination of RtI Tier II promised to reveal weak areas leading to the potential of disproportionate practices. Overall, goals of improving RtI and revealing any weakness leading to disproportionality each provided the rationale for conducting a program evaluation of RtI. Dr. John Hosp (n.d.), researcher and contributor to the online RtI resource, “RtI4 success,” asserted that core components of RtI potentially served the purpose of addressing disproportionality. Hosp (n.d.) explained further that while traditional evidence of disproportionality was determined by the numbers of student placements in special education categories, RtI had a prominent role in student performance outcomes. According to Hosp (n.d.), RtI components reduced disproportionality in screening assessments and decisions through its processes; implied in his statement was the critical role RtI had to impact student learning outcomes.

Overall my rationale for conducting a program evaluation on RtI in the Progressive School District centered on uncovering areas that needed improvement since it had not evolved since its inception in 2012. The extent to which staff held understandings of RtI had shaped their practices had not been explored prior to this study. Researchers Castillo, Dedrick, Stockslager, March, Hines, and Yin Tan (2015) drew attention to the understanding of RtI tenets and decision-making aspects of RtI processes as crucial for impacting student outcomes. These researchers explained that RtI implementation was subject to teachers’ “beliefs, skills, and experiences” (Castillo, et al.
Practices with data along with an assessment of staff beliefs were proposed to demonstrate an extent of the impact of RtI on student growth.

Goals

The overarching goal of this program evaluation research was evaluate RtI Tier II data and its readiness to support student growth. The goals set for the program evaluation were designed to inform leadership and key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals, special education providers, parents, school administrators, and district leadership) on impact of RtI Tier II supports on student growth. Program evaluation expert, Michael Patton (2008) described various types of program evaluation models. The “utilization focused” program evaluation was selected for its utility to generate new information for users. Patton (2008) pointed out that program evaluations should determine if processes were achieving what they were intended to achieve and if participants will be different because of new data. As researcher and educator practitioner, I proposed an analysis of RtI Tier II data for the purpose of producing information about RtI processes was served by the utilization-focused program evaluation. Information generated from the research study was intended to provide new information previously unknown to the users which in this study were administrators.

Research Questions

The program evaluation promised to take a closer look at RtI Tier II data and assess the health of this level of support in the Progressive School District. Three research questions guided my probe of the 2015-2016 RtI practices. The questions reflected the interest of school administrators to learn more about RtI—in particular, whether it worked to safeguard against the disproportionate practices associated with
culturally diverse and minority students. I focused on exploring if RtI Tier II practices could lead to the overrepresentation of referrals from any one student population subgroup for special education services. The three research questions were as follows:

1. To what extent did RtI Tier II demonstrate readiness to operate effectively by providing opportunities and experiences for staff to impact student growth?

2. To what extent did RtI Tier II data trigger opportunities to contemplate supports that varied by the needs of students?

3. To what extent had staff applied knowledge to conduct RtI activities?

The selected questions facilitated a deeper dive into RtI practices in the Progressive School District. The questions also framed consideration of RtI processes and the competencies of school leadership in leading staff to adapt new practices based on data generated from their current practices.
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

Introduction to Program Evaluation Concerns

Three areas that guided the literature review were chosen to provide additional insightful knowledge about RtI: (a) federal policies, (b) closer examination of RtI provisions, and (c) challenges around RtI. The first area, federal education policies, emerged from the rise in inequitable practices from varied general education experiences. Inequitable general education practices were exemplified by several realities: (a) growing trends toward placements in special education services; (b) an increased trend of students who received special education services per disability category; and (c) data on the disability distribution across ethnicities, which set the stage to examine disproportionate practices in special education. Notably, practices leading to special education were not buffered by subsequent, substantive supports designed to intervene and possible distinguish at-risk students from students with special needs until RtI was introduced. Individually, the three trending phenomena were taken on by several federal education policy enactments, including policy iterations which led to current special education legislation policy and subsequent changes introduced in the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA).

The 2002 general education legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), ushered in additional changes to general education practices, including attention to accountability and penalties when school districts failed to meet certain performance criteria. A significant change introduced with the 2004 IDEIA was the introduction of Response to Intervention (RtI). The significance of RtI was its focus as on both increasing and tracking student progress toward NCLB objectives. More specifically, RtI was expected
to increase teacher interactions with student data, thus assisting teachers in becoming more accountable and assisting districts at meeting accountability criteria per NCLB policy. Overall, as RtI scholar and online author Wedl (2005) explained, RtI was distinguished by new practices requiring teachers to use data for improving instruction and for special education identification criteria. According to Wedl (2005), a special education referral process requirement included ruling out inadequate instruction as a cause of student academic failure. RtI, as a process of supports embedded into instruction elevates the significance of its success to impact student growth.

Arguably, the result of federal education policymaker considerations of massive compilations of long-term data—as opposed to trending public school data—has shown a strong link between traditional educational experiences and low outcomes for many vulnerable student populations. The degree of effect of traditional education experiences, as framed by staff capacities and practices was reflected by positive and adverse student outcomes; this data also revealed the extent to which targeted RtI practices led to positive change for the Progressive School District. Furthermore, data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) noted the use of RtI in eligibility trends of students identified for specific learning disabilities (SLD).

The second area covered in the literature review focused on RtI with attention to processes designed to infuse change and address the phenomenon of disproportionality. Hosp (n.d.), a RtI scholar and writer for the RtI Action Network, explained that RtI offered a multi solution approach designed to change general education practices, to increase in student growth outcomes, and to address disproportionality. Additionally, two RtI models were examined along with information on pros and cons of each of the two
RtI models by researchers. Closer examination of Tier II RtI practices were also a focus in this section and offered opportunities to explore patterns of general education practices at the Tier II of supports that enabled or constricted student growth. This information supported the evaluation of specific practices and contributed to a new understanding of how this tier impacted RtI success.

The third area covered in the literature review focused on issues the researcher raised about gaps in RtI evolution that created barriers to its premise of disrupting ineffective general education practices. For example, Gerber (2005), an education researcher and RtI scholar, lamented that RtI success was linked to teacher skill sets, noting that variance in teacher skill sets resulted from outside factors such as, effort, motivation and the amount of time given to individual students. Gerber (2005) explained how the variances in teacher applied skills during RtI experiences affected student learning. In terms of RtI and the program evaluation, the alternative to knowing the effects of teacher variances is to use data generated from RtI processes, in this instance, Tier II. By using Tier II data more insight was gained into the variance in skills used to support students in grade level RtI experiences.

In summary, each of the three areas of inquiry included in the literature review section deepened the understanding of RtI as a multi-tiered support system and its reliance on data to influence new practices. The literature review provided a context for understanding the landscape which RtI was juxtaposed over, in terms of the historical conditions in public education and emphasized the need for leadership to educate itself on RtI processes and procedures to lead successful implementation practices.
Three Federal Education Policies

Throughout the history of public education in America, federal education policies have worked to facilitate change in public schools. Notable change in educational experiences introduced change through experiences and practices with projections to impact all students attending public schools. Education policies reflected both general education and special education policymakers’ ideals and corresponding provisions to support education success. For example, Rueda, Klinger, Sager, and Velasco (2008) explained that the *Education for All Children Handicapped Act* (EACHA) legislated into practice a policy that ensured students with disabilities received an education comparable to that of their nondisabled peers. Regarding changes to education practices, Rueda et al. (2008) further noted the 1975 EACHA, later renamed in 1997 as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), included a specific provision that mandated placement practices aimed at providing equity in education for minority and immigrant students with disabilities.

Shortly after the 1975 EACHA enactment, the 1983 Nation at Risk report followed drawing attention to the quality of education in public schools. The 1983 report also ushered into practice a plethora of changes with an emphasis on ensuring students had rigorous educational experiences. In that era, the issue of access to general education through placement practices for all students was beginning to unfold. Rueda et al. (2008) explained that unfair practices involving execution of the 1997 IDEA mandate at the school level led to unfair placement causing less access to their peers.

Yet other practices also influenced the introduction of the 2004 RtI initiative. Regarding changes to education practices, Rueda et al. (2008) noted the 1975 EACHA,
later renamed in 1997 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, targeted placements practices aimed at minority and immigrant students with disabilities. Shortly after the 1975 EACHA was enacted the 1983 Nation at Risk report which drew attention to the quality of education in public schools and ushered a plethora of changes intending to prepare students for rigorous educational experiences. While the public schools across the nation prepared to improve educational practices the issue of access for all students was beginning to unfold. Rueda, et al. (2008) further explained that prior to the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act many students with disabilities were denied access to education in their respective local schools and instead received their education in institutions.

Implications for schools seeking to ensure “adequate instruction” as included in a provisional clause of the EACHA were arguably high according to U.S. Government data. Closer examination of decisions directly related to special eligibility practices are illustrated in two figures sourced by the NCES (2015).

Figure 1 displays data taken from the U.S. Department of Education; the NCES illustrated percentages of ethnicities represented across four disability categories during the 2013-2014 school year. As it was related to the utility of RtI, the implications were substantive. The data showed a growing trend of diversity in schools based on the ethnicities represented in the category of SLD. General education instruction prior to eligibility determination was also implicated by questions of effectiveness and the presence of early prevention practices. Interestingly, as shown in Figure 1, the three highest percentages of students’ ethnicities identified as SLD reflected students from Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan Native backgrounds.
Comparatively, for those students in the disability category of Speech and Language Impairment (SLP), the three highest percentages of students’ ethnic identities were Asian, White (non-Hispanic), and Hispanic students. No information distinguished White (non-Hispanic) students as having a second language other than English or likewise determined that Asian and Hispanic students spoke a native language other than English.

**Figure 1.** Disability Distribution Across Ethnicities During 2013-2014. Source: NCES. Available at [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator/rbd.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator/rbd.asp)

**Disproportionality**

Data displayed in Figure 1 provides a context for understanding the rationale of using RtI for the prevention of, or solution to, a system challenged by an increasing trend of students identified with SLD. Furthermore, Figure 1 loosely suggests that in school year 2013-2014—9 years after the inception of RtI—four of seven ethnicities reflected in highest distribution of students identified with SLD were Pacific Islander (44), Hispanic (43), American Indian/Alaska Native (42), and Black (38). In the context of
disproportionate practices, RtI instructional and interventional successes were designed to positively impact growth and support learning, including that of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Educator Hodgkinson (2001) studied changing racial statistics in the United States and noted significant increases in minority student populations enrolled in public schools. Additionally, high mobility rates not explained by changing student enrollment numbers exemplified the constant movement of students. Certainly, teachers faced with diverse student populations would be expected to make data-driven adjustments to instructional experiences considering challenges presented from trends of instable student mobility behaviors.

**The 2002 No Child Left Behind Federal Legislation**

Education researchers and policy scholars, Dee and Jacob (2010), explained the NCLB federal education policy that emerged from the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). According to Dee & Jacob (2010), NCLB expanded the impact of federal legislation over state education agencies when it mandated that each school district implement an accountability system. Dee and Jacob (2010) further explained that NCLB influenced “student achievement and affected instructional practice, and school organization” (p. 150) as a result of embedded complex accountability school practices. Dee and Jacob proposed the general premise behind accountability polices (e.g., NCLB) were mobilized by targeting performance outcomes to influence shifts in behavior expected of students, teachers, and schools to align with policy goals for student performance. They also explained that NCLB distinguished achievement from policy mandated goals noting the latter referred to scoring results of traditionally disadvantaged student populations.
By policy-induced gains, Dee and Jacob (2010) explained that accountability policies mobilized change through output-based incentives embedded in policy mandates. According to these school researchers, accountability policies operated on the presumption that public schools somehow fell short of both educational objectives and desires of parents and voters. Wang, Beckett, and Brown (2006) conducted a review of research articles that examined the assessment accountability aspect of the NCLB reform policy. In contrast to Dee and Jacob (2010), Wang et al. (2006) agreed the NCLB policy initiative was designed to target all students without regard to race, class, or disability status in its efforts to close the achievement gap. Wang et al. (2006) based their findings on NCLB standardized testing components that consisted of uniform procedures for test administration and scoring. NCLB procedures also provided an interpretation of student performance aligned to score results. Significantly, Wang et al. (2006) drew attention to uniformity in procedures as a meaningful behavior with implications of removing bias by supporting all students.

**The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)**

According to the researcher and policy scholar, Weil (2005), IDEIA special education directives and NCLB policies shared a common goal: to improve education. Weil (2005) explained that RtI provided the means for all student education experiences and performances to comply with NCLB policy provisions (e.g., accountability measures). Weil et al., (2005) pointed out the RtI initiative turned attention back to student learning, while they also acknowledged that not all instruction would produce successful learners.
Both the 2002 NCLB general education legislation and the 2004 RtI general education initiative introduced substantive changes to general education practices. These practices paved the way for specific outcomes to result: (a) improved student outcomes, (b) identification of learning needs of all students followed by alignment of their needs to tiered RtI levels of support, (c) reduced referrals to special education, and (d) eradication of disproportionality practices.

**Response to Intervention Tiers of Support, Practices and Models**

Education researchers, Mellard, McKnight, and Jordan (2010), noted that the public health domain has a long-established use of RtI as a solutions approach to manage the provision of health remedies. According to these researchers, the RtI framework was used to successfully identify and assign varied intensities of remedies in response to diagnosed levels of need. Additionally, Mellard et al. (2010) explained the RtI framework was structured to support levels of support from preventive to more intense. These levels were described by primary, secondary, and tertiary support levels.

From their studies, Mellard et al. (2010) postulated that RtI frameworks currently used in schools drew doubt around the success of variability of their tiered structures and classification procedures to identify SLD. Mellard et al. (2010) noted that RtI evaluations should consider whether and how RtI tier structures matched the purposes of corresponding RtI levels of support. According to Mellard et al. (2010), RtI evaluations should examine three clear expectations for its leveled tier supports, including the following: (a) whether early intervention processes were aligned to specific needs, including the prevention of student failures, identification of disability, and determination processes; (b) whether Tier II processes were in congruence with other school-impacted
federal education policy initiatives (e.g., NCLB & IDEIA); and (c) whether schools
demonstrate the ability to support tiered supports in terms of “staffing levels, classroom
space, understanding of the systems, technology” (p 219).

Reddy, Fabiano, and Jimerson (2013) posited that progress-monitoring studies
focused more on students than teachers. These researchers postulated that teacher self-reports and observations were focused on their practices with instruction and behavioral
management tools. Furthermore, these researchers noted that evaluation tools yielded
insightful information on Tier I supports and their impact on students.

RtI scholars and researchers, Hughes and Dexter (2011), compiled a summary of
commonly implemented RtI components of Tier I leveled supports. Researchers
described RtI Tier I as adequate instruction, evidenced by appropriate progress, from core
instructional practices in reading. Hughes and Dexter (2011, p 5) noted that grade-level
reading skills consistent with kindergarten-to-third-grade instructional experiences, as
established by the National Reading Panel, covered five components of early reading
success including:

1. *Phonemic awareness*: the understanding that sounds of spoken language work
together with words;

2. *Phonics*: the relationship between the letters of written language and
individual sounds of spoken language

3. *Fluency*: the ability to read text accurately and quickly

4. *Vocabulary*: the words one must know to communicate effectively; and

5. *Text comprehension*: understanding of what one is reading.
Furthermore, these researchers noted that universal screening was purposed to assess reading skill consistent with early reading success. Hughes and Dexter (2011) explained how universal screening was utilized and noted its common goal: to provide early identification of struggling students at risk for reading failure and to establish documentation used to identify students at risk for learning disabilities. Hughes and Dexter (2011) also explained the universal screening design for early identification noting that universal screening procedures determined two outcomes including false positives (i.e., students deemed as at risk but, at later screening intervals, found not at risk based on scores) and false negatives (i.e., students deemed not at risk but, on later screening intervals, found to be at risk).

Campsen (2013), an RtI scholar and researcher with the RtI Action Network, advised on mistakes that occurred when implementing RtI components (e.g., universal screening, progress monitoring, data analysis, and evidence-based instructional strategies that were subject to teacher errors). According to Campsen (2013) flawed teacher practices contributed to unsuccessful RtI experiences; two areas where staff were more prone to errors included: (a) establishing low proficiency levels for intervention strategies and (b) utilizing test scores to identify and rank students while also choosing supports with failed track records to support student reading fluency success. Other research has shown that RtI was hindered by a number of flawed practices.

Hughes and Dexter (2011) described two RtI models of service delivery, including the problem-solving and standard protocol models. According to Hughes and
Dexter (2011), the two RtI models were distinguished by the approaches they utilized to assign intervention supports. The problem-solving model determined interventions based on the alignment to the needs of individual students or specific instructional groups. In contrast, the standard protocol model utilized preselected, research-based interventions after an initial intervention was not successful. Arguably, RtI practices associated with either of these two models raised questions about the extent to which those models led to changed instructional practices.

**Research and RtI**

Since the introduction of RtI into general education practices, researchers have investigated RtI through the lens of teacher practices. By doing so, a context to understand how RtI coalesced with teacher practices and solicited change has emerged for study. The extent of RtI to act as a disruption to general education practices—as intended by education policymakers—was secondary to the types of challenges that faced students prior to RtI. For example, Menzies and Falvey (2008) examined practices of general education teachers with increasing numbers of students with disabilities in their classrooms. They noted that although increasing numbers of students with disabilities were part of inclusionary practices responsibility for their education was still assigned to special education teachers. The learning climate of general education classrooms challenged teachers to teach to a wide range of ability levels. Moreover, these researchers pointed out the potential for general education experiences to be influenced by the dynamic makeup of students with implications for comparable academic growth of all students.
Other educational studies shed light on education policies that influenced the manifestation of practices that, arguably, worked against the interests of vulnerable student groups. Accordingly, some researchers including Harry and Klinger (2007), Garcia and Ortiz (2006), and Rueda et al. (2008) asserted that teacher decisions and practices were associated with inequities against students both before and after students were identified for special education services. These same researchers lamented the inequitable teaching practices that contributed to disproportionality practices and, consequently, to early referrals for special education services.

Comparatively, Fletcher, Denton, and Francis (2005) cautioned against referral processes that relied on intelligence quotient (IQ) assessments. According to Fletcher et al. (2005), IQ assessments used to identify students with learning disabilities failed to discern between low achievement and the impact of environmental factors (e.g., economic disadvantage and inadequate instruction) on learning. These researchers essentially shifted the focus of inequities that impact learning away from teacher practices and toward factors faced by the families of students. Mellard, McKnight, and Jordan (2010), Meyer and Behar-Horenstein (2015), and Thorius-King, Maxcy, Macey, and Cox (2014) found that RtI assessment results were correlated with effectiveness for interventions. VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson (2007), Ross and Begeny (2015), and Reddy, Fabiano, and Jimerson (2013) examined tiered supports and collectively pointed out that RtI encompassed multiple activities serving as a set of tools guided by procedures and decisions. Reddy et al., (2013) noted the need to examine teacher practices—particularly at the Tier I classroom level of RtI—to assess effectiveness of supports for all students.
RtI program evaluators, VanDerHeyden et al. (2007) argued that RtI efficacy should be determined by the success of each of its components in working correctly and by staff fidelity in making accurate decisions about interventions’ success or lack thereof. More specifically, VanderHeyden et al. (2007) supported practices of evaluating processes for referrals that led to the identification of at-risk students, and evaluating student outcomes, to learn more about the capacity of RtI practices to safeguard against disproportionate practices and be effective. More notably, these researchers determined that team decision-making was linked to the trend of over-identification at prereferral stages and, thus, led to disproportionate practices. Specifically, researchers raised concerns for accurate decision making practices and its overall impact to influence the selection of intervention resources used to support student needs.

Balu, Zhu, Doolittle, Schiller, Jenkins, and Gersten (2015) conducted a relatively recent study that focused on the impact of RtI interventions on reading. More specifically, the study examined effectiveness of RtI supports on reading by controlling for intervention intensity and the number of screenings used to guide intervention choices across different schools. Balu et al. (2015) studied two nuances of RtI: (a) the impact of assignment to Tier II and Tier III levels of support, and (b) the impact of interventions provided at both Tiers’ levels of support. Researchers distinguished between the impact of student assignments to Tier II-and Tier III-leveled supports and expectations that interventions matching those levels were provided to assigned students. These researchers learned that assigned intervention levels had not resulted in matching intervention intensities aligned to the needs of students. By examining two elements of
RtI (i.e., the effect of the number of screenings used to assign students to Tier II and III supports, and differences in intervention intensities), Balu et al. (2015) learned more about the efficacy of interventions for students whose scores placed just below and above cut scores. The researchers concluded that closely monitored interventions worked more effectively to benefit readers than those less closely monitored for effectiveness. Put another way, interventions must be monitored by staff to ensure all components work effectively with frequent follow-ups to render efficient and timely intervention efforts designed to support student growth.

In an isolated focus group study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education, (2011), researchers Means, Chen, DeBarger, and Padilla evaluated how teachers used data to inform instruction. According to the study, although teachers’ data-based decisions influenced their effectiveness to adopt instruction to meet student needs, teachers’ data skill sets were limited to a few strategies. Ball and Christ (2015) also drew attention to the effect of data-based decisions noting the high value of interpretation and analysis skill sets needed to guide decisions. Ball and Christ (2015) and by Shapiro and Clemens (2009) found teacher decisions around assessment results were a critical factor in student growth both between and within RtI-tiered supports.

Finally, Ball and Christ (2015) studied RtI processes and identified four tasks driven by data-based decisions that worked to mobilize the flow of RtI processes. Those tasks included the following:
1. *Problem identification tasks* designed to identify at-risk students based on information learned from universal screening results and cut scores decisions leading to inferences about student performances.

2. *Problem analysis tasks* driven by data needed to inform decisions about whether or not to make adjustments to instruction or interventions, or to change in instruction and or environment for the purpose of increasing the yield of student learning outcomes, while making the distinction between newly emerging skills and established skills.

3. *Progress monitoring tasks* described by data collection taken over months as opposed to weeks and used to assess student learning growth.

4. *Program evaluation activities* consistent with formative and summative program evaluation tasks using assessment to inform program effectiveness; data collected over a short term were predicted to be invalid due to short time to implement intervention.

**Literature Review in Conclusion**

The literature review has provided an historical synopsis of events that set the stage for the introduction of RtI. Notably, the literature has pointed to general education practices around instruction and has drawn attention to the educational outcomes for specific student subgroups. According to the literature review, education policymakers intentionally positioned RtI to intervene on behalf of students early on by using data to impact their education experiences with interventions as needed. In addition, the
literature review included findings from RtI researcher scholars, both criticizing and affirming RtI and pointing out nuances that needed attention in order to ensure RtI was implemented correctly.

Lastly, the literature review drew attention to the 2013-2014 national trending data showing students made eligibility for special education services, specifically under the disability label of specific learning disabilities (SLD). Important was data pointing out the percentages of students from their individual ethnic backgrounds made eligible for special education services. The phenomenon of disproportionality discussed in the literature review described it as the over-representation of students by subgroups placed in a special education categorical compared to other student subgroups. More concerning, resultant from disproportionality practices, students were more likely to have less access to core curriculum instruction and experiences consistent with general education as a result of receiving special education services. The literature review also included RtI scholars who explained the impact of disproportionality at the school district level noting how conditions for disproportionality manifested in the midst of the RtI system of supports. According to RtI scholars, disproportionality was linked to RtI data that failed to trigger supports for students, and thereby reflective of a vulnerability in school practices and understandings of the RtI system of supports. I would argue that disproportionality that occurs within the RtI context of supports undergirds the core premise of RtI to support student growth.

Three takeaways emerged from the literature review with attention to RtI success. Firstly, the (a) federal education policy makers, (b) explanation of RtI-tiered operations, and (c) errors pointed out in RtI practices by researchers suggested that
human involvement served a critical role in forging changes. Yet, as also pointed out by VanDerHeyden, et al. (2007), each component of RtI contributed to its overall success.

Secondly, the models of RtI mainly implemented in school districts included the standard protocol and the problem-solving model. Research studies drew attention to lingering unresolved historical issues around vulnerable student demographic subgroups that existed prior to the advent of RtI. The RtI model selected by individual school districts should consider its expected utility to support the needs of its students.

Thirdly, researchers raised concerns about teachers’ instructional practices which they argued contributed to disproportionate practices. RtI Action Network author, Lauren Campsen (2013), concerned about data practices argued against the use of screening scores to place students in tiered support groups without ensuring interventions were aligned to individual needs of each student. Campsen (2013) considered this practice as “superficial” (p. 2). RtI researchers, Campsen (2013) and Balu, Zhu, Doolittle, Schiller, Jenkins, and Gersten (2015) individually determined that RtI practices were undermined by low data skill sets. The problem with disproportionality in an RtI embedded instructional practice any tiered support that does not support student growth over extended time can make the case for special education referrals.

I postulated that the program evaluation results will raise awareness about RtI Tier II operations calling for more awareness of RtI operations by district leadership. More importantly, the research cited in the literature review reiterated the vulnerability of RtI in general and Tier II supports specifically as nuanced by any number of factors, including: (a) impaired understanding about data, (b) disenfranchisement of staff skills,
(c) unclear plans to determine actions and decisions around Tiered supports. In conclusion, the research study provided guidance for the selection of data used in the program evaluation.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

Primarily the research design of this program evaluation focused on RtI Tier II operations and its potential to contribute to disproportionality practices. Concerns for disproportionate practices were important to the district superintendent. As such the body of knowledge included in the literature review on past general education practices raised concerns for RtI with respect to the fact that it was juxtaposed over practices with data consistent with the NCLB era. The extent to which RtI interrupted past practices including data practices and successfully changed the trajectory of past outcomes for particular student groups was important to analyze.

Notably, literature review information influenced the research design. Information pointed to the expectations that RtI tiered level of supports aligned to the needs of students. In order learn more about RtI Tier II level of supports the research design also considered the tools used in Tier II processes. RtI researchers, Mellard et al.,(2010) suggested that RtI program evaluations examined school capacity to ensure RtI supports attended to key operational needs including “staffing levels, classroom space, understanding of the systems, technology (p.219 ).” Lastly, the research design also considered the expertise of Michael Patton (2008). According to Patton (2008) program evaluations gathered information through a variety of sources including: management information systems, program files, and both qualitative and quantitative artifacts. This research embraced a specific research design, which Patton termed the *utilization-focused program evaluation* based on its future utility. Patton (2008) distinguished the utilization-focused program evaluation by its ability to provide
information to the user—in this research, the user was identified as district leadership as opposed to teachers. As mentioned earlier, Patton (2008) contended the utilization-focused program evaluation generated new information useful for users.

Although the Progressive School District generated data about RtI in the 2015-2016 school year, the data was mainly used to communicate growth. Growth was reported in percentage metrics noted by students identified at each tiered level of support. Growth reported in percentages also reflected a measure of impact for the sum effect of RtI processes and supports after intervention intervals. Patton (2008) pointed out that program evaluations should ask if processes were achieving what they were intended to achieve and if participants will be different as a result of new data. The question of the extent to which artifacts informed the administrator on RtI practices, thus remained a relevant focus to guide the study. Undergirding this research were my own experiences as the administrator over RtI, which required access to specific knowledge about the health of its operations in order to hit the ground running as a leader.

Finally, this research design will focus on three areas with potential to excavate new information about the RtI program evaluation using the following tools: (a) a survey instrument, (b) RtI-generated data, and (c) a data collection form assessment activity. Primarily, I proposed the extent to which RtI operations were implemented were contingent upon the extent to which RtI-aligned practices were internalized by staff. As such, staff beliefs about RtI were expected to reveal the extent to which RtI practices influenced student outcomes. Secondly, the value of RtI-generated data from its information system, including data generated from its operations and information, had implications for the extent to which processes supported student growth. Thirdly, I
believed all data generated by RtI contributed to the purpose of the research study.

Patton’s (2008) utilization-focused evaluation model provided access into a window of data practices. Yet the conclusion formed from the analysis of RtI artifacts, student outcome data trends, and staff beliefs about RtI collectively raised concerns for staff practices with data and alignment with RtI Tier II expectations with data. To the point made by Patton, Tier II provided insightful information that addressed questions surrounding that staff practices with data with implications for improvement.

**Participants**

Selected participants for this study were teachers who provided RtI supports to students. Each participant had the potential to offer insight into teacher practices with RtI data. Selected participants were responsible for providing the expected Tier I core instruction in addition to Tier II supports. In all, 11 staff, knowledgeable of reading instruction for students across three grade levels were invited to participate in the study. Five of 11 staff returned packets with signatures consenting to participation in this study.

Ethical considerations provided for participants include confidentiality of survey responses, restating my former role as administrator over Response to Intervention (RtI) and my current role as the researcher. First, confidentiality was addressed to protect participant identities on surveys by assigning numbers in place of names thus ensuring all identifiable information was omitted from survey. Once all surveys were completed survey and returned I maintained all data in a secure location off school property. I could not control whether or not any of the participants shared their responses with anyone after turning in their completed surveys. Second, a benefit from being the former RtI administrator, I had already established a professional rapport with most of the staff and
believed we all shared the goal of improving RtI. The program evaluation results would increase the potential for RtI Tier II to be a useful tool to inform their practices and a support for students. Third, as the researcher, I believed the risk of harm from these ethical considerations were low as the data collected from survey responses did not address a controversial subject. Although staff responses were personal the survey was adapted from a published survey and was not purposed to judge their responses, yet rather to gather raw data. I believed staff trusted my role as researcher and the goal to improve upon the impact of RtI and support their work with students.

Data-Gathering Technique

Selected data-gathering techniques were determined from information included in the literature review. Per the literature review, conducting a program evaluation that targeted Tier II supports required examination of specific RtI Tier II tools, artifacts and, gaining access to staff information which staff used to inform their practices. As such, three data gathering techniques were employed to collect RtI Tier II data including a self-report survey, evaluation of RtI forms, and conducting a statistical analysis on Tier II student universal screening scores to identify trending information. The first efforts of data gathering activities involved me speaking to staff for the purpose of acquiring their individual consent to participate in the survey activity.

I attended a meeting in November with teachers, the current RtI administrator, and one other school administrator. I introduced myself as a doctoral student, and researcher of the RtI practices during the 2015-2016 school year. I also explained the purpose of the research. At the meeting consent packages were distributed to staff
containing the survey, and I also explained that consent required a signature before returning and completed.

**Self–Report Beliefs Survey**

During the meeting, I also read from a pre-developed script, teachers listened to information explaining the purpose of the program evaluation and the anticipated benefit of furthering the evolvement of RtI. They were told their input from the Beliefs Self-Report Survey (See Appendix A) would be used to provide greater insight into their practices with RtI. Eleven surveys were distributed to teachers who had returned their individual signed consents to participate in the program evaluation.

Staff participants also referred to as staff members were advised of the estimated time of completion for each of the survey instruments. Directions for returning the surveys included placing completed surveys back into the original manila envelope, which was placed in a safe cabinet. The survey envelope did not contain any information that revealed the participants’ identities. Returned surveys were sealed and stored in a larger envelope for pickup by the researcher. Surveys were collected 3 weeks after the initial distribution date. Staff members were also told the results would remain anonymous, and that aggregated results would be shared with school administrators. Five out of 11 surveys (i.e., 45%) were returned to the school.

**RtI-Generated Data**

The second data collection activity purposed to inform the program evaluation, involved the collection of RtI Tier II data generated on student outcomes from several of its processes (e.g., universal screening, progress monitoring, and reports). All three of the data types requested were gathered; however, the progress monitoring data was
incomplete and, therefore, was reviewed as a reference to provide greater insight into practices. The universal screening data provided similar information yet showed data trends acquired from three shortened data cycles rather than after a period of one year. The implication of consistency in practices added more credence to the program evaluation process. Two data sources comprised the collection of RtI generated data including:

- 2015-2016 Aims Web Curriculum-Based Measurement (R-CBM) Report Criteria Values showing universal screening cut scores for grade levels 3-5; and
- Disaggregated Aims Web Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement Student Score Distribution per grade level, and race or ethnicity.

The Aims Web Tier Transition Reports were disaggregated by grade level and race or ethnicity.

**RtI Template and Forms**

The third data source provided greater depth into how staff processed information about students per information documented in RtI data collection forms. The program evaluation forms were used to manage RtI processes. By drawing attention to documents that staff used to process information, further insight was gained into the skill sets used to mobilize actions informed by data generated from RtI Tier II processes. RtI templates and forms required that staff enter information into Aims Web, the digital information student data source, (e.g., information which explained or described student needs, staff feedback and work with students).

Lastly, to obtain the school institutional data, I sent a list of requested items to the school superintendent and RtI administrator stating plans to pick the items up at the
school. I later visited the school to collect the RtI- data generated during the 2015-2016 school year. The current RtI administrator provided the data. While on site, I also reviewed comments written on RtI forms in 2015-2016 that were included in the packet of RtI data. The comments noted on the forms were not deemed useful for further analysis and thus it was decided this source would not serve the evaluation. Examples of comments noted on other data not used in this study were “boilerplate” comments (e.g., “very good” and “ok” on student work). In effect, data noted with boilerplate comments further supported the need to bring visibility to the work done to support RtI success.

Although the written comments were not used, the permanent information noted on form templates was important. Form templates offered insight into the types of information staff engaged with to perform RtI process and inform their decisions about student needs.

Finally, the data provided further insight into current practices based on an evolving RtI experience for the school district. Equally important to the research processes of the program evaluation, the data assisted in measuring the success of RtI processes to support all students. Further scrutiny of RtI data used in the program evaluation drew attention to the needs of all students by looking more closely at their score outcomes at the Tier II level of support. I proposed this data was important as it indicated the extent to which staff demonstrated knowledge and application consistent with the core principles of RtI.

Data Analysis Techniques

Self-Report Beliefs Survey

Two statistical analyses techniques including a descriptive analysis and inferential analysis were selected to process data obtained from the Beliefs Self-Report Survey. The
descriptive analysis was directed at survey items one through four. The staff
demographic information noted in the RtI Beliefs Survey included, job description, years
of experience, number of years in your current position, and highest degree earned.

An inferential analysis was chosen to process Beliefs Survey items five through
23. Notably, five of the 23 items (numbers six through ten) included both an “a” and “b”
inquiry, respectively aligned to Reading beliefs, and Math beliefs. As, RtI offered in the
Progressive School District did not include Math supports during the time of this study,
“b” inquires on Math Beliefs were not included in study results.

The RtI Belief Survey Likert Scale responses were processed using an inferential
analysis technique to evaluate participant RtI Beliefs. Participants responded to survey
items by selecting one of five response options: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral,
agree, or strongly agree. These responses represented the degree that staff responses were
in congruence with RtI Beliefs. Lastly a consensus analysis was selected for closer
evaluation of staff capacity and congruence to RtI Beliefs. Survey publishers Castillo et
al., (2015) included another means for analyzing participant responses in the Beliefs
Survey design. In addition to the range of agreement to each survey item, Castillo et al.,
(2015, p. 1) assigned, each RtI Beliefs Survey item to one of three factors that
demonstrated staff capacity to implement RtI. Hence, Factor a provided insight into staff
capacity for implementing RtI “functions and core supplemental instruction” practices.
Factor b, provided insight into staff capacity for implementing “academic abilities and
performances of students with disabilities.” Factor c, provided insight into staff capacity
for implementing “data-based decision-making.”
In accordance to the description of the survey provided by Castillo, et al., (2015) several RtI Belief Survey items were not assigned to either of the three factors. Survey items one through four represented demographic information and therefore was not appropriate information to assign to factors. Items (5, 17, and 18) were also not included by the Castillo et al., (2015) study in its description of the three factors. As such the consensus analysis included a total of 16 RtI Beliefs survey items.

**RtI Universal Screening Data Analysis**

Two statistical analyses used in the study included a descriptive analysis, and an inferential paired sample \( t \)-test. Using the initial baseline screening results from the fall universal screening provided the means for determining the effect of RtI interventions during winter and spring in impacting growth for students. The results raised concerns for shared beliefs that not only reflected less than 100 percent consensus yet in addition suggested that staff beliefs influenced level of practices unaligned to the needs of its current student population. The first statistical analysis—the descriptive analysis—determined if the scoring data was normally distributed for student populations across three grade levels. The second statistical analysis, the Inferential Paired Sample \( t \)-test examined percentages of scores for students across three grade levels. The Inferential Paired Sample \( t \)-test provided an in-depth examination of student growth per the Reading-Curriculum Based Measurement (R-CBM) Report at the third, fourth, and fifth grade levels.

**RtI Template and Form Analysis**

The document analysis evaluated three RtI documents used to collect data and inform RtI processes, including the: (a) pre-referral template, (b) the RtI Tier III template,
and (c) the progress monitoring data form. Selected documents exemplified the types of data generated from RtI processes. Selected documents required staff to provide RtI supports based on the extent of skill sets used to process the data. Two analysis methods were applied to infer and derive meaning from RtI artifacts.

The first analysis involved a binary coding process used to identify whether or not numerical data was noted in documents. The second analysis method focused on evaluating the types of data that staff engaged with to operate RtI processes. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, (2011) determined five data skill sets were required of teachers to inform their instruction (identified and discussed in Section 4). The program evaluation utilized the headings noted in the U.S. Department of Education (2011) for classifying the types of data staff were exposed to from RtI experiences. By classifying the experiences identified from the artifact analysis emergent was a context to understand present skills staff used to operate RtI processes. The findings with the Belief Self-Report Survey and RtI form template evaluation worked to strengthen the context for understanding staff practices with Tier II processes with implications to inform decisions on student growth.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

In this section, information about RtI in the Progressive School District manifested as expected from each of the three data analysis techniques efforts. For example, the Beliefs Survey resulted in information on staff held beliefs about RtI. Next, the RtI form evaluation revealed information about the types of data staff engaged with during implementation of RtI. Lastly, the analysis of student universal screening scores revealed information about impact of Tier II interventions on student growth. However, achieving the goal of Patton’s (2006) utilization-focused program evaluation, to provide information for staff and administrator users, required a deeper dive into information by contextualizing it further to make it meaningful to users. The expert lens of RtI research scholars facilitated meaningful application of knowledgeable practices and insight for RtI and practices consistent with federal education policy, and the planning of pragmatic RtI structures.

RtI Beliefs Survey Findings

Before presenting information collected from the RtI Beliefs survey, important to note, items one and four, required staff to identify their individual job descriptions and number indicate highest degree earned, respectively. Due to the small number of participants survey items one and four were omitted to protect staff identifies and adhere to confidentiality expectations. Survey items three and four were used to targeted information on staff demographics. This information was illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively. While not measured, information included in both tables provided a broader context for understanding professional differences and similarities amongst staff (e.g., years of employment in the Progressive School District, and individual lengths of
employment in the same district). Lastly, due to the small number of participants this information cannot be generalized and thus limited to explain RtI Beliefs and practices associated with the school district named in this study.

Table 1. Current Employment Years at the Progressive School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N =5</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid 1-4 years</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 1, four staff had less than a decade of experience working at the Progressive School; one staff had accumulated at least 15 years’ experience working at the Progressive School. Table 1 information also provided insight into years of experiences working at the school and exposure working with RtI and understanding RtI processes. For example, for two staff reporting 1 to 4 years of experience working at the school, and based on the 2016-2017 school year when the survey was distributed and completed, two analyses can be made.

First, any staff who accumulated between 1-4 years of work at the school they had also worked in the district during the initial RtI installment period in school year 2012. Second, the remaining three staff members with over 5 years of experience at the Progressive School District there data practices were shaped by the 2002 NCLB education policy and the new orientations with data consistent with district RtI experiences. An informal and previous discussions with one administrator indicated that RtI had operated in the same manner since its initial installation. The degree of
congruence in staff RtI practices was important information to program evaluation users therefore discussed later at the end of this section.

Table 2. *Years of Experience in Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N =5</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4 years</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 Years</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19 Years</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 or more years</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 illustrated data on the number of years of experience in education. According to Table 2 data 80% of staff experiences in education were described by 5 or more years of experience in education. One staff was a relatively new educator having acquired less than four years of experience in education.

Figure 2. Response to Intervention Beliefs Survey—Graph A
Figure 2 illustrates responses to RtI Beliefs Survey items five thru twenty three. In the Graph the “Y” axis reflects the percentage of participants and the “X” axis shows individual staff agreement or disagreement for each of the 19 survey items included in the graph. Notably, forty-two percent of the 19 survey items in Figure 1 included a degree of staff disagreement with RtI Beliefs.

Table 3: Consensus of *RtI Beliefs Survey Participant Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Years of Experience or More as an Educator (n = 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RtI Process:</strong> Core Instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in Reading. (no. 6a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Primary function of supplemental is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in Reading. (no. 7a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average:</strong> 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill: Academic Abilities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performances of Students with</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RtI Beliefs Survey Items</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Consensus on Survey Items</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in reading. (no. 8a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority of students with emotional handicap/social-emotional disorder or emotional behavior disorder achieve grade-level benchmarks in reading. (no. 9a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with high incidence disabilities (e.g., SLD, emotional behavior disorder) who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks (i.e., general standards) in reading. (no. 10a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill: Data-Based Decision-Making</th>
<th>RtI Belief Survey Items</th>
<th>District Status on Consensus Survey Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General education teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body. (no. 11)</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General education teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support. (no.12)</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students. (no. 13)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem solving teams and placements in special education. (no. 14)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The &quot;severity&quot; of student’s academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention. (no. 15)</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The &quot;severity&quot; of student’s behavioral problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill: Data-Based Decision-Making</td>
<td>RtI Belief Survey Items</td>
<td>District Status on Consensus Survey Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student responds to intervention. (no. 16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only “teacher judgment.” (no. 19)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating a student's response to intervention is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from “tests” (e.g., IQ/achievement test). (no. 20)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional time and resources should not be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or above benchmarks. (no. 21)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill: Data-Based Decision-Making</th>
<th>RtI Beliefs Survey Items</th>
<th>District Status on Consensus Survey Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions. (no. 22)</td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student's parents (guardians) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about the student. (no. 23)</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average: 76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Consensus Explained

RtI researcher and RtI Action Network author, George Batsche (n.d.) explained that district preparedness for RtI implementation started with taking account of staff skills needed to operate processes prior to implementation. According to Batsche (n.d.) having staff discussions purposed for conducting individual skill inventory or for informing staff of expected skill sets required for implementing RtI described a phenomenon termed as “consensus (p.2). Although RtI in the district was implemented three years prior to the program evaluation, information that accounted or provided evidence of skill sets needed to implement RtI enabled an interpretation of findings. Batsche (n.d.) also explained the congruency achievement was determined by a measure of 80 percent of staff agreeing to
support for RtI implementation. Also important Batsche (n.d.) noted that congruence attainment occurred from agreement percentages rather than majority rulings. Agreement refers to shared understanding as opposed to a determination of an outcome based on majority of support.

Survey publishers Castillo, et al. (2015) designed the RtI Belief Survey to measure the degree that staff held beliefs aligned to RtI tenets. According to Castillo, et al. (2015) RtI tenets represented mandated practices for RtI drawn from NCLB and IDEIA federal policy mandates with influences on practices identified to improve outcomes for all students. As such Castillo et al. (2015) based its RtI Beliefs survey items on a three factor model informed and reflective of education policy ideals for grounded RtI practices. The three survey factors included, Functions of Core and Supplemental Instruction, Academic Abilities and Performance of Students with Disabilities, and Data-Based Decision Making RtI processes.

**Table 3. Consensus Findings**

Factor A, in Table 3 shows a consensus status of 100 percent participant agreement resultant from the total of two RtI Beliefs Survey items. Factor a information is important as its results indicated district capacity or awareness for or having skills needed to perform RtI practices aligned to functions of core and supplemental instruction in Reading. RtI Action Network author and RtI scholar, Matthew Burns (n.d) noted Tier II supplemental supports targeted components of reading fluency. Success of Tier II supports are driven by skill sets that support core and supplemental instruction in reading and exemplified by increasing higher reading fluency scores. As factor a survey items accessed teacher understandings and resulted in 100 percent participant agreement, the
results suggested that staff shared the awareness that tiered supports were provided in the general education classroom and at times required additional staff to implement supports. Findings of this consensus activity did not draw attention to any concerns for factor a, section of the RtI Beliefs analysis.

Factor b, in Table 3 shows a consensus status of 100 percent participant agreement for two of the three survey items and 80 percent agreement for the remaining survey item. In this instance, an average was taken on Factor b responses resulting in 93 percent participant agreement based on three total survey items. Factor b results were important for its implication of district capacity or awareness to provide RtI supports that strengthened academic abilities and performances for students with disabilities. Factor b were also important as its results suggested staff were aware that RtI served all students including those students identified with learning disabilities, high incidence disabilities or those students identified with emotional handicap/social emotional disorders were all able to achieve academically.

RtI researchers and scholars, Mellard, McKnight, and Jordan (2010) explained that students with disabilities often received RtI tiered supports. Shapiro and Clemens (2009) explained that analysis of Tier II supports represented some risk to low risk status based on Tier II to Tier I movement or the opposite, reflected by some risk to at risk status based on Tier II to Tier III movement to more intense supports for all students. Findings of the consensus activity did not result in any concerns for results from the factor b RtI Beliefs analysis.

Finally, Factor c, survey items included responses representing abroad range of consensus statuses based on percent of participant agreements as low as 20 percent and as
high as 100 percent across 11 survey items. As item percent agreement varied an averaged was determined noted by 74 percent participant agreement across eleven total survey items. Factor c results were important for implicating district capacity or awareness for skills needed to use data and make data based decisions. Batsche (n.d.) explained that decision making activities were imperative to implementation of all RtI tiered supports levels. O’Connor and Freeman (2012) explained that various data based decisions were guided by a range of data skills needed to support RtI instructional processes.

Two survey items included in Factor c reflected a high percent of agreement amongst staff, yet were not aligned to RtI tenets. Survey item 15 that stated, “The ‘severity’ of student’s academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.” Mellard, McKnight, and Jordan (2010) explained the RtI strategy as using increasingly more intense interventions to maximize students potential to learn and achieve. This information is important as it provides insight into staff understanding of the purpose of intervention and ability to judge and make decisions on intervention alignment to student needs to remove obstacles to their academic performance. RtI Action Network author and RtI scholar, Terri Metcalf (n.d), explained the “critical areas”, (p. 1) of Tier II were mobilized by various data analysis skills that triggered data decision making activities and resulted in adjustments made to interventions. Metcalf (n.d) expanded on the importance of Tier II interventions and or supplemental instruction noting its collective impact to strengthen student skill sets and conceptually reduce their academic problems based on decision making to adjust interventions decisions toward
more intense RtI tiered support levels. Metcalf (n.d.) also pointed out that Tier II supports included actions involving intervention, alignment of interventions to student needs, tracking student progress or lack of progress, managing interventions and tracking their individual effectiveness based on their performance for students in the district. The finding of this consensus activity determined 60 percent participant agreement to this survey item. The results raised concerns that staff were not in 100 percent accordance with their understandings that decisions and actions to implement RtI needed to align to RtI tenets.

In a second example there was a 20 percent participant agreement with Beliefs survey item no. 21. RtI Beliefs survey item no. 21 that stated, “Additional time and resources should not be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or above benchmarks.” This information is important as it ascertains staff understanding of a principled RtI premise on the significance of early preventive services.

The NJCLD (2005) report explained the premise of RtI provisions centered on early preventive and intervention supports at the onset of student academic struggles. Hosp (n.d.), RtI Action Network author, advised that close attention directed at student outcome data followed by timely decisions served to support the needs of students who struggled academically in a timely manner. According to Hops (n.d.) early responses to the needs of struggling students pre-empted special education referrals. The finding of from this survey item raised concerns that 20 percent of staff held beliefs that conflicted with the premise of RtI providing early preventive supports when needed for all student.
RtI Universal Screening Data Analysis Findings

Table 4 reflects findings of a Paired Sample $t$-Test based on 2015-2016 Tier II data. The paired sample $t$-test was conducted using student universal screening outcomes from third, fourth, and fifth grade levels. The screening scores represented post Tier II intervention scores earned after Winter and Spring supplemental instruction supports.

Table 4. Paired Sample $t$-test Results Comparing Effects of Winter/Spring 2015-2016 Tier II Assessment on Baseline Fall Assessment

Results for Third Grade ($n=33$), Fourth Grade ($n=43$), and Fifth Grade ($n=27$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Fall/Winter</th>
<th>Winter/Spring</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$df$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>38.42</td>
<td>10.97</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.11</td>
<td>9.39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.70</td>
<td>14.28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p* = ≤ .005

The paired sample $t$-test criteria indicated no gross violations of assumptions, and the results of the test at each grade level were significant. Table 4, data also noted the mean and standard deviation scores illustrated a comparison of significant differences between the Fall Baseline Screening Assessment scores and the Winter/Spring Screening Assessment scores for each of the three grade levels.

Shapiro and Clemens (2009) asserted that universal screening data collections provided information demonstrating changes in student skills over a period of time. As such, the paired sample $t$-tests allowed comparisons between growth from fall to winter...
and growth from winter to spring assessments for each grade level. The resulting $p$ values $\leq .005$ indicate statistical significance of differences between scores at each grade level of Tier II RtI data. In addition, individual student performance scores—as documented at each grade per the Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) results—provided further context for understanding the impact of RtI tiered supports and interventions. According to CBM experts, Ball and Christ (2012) longer intervention duration periods of months compared to weeks strengthened CBM result validity and “decision accuracy” (p. 236) to estimate student growth. Implied from the expertise of Ball and Christ, supplemental supports provided over the duration of the school year were expected to produce positive results yet did not for many students.

Lastly, Table 4 (i.e., the paired sample $t$-test results) illustrated the impact of Tier II interventions across two time intervals allowing comparisons of student growth between Fall/Winter and Winter/Spring. For example, the average mean scores reported in Winter after interventions, were higher for each of three grade levels when compared to average mean scores reported in the Spring. Yet, while the average mean scores reported in the Spring across each of the three grade levels were comparably lower than Winter, more concerning was the average mean score for 4th grade which was lower than 3rd and 5th grades. This data has important implications for educators and decisions made to support student growth in reading. Educators understand that at fourth grade and above students read to learn as compared to lower grade levels that focused on learning to read. Metcalf (n.d) an RtI scholar and RtI Action Network author asserted that Tier II data represented a crucial point for decision making activities.
For greater context on intervention effectiveness, my experience at the Progressive School District and informally discussions with administrators determined the school used the standard protocol model to provide supports to students (i.e., one size fits all approach to managing tiered supports). Based on the grade level mean scores, Tier II data supported data decision based actions to adjust supplemental instruction for some students were a function of the RtI model. For example, Table 4 shows the $SD$ contracted for third grade post winter/spring (10.97 to 10.21) and for fifth grade (14.28 to 12.35 post Winter/Spring Tier II supports). In comparison, Table 4 also shows the $SD$ of scores broadened from 9.39 to 10.58, thus indicating minimal growth experienced by many students. The finding from this information was important as it reflects information from universal screening which measures changes in student skills and over the duration of the school year shown consistently low scores and a placement consistency in the Tier II level of supports.

I rejected the null hypothesis for each grade level since there were significant differences in student performance between fall baseline scores and winter and spring outcomes at each grade level. The data indicated that Tier II, which provided supports in the form of supplemental instruction, resulted in various outcomes which extended out from the mean indicating little growth for those students. Based on the screening interval score outcomes, the data suggested actions or adjustments were made to intervention intensity levels or to the possibility of replacing low impact interventions for more effective ones. Data drew attention to the needs of individual students by excavating trends of low performance outcomes.
Finally, based on the outcomes for each of the three grade levels, Tier II experiences did not lead to successful outcomes for numbers of students across two Universal screening intervals. O’Connor and Freeman (2012) studied district supports for RtI implementation noting successful RtI practices were driven by assessment supports designed for sensitivity to student growth and capacity to inform appropriate allocation of resources for all students. According to CBM experts, Ball and Christ (2012) CBM assessments were more sensitive to measuring broad skills compared to “specific skills” (p. 231). This could be interpreted as a limitation from using CMB assessment measures to inform Tier II supports. My interpretation of district Tier II data centered on its CBM choice of assessment. Using the CBM assessment may not provide sufficient information about student struggles to attain skills needed to safeguard against disproportionate conditions. In addition, using the CBM assessment may limit staff exposure to the range of data needed about struggles to improve Tier II alignment to student needs.

**RtI Form Assessment Results**

The program evaluation determined that teachers interacted and facilitated RtI provisions through four documents used during the 2015-2016 school year. This information is important as it provided insight into the level of exposure staff had with data and the types of data used to implement Tier II supports. Notably, the majority of forms engaged staff with numerical data as compared to descriptive data used framed more precisely the needs of students. RTI Action Network contributors and RtI researchers, Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, and Noguera (n.d.) argued that RtI data management systems in urban schools were often “under resourced” (p. 4). RtI
researchers implicated the approach and strategies used by districts to analyze student data and decision making activities were susceptible to the types of information attended to and collected on data collection forms.

The form assessment findings gleaned information about staff relationships with RtI data collected through forms including the RtI Tier III template, the prereferral form, and progress monitoring improvement documents. A binary nominal coding method was used to distinguish forms that required data entries beyond cut scores to determine the level of data engagement required with RtI documents. The pre-referral form required teachers to locate and note information including: student performance history, RtI goals, program duration and frequency of supports, student deficits (from a checklist), attendance records, relevant medical information, Tier II and Tier III progress monitoring results, listed interventions provided at each tier level required work samples, report cards, and progress reports. Based on the review of forms, staff engaged with data to complete the following tasks:

- To locate and input Universal Screening cut score outcomes from Beginning of the Year (BOY) to Middle of the Year (MOY), illustrating by pyramid cones showing percentages of students in Tier I, II, and III intervention levels
- To notate current progress monitoring words read correct per minute (WRCP);
- To identify the deficient skill and check off the strategy used from a predetermined list strategy checklist;
- To identify target areas for support from checklist;
- To note the duration and frequency of the intervention;
- To identify who would implement the tiered support;
• To enter words read correctly, errors, baseline words read correctly, and goal/trend Rate of Improvement (ROI); and

• To indicate research-based strategies from a checklist across four areas, including phonological awareness, phonics and spelling, fluency, and comprehension and vocabulary, along with a list of titles for research-based intervention.

Table 6 illustrates categories of RtI form activities conducted by teachers during the 2015-2016 school year, which were required to implement RtI, and the types of data skills asked of staff to implement RtI.

Table 5. *Teacher Experiences With RtI Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Experiences With RtI Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RtI Triangles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input of Numerical Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View Raw Scores Percentage Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Numerical Data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56
Table 5 illustrates teachers’ experiences with AimesWeb RtI data generated RtI processes required teachers to locate student data on documents, to describe student performance, and to record student attendance and behavioral information from school records. RtI experiences with data involved entry and review of Universal Screening cut performance scores generated during fall, winter, and spring screening interval periods.

Review of the percentages of students identified for each of the three-tiered levels of RtI supports was communicate by cone shaped illustrations generated by AimesWeb to show growth and movement between tiers or lack of growth, yet did not reveal actions taken by staff to improve student outcomes. For example, comparing percentages of students at Tier I after the fall universal screening and at spring provided measures which indicated incremental growth in each of the three grade levels across the three RtI tiers. Based on the highest percentage of students reported at Tier I, a lower percentage at Tier II, and an even lower percentage of students at Tier III at the start of the research, with minimal movement to Tier I over the course of one school year, RtI had a positive impact
on growth. Overall, findings from the RtI form evaluation determined that data collection forms did not direct a variety of information about student needs, nor did any of the forms communicate procedures for any of the Tier processes.

**Interpretation of Findings**

Three RtI sources used to conduct the program evaluation included, the RtI Beliefs Survey, Tier II Universal Screening Scores, and RtI forms as artifacts. Collectively, the RtI sources provided insight into congruence of staff beliefs to RtI tenets, whether their decisions reflected their understandings about data to determine supports, and offered more insight into the types of data used to implement RtI during the 2015-2016 school year with implication for improved data collection forms. The evaluation of each section raised concerns around data that determined improvements in its understanding and uses of data were necessary to improve Tier II processes. For example, participant understandings of RtI Tenets on the survey suggested staff did not respond to consistently low and resistant student growth. In addition evaluation of artifacts raised concerns for the absence of narrative data on forms needed in meetings and to inform discussions between teaching staff on the effect of strategies or need for adjustments.
**Table 6. Findings and Interpretations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source:</th>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Interpretation of Finding within the context of RtI Tenets to guard against Disproportionality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RtI Beliefs Survey</strong></td>
<td>Results of the Consensus participant agreement activity determined all participants beliefs were not aligned to RtI tenets.</td>
<td>District RtI practices were influenced beliefs that were not in accordance with RtI tenets. The lack of 100 percent alignment of RtI practices to beliefs increases the possibility that practices may inadvertently lead to disproportionality for any student groupings by race, gender, or culturally and linguistically diverse student groupings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier II Universal Screening Scores</strong></td>
<td>Twenty percent of participant agreement held beliefs that conflicted with the premise of RtI providing early preventive supports when needed for all student.</td>
<td>The lack of 100 percent participant agreement raised concerns for staff awareness and understanding for the purpose of early preventive supports. Notably, RtI Beliefs survey item no 5 on agreement with ESSA principles resulted in 80 percent agreement and one neutral response. My interpretation is more coaching on RtI tenets and practices is needed to ensure the district practices do not inadvertently create conditions leading to disproportionate practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier II Universal Screening Scores</strong></td>
<td>Over the duration of the 2015-2016 school year universal screening scores after Fall and Winter interventions shown incremental scores described as low resulting in consistent placement at the Tier II level of supports.</td>
<td>While the state report card indicated the district met indicator of disproportionality denoted by the lack of excessive student groups referred for special education services, intervention effectiveness was a concern to ensure supports were aligned to student needs before referrals special education services are made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier II Universal Screening Scores</strong></td>
<td>Using the CBM assessment may not provide sufficient information about student struggles to attain skills needed for significant improvements and movement back to Tier I.</td>
<td>Screening scores used to measure changes in student skill sets may not be sufficiently guide choice of intervention due to embedded approached in curriculum verses a direct and isolated approach consistent with different intervention selections. Tools used to support RtI practice alignment to RtI Tenets also safeguard against conditions leading to disproportionate practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source:</th>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Interpretation of Finding within the context of RtI Tenets to guard against Disproportionality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBM assessment may limit staff exposure to the range of data needed understand student struggles while also limiting staff data skill sets.</td>
<td>Signs of ineffective practices may have to do with the tool used to assess student growth and the limited data skills possessed by staff from using a tool that does not expand data skill sets to meet the needs of practices that support district students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The finding determined that while universal screening measured changes in student skills over the duration of the school year growth was consistently low and a placement consistency in the Tier II level of supports.</td>
<td>My interpretation, this finding raises concerns that Tier II procedures had not been defined. Teacher practices in isolation may blind sight the need to establish and monitor Tier II activities and decision making events. Unless additional coaching is provided, staff practices may not evolve to align with RtI tenets and principles around intervention adjustments with sensitivity to intervention intensity to meet the needs of students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE: JUDGMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Judgment on the RtI Program Evaluation Findings

Overall, I learned that efforts to increase student growth outcomes nurtured conditions with potential to manifest as disproportionate practices due to limited practices with Tier II data. In my judgment the RtI program evaluation provided an accurate account of the RtI Tier II impact on students. By evaluating each of three inquiry areas of RtI including scores, forms, and participant responses collected from the RtI Beliefs survey a more compelling account was provided for users. Three research questions were identified in the introduction section that served as compass pointing this research in the direction of Tier II practices that were less visible yet important for level of new information revealed about this component of RtI.

1. To what extent did RtI Tier II demonstrate its readiness to operate effectively by providing opportunities and experiences for staff to impact student growth?

2. To what extent did RtI Tier II data trigger adjustment of supports with variance to the needs of all students?

3. To what extent does staff demonstrate proficiency to conduct RtI activities?

By including a focus on student growth and specifically targeting the RtI Tier II level designed to facilitate growth and provide early intervention and supports, a final determination of growth were made in accordance to each section of findings. By analyzing documents, I was able to explore the extent to which RtI provided opportunities for staff to impact student growth; also, by exploring staff beliefs, I was able to present staff with an assessment of beliefs regarding RtI practices and, more significantly, provide consensus information which highlighted evidence noting whether beliefs were consistent with RtI tenets. Furthermore, since student growth, within the
context of RtI, was indirectly linked to disproportionality via practices, the program
evaluation was able to show the risks created from stagnated Tier II practices.

Hosp (n.d.), an RtI scholar and researcher, explained that RtI was able to address
disproportionality. According to Hosp, “instruction and intervention must be aligned with
students’ needs” (p. 3). Hosp further explained that RtI should make a difference in
outcomes experienced by student demographic groups rather than be determined
successful based merely on a head count. Basically, Hosp (n.d) argued that RtI—if
operated successfully—would indirectly affect disproportionality practices. In addition
Hosp (n.d) raised concerns around efforts leading to disproportionality indicating the
need for strategic and timely instructional practices with RtI before making special
education referrals. Hosp (n.d) opposed efforts of addressing disproportionality by
managing numbers referred for special education. Timely intervention and decision-
making about interventions impact growth and make the argument that slow and low
growth leads to disproportionality.

RtI was intended as an early intervention support designed to meet the needs of
struggling students. Signs of struggling student concerns are evidenced by low impact RtI
practices as determined by slow and low growth depicted by the score analysis. The
extent to which RtI Tier II supports were evaluated for its impact on student growth can
have implications for disproportionality practices. The program evaluation determined
that while Tier II impacted student growth its efforts were representative of meaningful
improvement in student performances. As such not all student experiences resulted in
sufficient levels of growth to return to meet benchmark cut scores for Tier I.
Progressive School District Results

1. To what extent did RtI Tier II demonstrate its readiness to operate effectively by providing opportunities and experiences for staff to impact student growth?

The answer to the first question was explored using the RtI Beliefs survey and the RtI form evaluation. Ball and Christ (2012) noted in their research on assessments greater potential for tiered success depended on many factors including adjustments to interventions as needed based on data outcomes. Ball and Christ (2012) pointed out that RtI problem analysis processes were needed to both identify deficient skills targeted for intervention and distinguish those from skills already established. Finally, the RtI form evaluation suggested that staff exposure to a variety of data was limited to cut scores rather than information gathered from other sources.

2. To what extent did RtI Tier II data trigger adjustment of supports aligned to the needs of all students?

The answer to this question was explored from the evaluation of RtI Belief Survey items, the analysis of the Tier II Universal Screening Scores and the RtI form evaluation. I wanted to learn if staff beliefs were consistent with RtI tenets for being responsive to student needs, based on data showed changes in outcomes with implications of deliberate change to interventions. In this area, the data the collective evaluation showed that Tier II practices were insufficient as implemented based on the period of low student outcome Tier II Universal Screening Scores. The Tier II Universal Screening Scores represented the more positive aspect of this level of support. As Aims Web was the main source of RtI data management it also determined easy access based on it being an electronic storage source of RtI data. At the same the sole use of Aims
Web to provide data may have been excessive dependency on the electronic source and as such contributed to the level of skills with data and decision making practices in a timely manner from staff. Finally, the RtI forms did not reflect narratives about student needs and subsequent decisions on interventions or placements.

3. To what extent does staff demonstrate proficiency to conduct RtI activities?

The answer to the third question was explored by evaluating staff responses to RtI Beliefs survey items. Three findings from the survey indicated concerning practices based on staff beliefs. The findings show variability in staff knowledge, which raised concerns for the school to engage further as a group of stakeholders and bring conformity to their knowledgebase for RtI. Since RtI in the Progressive School District was still evolving, its practices were reflective of a very basic level of RtI usage. Measured by the findings of program evaluation, determined that RtI facilitated changes in instructional practices provided to all students in the Progressive School District; yet, it had remained a work in progress for too long. The program evaluation provided useful information and knowledge to staff about their practices and direction for future improvements.

I met with the users of the program evaluation including the district superintendent, the principal, and two assistant principals to review the findings. Administrators were interested in the Universal Screening Data presented in Figure 1 and in Table 4. They were accepting of the results which indicated Tier II had impacted student growth, yet very minimally. The superintendent was encouraged that past year RtI practices had not led to disproportionality. Yet the district leader also interested in improving current deficits to RtI Tier II practices after learning its relationship to the
disproportionate pathway. Overall, staff accepted the information and findings resistance and agreed to work on changes needed to improve RtI supports motivated by the Tier II analysis and evaluation of its respective data.
**Recommendations**

Adhering to the intentionality of a utilization program evaluation as described earlier in the study by Patton (2008), this study produced useful information about RtI Tier II practices for its users, the RtI building administrator and the district leader. In the context of RtI Tier II experiences the evaluation findings raised awareness around the utility of Tier II supports to drive meaningful student growth. In addition, the information learned from the study identified levers useful to building and district leadership to use for navigating future discussions on Tier II supports. Moreover, the program evaluation results pointed out the urgency for RtI Tier II operations to continue on a pathway of evolution.

More specifically, the program evaluation determined that while RtI had a positive effect on student growth based on the Tier II 2015-2016 score analysis, not all students experienced positive effects from their RtI experiences. I argued this outcome was plausibly linked to the level of data skills teachers used to operate RtI Tier II supports. The Corwin Connect (n.d.) an online RtI resource lamented that educator misinformation often guided decision making practices, explaining they (educators) believed the progress monitoring component of RtI served as the actual intervention. To this point, as the agency of RtI is activated by adult capacity and skills to use data and derive information from data, I recommend reducing the possibility of misinformation related to limited data skill experiences is necessary to improve the impact of Tier II supports.
As, a range of data is generated from the RtI Tier II outcomes of a diverse student population the response to student data must be aligned to address more student needs. Teachers must be able to derive key information from data. Implicated are decision-making skills which center on teacher abilities to “unpack” what they are to do with data. Increased understanding for effect that each type of data can potentially have on decisions aligned to student growth is promising for new outcomes. As noted earlier, the U.S. Department of Education (2011) study identified various types of data skills used to support teacher success in classrooms. Five areas identified competencies teachers needed to support decisions making with data per the study.

1. *Data Location*-finding relevant pieces of data within the data system or on a display;
2. *Data Comprehension*-Understanding what data is telling or data implications;
3. *Data Interpretation*-Deriving meaning from data;
4. *Instructional decision making*-Using data to determine the most appropriate instruction to address goals;
5. *Question posing*-Being able to frame and articulate questions that data can address (U.S. Department of Education (2011, p. 6-7)

I recommend increasing experiences with data first through forms that gather a range of data and from increased skills as mentioned earlier.

Overall the program evaluation activities provided insight into influences on RtI Tier II via the RtI beliefs, student data outcome trends, and data collection forms. The results drew attention to areas where leadership could intervene to support Tier II processes. Finally I recommend that district and school building leadership lead
activities that protect against disproportionality by improving RtI Tier II practices through professional development activities aligned to the findings in this study.
References


National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (2005, Fall). Learning Disabilities / Responsiveness to intervention and learning disabilities. 28, 249-259


Appendix A

Beliefs Survey

Directions: For items 1-4 below, please shade in the circle next to the response option that best represents your answer.

1. Job Description:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Solving/RtI Coach</th>
<th>Teacher-General Education</th>
<th>Teacher-Special Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>School Social Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Years of Experience in Education:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 1 year</th>
<th>1-4 years</th>
<th>5-9 years</th>
<th>10-14 years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>25 or more years</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
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</table>

3. Number of Years in your Current Position:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 1 year</th>
<th>1-4 years</th>
<th>5-9 years</th>
<th>10-14 years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>20 or more years</td>
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4. Highest Degree Earned:

| B.A. /B.S. | M.A. /M.S. | Ed. S. | Ph.D./Ed.D |

Directions: Using the scale below, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements by shading in the circle that best represents your response. Strongly Disagree (SD)
Disagree (D)
Neutral (N)
Agree (A)
Strongly Agree (SA)
5. I believe in the philosophy of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) even if I disagree with some of the requirements.

6. Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in:
   a. Reading
   b. Math

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree (SD)</th>
<th>Disagree (D)</th>
<th>Neutral (N)</th>
<th>Agree (A)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (SA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in:
   7a. reading
   7b. math

8. The majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in
   8a. reading
   8b. math

9. The majority of students with behavioral problems (Emotional Handicap/Social Emotional Disorder or Emotional Behavior Disorder) achieve grade-level benchmarks in
   9a. reading
   9b. math
10. Students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g. Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Behavior Disorder) who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) in

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10 a. reading

10 b. math

11. General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.

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12. General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.

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</table>

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

- Strongly Disagree (SD)
- Disagree (D)
- Neutral (N)
- Agree (A)
- Strongly Agree (SA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
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<td>13. The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.</td>
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<td>14. Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.</td>
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<td>15. The “severity” of student’s academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.</td>
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16. The “severity” of a student’s behavioral problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.

17. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identify effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.

18. Many students currently identified as “Learning Disability (LD)” do not have a disability, rather they came to school “not ready” to listen or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.

19. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only “teacher judgement.”

20. Evaluating a student’s response to intervention is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from “tests” (e.g., IQ/Achievement test).

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
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<tr>
<td>21. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or above benchmarks.</td>
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22. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.

23. A student’s parents (guardian) should be involved in the problem solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about the student.

THANK YOU!