ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY IN SECONDARY LITERACY RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

A Record of Study

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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August 2020

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

The focus of the study was to examine the perceptions of administrators responsible for monitoring implementation fidelity in the Response to Intervention (RTI) program in secondary literacy. Using a mixed methods design, quantitative data were collected from a district administrator and from administrators on secondary campuses in a North Texas school district. Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted on quantitative data to measure mean ratings and frequency distributions of scores. In addition, a Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to measure variances.

While the sample size was too small to reveal statistical significance, the overall general impression of implementation fidelity in secondary literacy RTI suggested that practices were perceived on average as occurring as often as intended. The RTI practices closest to implementation fidelity were: universal literacy screeners, the use of data to identify at-risk students, and providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. The RTI practices occurring infrequently were actions related to data-based decision making, particularly for actions conducted by RTI teams (problem-solving teams). In addition, the overall results revealed a variance *among* the district's secondary campus. Results provided strong evidence that levels of implementation fidelity were higher for middle school campuses in the district than high school campuses.

To further examine the factors causing variances between secondary campus, the qualitative phase of the study was conducted with selected secondary administrators. Administrators were identified based on the results of quantitative data analysis and were interviewed to divulge perceived factors affecting implementation fidelity. Document

analysis was also conducted to triangulate findings from interviews. The results revealed multiple factors that contributed to and hindered implementation fidelity among the district secondary campuses. The primary contributing factor was explicit policies, procedures and district supports from kindergarten through 8th grade. The primary barrier to implementation fidelity was the district policy allowing for "contextual flexibility" for high school campuses.

Given the importance of adolescent literacy acquisition, the findings resulted in a recommendation for articulating RTI program policies, procedures, and district supports *beyond* middle school. Findings suggested a need for balancing explicit guidance and district supports *with* the contextual flexibility that is necessary to implement RTI programs on high school campuses.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the loves of my life: Tara, Jennifer, Alec, Jace, Ryan, and Wanda. Additionally, I dedicate this to my Dallas-Fort Worth, Oklahoma, and California family, friends, and fellow educators.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am eternally grateful for the guidance and support that I have received from many special people. I am thankful for my daughter, LaTara, who is perhaps one of the most caring and genuine people that I know. Thank you for your support and your patience through this journey. My daughter, Jennifer, whose words of encouragement and feedback was just what I needed when I needed it. Thank you for sharing your strength during an incredibly challenging time. As a part of the high school Class of 2020, my greatest admiration goes to my son, Alec. You have had to give up so much in your last semester of high school. Despite graduating high school under quarantine from a global pandemic and escalating civil unrest, you have remained steadfast in your determination to persist despite challenges. Your strength of character is unmatched.

Special thanks go out to my doctoral committee, Dr. James Laub, Dr. Radhika Viruru, Dr. Larry Kelly, and Dr. Tong, for the exceptional amount of patience, advice, and assistance during this process. Thank you for your willingness to serve on my committee. I feel privileged to have been guided by these extraordinary individuals.

I want to thank my fellow educators, especially those who participated in the study. Thank you, district administrators, secondary administrators, and my literacy specialist, for sharing your time, knowledge, and for trusting me during this process. I want to thank my internship supervisors, Dr. Shelly Butler and Dr. Silvia Martinez, for sharing your professional expertise and for providing guidance.

Finally, I want to thank my dear friend, Serge Francois, without whom I would not have been able to complete this doctoral journey. Thank you!

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

This inquiry was supervised by a thematic committee consisting of Professor James Laub, Chair, Professor Rahdika Viruru, and Professor Larry Kelly of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture, and Professor Fuhui Tong of the Department of Educational Psychology.

Professor Shaun Hutchins provided guidance for the data analysis in Section 4. All other work conducted for the Record of Study was completed by the student, under the advisement of Professor James Laub of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture.

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1. INTRODUCTION: LEADERSHIP CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THE ACTION

The demands of literacy in the 21st century requires that adults have the ability to read to gain access to a world of knowledge, to synthesize information from different sources, to critique and evaluate arguments, among other things. As the International Literacy Association (2016) posits, "literacy is the essential education, the learning through which all other learning takes place. Crimp, deny, reduce, or thwart robust literacy acquisition and the prospects for achieving all other educational attainments are correspondingly diminished, resulting in serious social consequences that are known all too well." It is through literacy acquisition that students are able to make meaning in other content areas.

One of the challenges facing America's schools is the reduction of the disparities in literacy outcomes for the most academically vulnerable populations of children. At its basest level, literacy encompasses a complex set of skills, such as word-reading skills and knowledge-based literacy competencies. However, at the secondary level, the increased demand of text emphasizes the high importance of knowledge-based literacy competencies – those competencies directly related to comprehension. For academically vulnerable children, such as children from non-English speaking families and low-income students, literacy challenges rise when the text deals with information unconnected to any existing schema in the reader's knowledge base. According to Kelly, "new urgency and challenge is added to the work of literacy educators by the nation's schools changing demographics and persistent socioeconomic divide, a growing minority population, and continued ethnic disparities" (Kelly et al, 2008). Instructional approaches for teaching conceptual and knowledge-based literacy competencies are

critical to the academic success of these vulnerable children. These instructional approaches include how educators respond when students are not making adequate progress toward learning goals. What a teacher does to intervene when students struggle in literacy at the secondary level is of paramount importance.

Recognizing the growing number of students who need academic and behavioral interventions in secondary literacy, educators, policymakers and researchers have called for "school-wide intervention frameworks in which students' response to quality intervention is monitored and used to inform decisions about future intervention and placement" (Fletcher et al., 2007, p. 39). Researchers have found that while schools have enhanced the effectiveness of delivering interventions for elementary-aged students, similar gains have not been observed for secondary students (Elliott & Morrison, 2008). Research has consistently supported systemic efforts to use the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework as one of the mechanisms by which educators intervene with students who are at risk for reading difficulties (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2005). The RTI framework uses assessment data to efficiently allocate resources in order to enhance learning for all students through multi-tiered systems of support (Burns & Van Der Heyden, 2006). Research has shown that the RTI framework, a systemic way to address secondary literacy acquisition, has shown to be an effective way to improve outcomes for academically vulnerable students. However, RTI in secondary literacy was vastly different from the RTI framework that has existed for many years for elementary-aged students for many reasons that are fundamental to the structure and culture of secondary schools.

1.1. Context

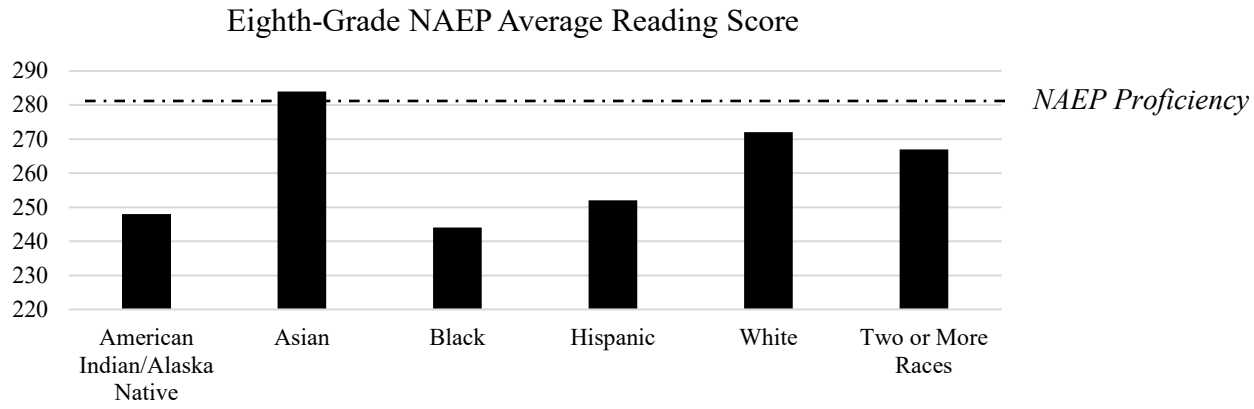
1.1.1. National Context

After decades of research on adolescent literacy within the context of a school system or district-level organization, it is clear that systemic reform efforts are important for improving the quality of adolescent literacy instruction. The process of implementing the instructional and organizational changes that are necessary to improve reading achievement are time-consuming and complex. However, recent national achievement-level results in reading highlight the urgency of improving student outcomes.

In 2019, a national report card on the overall educational progress in reading showed that 34% of eighth-grade students performed at or above the proficient level (i.e. cut score of 280) on the reading assessment. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which administered the reading assessment, defined "proficient" in eighth-grade reading as the ability to provide relevant information, to summarize main ideas and themes, to analyze text, and to make and substantiate judgments about text (NAEP, 2019). The national average reading score was 263 in the 2019 report, three points lower compared to 2017 results. When the average reading scores were disaggregated among racial groups, results showed a gap in achievement levels among groups with the subgroups. Consistent with NAEP results, research conducted by Solis et al. (2018) shows "a full 70% of U.S. middle and high school students require differentiated instruction—that is, instruction targeted to their individual strengths and weaknesses" (p. 221). Figure 1 shows the eighth-grade NAEP reading scores by student groups. The results underscore the importance of sustained efforts to improve adolescent literacy acquisition for all students.

Figure 1

Eighth-Grade NAEP Reading Average Scores



Note. Average scores for racial subgroups for eighth-grade students taking the 2019 NAEP reading assessment. Adapted from Trend in Eighth-Grade NAEP Reading Average Scores, in *The Nation's Report Card*, n.d., Retrieved May 7, 2020, from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/groups/?grade=8. Copyright 2019 by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Adapted with permission.

1.1.2 Situational Context

The challenges associated with implementing RTI in secondary literacy are multifaceted, many of which are due to the structure and culture of secondary schools. As concluded by the National High Center (2010), "secondary schools must consider many unique features when implementing RTI, such as class schedules, grading requirements, course credits, and curricular focus" (p. 6). Regardless, educators are still required to utilize the RTI framework to implement the instructional and organizational changes that are necessary to improve secondary literacy acquisition. Despite the current challenges of implementing secondary literacy RTI programs, so much potential lies

within the reach of educators who will devote the time, energy, and resources needed to implement the RTI program as intended.

A collaborative effort between district leadership and campus-level administrators to align RTI policies and practices is a necessary part of ensuring that the RTI program is being implemented as intended. At the district level, a nuanced understanding of the effects of RTI policies and practices on implementation fidelity is critical to sustaining comprehensive RTI program at scale. An examination of implementation fidelity should include an assessment of the program's application across *all* secondary campuses and its application within the context of each individual secondary campus. The results of the examination should assist district leadership with identifying and addressing any factors contributing to or hindering implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program.

At the campus level, secondary administrators tasked with leading the application RTI policies and practices on individual campuses should examine how implementation fidelity has been affected by contextual factors unique to each campus. An examination of implementation fidelity at the campus level should include an assessment of any structural and cultural factors contributing or hindering implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program. The results of the examination at the campus level, should assist secondary administrators with identifying and addressing those factors and could help identify what guidance and leadership supports are needed to ensure implementation fidelity. Without sufficient research and guidance on RTI implementation fidelity on secondary campuses, educators are left to devise their own plans for

interventions for secondary literacy students, resulting in variations across district campuses (Brozo, 2009).

1.1.3. Purpose of the Action

The purpose of the mixed methods inquiry was to determine if variances existed in the levels of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program across secondary campuses in a North Texas school district (referred to as "the district"). The study sought to determine what structural or cultural factors contributed to or hindered RTI implementation fidelity at scale. To accomplish this, the study measured both district leadership and secondary administrators' perceptions of RTI implementation to determine the effects of current RTI policies and practices on program integrity between and among secondary campuses. The study did not examine the effects of implementation as related to student performance outcomes.

To facilitate capacity building for RTI implementation at scale, the study findings were used to identify factors that facilitated or impeded fidelity in the secondary literacy program. In the study findings facilitated discussions regarding additional RTI guidance and leadership supports that were needed to address structural and cultural factors unique to individual campuses that limiting the implementation of RTI policies and procedures. Ultimately, the goal was to identify and mitigate any variances in implementation fidelity between secondary campuses in the secondary literacy RTI program, the framework used to improve secondary literacy acquisition.

1.2. The Problem

Measures of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program had shown variances in levels of implementation between the district's secondary campuses –

consisting of six middle schools and five traditional high schools. District guidance, consisting of goals, policies, procedures, processes, staffing, and resources, were explicit about implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program. Despite this, campus-level implementation fidelity within and among the secondary campuses in the RTI program could have been described as inconsistent. Inconsistencies in implementation fidelity were present among the middle school campuses; however, this phenomenon was considerable among the high school campuses in the district. Additionally, while the district was performing well in literacy *overall,* disparities existed in student performance for students participating in the secondary literacy RTI program. When district results were analyzed campus-by-campus, data showed variances in student performance. Administrators tasked with leading the implementation of the program needed a fuller picture of program integrity in secondary literacy RTI.

1.2.1. Relevant History of the Problem

The district's literacy program was divided into two bands: kindergarten – eighth-grade literacy and secondary literacy (grades 9-12). The RTI program, in kindergarten – eighth grade, had been implemented since 2014. The district had articulated the RTI program components in school board policy, in the audited Curriculum Management Plan, and through the district RTI procedural manual. The RTI program goals were published in the District Improvement Plan and in the Vision 2020 strategic planning document, which was publicly viewable via the district's website. Despite specific district guidance and ongoing support in the secondary literacy RTI program through eighth-grade, variances in implementation fidelity still existed between the district's

middle schools. Table 1 shows the district-provided RTI program supports and monitoring systems in secondary literacy.

Table 1

RTI Program Supports and Monitoring Systems

K – 8TH GRADE RTI PROGRAM SUPPORTS AND MONITORING

Supports	
Curriculum Delivery and Instructional Standards	Written, Taught, and Assessed Curriculum Instructional Frameworks
Staffing	Reading Coach (district) Reading Specialist (campus)
Professional Learning	Content-based professional development RTI professional development
Instructional Technology (RTI)	iStation, MobyMax, Edgenuity, etc.
Systems for Monitoring Implementation Fidelity	
Continuous Improvement Plan	Curriculum Calibrations
Student Performance Data	Curriculum Management Audit

Note. Adapted from the district RTI Implementation Manual (2019).

For the RTI program in secondary literacy beyond eighth-grade, the district expected RTI implementation; however, the district provided a decreased amount of direct guidance and supports. The district granted authority to high school administrators to make decisions about RTI program implementation based on student needs. Dulaney (2013) refers to this practice as "contextual fluidity in the RTI program" (p.54). Because of this, the actual structure of the secondary literacy RTI program differed greatly between high school campuses in the district.

1.2.2 Significance of the Problem

Without sufficient research and guidance on effectively implementing RTI, educators are left to devise their own plans or frameworks for interventions for students in higher grades, particularly in high schools. Administrators leading implementation are

often “improvising on the fly”, while navigating complex issues related to the structure of secondary campuses. To effectively implement RTI in secondary literacy, in addition to managing the staffing and scheduling complexities that are inherent in the structure of secondary schools, secondary administrators must navigate state graduation requirements.

To graduate in the state of Texas, high school students are required to following a high school graduation plan, earn 22 to 26 course credits, and pass five end-of-course (EOC) assessments (Texas Education Agency [TEA], n.d.). In addition to tracking student performance on EOC assessments, TEA calculates: the five-year graduation rate for each campus, tracks the percentage of graduates who meet criteria to be college, career, or military ready , measures academic performance of at-risk students, and tracks the campus’s efforts to “close the gaps” between different subgroups of students (TEA, n.d.). This poses a challenge to secondary administrators, as the preparation for high school graduation begins in middle school. For districts engaging in systemic RTI implementation, the importance of providing guidance and leadership support to secondary administrators cannot be understated.

Because secondary administrators are navigating competing academic priorities and negotiating structural and cultural factors affecting RTI implementation, the district’s contextual flexibility in grades 9 – 12 offered a path to ensure RTI implementation in secondary literacy. However, what the district noticed was the application of contextual flexibility had a detrimental influence on implementation fidelity across secondary campuses. A determination of ways to augment contextual flexibility by providing additional RTI guidance and leadership supports would be a pathway toward increasing district implementation fidelity. To accomplish this, the mixed methods research

questions ensured that the study was focused obtaining the needed information to eliminate variances in RTI implementation fidelity.

1.3. Research Questions and Hypothesis

1.3.1. Quantitative Research Questions

The purpose of the quantitative research questions was to assess administrators' perceptions of RTI practices as an indicator of implementation levels and to identify any variances in the RTI program. The quantitative phase, which occurred first, answered the following research questions:

1. What are secondary administrators' perceptions of implementation fidelity in secondary literacy RTI program?
2. Do administrators' perceptions reveal any variances in implementation fidelity among and between secondary campuses?

1.3.2. Qualitative Research Questions

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing perceptions of RTI implementation fidelity, administrators were evaluated qualitatively as well, to search for supplemental themes to explain the quantitative results. The following questions were answered for the second, qualitative phase:

3. What factors influenced the perceived implementation levels identified through the quantitative survey?
4. What factors were viewed as facilitators of implementation fidelity?
5. What factors were viewed as barriers to implementation fidelity?

1.3.3. Integrated Mixed Methods Research Question

The integrated mixed methods research question was as follows:

6. Do administrators' perspectives of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program reveal any factors contributing to variances among middle and high school campuses?

1.4. Personal Context

The totality of my teaching experience has been within the context of the middle and high school English Language Arts classroom. My deep concern for adolescent literacy issues drives the motivation to engage in research related to best practices that strengthen secondary literacy programs. Despite the multitude of challenges in secondary literacy, adjusting to the increased literacy demands are critical in order to impact student learning in a meaningful way. For the disengaged, academically vulnerable student, effective literacy interventions are essential. Because I've experienced disparities in education as a student and as an educator, I understand that raising standards without giving students ways of reaching them doesn't raise student achievement. But by providing students with the adequate support and resources, educators can go a long way in providing that high-quality and equitable education that we so critically need.

What an administrator does to ensure implementation integrity in the RTI program is of paramount importance and is a crucial step to ensuring that struggling students receive supportive interventions. Administrators must work to improve adolescent literacy outcomes for all students, especially given the rise in prevalence of students who are considered academically vulnerable. Given my background and understanding of the urgency related to secondary literacy interventions, my work as both a district level and school-level administrator of RTI programs directly influenced the decisions about the mixed methods design process (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Over the

course of my campus-level administrative experience, I have led multiple instructional leadership teams responsible for implementing RTI programs.

The experience that piqued my interest in conducting research on secondary RTI implementation was my experience as a middle school principal. Our goal was to improve student performance on state reading assessments by using the RTI framework. At the time, our team received professional development on research-based RTI practices and RTI implementation to ensure that the RTI components we used to be adaptable within the context of our school and based on our student needs. As a result of the professional development, we determined that we needed to hire a campus reading specialist (instructional specialist), who would be responsible for providing the tiered interventions to struggling students. What we realized was that RTI supports for middle school campuses was not available at the time due to the district's focus on elementary RTI implementation. Any RTI practices that we implemented were entirely funded through our campus budget. Both the budgetary and contextual challenges greatly affected our ability to employ the campus reading specialist on a long-term basis.

1.4.1. Researcher's Role and Personal History

Because of my experiences as a campus administrator, I am better able to support RTI implementation on secondary campuses. In my current role as director of instruction, our focus has been on ensuring RTI implementation fidelity by providing the necessary leadership supports (explicit RTI policies, professional development on RTI protocols and practices, funding for staffing, etc.). Over the past two years, our network support has been enhanced to provide campus administrators with the guidance and tools necessary for RTI implementation, as well as protocols to monitor fidelity. The study's focus on

mitigating variances in RTI implementation fidelity helped to build our district leadership team's capacity to support secondary administrators. By obtaining a view of the effects of district RTI policies, protocols, and practices, we were about to use the study's findings to make recommendations to district stakeholders on how to improve implementation fidelity.

My role in the study was to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis to meet the research purpose; to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings (perceptions) of the study participants related to the problems of practice (implementation fidelity in secondary literacy RTI programs); and safeguard participants and participant data. During the quantitative phase of the mixed methods study, I recruited secondary administrators and administered the survey questionnaire. To eliminate or minimize researcher bias, the collection of data sources was coordinated in collaboration with the district director of RTI. Ivankova (2015) posited, "selecting data sources through collaboration with the stakeholders helps ensure that the collected data represents stakeholders' views" (p. 210). The RTI director also provided feedback on the survey instrument and assisted in identifying potential survey participants.

For the qualitative phase, I identified a select number of information-rich participants to ensure that each had a sufficient amount of knowledge about RTI program implementation to support a deeper inquiry into the factors. Participants who chose to part in semi-structured interviews were interviewed by me, one-on-one, at office locations or on their campus. I assured that the interview transcripts were checked for accuracy by each participant to reduce errors in interview text data. In addition, I used district documentation to triangulate and confirm the data from both phases, in an effort

to reduce any bias. Finally, I translated the study's findings to share with stakeholders and to inform practice. Results were first shared with the district RTI director and who then reported the findings to the district's executive leadership team.

1.4.2. Significant Stakeholders

The study's findings add to the research on implementation fidelity in secondary literacy and furthers the understanding of the factors that contribute to or impede program integrity across secondary campuses within a school district. What administrators' report is occurring on their campuses can be compared to current district policies and procedures and be use to improve implementation goals. Discrepancies found between the two can be used as data to make informed decisions related to implementation fidelity. Thus, the appropriate audience for this study are stakeholders in leadership positions, such as school boards, district leadership teams, and school leadership teams. Although the study's participants were administrators, instructional staff, such as reading interventionists; general education and special education teachers; support professionals; and other professionals outside of a traditional school district would also be an appropriate audience.

1.5. Important Terms

Continuous Improvement Process is defined as the ongoing effort by districts and campuses to improve services or processes that are incremental over time (Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 36).

Curriculum-based Assessments refers to assessments created directly from material taught from selected academic content (Idol, 1996, p. 21).

Data-based Decision Making refers to the extensive use of data to guide decision making, to monitor progress, and to set and prioritize goals (Goldring & Berends, 2009) p.5).

Differentiated Instruction refers to a form of instruction requiring teacher flexibility in implementing an instructional approach to provide a means for dealing with individual student differences within the same classes (Wendling & Mather, 2009, p. 10).

Educators refers to all education professionals and paraprofessionals working to educate students (Ehren et al., 2010, p. 319).

Evidence-based Instruction refers to "the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction" (Wendling & Mather, 2009, p. 3).

Every Student Succeeds Act refers to the law that replaced NCLB. ESSA/ESEA is the source of most federal K-12 education initiatives, such as Title I schools, accountability for student achievement, programs for English language learners, math-science partnerships, and Title II professional development (Gov.Trac.us [ESSA], 2019).

General Education is the program of education that typically developing students should receive, based on state standards and evaluated by annual state education tests (Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 35).

Instructional Levels refers to the highest level at which a reader is not independent or text that students can read with assistance or instruction (Reed et al., 2012, p. 21).

Implementation Fidelity refers to the extent to which the intervention is implemented as designed (Benner et al., 2011, p. 80).

Multi-tiered System of Support refers to the tiered instructional model in which the instruction delivered to students varies depending on several aspects that are based on the nature and severity of the student's academic and/or behavioral difficulties (Regan et al., 2015, p. 234).

No Child Left Behind refers to 2002 law that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which included Title I, the government's flagship aid program for disadvantaged students (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002).

Progress Monitoring refers to a practice assessment administered on a regular basis for the purpose of determining if students are benefiting from instruction, and to develop effective programming for those students who are not adequately responding to instruction (Bender, 2012, p. 27).

Response-to-Intervention (RTI) Perceptions is the assessment of an educator's understanding, interpretation, and belief that they have the skills and/or support to implement RTI practices (Castillo et al., 2016, p.31).

Special Education refers to the practice of educating students with special needs in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs (Brozo, 2009, p.54).

Student Performance Data refers to the academic progress of a single student, such as data from formative and summative assessment data, coursework, teacher observations, and other information pertaining to student achievement on assessments (Dulaney, 2013, p. 54).

Tier I refer to the core instruction provided to all students in the general education classroom. Instruction is typically provided by the classroom teacher (Brozo, 2009, p. 279).

Tier II refers to the small-group interventions and instruction provided to approximately three to five students (Brozo, 2009, p. 54).

Tier III refers to the intensive individual or small-group interventions provided for approximately one to three students (Brozo, 2009, p.54).

Universal Screening refers to the use of an assessment tool to determine if a student is at-risk for learning difficulties (Reed et al., 2012, p. 21).

1.6. Closing Thoughts on Section 1

Research on instructional approaches for secondary literacy acquisition continues to be critical to student's academic success. The need for a fuller picture of implementation fidelity in secondary literacy RTI programs from an administrators' perspective was critical. This study added to the research on implementation fidelity in RTI and research related to perceptions of educators in the RTI program. By considering the perceptions of RTI implementation, stakeholders can better understand how the structure and culture of a particular school campus can enhance or inhibit the feasibility of a district-wide RTI program. In addition, findings shed light on the alignment needed within and between campuses in the same district.

2. REVIEW OF SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP

2.1. Introduction

RTI is a multi-level approach to tracking student progress which provides prescriptive research-based instruction, progress monitoring, and collaborative, instructional decision-making for students with reading difficulties. According to King et al. (2012), RTI was "most often conceptualized as a framework for providing multiple tiers of increasingly intensive instruction in an attempt to prevent academic failure" (p. 5). The goal in RTI is to target a student's specific learning challenges and to provide supplemental instructional support which increase in frequency if students lack academic progress or if students do not respond to the additional support.

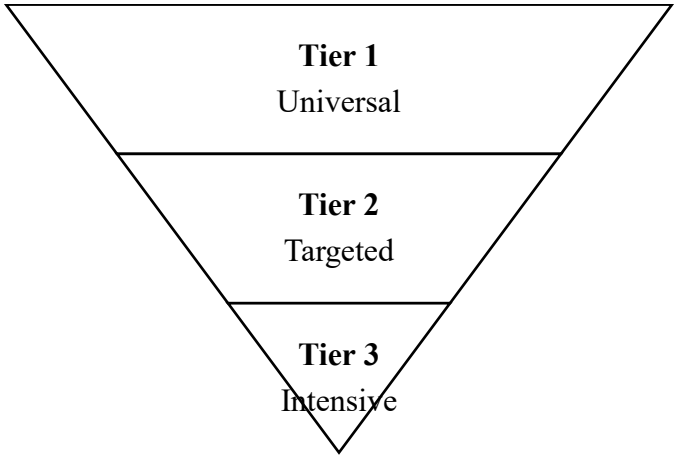
2.1.1. RTI Components

In 2014, the National Center for Response to Intervention identified five essential components of RTI programs. The components, which focus on struggling students, include assessments, data-based decision making, multitiered instructional levels, infrastructure and support mechanisms, and implementation fidelity and evaluation. The components are geared toward early intervention of struggling students, increasingly intensive instructional levels, a universal screening process, progress monitoring to support the data-based decision-making progress, and curriculum-based assessments. In addition, fidelity of implementation and evaluation of the RTI program is as essential to the success of the program as the assurances that the program components are implemented. The RTI system allows educators to move students within the tiered model and creates a system of disability identification that is aligned with statutory legislative requirements related to special education services. RTI provides multiple tiers, commonly

three, of evidence-based instruction through which students move based on their level of academic need. Figure 2 depicts a visualization of the RTI tiered support framework. At each tier, the instructional intensity increases.

Figure 2

Tiered Support Framework



Note. Some RTI models describe a fourth tier for special education.

Tier 1 represents high-quality instruction and services available to all students in the school setting, typically meeting the needs of approximately 80% of students. The Tier 1 practices and procedures are focused on balancing the needs of the entire student population and the resources available to the building. At the classroom level, teachers provide quality, research-based classroom literacy instruction. In secondary literacy, English Language Arts teachers must implement differentiated instructional lessons in order to meet the needs of Tier 1 instruction. In addition, secondary literacy teachers must deliver differentiated instruction in whole group, small group, and/or assist individual students one-on-one, as required. Tier 1 instruction, according to Collins (2010),

> Consists of general education instruction in the core curriculum and content interventions, including some implemented in differentiated instructional settings administered class-wide for struggling students who are identified through universal screening and/or benchmark assessments. Instructional strategies at this level are intended to build on student strengths and create a foundation for further learning and achievement. (p. 17)

The major feature of RTI is how students are monitored. Instruction at Tier 1 is also a time during which, as described by Brown & Doolittle (2008), baseline data through universal screening are gathered for all students and achievement is monitored regularly. Problem-solving, using RTI, relies on the use of evidence-based curricula that is taught in a consistent manner. Under RTI, teachers should keep detailed records of student progress, above and beyond typical formative and summative assessment records. Detailed records serve as documentation for students, especially those who continue to struggle. Students who do not make adequate progress at the Tier 1 level may be placed in RTI Tier 2. For students who continue to struggle, despite Tier 1 instruction, RTI allows for more intensive support at Tier 2. This means the students will receive prescriptive interventions designed to address their specific area of academic difficulty.

In the RTI framework, Tier 2 targets short-term instruction for a small group of students who need extra literacy instruction. In the original RTI pyramid, Tier 2 should represent approximately 15% of learners needing additional instructional support. The interventions administered during Tier 2 instruction need to be constructed from evidence-based practices. In secondary literacy, intervention can be offered as a part of small-group instruction in the regular classroom, pull-out instruction during the school

day, required intervention classes in place of elective classes, or before- and after-school programs. In middle and high school, Tier 2 interventions typically occur as its own class period, depending on school scheduling options.

Tier 2 interventions should be prescriptive in order to target the specific needs of individual students or small groups of struggling students. Tier 2 interventions are not meant for long-term. The interventions are meant to give students additional instruction in areas of weaknesses so that they may return to Tier 1 instruction. The goal is to provide supplemental instruction for as long as necessary until the student begins to make academic progress. As with Tier 1 interventions, student progress is monitored for improvement or lack thereof. For students who continue to fail to meet adequate progress, according to the RTI framework, they are placed in Tier 3, the most intensive level of instruction.

Tier 3 services are designed to address the needs of students who are experiencing significant academic problems and/or are unresponsive to Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention efforts. At the school level, as Burns and Van Der Heyden (2006) explained, "procedures should be in place through which students who are experiencing very severe or significant academic, behavioral, or social-emotional problems can be triaged directly into Tier 3 to receive necessary intensive and individualized intervention supports" (p. 4). As shown in the Figure 3, Tier 3 typically represents approximately 5% of the student population. For secondary literacy, these interventions are usually provided in the one-on-one context for students who have the most severe and chronic reading and learning difficulties. Tier 3 students are often referred for evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services if progress is not obtained. Overall, the RTI framework allows

for flexibility to meet the instructional demands and needs of students within the context of an individual campus.

2.2. Relevant Historical Background

Signed in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson as a civil rights law and a part of broader "War on Poverty" initiatives, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provided funding to states and attempted to ensure that every student had equal access to a quality education. ESEA's stated purpose was to "to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps" (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). ESEA funded primary and secondary education by offering federal grants to state education agencies to improve the quality of education. In addition, the law offered grants to districts serving low-income students, included grants for instructional materials (textbooks and library books), funded programs for special education, and included standards and accountability measures.

ESEA was reauthorized every five years with revisions and amendments, called titles, that further strengthened components of the law and/or provided additional funding for specific needs (Paul, 2016). The Title I program, created by the United States Department of Education, granted additional funding to schools with a high number of students meeting the criteria for the free and reduced school lunch program, traditionally low-income students. The Title II program granted funding for libraries, instructional materials, and preschool programs and was amended in 1969 to include funding for refugee children. The Title III program, amended in 1968, created the Bilingual Education Act, the Education of the Handicapped Act, and provided funding for rural

education. The Title IV program funded the education of individuals with disabilities, Title VII funded vocational education, and Title VIII defined gifted and talented education and the Teacher Corps. In 1972, Title IX, Public Law No. 92-318, 86 Stat. 235, was enacted to "protect individuals from sex-based discrimination in schools or other federally funded programs" (Paul, 2016, para. 3). In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) was a significant revision to ESEA in an attempt to better coordinate efforts and to continue to improve outcomes for students. IASA added an English language arts and mathematics assessment to be used to monitor student progress and to provide accountability. IASA also "reduced the threshold for schools to implement schoolwide programs from 75% poverty to 50% poverty and gave more local control in an effort to improve school" (Paul, 2016, para. 10).

In the fifty-four years since ESEA's enactment, many laws related to public education have sought to improve the education system and focus on equity, excellence, school choice, and standards and accountability. Every reauthorization of the ESEA has allowed stakeholders in public education to engage in the continuous improvement process to improve schools and the quality of education for all students.

2.2.1. No Child Left Behind

RTI was largely born from the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) and the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which required schools to close the achievement gap for all students. These laws contained specific language that called for classifying students based on documentation of how well they responded to interventions – this is the process educators have come to know as RTI.

NCLB aimed to raise all students' academic performance to a uniformly high standard; however, there is disagreement over whether the law achieved this goal. NCLB, passed into law in 2002, was complex, and its accountability plan included an expectation that all schools and school districts make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for every student subgroup toward the goal of 100% proficiency by 2014. NCLB's accountability plan included punitive measures and required a restructuring plan for schools with did not make progress toward academic performance. According to Brown and Clift (2010), the purpose of NCLB was stated in its introduction:

> to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments. To achieve this purpose, the law relied on a single pass/fail vehicle, the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measure, to deliver its core accountability and incentive mechanisms. (p. 776)

Any school that did not make AYP for every subgroup would be labeled a school in need of improvement, or it would face a series of increasingly weighty sanctions. Sanctions ranged from a simple notice for first year failing schools, to "corrective actions" up to and including closures. Schools were required to publish annual report cards detailing student achievement and demographic data.

NCLB (2002) Title I promoted "schoolwide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and academic content" (p. 115). NCLB included rules and appropriated funds that required states to establish reading programs that used proven, scientifically-based strategies and measures that

assessed the effectiveness of reading interventions. While NCLB (2002) did not explicitly include the language of RTI, section 1208 (3) of the law stated that "a child shall not be identified to be a child with a disability if determinant factor is a lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including in the essential components of reading instruction" (20 USC 6301). As Forte (2010) posits:

> the designers of NCLB were responding to real failures of the U.S. public education system, and the focus of the law on closing the testing gap, holding schools accountable, and forcing school systems to remain focused on student learning are all laudable public policy goals. But through its pass/fail design, NCLB fails to consistently correct the failures it intended to address. (p. 68)

In some ways, the era of NCLB offered the strongest school improvement efforts, for example, greater expectations for schools serving low-income students in disadvantaged communities – the students representing a large population of those identified as needing interventions. In other ways, NCLB was a challenging. As Forte stated in 2010, "certainly, the next reauthorization of the ESEA will provide a great opportunity to address the shortcomings of the current version of the law and could do so without losing sight of the fundamental commitment to supporting high-quality educational opportunities for all students" (p. 69).

2.2.2. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

When enacted in 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) provided guidance for special education services. IDEA required local educational agencies to determine if a student responded to intervention as a part of the evaluation process to determine whether the student had a specific learning disability.

RTI, though not specifically stated in IDEA, was alluded to through the law's requirement of the use of research-based interventions when identifying students with a learning disability. IDEA (2004) stated, "when determining whether a child has a learning disability…a local education agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to a scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures" (20 U.S.C. §1414[b][A] and [B]). Additionally, IDEA included specific components favoring proactive, preventative measures through its Early Intervening Services. It required that up to 15% of IDEA funds be used to provide early intervention for at-risk students without an Individual Education Program (IEPs). These were students who required additional supports in order to make progress in general education classes. The IEP is an essential component in providing a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to individuals with disabilities. In this way, IDEA provided a pathway for the further structured articulation of RTI as a part of a continuum of supports for struggling students because RTI focuses on helping all students in general education prior to evaluation for special education services. This eliminated the previous NCLB "wait-to-fail" approach used when evaluating whether students qualified for special education services, which was ineffective and greatly disadvantaged students. In addition, IDEA had specific language that prevented a single source of data being used, including RTI, as sole data source for student referral to special education services.

Consistent with IDEA (2004), RTI must be a part of a comprehensive evaluation, including "a variety of assessment tools and strategies and cannot rely on any single procedure as the sole criterion for determining eligibility for special education and related services" (Section 614[b][2]). Thus, RTI became a part of a problem-solving model that

also included evaluations in cognitive, linguistic, and motor functioning prior to a problem-solving team's determination that a student had a specific learning disability and a determination that special education services may be required. Taken together, NCLB and IDEA worked in partnership to improve the academic achievement of all students – NCLB's mandates for 100% proficiency for all students, paired with IDEA's mandates for specially designed instruction for each student with a disability to participate in the general curriculum and make progress toward proficiency.

2.2.3. Every Student Succeeds Act

The reauthorization of the ESEA, signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2015, is named Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The purpose of ESSA, the current law related to student performance, is to provide all students a "significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps" (Sec. 1001). ESSA, the current law, presents an opportunity for greater flexibility for state and local education agencies to determine the best approach for their students, while also maintaining protections for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English learners. This flexibility is a departure from the one-sized-fits-all legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. ESSA (2015) also amended the Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999 which required states to "identify three categories of schools: (1) those needing comprehensive support and improvement; (2) those needing targeted support and improvement; and (3) those needing additional targeted support and improvement" (Sec. 1204). ESSA (2015) defines schools identified as "comprehensive support and improvement" as representing the lowest-achieving 5% of Title I schools, high schools with graduation rates below 67%, and/or schools

previously identified as “additional targeted support and improvement” who did not improve (Sec. 1204). ESSA allows states to have flexibility in identifying schools needing “targeted support and improvement”, but in general terms, these are based on the performance of subgroups of students. For example, a school may be identified as “targeted support and improvement” if the students identified as economically disadvantaged perform in the lowest 5% of Title I schools in a particular state (Sec. 1204). To qualify for the flexibility, according to Paul (2016), “states must demonstrate that they adopted college and career-ready standards and assessments, implemented school accountability systems focusing on the lowest performing schools with the largest achievement gaps, and ensured that districts were implementing teacher and principal evaluation systems” (para. 11).

A noted difference between ESSA and NCLB was in the language of interventions. ESSA replaced the language of “scientifically-based” strategies of the NCLB era with “evidence-based interventions”. ESSA (2015) emphasizes the use of “evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions” (Sec. 1111), as detailed in the United States Department of Education’s four-tier evaluation criteria that was written into the law. ESSA legislation requires schools and school districts to provide a multi-tier system of supports, a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, place-based, and responsive practices. ESSA requires the institution of positive behavior supports, and programs and support services for students with disabilities, English learners, and struggling students. ESSA’s Title I Program, which improves upon basic programs offered by states and local education agencies, provides all students a fair, equitable

education and included mandates to close the achievement gap. ESSA defines "evidence-based interventions with proven results" as interventions that

> [Demonstrate] a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on:
>
> (I) *strong evidence* from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study; or
>
> (II) *moderate evidence* from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or
>
> (III) *promising evidence* from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
>
> (I) demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and
>
> (II) includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention. (Sec. 1111)

ESSA also created four reading and literacy programs: Comprehensive Center on Literacy, which serves as a clearinghouse for literacy and students with disabilities and three grant programs, Comprehensive Literacy State Development, Improving Literacy through School Libraries, and Innovative Approaches to Literacy, all of which appropriates funding to support literacy acquisition from birth to grade twelve.

2.2.4. ESSA and Multi-Tiered System of Support

Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a school-wide system that is a data-driven and prevention-based framework for improving learning outcomes for every student. Through a layered continuum of evidence-based practices and systems, students are assessed, monitored, and assigned the appropriate interventions based on individualized needs. ESSA defines MTSS as "a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs, with regular observations to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making" (Title IX, Section 8002 [33]). Patrikakou et al. (2016) noted, "the term appears three times in the law, with two additional references to a 'schoolwide tiered model' focused on behavior" (p. 234). In Title II of ESSA, local education agencies may use funds for teacher professional development on multi-tier systems of supports and positive behavioral intervention and supports. Title II, Section 2224(e)(4) of ESSA, provides for the use of funds for literacy multi-tier systems of supports under the comprehensive literacy state development grant. Taken together, ESSA provides more explicit working and guidance for use in tiered interventions and supports for all students.

2.2.5. MTSS and RTI

Although the ESSA's language is MTSS, many local schools and school districts use the term "RTI" when discussing *academic* interventions rather than use "MTSS academic interventions and supports". However, this is not problematic because MTSS encompasses RTI components and RTI is embedded within the overall MTSS framework. The National Center on Intensive Intervention (2017) defines MTSS as:

> A prevention framework that organizes building-level resources to address each individual student's academic and/or behavioral needs within intervention tiers that vary in intensity. MTSS allows for the early identification of learning and behavioral challenges and timely intervention for students who are at risk for poor learning outcomes. The increasingly intense tiers (i.e., Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3), sometimes referred to as levels of prevention (i.e., primary, secondary, intensive prevention levels), represent a continuum of supports. (para. 3)

Under the MTSS umbrella of services, the principles of RTI and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) are integrated. MTSS includes a continuum of systemwide resources, strategies, structures and practices, such as school and community collaboration, parental action, professional development, teamwork and curriculum design. By including RTI and PBIS in the MTSS design, students are supported academically, as well as socially, emotionally, and behaviorally from early childhood through high school graduation. MTSS provides multiple levels of support for all learners on the continuum - from struggling students through advanced students. Additionally, MTSS aligns resources and supports for students, teachers, and support staff.

For the purposes of this study, the terms RTI and MTSS were viewed as largely synonymous. For consistency, the term RTI was used throughout the study and was used to specifically address issues related to *academic* interventions that support secondary literacy acquisition, referred to as RTI in secondary literacy. Additionally, the study addressed other components of MTSS that had an impact on implementation fidelity of RTI processes.

2.2.6. Texas Secondary RTI Legislation

In addition to federal laws related to RTI, the State of Texas has educational laws associated with students with reading difficulties. These laws are relevant as the research occurred in Texas. The Texas Education Agency (TEA), the state agency that oversees education, clarified ESSA's Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) provisions, applying the law to "services for K-12 children who have *not* been identified as special education" (TEA, n.d., para. 1). Schools may fund the campus RTI program with federal CEIS funds. Next, Senate Bill (SB) 1153 (85th Texas Legislature) requires local educational agencies to notify parents when offering an RTI framework and intervention to their child (TEA, n.d.). Finally, House Bill (HB) 2237 (80th Texas Legislature) requires districts and public charter schools to administer the Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment (or an approved alternative assessment) to seventh-grade students who did not demonstrate proficiency on the sixth-grade state reading assessment (TEC, §28.006, TEA, n.d.). The notification requirement is the most recent update to state laws related to intervening with students.

2.3. Alignment with Action Research Traditions

In the study, actions (implementation fidelity) between the district's secondary campuses had variations due to contextual needs. Because of this, pragmatism was useful in the research design and methodology to appropriately answer the research question. In addition, pragmatism allowed for the use of abductive reasoning. Pragmatism is typically associated with abductive reasoning that allowed for transferability. Mitchell (2018) posits, "transferability is assessing whether the results from one particular study have implications for the use of similar programs in other contexts" (p. 32). By investigating

the factors related to implementation fidelity, the knowledge gained can be transferred to other settings. In the study's case, knowledge gained on transference in and between campuses within the same school district can be useful for consideration in others school districts. For this reason, pragmatism using an abductive approach was appropriate to answer the research questions.

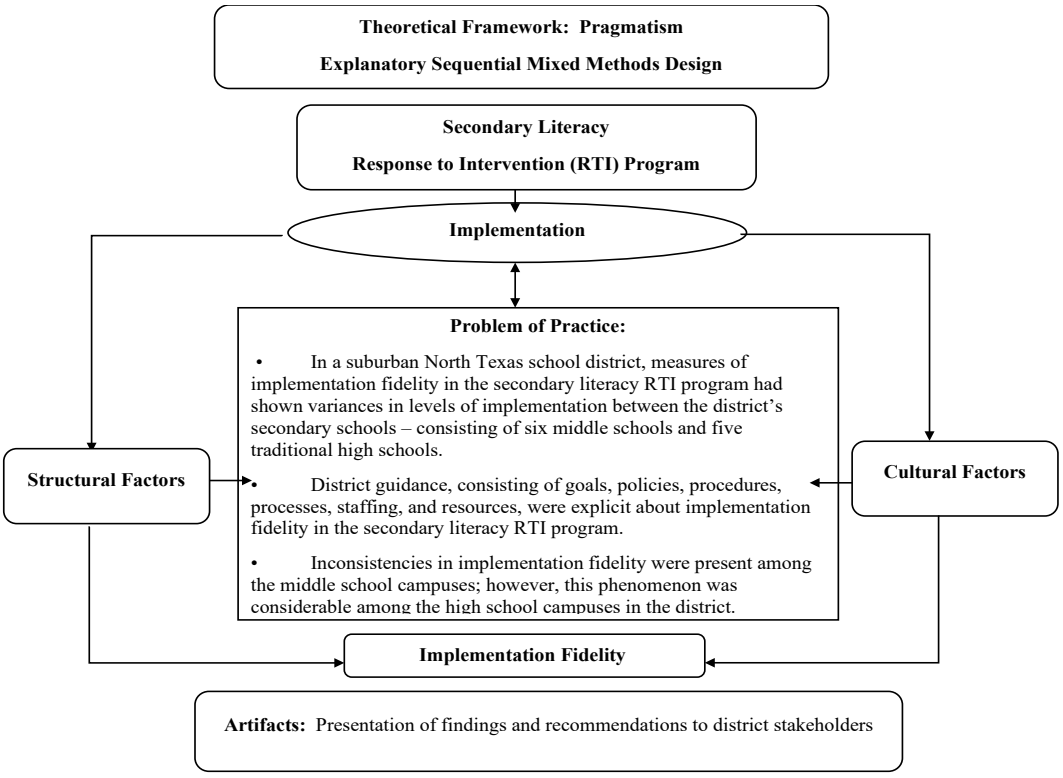
2.4. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Pragmatism was the *a priori* theoretical framework and conceptual lens that guided the inquiry (Clark & Ivankova, 2016, p. 199) and served as the foundation of the research study. Pragmatism, as argued by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), "makes it possible for researchers to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study to address different aspects of the same general research problem with the aim of providing its more complete understanding" (p.27). Pragmatism fit the mixed methods study due to the recognition that the secondary literacy RTI program can be implemented differently depending on school characteristics and contextual constraints. Morgan (2014) further acknowledged pragmatism as useful to mixed methods studies. Morgan argued, "mixed methods can nourish research through acknowledgment of the importance of context" (p.29). Between secondary campuses in the studied school district, the inquiry determined if contextual variations arose as administrators led implementation. Additionally, the study provided a lens to better understand whether the decisions were based on the administrator's interpretations of essential RTI program components, given that the district allowed for flexibility. Morgan (2014) acknowledged that "actions cannot be separated from the situations and contexts in which they occur" (p.26). Figure 3 depicts the theoretical and conceptual framework of

the study and shows the situational and contextual factors which may contribute to levels of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program.

Figure 3

Visual of the Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks



2.5. Most Significant Research and Practical Studies

2.5.1. Implementing RTI Framework

Implementing a comprehensive RTI program is not a recipe to be followed by each school in the hopes that, despite the context, student achievement will be affected. Tackett et al. (2009) stated, "RTI is too sophisticated and its successful implementation too dependent on unique strengths, needs, and capacities of local schools, districts, and

states to be adequately addressed in 'cookbook' fashion" (p. 16). However, a better and more nuanced understanding of RTI's application can help schools tailor its implementation and meet the needs of the school or school district. At the secondary level, RTI offers the potential to be helpful to all students, especially the academically vulnerable, if it allows educators to think about their entire school's model for adolescent literacy. According to Tackett et al. (2009), "RTI implementation can be conceptualized in one of two ways: as a framework for enhancing instruction and improving student outcomes (tiered prevention model), or as a means of identifying students with specific learning disabilities" (p.17). For schools using RTI as an instructional framework, the strategies are influenced by local context and are a data-driven system of support for students who are struggling academically. Most of the studied schools that successfully implemented RTI programs contained similar models. Tackett et al. (2009) speculated that RTI implementation could be "better attained if the essential components [were] individually implemented with a high degree of fidelity" (p. 18).

Davis Bianco (2010) also emphasized the importance of school systems guaranteeing implementation of interventions as intended through monitoring fidelity. According to Davis Bianco (2010), "recent research on RTI in secondary literacy reveals that implementation fidelity has received little attention" (p. 3). Without this, Davis Bianco (2010) noted, "RTI becomes a hollow shell that produces meaningless outcomes. Failure to truly implement the required intervention subverts RTI's main goal of providing services" (p. 4).

Dulaney's (2013) study on the implementation of RTI in secondary literacy describes one school's first year of RTI infrastructure building and implementation. The

focus of the study was to determine if the RTI processes, which are currently found in elementary schools, transfer to a secondary school context. The qualitative case study collected samples from field notes, focus groups and individual interviews. Dulaney (2013) found that school leaders need time to build consensus to prepare their school for implementation; leaders must identify resources (human and capital) to build RTI infrastructure; the school community must participate in data-driven decision making; and teachers must receive ongoing professional development on the use of best practices. Dulaney concluded that the procedures used to implement RTI at the secondary level must be innovative to account for challenges beyond academics. School teams attend to the challenges within the process and provide motivation for sustained staff participation in the new paradigm. From a procedural standpoint, there is not a specific template for secondary schools to follow. Rather, schools must embrace RTI's principles and layer them in the context of their school communities. The study's conclusion echoes and expands upon other studies that suggested the need for contextual fluidity in RTI frameworks for secondary schools.

In a study conducted by Pyle and Vaughn (2012), specific challenges of implementing an RTI framework in secondary schools were identified, such as "the roles and responsibilities of staff members, schedules and structures, graduation requirements, and school culture, including the expected practice of teachers discussing how to meet students' needs to support all students in a tiered approach" (p. 275). The study concluded that unique logistics are required to implement the RTI model in secondary schools. In addition, Pyle and Vaughn (2012) identified individual student characteristics, such as "reading multiple years behind grade level or a lack of motivation

in school due to consistently low achievement" (p. 280), as additional challenges for implementing tiered interventions in secondary RTI programs. The study suggested monitoring the efficacy of tiered interventions was critical to address the range of literacy needs for students with reading difficulties (Pyle and Vaughn, 2012).

Another study that examined implementation in secondary schools concluded that successful RTI implementation relied on educators implementing RTI with fidelity or as intended (Fuchs et al. 2010). Implementation fidelity depended on quality job-embedded professional development that was offered to the school staff on an ongoing basis. The researchers suggested that implementation fidelity be embedded into school-wide RTI protocols and that school leaders monitor implementation fidelity on an ongoing basis.

The studies on implementing the RTI framework in secondary schools all identified the need for contextual flexibility to help tailor the RTI programs to the specific needs of the campus or district. In addition, monitoring implementation fidelity and the efficacy of tiered interventions should be embedded into RTI practices. This should occur at both at the campus level and district level.

2.5.2. Teacher's Role in RTI Implementation

Multiple research studies examining teachers' role in RTI implementation has shown the importance of classroom teachers, who are closest to implementation. According to Shanklin (2008), "under RTI, it is the job of the classroom teachers to recommend students for appropriate interventions and to deliver classroom-level interventions themselves. If students do not respond to classroom interventions, then teachers need to seek the help of specialists" (p. 62). Interventions need to be constructed from evidence-based best practices (Deshler et al., 2007) or can be teacher-created based

on the results of specific curriculum-based assessments. Classroom level interventions required the use of organizational structures, such as workshop time, small groups, and centers. General education teachers, ELL specialists, and special education teachers should work together to determine, based on applicable data, the best Tier 1 interventions. They must also be knowledgeable of and have control over a range of sophisticated literacy strategies and instructional interventions. As Shanklin (2008) posits, "teachers need to help students transfer skills they are learning in interventions to the regular classroom work or assessments" (p. 62). Researchers suggest that ongoing professional communication is key among team members in order to assess the use of interventions, their results on student achievement, other available services for students, and next steps. Allington and Walmsley (2007) believed that opening up such communication and sustaining it is vital to improving the achievement of all regular classroom curriculum.

As Brozo (2009) posits, "RTI's goal is preventative. Preventative action in an RTI program should occur primarily in the general education classroom at Tier 1. At the secondary level, this means content area teachers" (p. 279). Often, it is difficult to overcome resistance by middle and high school teachers to incorporate responsive literacy practices into their daily lessons. If responsive literacy instruction is not provided at Tier I, Brozo (2010) explains,

> Many students who might otherwise be able to succeed will be referred to increasing intense interventions at Tier II and Tier III. Thus, if content teachers fail to provide quality literacy instruction to benefit every student and provide

> differentiated assistance for those needing extra help, then the preventative potential of RTI is lost. (p. 280)

However, when this did occur, research showed improvements in the quality of literacy instruction and a reduction of students referred to Tier II and Tier III interventions. Tackett et al. (2009) concurred:

> RTI's focus on prevention also fostered a more collaborative spirit in several of the schools; the past tendency of immediately referring a student having difficulties to special education has been replaced by an increased awareness of the possibility and benefits of prevention. (p. 18)

Likewise, a study conducted by Sullivan and Long (2010) studied how implementation of RTI varied at the teacher level. Specifically, the study intended to find the relationship between fidelity to implementation and student outcomes. The study focused on linking literacy coaching to teacher practice to student outcomes. Through their findings, the researchers showed that when teachers implemented instructional practices as intended, student outcomes were improved, as was the frequency of high-intensity instructional coaching. Conversely, the study also revealed that when a teacher exhibited reluctance to provide interventions, to progress monitor, or administer assessments as intended, student achievement declined. Recommendations supported developing fidelity checklist to monitor low implementation and/or poor instructional delivery. This finding was confirmed by the Tackett et al. (2009) study that concluded,

> Schools appear to see a strong need to develop and use fidelity checklists to monitor basic program implementation. Ideally, fidelity data will be used for

> teacher professional development and to prompt a schoolwide focus on high-quality implementation of interventions in Tiers II–IV. (p. 21)

The studies examining teacher's role in RTI implementation concluded that professional communication was vital to implementation fidelity. At the secondary level, RTI's preventative actions occur in the core classroom (Tier 1) and should be monitored using fidelity checks. Results suggested that when implementation fidelity occurred, student outcomes improved.

2.5.3. Leadership's Role in RTI Implementation Fidelity

A 2018 report by the International Literary Association (ILA) on leadership in the RTI process revealed four common themes. Principals needed to protect master schedules and ensure staff members have sufficient time to understand and incorporate RTI into daily routines. Principals promoted buy-in from literacy teachers and interventionists by being personally involved in the planning, implementation, and creation of a culture of open communication. Principals who established RTI as an expectation, and a part of the school's culture, promoted active participation and buy-in. Going further, the researchers posited, "when variation exist across schools within a district with regard to secondary literacy instruction, differences can have a considerable impact on student achievement" (ILA, 2018, p. 5). The report identified leadership as a key component to successful implementation of large-scale literacy initiatives, specifically identifying the building principal, assistant principal, and school leadership team as being critical to implementing RTI at the campus level. Key leadership moves by the school leadership team could either help or hamper implementation efforts. These included setting a strong vision for how RTI would be implemented, efforts to provide ongoing professional

development on implementation, and the active engagement of the data-based problem-solving process.

While research has consistently recognized the importance of implementing RTI programs in secondary literacy as intended, monitoring fidelity was deemed equally important. Implementation fidelity is defined broadly as, "the extent to which the intervention is implemented as designed" (Benner et al., 2011, p. 80). Monitoring implementation fidelity has posed a challenge and is an area requiring improvement. A 2011 study of implementation fidelity in the RTI program at a middle and high school was conducted by Benner et al. (2011). The study documented the importance of well-organized measures of fidelity to be used to guide ongoing coaching and principal visits. According to the study, "structured coaching and principal visits to 'look for' key instructional behaviors provide a measure of teacher capacity to implement evidence-based approaches well" (Benner et al., 2011, p. 80). Study findings indicated that adherence to delivery of lessons as designed (i.e., follow the lesson format) appeared to have an effect on the reading intervention on students' basic reading and passage comprehension skills. Further, the study's findings concluded that "administrators and teachers may consider building these teacher actions into existing tools used for coaching or administrative classroom visits" (Benner, et al, 2011, p. 87). Establishing a fidelity check schedule to ensure that interventions are being implemented as intended should be built into the structure of the RTI program. Additionally, professional development sessions for teachers to learn about fidelity procedures, tools and checks help fully develop an RTI program.

Researchers suggested that other factors at levels including educator (e.g. beliefs), school (e.g., leadership, climate), and the district and state (e.g., policies and procedures) contribute to whether practices are implemented with fidelity (Hall & Hord, 2006). Implementation fidelity of RTI in secondary literacy was critically related to how successful the program will be in improving literacy acquisition. The degree to which educators are faithful to the critical RTI components should, therefore, be measured to understand why results within and across campuses in a district may be highly variable. Additionally, implementation fidelity should be measured to ensure that comparison between and across schools are not obscured by poor or uneven implementation.

Studies on leaderships' role in RTI implementation highlighted that variances in implementation fidelity across schools had an effect on overall student achievement. For districts engaging in large-scale RTI implementation efforts, monitoring the factors affecting the implementation of the critical components of RTI program was necessary. To do so, school level leaders needed professional development on how to conduct fidelity checks and how to respond to the resulting data.

2.5.4. Perceptions of RTI Implementation

As RTI continues to be implemented in secondary literacy, researchers have suggested that, "it is important to consider how RTI is perceived by educational professionals involved and affected by implementation of the process" (Patrikkou et al., 2016, p. 236). In several recent studies, researchers have shared the importance of understanding the perceptions of those closest to implementation – teachers' and literacy interventionists, and administrators – and their links to implementation fidelity, as well as how their perceptions affect student performance outcomes. Identifying the perceptions

of all stakeholders involved in the RTI program was determined to be an important part of successful implementation.

Conducted in 2010 by Greenfield et al., a research study investigated teachers' perceptions of school wide changes related to policy changes resulting from the passages of IDEA to implement RTI models. The study interviewed elementary school teachers one year after implementing RTI and analyzed their attitudes toward interventions and the affect their attitudes had on student academic growth. The study concluded by acknowledging that school initiatives often "fail to take into account the feelings and opinions of those teachers who are responsible for implementing the educational changes, which in turn, negatively impact the program's implementation" (p. 48). Findings showed that the strongest relationship between teachers' perception of RTI and their implementation fidelity were motivated by accountability, time, procedures, and training. The study's recommendation focused on improving perceptions of RTI and proving adequate training. While the study did not focus on student performance, it did highlight the importance of considering how initiatives are perceived by the educational professionals delivering the program.

In a study conducted in 2014 by King Thorius et al., the assessment of the perceptions of those that lead implementation was identified as a critical practice in RTI. The researchers posited, "policy is never simply implemented, instead, it is interpreted, negotiated, and implemented by multiple actors in the educational environment" (p. 23). District-level and campus-level administrators are tasked with leading the implementation of RTI policy initiatives and monitoring RTI program fidelity. Therefore, identifying both district and campus-level administrators' perceptions of RTI

is a critical part of measures of implementation fidelity, as they interpret and negotiate RTI policy initiatives and implement them within and across district campuses.

A research study on educational leaders' implementing MTSS also revealed the usefulness of examining the perspectives of school level leaders (Drury, 2018). The study examined "whether school leaders perceived themselves as knowledgeable and prepared to implement MTSS in their schools" (p. 134). The study revealed that school leaders had varying understandings of how to implement MTSS and limited understandings of the major components of MTSS, such as universal screenings, data-based decision making, or tiered interventions. In addition, the perceptions of school level leaders revealed a surprising finding. School leaders perceived that, "MTSS was a novel and unique model as opposed to a combined model of tiered interventions that was essentially combining RTI and PBIS models into an integrated approach to student learning" (Drury, 2018, p. 135). The researcher posited that this was substantial misunderstanding of how MTSS developed as a policy initiative. Finally, the findings revealed that school leaders received inadequate and/or limited training and support on RTI or MTSS. According to the researcher (2018), that resulted in "a major shortcoming in leaders' understanding of MTSS" (p. 135).

Across all four research studies, the study of perceptions was linked to successful implementation. They emphasized the need for leaders to share the responsibility for implementing and sustaining a comprehensive RTI framework in secondary literacy with a variety of stakeholders. The studies recognized that aligning RTI policies and RTI practices within and across campuses was critical, considering the mandated implementation of RTI/MTSS expected by ESSA (Title IX, Section 8002 [33]).

2.6. Closing Thoughts on Section 2

Research suggests that assessing the perceptions of RTI implementation and monitoring implementation fidelity can have a positive effect on student outcomes. By studying perceptions of RTI implementation fidelity, educational leaders can use the data to evaluate the effectiveness of their prior attempts at RTI implementation and use an iterative process to refine approaches until implementation fidelity is demonstrated.

Studies focused on RTI implementation cannot disregard measuring program integrity as a part of the evaluative process. Fidelity checks should also accompany interviews with those closest to implementation as well as other stakeholders along the RTI continuum – central office or district level and school level – so that a holistic view of the status of implementation can occur. In this way, decisionmakers can make the appropriate adjustment to the RTI program to ensure that the program is effectively implemented as designed. According to King et al. (2012), "schools have two basic options regarding implementing RTI. They can sit back and wait a few more years until more empirical guidance exist or they can take on the challenge of becoming an RTI pioneer" (p. 18). Status quo RTI programs can be maintained, resulting in stagnant 8th grade reading proficiency rates on national reading assessments. Or educators can take on the challenge of implementing and sustaining a higher-quality RTI program that uses the problem-solving process to ensure that secondary literacy acquisition is a priority for all students.

3. SOLUTION AND METHOD

Sustained implementation fidelity in a secondary literacy RTI program poses a challenge that is centered around the manner in which RTI components are organized and implemented within the context of an individual campus. The challenge can be magnified as RTI practices are implemented across multiple campuses. When districts engage in systemic efforts to improve secondary literacy acquisition, implementing the RTI framework, at scale (e.g. across multiple campuses) requires a coordinated effort that emphasizes collaboration between district leadership and campus-level administrators across and between all district campuses. District leadership should provide both technical and adaptive leadership supports that will guarantee implementation fidelity of the RTI components that are necessary to support students with reading difficulties. "Technical" refers to the critical, non-negotiable components of the RTI framework implemented on a campus. "Adaptive" refers to ongoing guidance and supports to administrators as they are making decisions about contextual adjustments in the context of individual campuses, based on student needs (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 28). According to the International Literacy Association (2018), "reading performance improves when district policy and leadership support steady progress at the school level and suffers when district leaders knowingly or inadvertently are unsupported" (p. 4).

3.1. Outline of Proposed Solution

Examining the perceptions of administrators across the RTI continuum – district leadership and secondary administrators – on an ongoing basis can inform practice and can assist with identifying any factors affecting RTI implementation fidelity. Data findings could be used to build capacity for RTI implementation by addressing the factors

that facilitate or impede fidelity. Findings can help stakeholders understand how the structure and culture of a particular school can enhance or limit the feasibility of RTI implementation fidelity. In addition, findings could help the alignment of RTI policies and practices to support fidelity and eliminate variance between secondary campuses.

3.2. Justification of Proposed Solution

Considering the multiple challenges facing educators: the challenge of adolescent literacy acquisition, the challenge of RTI implementation in secondary settings, and the challenges of a sustaining RTI efforts within and across campuses in a district, monitoring RTI implementation fidelity should be prioritized and ongoing if RTI is to be used as a viable solution for improving student performance. Research has supported a systematic effort emphasizing coordination within and across campuses on RTI implementation. Researchers posited, "district and school leaders must understand and know how to provide leadership support in two dimensions of the RTI process: the technical and the adaptive" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 28). With any multi-campus improvement effort, district level policies can have an unintended impact on an individual campus. District leadership lacking knowledge about how to support individual campuses in RTI implementation can disrupt the process and contribute to poor student performance. As Dulaney (2013) posits, "district leaders must allow for and accommodate a reasonable level of principal discretion with respect to the sequence and components that are implemented at an individual campus" (p. 63). By assessing the perception of secondary administrators, district leadership will have data on factors affecting individual campuses and can use the data findings to facilitate leadership supports on RTI practices.

Likewise, research has shown, “leadership moves by the school leadership team can either help or hamper implementation efforts, these include setting a strong vision for how RTI will be implemented, efforts to provide ongoing professional development on implementation, and the active engagement of data-based problem-solving process” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p.13). Without guidance on how to effectively lead RTI implementation at the campus level, secondary administrators at individual campuses can also disrupt the process and can contribute to poor student performance. Not only does the disruption occur within one campus, but can also disrupt the process across campuses and can have an effect on the sustainability of large-scale improvement efforts.

If systemic reforms in secondary literacy acquisition are to be implemented and sustained, “complex educational systems require that key stakeholders take a system’s view of facilitating change and develop plans to address variables likely to relate to successful implementation” (Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 28). Although a comprehensive strategic plan designed to address these systemic factors is a necessary condition for successful implementation, it is not sufficient by itself. Studying the perceptions of secondary administrators can be used to inform practice.

3.3. Study Context and Participants

The study took place within the context of a suburban North Texas school district, referred to throughout this work as “the district”. The district’s boundaries cover approximately 100 square miles, and attendance boundaries incorporates parts of multiple suburban cities. At the time of the study, the district employed almost 4500 employees, educating over 35,000 students in forty-five schools, including six middle schools and seven high schools. The diverse student population boasted over 100 students-spoken

languages and an ethnic diversity composed of 36% White, 29.7% African American/Black, 25.5% Hispanic, 7.2% Asian, and 4.6% two or more races.

The district's strategic plan outlined the district's mission, vision, core values, and goals. It provided a clear focus for improvement and served as a guidepost for measuring how the district was progressing toward the goals in the strategic plan. The district used a scorecard to document progress toward the five-year strategic plan by identifying the baseline measurements, the five-year goal, and the goal for each performance area. According to the district snapshot detail provided through the Texas Education Agency, the district earned the highest possible rating of "Met Standard" on the state accountability system, outperforming state averages in the reading/English Language Arts areas of the state assessments (TEA, n.d.). Table 2 shows the overall district and the campus-by-campus performance on the state English Language Arts assessment.

Table 2

District-level Secondary Results

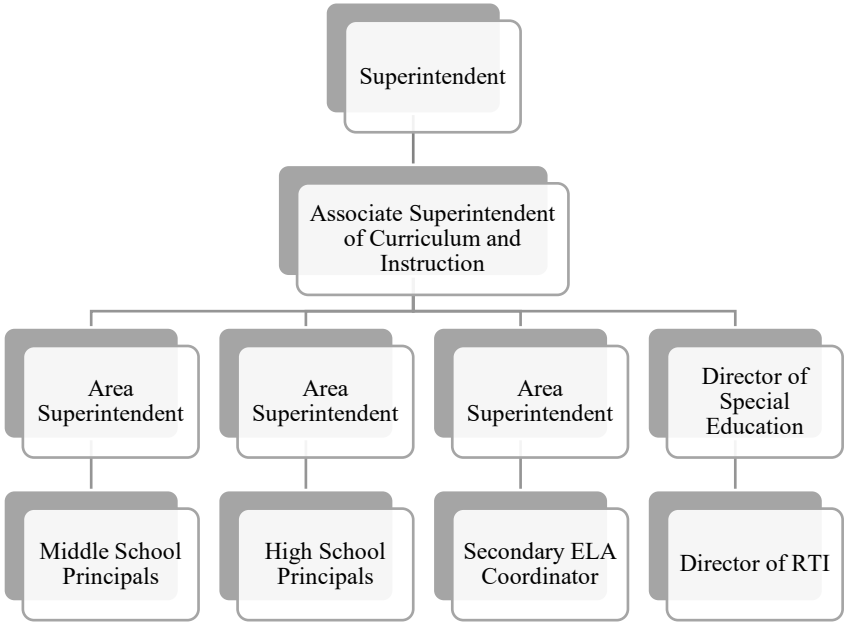
	State	District	Campus 1	Campus 2	Campus 3	Campus 4	Campus 5
Master Grade Level							
Reading	21	28	46	33	31	14	16
Writing	14	21	31	30	17	*	*
Meets Grade Level							
Reading	48	60	69	59	60	61	69
Writing	38	51	59	53	44	*	*
Approaches Grade Level							
Reading	75	84	91	87	87	76	85
Writing	68	80	86	79	76	*	*

Note. Source - State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness, retrieved from: http://txschools.gov.
* High School STAAR is a combined reading and writing score report.

The Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) Department, led by an associate superintendent, provided leadership, service, and support to the district's staff on implementing the educational programs and practices. The department managed the core and enrichment curriculum and additional programs such as, advanced academics, special education, dyslexia services, English Language Learner/Bilingual services, educational technology, and Career and Technology Education. The RTI program was led and managed by district level administrators, as referenced in the organizational chart in Figure 4. The primary contact for the RTI program was the director of RTI who was directly responsible for implementing the program, ensuring program integrity, and providing professional development and support.

Figure 4

Organizational Chart



Note. Adapted from the May, 2020 organizational chart for the studied school district which was located on the district website.

3.3.1. Participants

The study participants included administrators involved in the secondary literacy RTI program. In this research, I centered on determining if there was alignment between district guidance for RTI and perceptions of school-level administrators who were tasked with leading the program at their individual campuses. Therefore, I placed importance on obtaining participants from the available district administrators to determine the overall vision for the secondary literacy RTI program prior to obtaining perceptions from administrators tasked with carrying out the vision on the respective campuses. The district administrator's perceptions, as well as a review of district strategic documents, guided, in part, the questions related to perceived factors contributing to or departing from implementation fidelity at individual campuses.

At the school level, I included as many campus-based administrators who were leading implementation in secondary literacy RTI as possible. A list of campus-based administrators was provided by the Director of RTI and reviewed to determine the best candidates for the inquiry. The secondary administrators in the district consisted of middle school and high school principals, associate principals, and assistant principals. At the middle school level, the administrative team consisted of a campus principal, a seventh-grade assistant principal, and an eighth-grade assistant principal. Typically, the campus principal assigned one of the two assistant principals with primary responsibility for implementing the RTI program at the campus. For the purposes of the study, priority was given to obtaining participation from the middle school principal and the assistant principal responsible for implementing the program. At the high school level, the administrative team consisted of a high school principal, an academic associate principal,

and up to six assistant principals, depending on the size of the campus. Typically, the academic associate principal was responsible for implementing the RTI program at the campus. For the purposes of the study, priority was given to obtaining participation from the high school principal and the academic associate principal.

From the list of available administrators, the maximum participation in the survey was determined to be twenty-five administrators, both district-level and campus-level. Ultimately, participants who took part in the inquiry were volunteers – individual who were willing to participate in the study. Priority was given to decision-makers, leaders in the implementation of the RTI program, those knowledgeable about the RTI process, and participants from campuses with either high implementation fidelity or low implementation fidelity.

3.4. Proposed Research Paradigm

In this inquiry, I used an explanatory sequential mixed method design to study the perceptions of administrators in a suburban North Texas school district who lead the implementation of the secondary literacy RTI program. Mixed methods research "integrates quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to best understand a research purpose and gain a deeper insight into the issue and to ensure the inferences made were valid" (Clark & Ivankova, 2016, p. 23). The mixed methods approach allowed me to target administrators responsible for implementing RTI and ensure program integrity through their leadership practices. Additionally, the mixed methods approach allowed me to capitalize on the strength of both quantitative and qualitative methods to produce a more credible study. The study design was informed by the desire to answer the research questions and to gain a deep understating of the

perceptual factors that cause a lack of program integrity in secondary literacy. Finally, a mixed methods research approach allowed me to tailor the study to the intended sample – secondary administrators (Dillman et al, 2014).

3.4.1. Quantitative Phase

Quantitative data collection occurred first and was given priority, according to the study's explanatory sequential approach. The quantitative data were used to inform the strategy, participants, and interview questions for the subsequent qualitative data collection. The goal of the quantitative phase was to measure the perceptions of implementation fidelity that were congruent to the underlying framework and reflected the core components of the RTI program. Additionally, the goal was to uncover whether perceptions of RTI reveal any variances in implementation fidelity on secondary campuses. Finally, the goal was to establish the level of intensity between the perceptions and implementation fidelity.

Considerations for the quantitative phase included ensuring enough stakeholder representation from administrators along the RTI continuum in the district. Participants for the quantitative phase were district-level administrators, high school administrators, and middle school administrators. Because the levels of fidelity and the intensity between perceptions and implementation was an important foundation of the study, administrators who perceived their campuses to have low levels and high levels of implementation were identified and engaged. In this way, the integrated question, which focused on revealing factors contributing to implementation fidelity, could be answered.

According to Teddie and Tashakkori (2009), "integration is an essential component of the mixed methods research process" (p. 91). Integration, or connecting,

first occurred in the study when the quantitative results were used to inform the qualitative data collections. I selected participants for the qualitative follow-up from those who responded to the quantitative survey. Additionally, the quantitative results helped to develop and refine the interview questions guiding the qualitative phase. Collins et al., (2006) referred to this process as participant enrichment, which "uses a quantitative method to optimize the study sample by improving recruitment and determining inclusion category" for the qualitative phase (p. 98).

3.4.2. Qualitative Phase

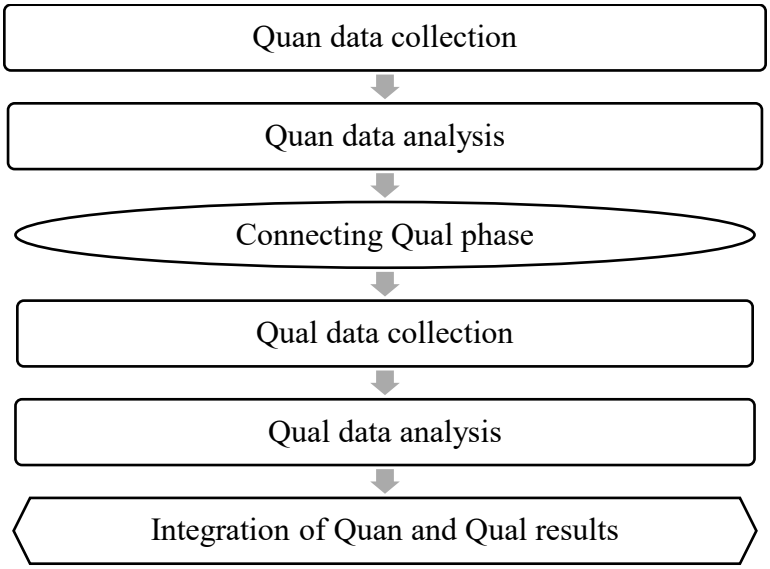
The goal of the qualitative phase was to identify any factors - structural or contextual - that contributed to or departed from implementation of the RTI framework and the core components of RTI within the context of each campus. In addition, a deeper insight into administrators' perceptions of this practice helped to determine whether there was alignment between perceptions within each campus (i.e., administrators at the same campus) and alignment across campuses within the district (i.e., administrators with the same position but at different campuses). Considerations for the qualitative phase included the following: individual experiences of each participant, the fact that some administrators may be new to the district, participants' levels of engagement in the RTI program, and the level of implementation fidelity present at their assigned campus. In this way, a greater assortment of divergent views was used to diversity the understanding of the RTI program. The results from both phases were interpreted together "so that the qualitative findings can provide a better understanding of the initial quantitative results" (Clark & Ivankova, 2016, p. 122).

The study examined existing RTI practices, policies, and procedures to measure and confirm if implementation fidelity was present within and among the district's secondary campuses. The confirmation occurred at the district level through the participation of district administrators responsible for leading RTI implementation and for ensuring fidelity. At the campus level, confirmation occurred through the participation of school-level administrators tasked with leading RTI at each individual campus.

The study captured the diverse perspectives and viewpoints from secondary administrators across the RTI leadership continuum, allowing the study to be explanatory. In the context of administrator's various roles within the RTI program, insights into district expectations and perceptions of campus-based administrators were obtained. Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), defined the kind of method used in the study as "focusing on research questions that call for real-life contextual understanding, multi-level perspectives, and cultural influences" (p.8). Ultimately, the goal of the research study was to measure the extent to which the perspectives of secondary administrators have an effect on program integrity. Recommendations based on the results of the study could assist in transforming existing RTI policies, practices, or procedures that may impede the secondary literacy RTI program from being implemented as intended. In this way, the mixed methods design was appropriate and allowed the district to build capacity in administrators of the program. Figure 5 depicts the methodology flow chart of the study.

Figure 5

Methodology Flow Chart



3.4.3. Advantages and Disadvantages

Researchers consider the exploratory sequential mixed methods design as being advantageous to social and health sciences, which includes educational settings (Ivankova, 2015, p. 136). The advantages of using the mixed methods design for the study were:

1. The sequential nature of the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis "makes the design more straightforward and easier to implement by one researcher" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011);
2. The opportunity to further explore the quantitative results in more detail is attractive (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 153);

3. The design allows for more methodological flexibility "because the design components of the follow-up qualitative strand are shaped by the outcomes of the qualitative strand" (Ivankova, 2015, p. 137).

The disadvantages of using the mixed methods design for the study were:

1. The study progresses in a slower pace "due to the length of time to conduct the quantitative phase data collection and analysis before making a decision about which participants to approach" (Ivankova, 2015, p. 138);

2. During the qualitative phase, re-contacting participants to complete the interview posed an additional challenge (Clark & Ivankova, 2016, p. 239);

3. Considering which participants to conduct an interview with posed an additional challenge. "Choosing less important quantitative results and selecting the wrong individuals for follow-up may produce inconsistencies in the conclusions and result in erroneous and incomplete assessment of the program" (Ivankova, 2015, p. 138).

3.5. Data Collection Methods

3.5.1. Quantitative Data Collection Methods

For the quantitative phase of the study, the Perceptions of Practices survey was used to assess administrators' perceptions of the implementation of the secondary literacy RTI program. Castillo et al. (2016), offered the following:

> Research suggests that educators implement new practices when they (1) understand the need and (2) perceive they have the skills and/or support to implement. Potential elements that impact whether educators understand the need to implement new practices involve data suggesting students are not meeting

> performance expectations, beliefs that the new practices will help improve student performance, and acknowledging that the new practices are not currently being fully implemented (p.43).

The survey used a questionnaire with numerically rated items to "collect the information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 160). The survey was developed by the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention (PS/RtI) Project as a part of a collaborative effort between the Florida Department of Education and the University of South Florida. The survey was a part of a suite of tools designed to "assist educational stakeholders in assessing which systemic factors contribute to and/or hinder implementation of PS/RtI practices" (Castillo et al., 2016, p. 2). The tools designed for the project were aligned with a blueprint model outlined by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) that provided a framework around implementation of RTI. The NASDSE RtI Implementation Blueprints outlined the components of a district level and school level strategy to implement RTI district-wide (Elliott & Morrison, 2008) and to provide support to individual campuses (Kurns & Tilly, 2008). The Perceptions of Practices survey contained 16 items and was used as a "self-report measure developed to assess educators' perceptions of the extent to which their schools implemented PS/RtI practices" (p.43). Further, the survey instrument contained items that examined perceptions of implementation across the multiple tiers (i.e. tiers 1-3). Items were completed using the following scale:

1 = Never Occurs (NO);

2 = Rarely Occurs (RO);

3 = Sometimes Occurs (SO);

4 = Often Occurs (OO);

5 = Always Occurs (AO);

0 = Not Applicable (N/A).

In addition, the survey contained 15 open-ended questions designed to allow respondents to type a response more specific to their campus. The open-ended questions were designed to prompt respondents to elaborate on their perceptions and to give them space to further explain expound on their choices. The survey was administered electronically through SurveyMonkey™, a commercially available technology resource and was consistent with IRB approval of the survey approach. Informed consent was obtained electronically as well as via paper for study participants. Administering the survey electronically was practical for the study, considering the participants were at different campuses and had very different schedules. The survey data were triangulated with district RTI program documentation on secondary literacy, including the RTI manual.

3.5.2. Quantitative Sampling

Nonprobability, convenience sampling (Creswell, 2014) was used to include participants who represented the studied population – secondary administrators responsible for and/or engaged in implementing the RTI program, both at the district and campus level. The goal of chosen sampling technique was to ensure a sufficient sample of secondary administrators was obtained. According to Dillman et al. (2014), "using a combination of methods of survey administration can help ensure better sample coverage (i.e., all individuals in the population having a chance of inclusion in the sample) therefore reducing coverage error" (p.133). To reduce both sampling and coverage errors,

to facilitate the data collection process, and to recruit a maximum number of participants, the director of RTI provided a list of all available secondary administrators. The director of RTI, acting as gatekeeper, also emailed all secondary administrators to explain the reason that the survey was being administered and to ensure that participation was confidential and voluntary. Following the director's email introduction, the survey link was confidentially emailed to all secondary administrators. The survey was also available via paper copy to ensure a better response rate. In addition, the study employed multiple recruitment strategies, email, telephone, and in person, to maximize participants. When initial survey participant numbers were low, the director of RTI arranged an open computer lab during an administrator professional development day to accommodate any administrator who wished to complete the survey. I was on site for four hours to answer survey-related questions. The survey was completed independently and anonymously by participants.

3.5.3. Between Phases

A critical part of recruiting survey participants for the follow-up qualitative phase was linking survey responses to the survey participants. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) argue that "it is important to have the same individuals participate in both the quantitative and qualitative phase for the credibility of the survey results" (p. 65). Special consideration for anonymity and confidentiality was considered for the study participants and settings for the qualitative phase of the study. The results from the quantitative survey data analysis formed the basis of the selection of a sample of administrators for the follow-up interviews. Therefore, each respondent was coded with a confidential

participant identification number to aid in the recruitment efforts for the qualitative follow-up interview.

3.5.4. Qualitative Data Collection Methods

The qualitative data included semi-structured interviews with selected administrators and document analysis from the following sources: school board policy, curriculum management plan, RTI manual, RTI related documentation from the individual campuses, and field notes. The interviews were conducted using a combined approach, starting with standardized interview questions and ending with open-ended questions to allow participants to expound up on perceptions and reveal factors influencing implementation fidelity. The interviews addressed the perceptions of and experiences with implementing fidelity of RTI in secondary literacy within the context of the individual campuses. The interview guide was developed, in part, as a result of quantitative findings to ensure that participants had the opportunity to expound upon the results and allowed participants to provide insights into factors that contributed to or hindered implementation fidelity. The interview questions were categorized into four areas, consistent and in alignment with the domains in the quantitative phase. The categories were screeners, tiered instruction, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making (Appendix E).

3.5.5. Qualitative Sampling

Qualitative purposeful sampling allowed a small number of "information-rich" participants to be intentionally selected from participants in the quantitative phase. Qualitative purposeful samples tend to be small. According to Ivankova (2015), "the size of a qualitative purposeful sample is determined based on whether a researcher has

achieved saturation – that is, the point in data collection and analysis at which additional individuals do not provide new information" (p. 183). In the case of this study, the sample size was small due to the number of overall participants in the study (N=17) and the purposeful selection of individuals to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. The participants were experienced administrators representing various perspectives of RTI practices along the leadership continuum of the studied district. Extreme case sampling further allowed me to include participants for the qualitative phase from campuses which had higher levels of perceived implementation fidelity and those campuses perceived to have lower implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program. Ivankova (2015) described extreme case sampling as, "purposefully selecting individuals or cases that are extremely different from each other, often referred to as outlier cases" (184). The purpose of recruiting "extremes" was to understand any contextual or situational factors from the perspective of administrators who were leading program implementation.

The number of participants (n=5) for the qualitative phase consisted of a district administrator and four campus-level administrators - two principals and a two assistant/associate principal. Further, the campus-level administrators represented "extreme cases" – a principal and assistant principal leading a campus perceived to have higher levels of implementation fidelity and a principal and assistant principal leading a campus perceived to have lower levels of implementation fidelity. The sample size was sufficient to answer the posed research questions and to achieve saturation.

To recruit the selected participants, the researcher contacted each by phone to determine if they would be interested in participating in a 45-minute follow-up interview.

At the participant's convenience, the researcher coordinated the dates and times and conducted each interview at the participant's office or campus location. The informed consent form (Appendix C) was emailed in advance to allow participants to review the information prior to the interview. Participant interviews took place in the fall of 2019 and in the spring of 2020. At the start of each interview, informed consent was explained, and each participant signed the form granting consent to participate in the study. All research files and data were protected and secured.

3.6. Justification of the Use of Survey Instrument

The study used the Perceptions of Practice survey instrument to measure secondary administrators' perceptions of the implementation of RTI practices in secondary literacy. According to Castillo et al. (2016), the survey was appropriate to use as an indicator of implementing RTI practices (p. 32) and the use of the results of the survey were appropriate for district leadership to use when making decisions on any adjustments to RTI policies and RTI practices that affect implementation fidelity (p.32). Because the survey instrument identified item-level RTI practices and well as domain-level RTI components, both were useful for facilitating discussions about implementation fidelity. In addition, both a districtwide view of implementation levels, as well as a campus level view of implementation levels was useful for evaluating trends across and between campuses. Finally, the survey instrument allowed for ease of data triangulation with district RTI documentation, given the survey was in alignment with the expected district RTI components.

3.7. Data Analysis Strategy

3.7.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was used to analyze data from the survey instrument to measure means, frequency, distributions and to identify any variations between participants. According to Ivankova (2015), “The main focus of the descriptive statistics is to describe and summarize quantitative information with the purpose of identifying trends and patterns in the data and uncovering potential relationships among the variables” (p. 220). For the quantitative phase, the Florida PS/RtI Project that developed the perceptions survey recommends two techniques for analyzing the survey results. According to Castillo et al. (2016), “first, the mean rating for each item to determine the average level of perceived practices reported by educators that complete the Perceptions of Practices survey” (p.47). By calculating item means, I obtained an overall impression of the perceived level of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program and the extent to which administrators perceive certain practices are being implemented. The data were then used to identify specific practices that are at high levels or low levels of implementation fidelity. The second technique for analysis, as recommended by the survey, was the calculation of the frequency of (i.e., frequency distribution). Castillo et al. (2016) advised, “each response option selected by educators can be calculated for each survey item” (p. 47). By calculating the frequency, the data provided information on the range of levels of perceived practices that assisted determining the associations between the two data points. The data were displayed graphically to analyze the trends in perceptions for each item and for each domain. A

visual analysis of the frequency of educators reporting the levels of implementation allowed for an interpretation of the extent of implementation fidelity.

3.7.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

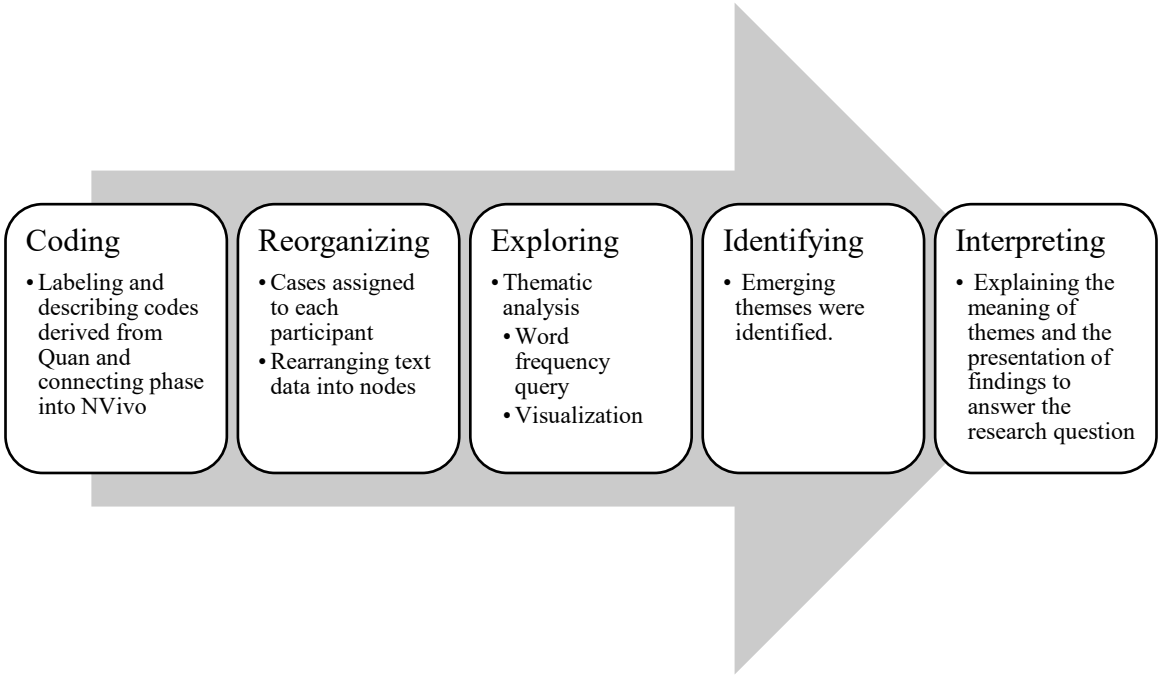
The qualitative phase used both a deductive and inductive thematic approach. The qualitative analytic process involved "segmenting data into relevant categories and the naming of these categories with codes" (Creswell, 2014, p. 76). The interviews conducted with the selected administrators were transcribed for data analysis to "make meaning." The interviews were audio recorded using the researcher's voice memo recording device. Recordings of all interviews were uploaded into an online transcription service to convert the audio files into text files for ease of analysis. Participants reviewed transcripts and made corrections, where needed. A confidentiality agreement (Appendix F) was obtained from the online transcription service. Data analysis began with, first, listening to audio recordings and then reading text transcriptions to get a general sense of the data.

Boeije (2009) defined qualitative analysis as, "segmenting of data into relevant categories and the naming of these categories with codes" (p. 76), the purpose of which was to transform data into findings. NVivo (Windows), a qualitative data analysis software, was used to complete the data analysis process. The analysis process included the development of codes, categories, and themes. Data were cleaned by correcting any transcription errors and uploaded into NVivo. Adu (2016) explained, "in NVivo, coding is the process of gathering related material into a container called a node" (p.6). Codes were generated *a priori* from the quantitative and connecting phase of the study (deductively). Using the results from the quantitative phase, the following codes were identified: staff, problem-solving team, tiered instruction, instructional

materials/resources, collaboration, data, time, training, priorities, responsibility, and screening. From the connecting phase, an additional code was identified - district supports. Cases were assigned for each participant and data were arranged into nodes. Participant's characteristics were displayed on a table. Next, thematic analysis of interview data was completed. Data were explored via word frequency queries and through the creation of visualizations (word clouds) to identify reoccurring concepts and patterns. The resulting concepts were arranged into emerging themes, which were then interpreted for meaning. A visual model of the qualitative data analysis process is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Visualization of Qualitative Data Analysis



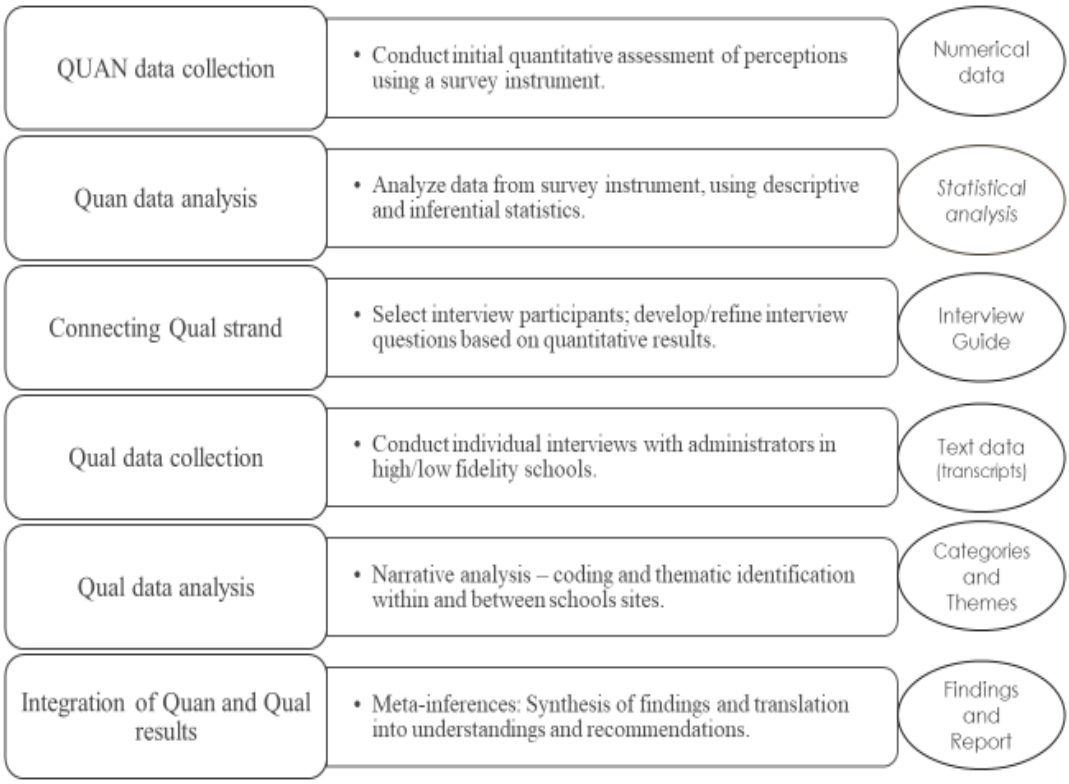
Note. Adapted from Adu (2016).

3.8. Timeline

The inquiry was approved by the North Texas school district on March 21, 2018. The signed letter of approval, along with a copy of the informed consent was sent to the Texas A&M University Division of Research's Institutional Review Board. Document review began in May 2018 and continued through January 2020. On August 20, 2019, the study (IRB 2018-1254M) was approved and determined to be exempt in accordance with 45 CFR 46.104. Data collection and analysis for the quantitative and qualitative phase of the study occurred from August 2019 through January 2020, beginning with the quantitative survey and qualitative interview of district administrators. Figure 7 depicts the study's data collection and data analysis process, along with the resulting outputs.

Figure 7

Data Collection and Analysis Process



3.9. Reliability and Validity

3.9.1. Quantitative

Conclusions drawn by, particularly from the quantitative phase, had the potential to reveal factors that contributed to and/or hindered implementation fidelity in secondary literacy, as perceived by those who led the program. Because of the importance of the program on secondary literacy acquisition, the reliability and validity of the chosen instruments was given additional consideration.

For the quantitative portion of the study, the survey instrument's reliability and validity were reported by the Florida PS/RtI Project: content validity, construct validity, and internal consistency reliability. Content validity refers to the extent to which the items on the perception survey were designed to measure what it intended. Castillo et al. (2016) posited, "in the context of the Perceptions of Practices survey, the content-related validity evidence is based on expert judgment that the sample of items is representative of the educator practices required for RTI implementation" (p.46). Construct validity also refers to the extent to which the individuals scores represent a meaningful measure of each domain in the perceptions survey. Castillo et al. (2016) reported that

> In the case of the Perceptions of Practices survey, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess the internal structure of the instrument and to develop evidence to support the validity of interpretations based on individuals' scores on the resulting factors. Results of a common factor analysis using the responses from 2,140 educators in 62 schools from seven school districts suggests that the Perceptions of Practices survey taps into educators' perceptions of the extent to which RTI practices are occurring. (p.47)

Internal consistency reliability relates to item homogeneity, or the degree to which the items on a test jointly measure the same domain (Henson, 2001, p. 177). The internal consistency reliability estimates, provided by the Florida PS/RtI Program, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, for the domains (factors) yielded by the factor analysis was: $\alpha = .97$.

3.9.2. Qualitative

The study did not assume that each secondary campus was aware of the district-level RTI processes and procedures. The study also did not assume that each campus

implements RTI consistently. The qualitative phase gave insight into the structural and/or contextual factors affecting implementation fidelity. In addition, conclusions from the qualitative phase revealed hinderances related to implementation fidelity that could be used by stakeholders for ongoing learning of systemic changes necessary to the RTI program. Both of these affected outcome and process validity.

Creswell (2009) recommended that researchers utilize at least two verification strategies in any study to reduce "the researcher's experiences, orientations, and preconceptions that may have affected the research approach and interpretation of the data" (p.123). Multiple verification procedures were employed to establish trustworthiness and credibility during the qualitative phase. First, interview transcripts were shared with and checked by each participant to ensure accuracy. In addition, the study included "rich, thick descriptions" (Creswell, 2009) that provided a detailed narrative of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from qualitative analysis. Finally, to improve the study's reliability and validity, document analysis was used to triangulate the information collected through semi-structured interviews.

3.9.3. Integration of Findings

To further enhance the credibility of the data findings and interpretations, triangulation of multiple data sources was used. Creswell (2014) suggests that "triangulation is an important concept in research: combining different types of data and individual perspectives helps enhance the creditability" (p. 121). The joint interpretation of both the quantitative and qualitative data results created meta-inferences that provided evidence for implementation fidelity in the RTI program. The interpretation of meta-inferences elucidated the perceptions of administrators leading the RTI program,

provided a realistic understanding of the problems that persist with fidelity of implementation, and answered the integrated mixed methods question.

Both the quantitative and qualitative phase of the study created democratic validity. Both phases represented data from sources along the RTI continuum in the district, revealed multiple perspectives, and included both district-level and campus-level administrators. Results, when shared with additional stakeholders, can create catalytic validity in that it will allows for a determination of any needed adjustments to the RTI program in light of the results. In this way, the study findings allow stakeholders to address current issues and be proactive in addressing areas that cause a lack program integrity.

3.10. Closing Thoughts on Section 3

Using a mixed methods approach was appropriate for the study because it allowed me to balance the district's expectation of implementation fidelity with the perceptions and experiences of the administrators responsible for leading the secondary literacy RTI program. Because the goal of RTI programs is to positively affect secondary literacy acquisition, implementation fidelity serves as the foundation of a successful program. The findings and recommendations of the study can impact conversations regarding implications for RTI implementation, can be used to aid in needs assessments, and can be used to facilitate consensus building among stakeholders.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction of Analysis

In this research study, I sought to investigate whether perceptions of practices were related to implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program. Priority was given to recruiting administrators from both middle school and high school, representing a variety of perspectives from those responsible for administering the secondary literacy RTI program.

Seventeen secondary administrators completed the survey instrument (n=17). Data were gathered from campus-level administrators consisting of 70.6% assistant/associate principals and 29.4% principals. Although a smaller number of principals were surveyed, the number of principals and assistant/associate principals surveyed was enough to answer the research question and to give insights into the study's problem of practice. Likewise, of the total available administrators in the district (N=25), 68% of administrators completed the survey instrument (n=17). Table 3 shows the study participant demographic data, such as secondary level, position, years in education, and years in current position. To protect the confidentiality of survey participants, a participant number was created for each respondent.

Table 3

Quantitative Participant Data

Campus Number			Participant ID	Position	Secondary Level	Gender	Yrs. in Educ.	Yrs. Position
Campus 1		1	07	Assistant / Associate Principal	Middle School	Male	23.00	9.00
		2	10	Assistant / Associate Principal	Middle School	Female	5.00	2.00
		3	13	Principal	Middle School	Male	26.00	10.00
	Total	N	3					
Campus 2		1	09	Assistant / Associate Principal	Middle School	Male	11.00	6.00
		2	12	Assistant / Associate Principal	Middle School	Female	18.00	11.00
		3	16	Principal	Middle School	Female	31.00	5.00
	Total	N	3					
Campus 3		1	01	Assistant / Associate Principal	Middle School	Female	7.00	.50
		2	05	Assistant / Associate Principal	Middle School	Female	12.00	7.00
		3	17	Principal	Middle School	Male	12.00	7.00
	Total	N	3					
Campus 4		1	03	Assistant / Associate Principal	High School	Female	5.00	.50
		2	06	Assistant / Associate Principal	High School	Male	6.00	2.00
		3	08	Assistant / Associate Principal	High School	Female	8.00	1.00
		4	14	Principal	High School	Female	14.00	8.00
	Total	N	4					
Campus 5		1	02	Assistant / Associate Principal	High School	Female	14.00	5.00
		2	04	Assistant / Associate Principal	High School	Female	7.00	1.00
		3	11	Assistant / Associate Principal	High School	Male	10.00	5.00
		4	15	Principal	High School	Male	10.00	2.00
	Total	N	4					
Total		**N**	**17**					

Note. All campuses are located in the same suburban district. Campuses 1-3 are middle school campuses. Campuses 4 and 5 are high school campuses.

4.2. Presentation of Quantitative Data

4.2.1. Research Question 1

The purpose of the quantitative research question was to assess administrators' perceptions of RTI practices as an indicator of implementation levels. The Perceptions of Practices survey (Castillo, et al., 2016), a 16-item survey instrument, was used gauge the intensity of administrators' perceptions of RTI practices. Research question one asked: what are administrators' perceptions of RTI implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program?

The data collected from the survey instrument was used to answer broad and specific questions about perceived levels of implementation fidelity at the campus-level and provided a general impression of the extent of program integrity across the studied district. All statistical data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS, Version 24.0. A quantitative codebook was created with the response categories and assigned values for each of the items on the survey instrument. Data were entered into SPSS and checked for any errors or for missing data.

4.2.1.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The recommended method of data analysis, according to the Perceptions of Practices survey manual (2016), was calculating the mean rating and frequency distribution for each item to determine the average level of perceived RTI practices reported by each secondary administrator. As such, 16 mean scores were available for analysis. Table 4 summarizes administrators' perceptions after completing the survey instrument.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Response Survey

Item	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
3	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.41	.285	-2.25	.550
4	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.29	.254	-2.16	.550
5	17	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.47	.212	-1.81	.550
6	17	2.00	3.00	5.00	4.70	.143	-1.98	.550
7	17	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.82	.176	-4.12	.550
8	17	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.41	.211	-1.63	.550
9	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.23	.278	-1.65	.550
10	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.35	.256	-2.26	.550
11	17	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.29	.281	.162	.550
12	17	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.59	.258	-.437	.550
13	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.18	.286	-2.02	.550
14	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.65	.270	-.726	.550
15	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.12	.240	-1.99	.550
16	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.76	.291	-.962	.550
17	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.12	.256	-1.71	.550
18	17	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.94	.254	-1.76	.550

Note. Calculated using SPSS 24 descriptive statistics function.

4.2.1.2. Calculated Item Means

Ratings approaching 5.00 (always occurs) are an indication that perceived RTI practices are closest to implementation fidelity. Ratings between 4.00 (often occurs) and 5.00 (always occurs) can be interpreted, on average, as the perceived RTI practices occurred as often as intended. Scores from the following items recorded the highest calculated means, suggesting that administrators perceived that the practices were closer to implementation fidelity:

- Q3 (4.41) “data from literacy screeners were used to determine percent of students receiving core instruction (Tier 1)”;

- Q5 (4.47) “data were used to identify at-risk students in need of supplemental and/or intensive interventions (Tier 2 and Tier 3)”;
- Q6 (4.70) “identified at-risk students routinely received additional instruction (Tier 2 and Tier 3)”;
- Q7 (4.82) “progress monitoring occurred for all students receiving interventions (Tier 2 and Tier 3)”; and
- Q8 (4.41) “progress monitoring data was used to determine percent of at-risk students who achieved grade-level benchmarks” (movement back to Tier 1).

Ratings between 3.00 (sometimes occurs) and 4.00 (often occurs) can be interpreted, on average, as the perceived RTI practices occurred infrequently or less often than intended. Scores from the following items reported the lowest calculated means, suggesting that administrators perceived that the practices were further from implementation fidelity than others:

- Q11 (3.29) “the Problem-Solving Team developed hypotheses to explain why at-risk students were not performing on grade level”;
- Q12 (3.58) “data were collected to confirm reasons at-risk students were not performing on grade level”;
- Q14 (3.65) “the referring teacher routinely received staff support to implement the intervention plan”;
- Q16 (3.76) “data were routinely graphed to aid in interpreting student performance”; and

- Q18 (3.94) “a student’s RTI data were routinely used to determine whether or not the student’s performance was due to a disability”.

4.2.1.3. Frequency Distributions

Calculating the frequency of secondary administrators who selected each response option for an item involved calculating and displaying the number of secondary administrators reporting that the RTI practice(s) never occurred (NO), rarely occurred (RO), sometimes occurred (SO), often occurred (OO), or always occurred (AO). Frequency distributions were useful for providing general information on overall “the range of perceived practices” and “what percentage of administrators perceive a given practice is occurring” (Castillo et al., 2016, p.6). Table 5 shows the frequency distributions of the 16-item survey instrument, along with the frequency number and percentages.

Table 5

Frequency and Distributions

Item	N	Never Occurred (NO)		Rarely Occurred (RO)		Sometimes Occurred (SO)		Often Occurred (OO)		Always Occurred (AO)	
	Statistic	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
3	17	1	5.9	1	5.9			3	17.6	12	70.6
4	17	1	5.9			1	5.9	6	35.3	9	52.9
5	17			1	5.9	1	5.9	4	23.5	11	64.7
6	17					1	5.9	3	17.6	13	76.5
7	17			1	5.9					16	94.1
8	17			1	5.9	1	5.9	5	29.4	10	58.8
9	17	1	5.9	3	17.6	3	17.6			10	58.8
10	17	1	5.9			1	5.9	5	29.4	10	58.8
11	17			6	35.3	3	17.6	5	29.4	3	17.6
12	17			4	23.5	2	11.8	8	47.1	3	17.6
13	17	1	5.9			1	5.9	8	47.1	7	41.2
14	17	1	5.9	1	5.9	5	29.4	6	35.3	4	23.5
15	17	1	5.9			1	5.9	9	52.9	6	35.3
16	17	1	5.9	2	11.8	2	11.8	7	41.2	5	29.4
17	17	1	5.9			2	11.8	7	41.2	7	41.2
18	17	1	5.9			2	11.8	10	58.8	4	23.5
Total	17	10		20		26		86		130	

Note. Calculated using SPSS Version 24 frequency distributions function.

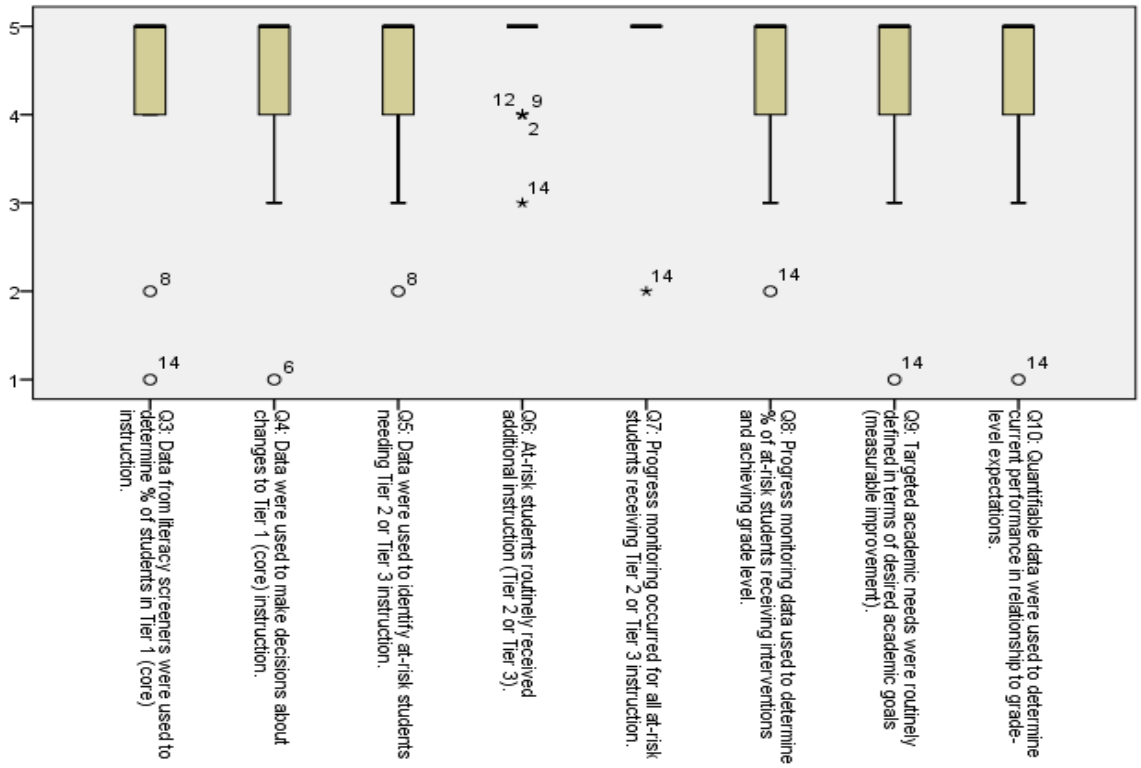
To determine the general perceptions of implementation of RTI, practices scores were computed for each respondent by calculating the sum of the ratings for each item measured by the instrument. The values corresponding with the responses were added together to obtain the total value of perceptions of RTI practices (Castillo et al., 2016, p.5). The total value of 1,152 [i.e. (10x1) +(20x2) +(26x3) +(86x4) +(130x5) =1152] was divided by the total number of response items of 272 [i.e. (16 items) x (17 participants) =272] to obtain an average overall score of 4.24. The average score of 4.24 could be interpreted as secondary administrators perceived *on average* that secondary literacy RTI practices often occurred.

4.2.1.4. Visual Distributions of Data

To visually show the distribution of the data and for efficient comparisons of the averages, ranges, and outliers, boxplots were drawn for the ratings on each item of the survey instrument. Figure 8 depicted the boxplots for items 3 – 10 of the survey. Note that the boxplots for these items were comparatively short suggesting an overall high level of agreement in ratings for items 3-10. The median line of the boxplot showed that *on average* the perceived practices measured on items Q3-10 were scored as "always occurred" or (5.00). The whiskers on items Q4-5 and Q8-10 represented the lower 25% of the scores on the items and show that these items were negatively skewed. The overall spread, as shown by the extreme values, were depicted with circles (o) or asterisks (*) at the end of the lower whiskers. These scores were checked for data-entry errors and none were found. Note that the ratings for participant 14 were outliers for all items in Figure 8 (Q3-10). Ratings for participant 8 were outliers on items Q3 and Q5. Participant 6 was an outlier for item Q4. Finally, item Q6 showed outliers for participants 2, 9, 12, and 14.

Figure 8

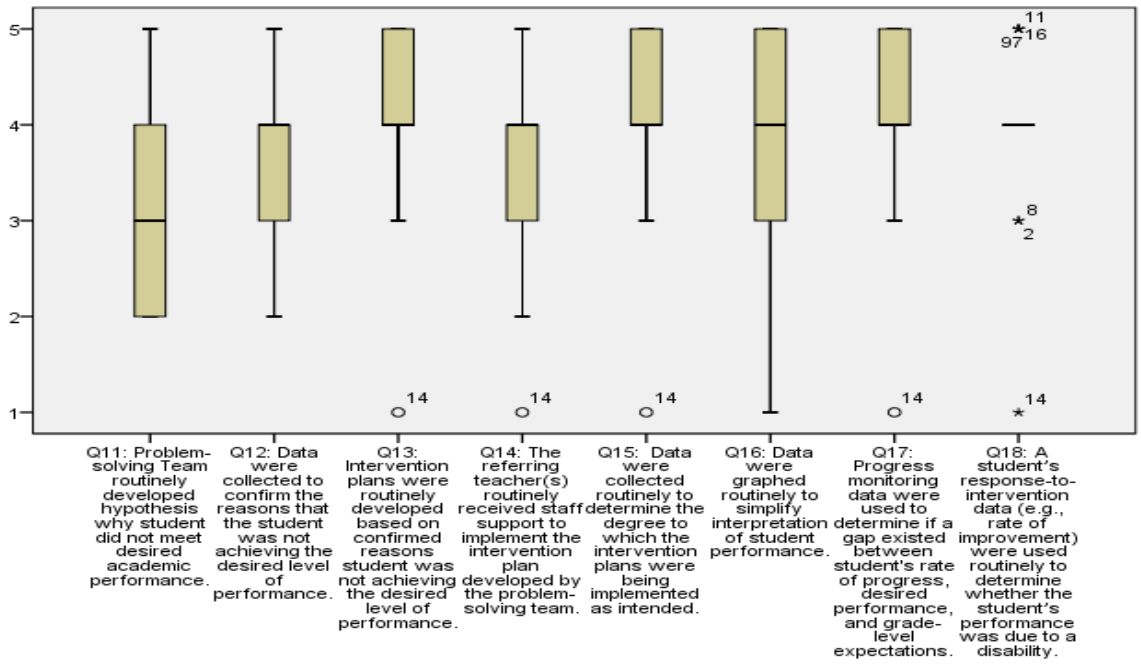
Boxplots for Items 3 – 10



The median line for items Q11-18, as depicted on Figure 9, showed the lowest *on average* rating for item Q11 at 3.00 (rarely occurred) and was positively skewed. The interquartile ranges for data on items Q11 and Q16 show that the data were more dispersed. For Q12-Q15 and Q17, the data were less dispersed and negatively skewed. Data for participant 14 were outliers for Q13-18. Finally, for item Q16, the median rating on perceived practices was 4.00 (often occurred); however, extreme values were depicted for seven survey participants.

Figure 9

Boxplots for Items 11 – 18



4.2.1.5. Domain-Level Analysis

The Perceptions of Practices survey manual (2016) recommended calculating the average *by domain level* to determine the perceptions when applying practices across the various components of the secondary literacy RTI program. Calculating averages by domain level also allowed for analysis of general trends in RTI practices.

Average domain-level scores were computed by calculating the sum of the ratings of items that comprised the domain. The values were added together and divided by the number of items within the domain. The results were the average level of perceived

practices for each domain, as suggested by the Perceptions of Practices survey manual (Castillo et al., 2016, p.5).

To accomplish this, the 16 items on the survey instrument were categorized into domains, representing the four components of RTI implementation articulated by the National Center on Response to Intervention (Risk, 2014). The four domains were: screening, tiered instruction, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making. Survey items 3, 4, and 5 were group together for analysis in the Domain 1: Screening. Items 6, 7, and 8 concerned adjustments to instruction for at-risk students and were analyze together in Domain 2: Tiered Instruction. Items 9 – 13 were analyzed together in Domain 3: Progress Monitoring, as they involved using performance data to respond to student needs. Finally, items 14-18 were related to monitoring, goal setting, and decision making and were analyzed together in Domain 4: Data-based Decision Making. Figure 10 depicts the item and domain breakdown of the 16-item survey instrument used for domain-level analysis.

Figure 10

Items Categorized by Domain Level

Domain 1 Screening	Domain 2 Tiered Instruction	Domain 3 Progress Monitoring	Domain 4 Data-based Decision Making
• Q3 Universal Screeners • Q4 Changes to Tier 1 • Q5 ID At-risk Students	• Q6 Additional Instruction • Q7 PM for At-risk • Q8 PM on Improvements	• Q9 ID Student Needs • Q10 ID Current Performance • Q11 Develop Hypothesis • Q12 Data Confirmation • Q13 Intervention Plans	• Q14 Teacher Support • Q15 Intervention Fidelity • Q16 Data on Performance • Q17 RTI Data vs Goals • Q18 RTI Data to Refer to SPED

Note. Item domain categorization is consistent with identifiable practices and components outlined in RTI frameworks (Patrikakou et al., 2016).

4.2.2. Research Question 2

The purpose of research question two was to assess whether administrators' perceptions would reveal any variances in implementation fidelity that may exist among and between secondary campuses. Studying variances among campuses allowed the study to "detect meaningful patterns and relationships" (Ivankova, 2015, p.220) and to identify areas requiring a deeper level of analysis.

4.2.2.1. Demographic Analysis of Average Domain Levels

When applying demographic data to domain-level analysis, trends in perceived practices were analyzed to determine the extent to which various components were implemented across all secondary campuses and used to answer research question 2. Therefore, a demographic analysis of average domain levels was conducted by campus, by secondary level, and by administrative position to measure:

- overall perceptions of RTI practices across all studied campuses (vertical articulation);
- the average perceptions of RTI practices across all studied middle school campuses;
- the average perceptions of RTI practices across all studied high school campuses; and
- average perceptions of RTI practices within and between administrative positions.

To summarize and compare descriptive statistics by group (compare means) across factors, categorical values (campus number, position) were used to subset the dependent variables (item ratings) in SPSS. Table 6 delineates the sum of items, the number of items,

and the average levels by domain. Further, Table 6 groups the average levels by overall domain, by campus, by secondary level, and by position.

Table 6

Domain-Level Analysis

	Domain 1 (Q3-Q5)			**Domain 2** (Q6-Q8)			**Domain 3** (Q9-Q13)			**Domain 4** (Q14-Q18)		
	Sum	Num	Avg.	Sum	Num.	Avg.	Sum	Num.	Avg.	Sum	Num.	Avg.
Overall Domain	224	51	4.39	237	51	4.65	334	85	3.94	333	85	3.92
By Campus and Level												
Campus 1	44	9	4.89	44	9	4.89	66	15	4.40	68	15	4.53
Campus 2	40	9	4.44	42	9	4.67	57	15	3.80	58	15	3.87
Campus 3	41	9	4.56	43	9	4.78	62	15	4.13	63	15	4.20
Overall Middle	125	27	4.63	129	27	4.78	185	45	4.11	189	45	4.20
Campus 4	42	12	3.50	52	12	4.33	65	20	3.25	65	20	3.25
Campus 5	57	12	4.75	56	12	4.67	85	20	4.25	80	20	4.00
Overall High	99	24	4.13	108	24	4.50	150	40	3.75	145	40	3.63
By Position												
Overall Asst/Assoc	158	36	4.39	172	36	4.78	243	60	4.05	244	60	4.07
Middle Asst/Assoc	81	18	4.50	85	18	4.72	99	30	3.30	106	30	3.53
High Asst/Assoc	77	18	4.28	87	18	4.83	120	30	4.00	118	30	3.93
Overall Principal	66	15	4.40	65	15	4.33	91	25	3.64	89	25	3.56
Middle Principal	44	9	4.89	44	9	4.89	61	15	4.07	62	15	4.13
High Principal	22	6	3.67	21	6	3.50	30	10	3.00	27	10	2.70

Note. A two-layer analysis report was run using the SPSS *Compare Means* procedure to simultaneously view the averages with respect to each factor.

The overall average scores for Domain 1 (4.39) and Domain 2 (4.65) could be interpreted as administrators' perceiving that screeners (the use of data to make changes to core instruction and identify at-risk students) and tiered instruction (providing supplemental and/or intensive instruction) tended to almost always occur. Average scores for Domain 3 (3.94) and Domain 4 (3.92) for practices related to monitoring student

performance and data-based decision-making practices were perceived to occur less often. From Table 6, several observations were made about the patterns and trends when applying demographic data to domain-level analysis:

- Across all domains, the overall impression of the level of perceived implementation was higher for middle school campuses as compared to high school campuses.
- The highest average levels for each domain were reported by Campus 1 (4.89, 4.89, 4.40, 4.53), a middle school campus, indicating that perceived RTI practices nearly always occurred.
- The lowest average levels for each domain were reported by Campus 4 (3.50, 4.33, 3.25, 3.25), a high school campus, which can be interpreted as RTI practices occurring on certain occasions or in certain circumstances.
- Middle school principals, *on average*, rated perceived levels of implementation greater than 1 point higher across all domains as compared to high school principals (4.89, 4.89, 4.07 and 4.13 versus 3.67, 3.50, 3.00, and 2.70 respectively).

4.2.2.2. Demographic Analysis of Experience

In addition to data related to campus levels and administrative positions, demographic data on years of experience in education and years in current position for each participant were collected to further analyze perceptions of RTI practices. The data were useful during the in-between stage of data analysis to select participants for the qualitative phase of the study. Descriptive statistics for the "position" variable were computed for mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, range, and standard error

of mean. All participants (n=17) reported their total years of experience in education, years in current position, secondary level (middle or high school), and gender. Of the administrators surveyed, 58% were middle school administrators and 41.2% were high school administrators. 58.8% of survey participants were female and 41.2% were male. Although the gender demographic data were obtained, it was not used as a part of the data analysis. Table 7 shows that the total years of experience in education ranged from 5 to 31 years with a mean of 12.88 years (± 1.84 standard error of means). Skewness of less than 1.0 represents normal distribution. The skewness statistic (1.22) shows the data for years of experience in education were highly skewed. The participant's years in current position ranged from .50 (six months) to 11 years with a mean of 4.83 years (± .84 standard error of means). The skewness statistic (.27) shows the data were approximately normally distributed.

Table 7

Participant Work Experience

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Yrs. in Education	17	26.00	5.00	31.00	12.8824	1.83688	1.222	.550
Yrs. in Position	17	10.50	.50	11.00	4.8235	.84447	.269	.550
Valid N (listwise)	17							

Note. Calculated using SPSS Version 24 descriptive statistics explore function.

4.2.2.3. Inferential Statistical Analysis

For further analysis of the survey results, a Mann-Whitney *U* (M-W) nonparametric statistic test, was used measure the difference between two independent

groups (middle school administrator, high school administrator) when dependent variables were ordinal (Fritz et al., 2011). SPSS was used for all calculations, including the critical value for sample sizes ($n_1 = n_2 = 15$). The mean ranks allowed for comparisons between each group's ratings for each item. Testing the hypothesis was needed to determine whether the observed data (*U*) supported a difference in the responses of secondary administrators (Fritz et al., 2011). If the *U* value was less than or equal to 15, the research hypothesis is rejected. If the *U* value exceeded 15, the research hypothesis is not rejected. The *U* values for all items (Q3-Q18) exceeded the critical values (15), ranging from 18.50 to 36.00; therefore, the hypothesis was rejected (Type I error). There was sufficient evidence to conclude that the perceptions of implementation fidelity as rated by middle school administrators differed from high school administrators.

Table 8 depicts the result of the Mann-Whitney *U* test which provided the mean ranks, *U* statistic, Z value, and the effect size. The effect size, *r*, was calculated by dividing the *Z* value by the square root of N, according to Cohen's (1988) guidance for interpreting effect sizes. The sample size was too small to conclude any statistical significance. Fritz et al. (2011) posited, "*Z* is sensitive to sample size; dividing by a function of N removes the effect of sample size from the resultant effect size estimate" (p. 12). Therefore, for *r* a large effect is .50, a medium effect is .30, and a small effect is .10.

Table 8

Mann-Whitney U Test

			Test Statistics		
Items	**Mean Ranks**		**Mann-Whitney U**	**Z**	**ES (*r*)**
Q3	Middle	9.00	36.00	.00	0
	High	9.00			No effect
Q4	Middle	10.11	26.00	-1.07	-.26
	High	7.75			Smaller than typical
Q5	Middle	9.50	31.50	-.51	-.12
	High	8.44			Small
Q6	Middle	9.22	34.00	-.26	.06
	High	8.75			No effect to small
Q7	Middle	9.50	31.50	-1.06	-.26
	High	8.44			Smaller than typical
Q8	Middle	9.17	34.50	-.16	-.04
	High	8.81			No effect to small
Q9	Middle	9.67	30.00	-.65	-.16
	High	8.25			Small
Q10	Middle	8.83	34.50	-.16	-.04
	High	9.19			No effect to small
Q11	Middle	10.17	25.50	-1.05	-.26
	High	7.69			Smaller than typical
Q12	Middle	10.28	24.50	-1.18	-.29
	High	7.56			medium
Q13	Middle	7.67	24.00	-1.27	-.31
	High	10.50			medium
Q14	Middle	10.94	18.50	-1.76	-.43
	High	6.81			Larger than typical
Q15	Middle	8.94	35.50	-.05	-.01
	High	9.06			No effect
Q16	Middle	9.78	29.00	-.71	-.17
	High	8.13			Smaller than typical
Q17	Middle	9.11	35.00	-.10	-.03
	High	8.88			No effect
Q18	Middle	10.83	19.00	-1.79	-.49
	High	6.94			large

Note. The critical value 15 and the decision rule is to reject research hypothesis (H_0) if $U \leq 15$.
[a]Grouping Variable: Secondary Level

Note that the means ranks of all items are similar except for items Q4, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, and Q18.

Q4: High school level administrators had lower mean rank (7.75) than middle school administrators (10.11), $U = 26$, $p = .29$, $r = -.26$, which was not statistically significant and had an approximately medium effect size.

Q11: High school level administrators had a lower mean rank (7.69) than middle school administrators (10.17), $U = 25.5$, $p = .29$, $r = -.26$, which was not statistically significant and had an approximately medium effect size.

Q12: High school administrators had a lower mean rank (7.56) than middle school administrators (10.28), $U = 24.5$, $p = .24$, $r = -.29$, which was not statistically significant and had a medium effect size.

Q13: High school administrators had a higher mean rank (10.50) than middle school administrators (7.67), $U = 24.00$, $p = .21$, $r = -.31$, which was not statistically significant and had a medium effect size.

Q14: High school administrators had a lower mean rank (6.81) than middle school administrators (10.94), $U = 18.5$, $p = .08$, $r = -.43$, which was not statistically significant and had an approximately large effect size.

Q18: High school administrators had a lower mean rank (6.94) than middle school administrators (10.83), $U = 19.0$, $p = .07$, $\mathbf{r} = -.44$, which was not statistically significant and had an approximately large effect size.

4.2.3. Summary

For research question one, secondary administrators (n=17) were invited to respond to the online Perceptions of Practices survey (Appendix D). Administrators were asked to identify the perceived levels of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program. The means ratings and frequency distributions for each survey item were

calculated and reported on Table 4. The overall general impression of implementation fidelity in secondary literacy RTI was 4.24, suggesting that practices were perceived *on average* as often occurring. Analysis conducted on the individual item level indicated that administrators perceived that RTI practices were closest to implementation fidelity in (a) data from literacy screeners (4.41), (b) identifying at-risk students (4.47), (c) providing strategic and/or intensive instruction (4.70), and (d) using data to progress monitor (4.82). Finally, the RTI practices that were perceived to occur less often and those which measured the lowest levels of implementation fidelity were the actions completed when engaging in data-based decision making (3.29, 3.58, 3.65, 3.76, 3.94).

In order to determine if variations existed in levels of implementation fidelity between secondary campuses and to answer research question two, a domain-level analysis (factors) was completed and reported on Table 6. The overall impression of perceived implementation fidelity was higher for middle school administrators, with Campus 1 administrators rating the highest per domain (4.89, 4.89, 4.40, and 4.53, respectively). The overall impression of perceived implementation fidelity was lowest for high school administrators, with Campus 4 administrators rating the lowest per domain (3.50, 4.33, 3.25, and 3.25, respectively).

To further measure variances between campuses, a Mann-Whitney *U* nonparametric test (Table 8) was used to compare the two groups of administrators by mean ranks. The overall results indicated that there was sufficient evidence to conclude that perceptions of implementation fidelity in secondary literacy was different for middle school administrators and high school administrators. The sample size was too small to conclude any statistical significance and the effect sizes were smaller than typical to

large. Overall, high school administrators had lower mean ranks on 68% of survey items than middle school administrators, with the greatest difference on item Q14 ($U = 24.00$, $p = -1.27$, $r = -.43$, larger than typical effect size) and item Q18 ($U = 19$, $p = -1.79$, $r = -.49$, large effect size). To assess whether the data from the variables were reliable, a Cronbach's alpha was computed. The alpha was .94, which provides strong evidence for internal consistency reliability.

4.3. Connecting Qualitative Phase

Selecting an appropriate sample of participants for the qualitative phase was accomplished in two ways: between-strategies data collection and purposeful (extreme case) sampling. Both methods yielded participants who were "information-rich" and provided insight into the quantitative results. In addition, Stringer (2014) recommended "identifying a sample from individuals who are affected by or had an effect on the problem of interest" (p.77). The selected participants consisted of both district-level and campus-level administrators who were tasked with leading the implementation of RTI and monitoring program integrity.

4.3.1. Purposeful Sampling

4.3.1.1. Outlier Cases

To aid in the selection of administrators to participate in the qualitative phase of the study, a visual analysis of frequency distribution was conducted to identify outlier or extreme values among survey respondents. Mills (2011) emphasizes the relevance of following up with outlier cases using qualitative methods to further understand critical situations (p. 249). A visual analysis of frequency distributions (Figure 8 and Figure 9)

indicated outliers or extreme values for participant 6, participant 8, and participant 14. Ratings for participant 14 were outliers on nearly all survey items (10 of 16).

4.3.1.2. Domain Analysis by Campus, by Secondary Level, and by Position

A review of the domain-level analysis by campus, by secondary level, and by position (Table 6) also informed the selection of qualitative phase participants. In order to examine the factors that contributed to implementation fidelity, data were reviewed to identify participants whose ratings were closest to "always occurred". The results by campus indicated that Campus 1, a middle school campus, had the highest average domain ratings (4.89, 4.89, 4.40, and 4.53, respectively). When results were analyzed by position, the highest average domain ratings (4.89, 4.89, 4.17, and 4.13, respectively) were by participant 13, a middle school principal.

In order to examine the factors that hindered implementation fidelity, data were reviewed to identify participants whose ratings were farthest from "always occurred". The results by campus indicated that Campus 4, a high school campus, had the lowest average domain ratings (3.50, 4.33, 3.25, and 3.25, respectively). When results were analyzed by position, the lowest average domain ratings (3.67, 3.50, 3.00, and 2.70, respectively) were associated with participant 14, a high school principal.

4.3.2. Interview Protocol Development

4.3.2.1. Open Ended Responses

Participants were invited to identify factors that contributed to or hindered implementation fidelity in the RTI program. To accomplish this, participants were asked open-ended questions (Appendix D) to elaborate on RTI practices within the context of the participant's campus and specific to his or her administrative position. The most

salient commonalities in those responses were comments about implementation support from district-level administration, adequate professional development at the district-level, time for collaboration between reading specialist and core content teachers, and the absence of a literacy universal screener. Based on this, the interview guides (Appendix E) were created, adding specific questions to allow participants to elaborate on the findings from the quantitative phase and to elaborate on the responses from the open-ended questions. In addition to questions about RTI practices, the following question was added as a result of the open-ended questions: What supports does your campus receive from district leadership that helps with implementing the secondary literacy RTI program?

4.3.3. Summary

The criteria for selecting participants for the qualitative follow-up resulted from identifying outlier cases, reviewing data on perceived levels of implementation fidelity, and a review of responses on open-ended questions. The following participants were selected for the qualitative phase:

1. Participant 1, Director of RTI
2. Participant 7, Campus 1
3. Participant 13, Campus 1
4. Participant 8, Campus 4
5. Participant 14, Campus 4

The selected participants provided a broader range of stakeholder perspectives, including perspectives from district leadership, high school leadership, and middle school leadership. In addition, the participants were able to identify any structural or contextual factors contributing to their perspectives.

4.4. Presentation of Qualitative Data

4.4.1. Qualitative Phase Participants

Qualitative interviews took place in the fall of 2019 and in the spring of 2020 at the participants' office or campus location. The five participants for the individual interviews were asked to reflect on their leadership practices to clarify or expound upon the survey responses. Participants were also asked to think about the applicability of district guidelines and expectations on their RTI practices. Table 9 shows the participant characteristics of those who were interviewed for the qualitative phase of the study.

Table 9

Qualitative Participants' Characteristics

Participant *(pseudonym)*	Campus	Secondary Level	Position	Yrs. in Education	Yrs. in Position
Participant 1 *(Mary)*	District Administration	ALL	Director of RTI	19	7
Participant 7 *(Daniel)*	Campus 1	Middle	Assistant/Associate Principal	23	9
Participant 13 *(Thomas)*	Campus 1	Middle	Principal	26	10
Participant 8 *(Keisha)*	Campus 4	High	Assistant/Associate Principal	8	1
Participant 14 *(Sharon)*	Campus 4	High	Principal	14	8

4.4.1.1. Participant 1: Director of RTI

Mary was interviewed on August 29, 2019 and again on September 3, 2019. At the time of the study, Mary (pseudonym) was the director of RTI. She had overseen the district's RTI program since 2013, having been promoted from primary reading coordinator. Her primary responsibilities included providing professional guidance and

support on behalf of academically vulnerable students to districtwide stakeholders in the areas of monitoring, implementing, and sustaining the RTI, Dyslexia, and 504 Programs. In addition to ensuring compliance with district, state, and federal regulations, Mary's focus was to build the systems and processes necessary to support program integrity and to improve student academic performance. As the director of RTI, Mary was responsible for identifying and providing guidance on appropriate instructional strategies, evidence-based interventions, instructional resources, and assessment tools to be adopted by the district. Mary collaborated with the executive leadership team, curriculum coordinators, and campus-based administrators to manage and analyze RTI data for districtwide improvement. Mary facilitated professional development and monitored classroom instruction to ensure that sound teaching practices and evidence-based interventions were being implemented with fidelity. Mary had direct supervision of two district reading-level specialists, who were responsible for supporting all district high schools. As director of RTI, Mary was interviewed twice. The primary purpose of the first interview was to capture the district expectations for implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program, as lead and managed by the director of RTI. The district RTI Manual, curriculum management plan, and board policies were used to corroborate information from the director's interview (Ivankova, 2015). The intent of the second interview was to gain an understanding of the factors that contributed to or hindered fidelity in the district, from the director's perspective.

4.4.1.2. Daniel, Participant 7: Middle School Assistant Principal

Daniel was interviewed on September 9, 2019 at Campus 1 in his office. At the time of the interview, Daniel was the eighth-grade assistant principal. He had overseen

the campus-level implementation of the RTI program since 2010. Over the span of his administrative career (nine years), Daniel had been employed at the same campus and with the same principal. Daniel shared, "I've been here long enough to know what works and what don't work with our kids. The district has expectations, but we have latitude to figure out what works in our building. Our scores are high enough." Given Daniel's longevity leading the campus' RTI program, his perspectives revealed some background information on the history of RTI implementation within the district.

4.4.1.3. Thomas, Participant 13: Middle School Principal

Thomas, the Campus 1 principal, was interviewed on September 10, 2019 in his office. At the time of the interview, Thomas's career in education spanned 26 years. He has worked at Campus 1 since its inception, starting as the campus assistant principal. He has been the campus principal for ten years. Thomas shared, "I've seen all the RTI changes in the district. I think we started doing RTI when the school opened, before any other campus really had anything in place."

4.4.1.4. Keisha, Participant 8: High School Associate Principal

As a new associate principal, Keisha was a bit hesitant to take part in the research study. Although she was first interviewed on September 9, 2019, her responses were not forthcoming, and she often answered, "I don't know." After reassuring her that both the district and her campus principal supported the study, the interview was rescheduled. In addition, a copy of the district approval letter was emailed to her for review. Informed consent was reviewed again in detail and additional contact information was shared. I shared my background information and the reasons why the study was initiated. To build

trust and to develop a relationship, Keisha's interview was rescheduled to September 18, 2019.

At the time of the second interview, Keisha was new in her role as the school's associate principal, having been promoted mid-year the previous school year from assistant principal. Her eight-year educational career included experience as a classroom teacher, mathematics department chair, assistant principal, and now associate principal. Keisha shared, "I am so careful to do everything by the book. I don't want to fail in this position. I'm sorry to be so hesitant, but everything I do now is about academics and student performance. If I make one wrong step, it affects a lot."

4.4.1.5. Sharon, Participant 14: High School Principal

At the time of the study, Sharon had been a high school principal for eight years, five at Campus 4. She was hired from a neighboring district where she was a middle school principal. She was completing her 14th year in education. Sharon was interviewed on September 10, 2019 in her office. She shared, "there's a lot of work that we have to accomplish this year. Every school year we have to identify one goal. Last year we chose literacy. This year, I want to make sure we deepen our practices."

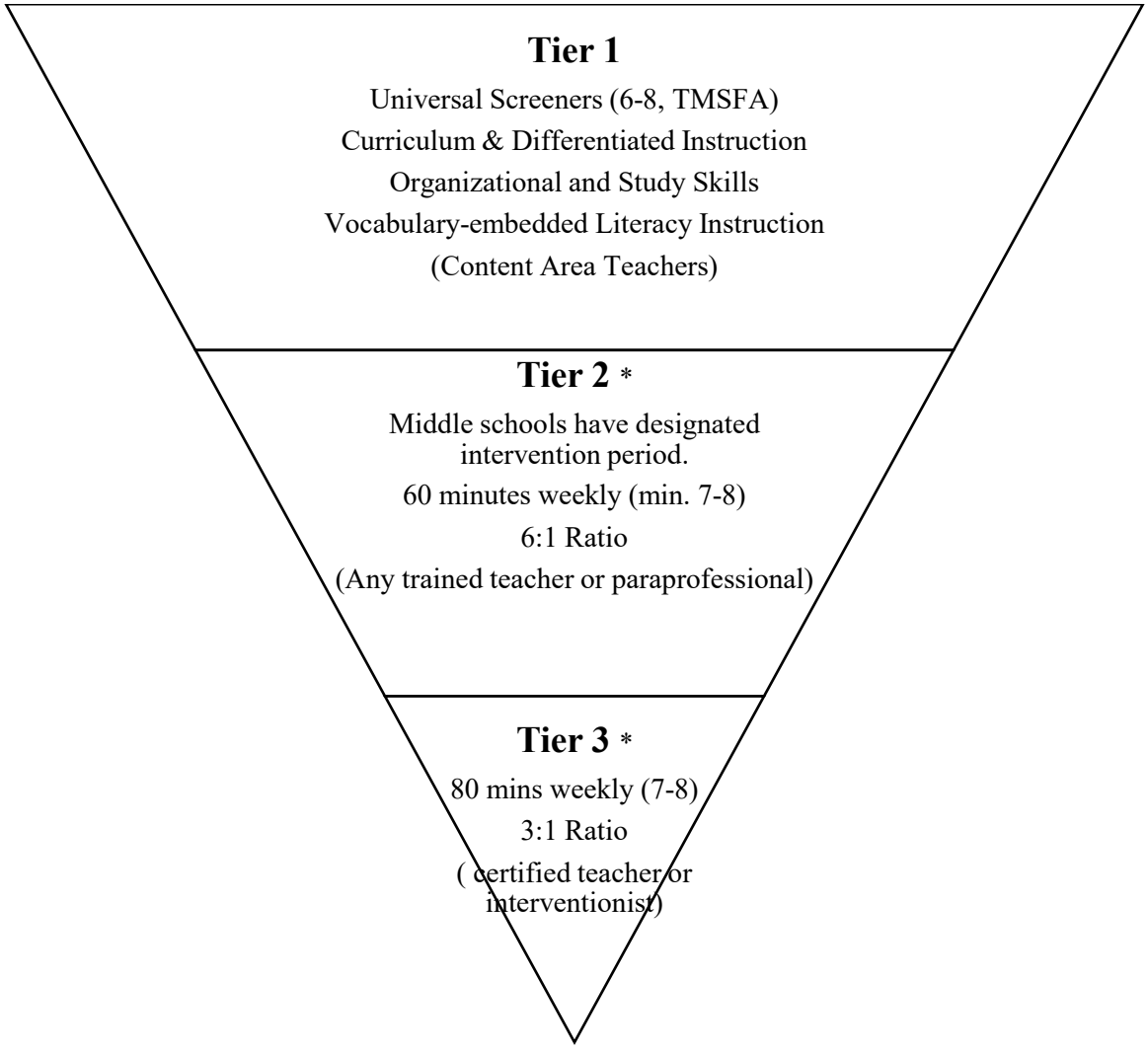
4.4.2. Baseline Implementation Fidelity Measure

The purpose of the research study was to investigate the administrators' perceptions of RTI implementation fidelity. To establish a baseline understanding of district expectations for implementation of the secondary literacy RTI program, several data sources were utilized as a part of the qualitative phase of the study. Documents, including the district RTI manual, curriculum management guide, and board policies were analyzed to set a baseline for implementation fidelity. In addition, an interview with

the director of RTI measured her perspectives on the level of implementation fidelity for the secondary campuses in relationship to the district expectations. Figure 11 illustrates the district RTI components, as compiled from document analysis and confirmed by the director of RTI.

Figure 11

District RTI Components



Note. Adapted from district RTI procedural manual and district curriculum management plan.
* No guidance for high school RTI at Tier 2 and Tier 3

4.4.2.1. Interview 1: Director of RTI

At the start of the interview, Mary was asked to give an overall impression of RTI implementation fidelity in the district. Mary reported that her biggest professional accomplishment within her role was the elementary (K-6) RTI program. She reported:

> I can say for sure that we implement in K-6. We have staff - a reading specialist at each campus. We do tiered instruction, especially Tier 1. We progress monitor, and we've shown student improvement. I think elementary does RTI pretty well".

Her comments are in alignment with numerous research studies that suggested that districts are more prone to have well-establish RTI frameworks and engage in implementation fidelity monitoring to a greater extent at the elementary school level (Tackett et. al, 2009). Mary was asked to share what her current goals were in relationship to the RTI program. She shared a goal of moving beyond K-6 implementation fidelity, adding that "I think the movement is toward an increased support for RTI across the board."

To establish baseline levels of implementation fidelity from Mary's perspective as the district director, she was asked to rate the levels of perceived implementation fidelity for each expected RTI component (Figure 11). To offer clarification and to aid in the determination of variances between middle and high school campus, Mary was asked to first give a general perception of implementation fidelity *overall*, then rate domains levels by middle school and high school. Table 10 captures Mary's domain-level ratings, including evidence (comments) gleamed from interview transcripts to support the ratings.

Table 10

Baseline Implementation Fidelity (District)

	Evidence Middle School	Evidence High School
Domain 1: Screeners **Avg. Domain Score:** 4.25 Often Occurs	**Rating:** Always Occurs (5.00) "Yes, all students are screened in middle school. Scores are not always accurate due to fidelity with testing and student disinterest." "They're doing the Texas middle school fluency assessment, but then they're also using a digital resource. They're using Mobi Reading."	**Rating:** Sometimes Occurs (3.50) "There is a variance between high school due to choice in assessments. STAAR/Curriculum based assessments are primary sources of information." "High schools receive a list of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students that are promoting up, so they are aware. But there's not a universal screener other than that. They all do different things."
Domain 2: Tiered Interventions **Avg. Domain Score:** 4.00 Often Occurs	**Rating:** Always Occurs (5.00) "All responsible staff is provided training in interventions and receive ongoing prof. development. I train them." "Middle school interventionists are equipped to deliver evidence-based interventions." "For middle school yes. For middle school. Absolutely because we monitor how many students are in those classes. I set that guideline for middle school.	**Rating:** Sometimes Occurs (3.00) "Some forms of PD provided, but most are not school based or do not support continuous improvement." "Reading specialists are well trained and have very small groups that target intervention but not my classes. There's so many different layers there. They mainly do dyslexia classes. Secondary teachers are not always experts in foundational skills, so it may be STAAR practice." The secondary level interventions consist of a variety of strategies; only some are evidence-based. This is done mainly in core classes. I'm not convinced." "Only one high school has intervention class in place specifically targeting below grade level skills.

Table 10, continued

	Evidence Middle School	Evidence High School
Domain 3: Progress Monitoring **Avg. Domain Score:** 3.50 Sometimes Occurs	**Rating:** Always Occurs (5.00) "Middle Schools are required to progress monitor and have regular RTI meeting with RTI leadership teams. Schedules are set by campus, not district." "It's not always a team. But they are progress monitoring. District... they have to progress monitor. They do progress monitor."	**Rating:** Rarely Occurs (2.00) "High schools do not always differentiate between Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction, so there's a concern with progress monitoring. Like I mentioned, there's only one high school progress monitoring. That's because they have an intervention class for Tier 2 and Tier 3. The other high schools don't have that. Not in reading. I know quite a few have it in math because of STAAR Algebra 1. But not for reading." "High school has kind of come and go with it. I think it's a staffing issue. I think that if they have the staff I think that they would love to have something in place. I do. And they've expressed that with me. But I think it's a staffing issue."
Domain 4: Data-based Decision Making **Avg. Domain Score:** 3.00 Often Occurs	**Rating:** Rarely Occurs (4.00) "MS has higher degree of fidelity with structure, resources, etc. When students are in the MS elective class, parents are notified about what the class is and why students are there. Parent involvement in RTI meetings is campus based." "I think that the fact that the middle school's principals are still buying in and supporting that class, says a lot. And they don't buck me on how many kids to put in there or what kids to put in those classes."	**Rating:** Rarely Occurs (2.00) "High School does not have regular RTI meetings unless considering for SPED. Yeah, high school won't have a RTI meeting unless they are considering SPED. And then they're calling it an RTI meeting just because they're supposed to but it's just a... It's not." District communication in the area of defining and describing RTI and the RTI process for high school can be improved.

Note. Adapted from the director of RTI interview transcript dated August 29, 2019.

Ratings of perceived levels of implementation fidelity for the director of RTI were compared to the overall ratings by campus-level administrators and is depicted in Table 11.

Table 11

Ratings of Implementation Fidelity

	Domain 1: Screeners	Domain 2: Tiered Instruction	Domain 3: Progress Monitoring	Domain 4: Data-based Decision Making
Secondary Overall	4.3	4.65	3.94	3.92
Director Overall	4.25	4.00	3.50	3.00
Middle Overall	4.63	4.78	4.11	4.20
Director Middle	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00
High Overall	4.13	4.50	3.75	3.63
Director High	3.50	3.00	2.00	2.00

Note. Data combines director's domain ratings (Table 10) with campus-level administrators' domain ratings (Table 6).

It was noted that the director's ratings of perceived levels of implementation fidelity was lower on all domains of RTI practices. To better understand the reasons for the variations between the two, data were shared during the director's second interview to allow her to share any insight into why she perceived the overall implementation fidelity levels as lower than campus-level administrators. Mary responded,

> I think that they want the perception to be that they're doing very well with fidelity. The hard part, as you go up the grades, is to see as *true* intervention and not just test prep, especially when campuses are limited with their staffing and how they use their staffing. That's what a lot of it boils down to and that's where we are at now. So, when I rate *true* implementation, I am rating it as I'm looking at actual intervention, meaning skills practice, going on in those classes. At some high schools, I have to be honest and say that it's test prep for the EOC and not skills practice which is what we're supposed to do. Because of that, I rated it lower.

Mary's response to the discrepancies brought to mind one of the disadvantages of self-report survey instruments, as shared in the study's limitations. As Noell and Gansle (2006) posited, "self-reports tend to be upwardly biased" (p. 33). To ensure the credibility of the research findings (Ivankova, 2015, p. 265), campus-administrator's domain-level ratings were triangulated with different participants (assistant/associate principals and with participants at other secondary campuses), using member checking (p. 266) of participant survey data, and through document analysis.

Mary was then asked to then share why she rated middle school fidelity higher than the middle school administrators. She shared,

> I see those campuses really using data to drive what they're doing with their students. I also see regular communication between the administrators and the interventionists on their campus. Yeah, because the middle school level could produce clear progress monitoring, targeting some instruction. The middle school could produce clear that, I can't promise that the high school could produce that.

Consistent with a document analysis of middle school RTI structures, middle school campuses were staffed with district-funded reading specialist at each campus whose responsibility include RTI implementation monitoring. Additionally, reading specialist conduct campus data analysis on a monthly basis with the director of RTI, confirmed by the district RTI professional development calendar and resulting student performance monitoring outputs. In addition, the data were shared quarterly with the district executive council during Cadence of Accountability (COA) meetings.

Finally, Mary was asked to clarify ratings of Domain 3: Progress Monitoring and Domain 4: Data-based Decision-Making for high school. Note that the campus-level administrators rated progress monitoring 3.75. For data-based decision-making, high school administrators rated implementation fidelity at 3.63. Mary's rating of 2.00, was much lower. Mary shared,

> High school is complex. They've had some administrator changes, so as they've had administrator changes and they have had to prioritize what they work on from year to year. RTI just hasn't been a stated priority. They've really been working on a lot of social emotional growth, so RTI has kind of not been a focus. And then they had to work on tier one. Some high school principals feel like they can handle RTI in tier one, in the core classes. I just lost another principal. With the old principal RTI was actually going to be a priority on that campus this year. Priorities restart with every new principal.

As a follow up question, Mary was asked, "what RTI professional development do you have in place for new principals (new to campus or new to district)? She responded, "none." Going further, she was asked, "do you expect this to change considering the

staffing changes, and the districts new focus on RTI across the board?" A pregnant pause preceded Mary's response of "I don't know." Mary added,

> I think they try, sometimes their hands are tied by their staffing, by a lot staffing. They do the best they can with what they have, I do, but I also think that sometimes we've got classes maybe designated as, I know I'm beating this dead horse, but maybe designated as EOC classes that could be reallocated for intervention.

4.4.2.2. Summary of Director's Interview

To measure the perceptions of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program, both campus-level administrators and the director of RTI completed the survey instrument to determine if any variances existed between district expectations and campus-level perceived RTI practices. The director of RTI was interviewed to share her viewpoints on variances between the domain-level ratings. Mary cited the following factors as contributing to the higher domain ratings for middle school campuses: district-funded reading specialist at each middle school campus, explicit district policies and procedures outlining middle school RTI expectations, and the consistency of data monitoring between Mary and the executive council.

Mary rated the high school domain-level ratings lower than campus-level administrators. The primary factor causing lower ratings was Mary's observations of RTI practices within the designated high school intervention classes. Mary perceived that the intended intervention classes functioned as test prep classes for state end-of-course exams rather than skill-based, individualized *true* intervention. She also cited staffing as a factor presenting a barrier to implementation fidelity, specifically the lack of high school

reading specialist at each campus and the frequency of secondary principal staffing changes. Finally, Mary considered if the lack of explicit district guidance for high school presented a barrier, in and of itself, due to the complexity of the structural and contextual factors present at each individual high school campus.

4.4.3. Research Questions 3, 4, and 5

The purpose of the qualitative phase of the study was to gain insight into structural and/or cultural factors present at secondary campuses that may have had an effect on implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program. To answer the qualitative research questions, campus-level secondary administrators (n = 4) were interviewed. The qualitative phase research questions were:

3. What factors influenced the perceived implementation levels identified through the quantitative survey?
4. What factors were viewed as facilitators of implementation fidelity?
5. What factors were viewed as barriers to implementation fidelity?

During the process of qualitative data analysis, district documents were again analyzed to triangulate findings and assist with informing the development of emerging themes. A thematic analysis of interview transcript data resulted in the generation of five emergent themes. Table 12 aligns the emerging themes that were identified as a result of the rearrangement of text data via word frequency queries and visualizations. Table 12 aligns the emergent themes with the representative codes, data sources, and connection to qualitative research questions.

Table 12

Emerging Themes From Qualitative Data Analysis

Theme #1		
Administrators perceive that variations in RTI implementation fidelity between middle and high schools are the result of limited district guidance at the high school level.		
Codes	**Data Sources[a]**	**Research Question**
problem-solving, team, instructional materials/resources, training, responsibilities	1, 2, 3, 4	3, 4, 5
Theme #2		
Administrators desired explicit, consistent communication between district administrators and campus-level administrators on strategies to improve RTI implementation fidelity.		
Codes	**Data Sources[a]**	**Research Question**
data, district supports, priorities, responsibility	1, 2	3, 4, 5
Theme #3		
Structural factors at the campus level, such as staffing and scheduling, have a direct effect on secondary administrators' perception of implementation fidelity.		
Codes	**Data Sources[a]**	**Research Question**
staff, team, tiered instruction, district supports	2, 3	3, 5
Theme #4		
To minimize the effect of competing academic priorities, the presence of a campus-based reading specialist was a significant factor to maintaining implementation fidelity.		
Codes	**Data Sources[a]**	**Research Question**
staff, team, priorities, time, problem-solving team	2	4, 5
Theme #5		
If not supported by professional development on RTI best-practices, contextual flexibility in RTI implementation becomes a barrier.		
Codes	**Data Sources[a]**	**Research Question**
Responsibility, training, collaboration	1, 2	4, 5

Note. [a] Data sources are: 1 - survey responses, 2 - interviews, 3 - RTI manual, 4 - Curriculum Management Guide

4.4.3.1. Theme 1: Variances Between Middle and High Schools

RTI implementation fidelity ratings from the survey revealed that middle school administrators perceived that *overall* RTI practices occurred almost always as intended. Conversely, high school administrators perceived that *overall* RTI practices occurred "sometimes" as intended, indicating a lower level of fidelity. Interview participant were asked to identify any factors that may have had an effect on implementation fidelity and to share thoughts about how the factor affected middle school versus high schools. The director of RTI shared that she considers the principal the greatest factor on if implementation happens in high school. Participant 1 (district director) shared,

> Right now, it's more structured in middle school because we have guidance through 8th grade. With high school, it's a little different. High school principals can define their RTI programs. So it depends on what they see as a priority. I have a high school campus that's rockin' it because they do see it is a priority. The buy-in has so start with the campus administrator and trickles its way down, so however important that the campus administrator deems intervention, is how much time is going to be allotted and how much emphasis is going to be placed on the RTI process on that campus.

Campus-level administrators, however, had a differing view of the factors contributing to variations between middle and high school campuses. Campus 1, rated by both administrators as implementing RTI practices nearly always as intended, explained their view of the factors affecting variances between secondary campuses. Participant 7 replied with the following:

> We have a reading specialist that handles RTI. I mean, I lead RTI but all of the managing of the RTI program is handled by our reading specialist. She monitors the data, makes sure the right kids are in the classes, and makes sure interventions happen. I monitor the data and schedules. Between us both, we get it done. High schools don't have that option.

Participant 8, the campus principal, added, "if you ask high schools what they're doing for RTI, they'll all have different answers. I don't know how it's all tracked, well I know how it's tracked when our kids go to high school because we work together." For campuses with high implementation fidelity, such as with Campus 1, explicit district guidance on the structure, staff, and policies related to implementation serve as a factor contributing to high fidelity in RTI practices. In addition, the campus principal shared a close working relationship with his feeder pattern high school principal as a reason why both campuses rated high implementation fidelity.

Conversely, for campuses rated low implementation fidelity, the limited district guidance was a barrier to program integrity. This was the case at Campus 4. The campus principal shared,

> the lack of communication, lack of consistency, and unwillingness to stand by a statement given in a meeting is the factor. For example, they'll say, 'you should do XYZ'. When XYZ is questioned by campus administration, the response is 'well every campus does it differently.'"

Participant 8's response was similar. She stated, "every campus does everything differently. When we talk about RTI in AP meetings, it's not the same. We try to help each other with strategies, but it keeps going back to 'it depends on your school." Both

administrators expressed frustrations that more guidance from the district level was not provided, citing high school programmatic choice in RTI as “a double-edged sword.”

4.4.3.2. Theme 2: Communication

Administrators along the entire RTI continuum, from the assistant superintendent to campus-level administrators shared a desire for more explicit, consistent communications about RTI implementation between all levels in the district: executive leadership team, district-level administrators, and campus-level administrators. The primary repeating factor that was revealed from multiple interviews was the failure to retain institutional knowledge when employees leave or when organizational charts were realigned. This factor caused a lack of continuity and caused RTI knowledge issues that resulted in variances in implementation levels from year to year and between and within campuses. At the time of the first interview, the director of RTI was navigating a change in her supervisor due to a realignment of the organizational chart. She shared,

> Well, every supervisor has had a little different focus. When I turned in my yearly focus plan to my new supervisor, she returned it saying it was too broad. But it is literally a continuation of what we started last year. And I thought I'm going to take a deep breath. If this new boss were here. I don't have to make a lot of changes. I've got to build on what we have. So, that’s why maybe it could be a little narrower. But still, I just need to stay with somebody for a couple years.

The instances of changing priorities from year-to-year was also revealed in relationship to campus principals. The director shared,

> One high school campus was high fidelity, until they lost a person who was phenomenal at it. They have in the past had dedicated reading support that wasn't

necessarily just all test based. That's new this year that they don't and I'm thinking that it might just be a staffing, something that he's probably going to pick back up again because he did see the importance of that.

Communication was a factor present within campuses, as well. Participant 8, an associate principal new to her campus shared an experience at her previous school. She explained, "We had principal changes and we changed what we worked on from year to year. One year we were getting our RTI up and running and had a specialist. When the principal changed, the new principal did not keep the position." The Campus 4 principal shared the importance of consistent, explicit communication of RTI practices, considering she had several new and novice assistant principals. When sharing annual campus academic goals, Participant 14 remarked, "last year we focused on English 1, and our goal was tiered instruction. We are going to keep that same goal, just deepen it to focus our work."

Going further, Participant 7 added, "I think that the communication between the campus level specialists to the teachers can be improved. Sometimes there's not enough time allotted for them to do that. The training that the teachers get is not near as involved in the training that the specialists get."

4.4.3.3. Theme 3: Structural Factors

Structural factors at the campus level, such as staffing and scheduling, can have a large effect on administrators' perceptions of implementation fidelity. Staffing, in particular, appeared to have a greater impact on implementation fidelity. In the studied district, the director of RTI was solely responsible for leading the RTI program. She did not have assistance at the district level. Going further, her direct reports consisted of two high school reading specialists, who were responsible for all the high school campuses.

Participant 1's direct supervisor shared a concern about the alignment of the organizational chart:

> She's one person, okay. And yet, she's required to be knowledgeable of all things. That's impossible. It's an impossible task without some time of collaboration amongst the ELAR (English Language Arts and Reading) people and the math people. So, the ELAR people, here's the thing is that they're all about tier one and writing the curriculum and the content. But when it comes to what if the kids don't get it, then what?

Mary added, "Yeah, when I asked them for help, they see it as they are doing my job." Having the director of RTI as the sole leader of RTI implementation fidelity was deemed a barrier by both district administrators.

At the middle school level, the district provides funding and staffing allocations for a campus-based reading specialist. Depending on the availability of additional funding, for example, through Title 1, middle school campus administrators can fund an additional reading specialist. This was the case at Campus 1. With two campus-based reading specialist, RTI implementation supports and fidelity monitoring was split between both interventionists. In addition, both specialists were solely responsible for delivering Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Students identified as Tier 2 or Tier 3 were automatically assigned additional instruction through the "Skills for Success" course, taught by the reading specialist. Participant 13 discussed his rationale for funding an additional reading specialist in addition to the district-funded specialist. He explained,

> we have too many kids. Our school has the largest population, and we are expected to be over capacity in two years. We also have the highest STAAR

> scores in middle school. I'm going to keep it that way. Our reading specialist can manage the student workload and we have growth in student performance. As long as I'm allowed to have two reading specialists, I'll keep it that way.

Conversely, Participant 14 identified staffing barriers at the high school level. She shared, "There are only two reading specialists assigned to all of the high schools, and they only do dyslexia." As a follow-up question, she was asked to share what campus-based structures are in place to minimize the staffing issue. She shared, "we do interventions in the core content areas. It's done by the content area teacher." I further probed how the Tier 2 and Tier 3 students were getting additional instructional time for interventions, she responded, "it's done by the classroom teacher." This was further corroborated by the director of RTI. She added,

> not only is there not an intervention class, there's not even a class in place, interventions in place for students who aren't passing their EOCs. It's to be taken care of within the tier one teachers' classroom, so that support. The support for the teachers and the students on that campus has not been, in my experience, has not been evident.

As an additional question, Mary was asked, "what structures do you foresee as being beneficial to ensure that contextual factors within individual campuses are mitigated? Mary responded, "every year we get closer so I definitely think we're knocking on the door of high school, we're knocking on the door."

4.4.3.4. Theme 4: Campus-based Reading Specialist

Administrators at all levels identified competing academic priorities as a factor to implementation fidelity. Unified across interviewees was prioritizing tier one instruction.

Within the RTI framework, it is anticipated that 80% of students will be serviced within tier one. It is not surprising that administrators reported strengthening tier one as a priority. However, MTSS/RTI tiered instruction and interventions is required by law (federal and state) and through local board policy. To minimize the effect of competing academic priorities, the presence of campus-based reading specialist was perceived to be a significant factor in maintaining implementation fidelity. The RTI director shared expectations for campus reading specialist. She shared,

> I expect them to come to trainings to stay current with their practices. They manage any screeners, anything like that on their campuses, making sure that the help like being part of that RTI leadership team. That's the expectation of the interventionists, it's not just to teach the kids, but it's also to make sure all those processes run smooth on their campuses to be a part of that team.

The director also communicated the impact of a lack of campus-based reading specialist at the high school level:

> For tier two, for high school, that takes place within the tier one classroom so that's on the teacher if the student's not grasping a concept. I mean, it's on the burden, it's to take place in the tier one classroom. A lot of times it's in the form of tutoring and things like that outside of their class and then that's it the student goes. If I just had one more reading specialist, because three could cover the five high schools. Like I said, at least A day and B day one intervention class, I mean that would even be huge. Then they could still service their students with dyslexia.

Participant 14 explained, “we have no other option other than to try to do interventions in tier one. We do not have the staff. Also, we have to focus on STAAR assessments. Without staff, it will be impossible to do interventions. I wonder what other schools are doing. Can you share?”

4.4.3.5. Theme 5: Professional Development

The interaction with RTI implementation and fidelity monitoring for middle school administrators is a different experience from high school principals. For middle school administrators, RTI structures, processes, and procedures are outlined in district documents and supported through district-provided resources. For high school administrators, the district has provided flexibility to adapt the RTI framework within the context of the individual campus. However, data findings from the survey results provided a numerical measure of implementation fidelity, as perceived by administrator leading campus implementation. Findings show disparities between secondary levels, consistent with the district’s granting of “contextual flexibility” which occurs at the high school level. The director of RTI was asked to share the professional development plan and detail how RTI processes and procedures are communicated with stakeholders. Mary explained,

> At the very beginning of the year before school even starts, I meet with all of the campus reading specialists so we start that conversation then. Then again, before school starts, all the administrators are in and I have a brief amount of time with them in a rotation, just to communicate anything new or any changes in our program. Then we have a fall interventionists networking, and usually in September where I meet with all of the interventionists in the district again. Then

> we have a timeline set where they're supposed to turn around and communicate to teachers, just an overview of our RTI program, the services provided, any changes, any updates. That's done in September, communication with the teachers. Then any time a student begins an intervention or intervention changes, there's a parent, a required parent letter that has to go home. That has what the intervention is, when it's beginning, who's providing the service, how long the service is and then when that plan's going to be reviewed. That information is supposed to be sent home to the parents at that time.

A review of district documentation related to RTI professional development offerings corroborate the director's explanation of the process. All K-8 are exposed to multiple opportunities for professional development and collaboration. For high school reading specialist, since their primary focus is dyslexia services, both attend dyslexia training both inside and outside of district offerings. The director was asked to share the onboarding process for new principals (new to district or new to campus) related to academic initiatives related to RTI or on RTI processes and procedures. She replied, "none".

Participant 8 reported that the lack of RTI professional development for new administrators had a personal impact on her practice. She expressed frustrations saying, "There is no definite solution for us. The district doesn't have anything in place for highs school, except to say it's up to the individual administrator." This concern was echoed Participant 13, "it's up to the principal. If they don't care, no one else does either." Finally, during the second interview with the director, she added, "We have had discussions on onboarding since our last interview. Some of us have even outlined that,

that there is nothing in place. We would love to see an onboarding process, so we've seen some really good onboarding processes in other districts."

4.4.4. Summary

Research question three sought to examine the factors causing variations in the perceived levels of implementation fidelity between middle and high school campuses. Qualitative data analysis revealed that the primary influencing factor was the varied guidance between middle and high school campuses. The district provided K-8 campuses with explicit RTI implementation guidance, staffing, and supports. In addition, fidelity monitoring was completed on multiple levels – executive leadership, director of RTI, campus administrators, reading specialist, and RTI Teams. High school level RTI guidance consisted of a single statement in the RTI manual indicating that high school administrators had the authority to implement RTI based on the needs of the campus *(contextual flexibility)*.

The fourth research question examined the factors that facilitated implementation fidelity in the RTI program. In addition to the explicit K-8 guidance, the following were identified as factors contributing to RTI implementation fidelity in secondary literacy:

- a district-provided campus reading specialist at each middle school campus;
- middle school administrators had the freedom to use other funding to allocate staffing to employ an additional reading specialist;
- explicit communication processes, led by the director of RTI; and
- professional development and collaborative opportunities for all campus-level reading specialist.

Research question five examined the factors presenting barriers to RTI implementation fidelity. While all campuses had complexities with implementation, high school administrators reported the following additional barriers resulting from "contextual flexibility":

- limited staffing – 2 high school reading specialists to all five traditional high schools;
- due to caseload, reading specialist could only provide dyslexia services;
- instances of high school administrators using other funding sources to employ a campus-based reading specialist was 1 campus out of 5;
- limited communication from district RTI leadership on expectations of RTI implementation; and
- changing academic priorities with staff changes.

4.5. Interaction Between the Research and the Context

Research has an impact on the study's context in multiple ways. Research has supported a systemic effort to coordinate RTI within and across campuses, allowing for both technical and adaptive adjustments (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). In context of the studied district, the limited guidance on both the technical and adaptive aspects of RTI implementation has left some secondary administrator to their own devices. Secondary administrators that participated in the study understood that limited guidance provided a barrier and sought ways in which research findings could be used to support additional district supports on implementation fidelity.

Research on secondary implementation fidelity has consistently recognized the unique challenges with implementing RTI on secondary campuses. Pyle and Vaughn

(2012) posited that the best strategy to sustain collective efforts is to remove obstacles to progress by providing supportive resources and supports. Staffing was a recurring theme, cited in numerous interviews with administrations across the RTI continuum, and has been identified as a consideration for the future directions in the program. The director shared:

> I think we need a reading interventionist at every high school, but with that comes separate dyslexia staff. We need separate dyslexia staff because right now our interventionist, reading interventionist is also our dyslexia specialist. Our reading interventionist could devote more time to true reading intervention if we had a different person servicing students with dyslexia.

Decades of research has also underscored the impact of reading specialist on RTI implementation efforts (Dulaney, 2013). In an effort to support RTI implementation fidelity, the district funded reading specialist on all K-8 campuses. The campus-based reading specialist provided cohesion, assisted with providing literacy interventions, engaging stakeholders, and monitoring fidelity. At the high school level, however, the number of reading specialist factors into levels of implementation among high school campuses. At best, high school reading specialist provided dyslexia services to students, rotating between high schools. For most high schools, staffing considerations affected the ability to implement the secondary literacy RTI program. For campuses that did not chose to allocate a position to a campus-based reading specialist, structural factors were intensified. For administrators participating in the study, district funding allocations for more campus-level reading specialist was “based on the needs of the district”, as reported by several administrators.

Biancarosa and Snow (2006) identified, “setting a strong vision for how RTI will be implemented, efforts to provide ongoing professional development on implementation, and the active engagement of data-based problem-solving process” as critical leadership practices that support high levels of implementation fidelity. While research also recognizes the need for contextual flexibility, leaving secondary administrators solely responsible for determining what the “flexibilities” are can be a barrier to implementation fidelity. The study’s findings, shared with district leadership, highlighted the need to activate the professional learning for secondary administrators, such as what occurred for elementary administrators. For new secondary administrators, suggested onboarding and ongoing professional development on best-practices of RTI implementation and fidelity monitoring can mitigate the instances where contextual flexibility caused barriers. This training should be offered regardless of hiring status (i.e. new to the district or new to campus (either promotion or lateral move).

Research on RTI implementation fidelity has cited a lack on consistent communication as a hinderance to implementation fidelity. King et al. (2012) describes inconsistent communication as “disruptions in the RTI process across campuses that can have an effect on the sustainability of large-scale improvement efforts” (p.8). In the study’s context, the inconsistency of explicit, consistent communication at all levels of administration on expectations for RTI implementation fidelity can be a barrier to district-wide levels of fidelity. This can trickle down to the classroom-level as well, as was evident at Campus 4. Secondary administrators citing communication as a factor causing a barrier to implementation fidelity shared a concern that students experiencing

reading difficulties on secondary campuses were not being adequately serviced through tiered interventions. More communication, such as guidance and supports for tiered instruction in high schools, were requested.

4.6. Closing Thoughts on Section 4

Perceptions of secondary administrators leading the implementation of the RTI framework in secondary literacy was important in light of the recent national NAEP eight-grade reading average scores. Persistent challenges in providing RTI in secondary literacy continued to exist. The mixed methods study design allowed the inquiry to measure the perceived levels of implementation fidelity and to also assess any perceived factors contributing or hindering implementation fidelity from occurring throughout the studied district and on individual secondary campuses.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Summary of Findings

The purpose of this mixed methods inquiry was to assess administrators' perceptions of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program to determine what factors, if any, contributed to variances between and among secondary campuses in a suburban Texas school district. The study's findings detailed the extent of administrator's perceptions of implementation fidelity and identified contributing factors affecting program integrity. In this study, I did not examine the effects of implementation fidelity as related to student performance outcomes.

The study's findings assisted with making recommendations to improve upon the study's problem of practice. The integrated mixed methods research question (question 6) asked:

> Do administrators' perspectives of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program reveal any factors contributing to variances among middle and high school campuses?

The results of the quantitative phase findings revealed variances between secondary levels as measured by a survey instrument, finding that middle school campuses came closer to implementation fidelity than high school campuses. Among the five secondary campuses included in the results, the middle school campuses rated consistently rated implementation higher, with Campus 1 registering the highest ratings of fidelity (4.89, 4.89, 4.40, 4.53). The results suggest Campus 1 had implemented RTI practices closest to "always occurred" as intended. In contrast, Campus 4, a high school campus, registered the lowest ratings of fidelity suggesting that RTI practices were implemented

"sometimes" as intended. High school administrators had lower ratings of implementation fidelity on 68% of survey items. Domain-level ratings were considerably lower when compared to middle school ratings. While the sample size was small, the alpha was .94 providing strong evidence for internal consistency reliability. The effect sizes were small to large.

The qualitative findings revealed specific factors (contributing and hindering) that caused variances between and among secondary levels and campuses. Contributing factors identified were explicit district procedures and supports from K-8th grade, consistent, ongoing RTI professional development, district-funding reading specialist/interventionist, instructional resources, assessment resources, and the ongoing monitoring of student performance data. The primary factor causing barriers to RTI implementation fidelity across all secondary campuses was a broad application of the contextual flexibility to high school administrators. As reflected in district documentation and confirmed through semi-structured interviews, the district instituted a policy granting high school administrators the authority to determine their campus RTI program "based on student needs" (RTI manual, 2020, p. 4). As a result, district guidance and supports were substantially limited to high school campuses which caused variances in implementation fidelity. Limited RTI guidance and communication from district administration, limited staffing, and the absence of RTI professional development for high school administrators were barriers. Additional hindering factors included: absence of high school literacy screeners, fidelity issues resulting from staff changes, and shifting academic priorities.

5.2. Discussion of Results in Relation to the Extant Literature

The findings were consistent with research studies in my literature review on the impact of examining the perceptions of educators tasked with implementing RTI programs and monitoring program integrity (Dulaney, 2013; Hall & Hord, 2006). The studies linked implementation fidelity to the study of perceptions, specifically the degree to which educators are faithful to the critical RTI components should, therefore, be measured to understand why results within and across campuses in a district may be highly variable. The studies emphasized the need for leaders to share the responsibility for implementing and sustaining a comprehensive RTI framework in secondary literacy with a variety of stakeholders. The studies recognized that aligning RTI policies and RTI practices within and across campuses was critical, considering the mandated implementation of RTI/MTSS expected by ESSA (Title IX, Section 8002 [33]). In the study, secondary administrators' overall perception of implementation fidelity was that RTI practices in secondary literacy were, on average, occurring "often" as intended. The overall impression of implementation fidelity was higher for middle school campuses than high school campuses. There was significant evidence to conclude that variances existed in implementation fidelity between middle school campuses and high school campuses. The resulting findings provided information on how to better align RTI policies and RTI practices to support implementation fidelity across all secondary campuses.

The findings were consistent with Hall & Hords (2006) study of other factors affecting implementation fidelity. Researchers (2006) suggested that other factors at

levels including educator (e.g. beliefs), school (e.g., leadership, climate), and the district and state (e.g., policies and procedures) contribute to whether practices are implemented with fidelity (Hall & Hord, 2006). The study's findings identified the primary contributing factors for variances between middle school and high school campuses as: explicit guidance and district supports for middle school campuses and the allowances of "contextual flexibility" for high school campuses.

Findings are also consistent with Dulaney's (2013) study that found that leaders must: identify resources (human and capital) to build RTI infrastructure; the school community must participate in data-driven decision making; and teachers must receive ongoing professional development on the use of best practices. Specific factors identified as contributing to implementation fidelity were: presence of campus reading specialist, adequate staffing, explicit communication and collaboration between district administrators and campus level leadership, and ongoing professional development. Specific factors identified as hindering implementation fidelity (barriers) were: limited access to reading specialist at the high school level, inadequate staffing to deliver tier 2 and 3 interventions, shifting academic priorities due to staffing changes, and contextual flexibility without professional development on RTI implementation best-practices.

5.3. Implications for Practice

5.3.1. Connection to the Field of Study

Statistics on the national overall educational progress in reading underscores the urgency of using the RTI framework to improve literacy outcomes for secondary students. RTI leadership at the district and campus-level should not disregard measuring implementation fidelity as a part of the evaluative process. Information from

administrators who are responsible for implementation can provide a wholistic view of the status of RTI program integrity. This information can assist decisionmakers in making appropriate adjustments to RTI programs where needed, whether scaling up best-practices across campuses or mitigating factors preventing implementation fidelity. I found that studying the perceptions of secondary administrators helped to measuring levels of RTI implementation and to identifying factors affecting fidelity among and between secondary campuses. This is important because secondary literary RTI program implementation is challenging, especially given the complexities associated with implementing RTI on middle school and high school campuses. Through this study, I found that monitoring implementation fidelity and understanding the perceptions of secondary administrators in RTI leadership roles were both critical to program integrity.

5.3.2. Connection to the Context

When assessing implementation fidelity across secondary campuses, district leadership should carefully consider policies granting total "contextual flexibility" and should measure the effects of such policies on district RTI program integrity. Without proper guidance and supports, contextual flexibility can lead to variances between secondary campuses. I found that middle school campuses were implementing RTI practices, as intended, due to explicit guidance and district supports that were embedded in district policies, processes, and procedures. While middle school administrators were allowed to make programmatic adjustments based on student needs, there were unified, non-negotiable RTI program components that were foundational to middle school implementation. Middle school administrators subsequently made adjustments to augment RTI program components to better meet the needs of the campus. This was not

the same for high school campuses, which were granted complete flexibility to determine RTI program components based on student needs. I found that the different levels of contextual flexibility resulted in lower levels of implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy RTI program.

At the high school level, I found that contextual flexibility was generally translated to mean having the autonomy to define what RTI program components existed on a given campus, if any. Although high school administrators were responsible for RTI program implementation, practically speaking, I found that variances campus-to-campus resulting from contextual flexibility limited the ability to monitor high school implementation fidelity. In addition, because district leadership allowed for high school flexibility the district-level guidance and programmatic supports were greatly diminished. The findings suggested a need for balancing explicit guidance and district supports *with* the contextual flexibility that is necessary to implement RTI programs on high school campuses.

5.4. Limitations

There were three study limitations: generalizability, a small sample size, and the use of a self-reporting instrument. Because the study took place within the context of a single school district, the study has a lack of generalizability. However, this was intentional. The problem of practice centered around variability between RTI implementation across secondary school in a *specific* school district.

The context of the study presented another limitation related to sample size. The total number of available secondary administrators to participate in the study was 25, and participation was voluntary. The sampling method and recruitment efforts for the

quantitative phase resulted in a small sample size (*n*=17). Nevertheless, the sample size represented a majority of available secondary administrators in the district. For the qualitative phase, participants for semi-structured interviews were selected from those who participated in the quantitative phase, resulting in a smaller sample (*n*=6). For qualitative studies, researchers have to consider sample size and determine when data saturation is achieved. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation is defined as the point when "no new data, no new information, no new themes, and no new coding" is obtained (p. 1409). Participants interviewed included both district level RTI administrators and multiple campus level administrators across secondary campuses. The data revealed nuanced views on RTI implementation fidelity from various perspectives. Considering the quality of the participants no new information could be revealed and data saturation was met.

Finally, the Perceptions of Practices survey used during the quantitative phase of the study was a self-report instrument. Noell & Gansle (2006) highlighted the importance of supplementing survey data with other measures, "given that self-report can be upwardly biased" (p.5). By using a mixed methods design, data from multiple sources was triangulated to improve the reliability and validity of the study. The additional data sources use to minimize the limitation included: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field notes.

5.5. Recommendations and Closing Thoughts

This study demonstrates the value of measuring perceptions of administrators tasked with leading implementation. Additionally, the study highlights the value of

monitoring implementation fidelity. Overall, the findings suggest a need to examine the perceptions of secondary administrators over time. This is helpful in a number of ways.

First, results could be used to start conversations regarding broader implications for RTI implementation, including monitoring fidelity across multiple campuses. Examining perceptions can lead to ongoing reflections by administrators on ways in which their leadership practices effect motivation and consistency. Reflective practices should engage the continuous improvement cycle which is foundational to RTI implementation fidelity.

Another useful recommendation would be to use perceptions ratings to conduct root cause analyses to understand what factors cause specific RTI practices to occur less frequently than intended. In this way, factor analysis of infrequent practices will allow administrators to adjust structural and cultural factors to facilitate better implementation fidelity. Trends resulting from a study on administrators' perceptions of RTI implementation fidelity can be used to target professional development, coaching for instructional leadership teams, and the development of individual administrators.

Finally, the study revealed a need for balancing explicit guidance and district supports *with* the contextual flexibility that is necessary to implement RTI programs on high school campuses. Secondary administrators at high school campuses could benefit from more explicit communication and professional development from district leadership on RTI best practices and guidance on how to apply best practices within the context of their individual campus.

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APPENDIX A

IRB DETERMINATION LETTER

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION
(Common Rule –Effective January, 2018)

August 20, 2019

Type of Review:	Submission Response for Initial Review Submission Form
Title:	Fidelity to Systems of Practice: Response to Intervention in Secondary Literacy Classrooms
Investigator:	James Laub
IRB ID:	IRB2018-1254M
Reference Number:	082915
Funding:	
Documents Reviewed:	IRB Application (Human Research) - (Version 1.3) Informed Consent 2019 (English) - (Version 2.1 Approved on 08/20/2019) Informed Consent 2018 (English) - (Version 1.0 Void on 08/20/2019) Research Approval 2018 Ndiaye - Site Authorization - (Version 1.1) ROS Research Flyer - (Version 1.0 Approved on 08/20/2019) Ndiaye Recruitment Email and Telephone Script 2019 - (Version 1.0 Approved on 08/20/2019) Interview Guides - (Version 1.0 Approved on 08/20/2019) District RtI Essential Components Implementation Integrity Rubric - (Version 1.0 Approved on 08/20/2019) Perceptions of Practice Survey Instrument - (Version 1.0 Approved on 08/20/2019) District RtI Essential Components Implementation Integrity Rubric - (Version 1.0 Approved on 08/20/2019) CITI Biomed Research Certificate - (Version 1.0)
Review Category	Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

Dear James Laub:

The HRPP determined on 08/20/2019 that this research meets the criteria for Exemption in accordance with 45 CFR 46.104.

750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701
1186 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-1186

Tel. 979.458.1467 Fax. 979.862.3176
http://rcb.tamu.edu

This determination applies only to the activities described in this IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately contact the IRB. You may be required to submit a new request to the IRB.

Your exemption is good for three (3) years from the Approval Start Date. Thirty days prior to that time, you will be sent an Administrative Check-In Notice to provide an update on the status of your study.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Administrative Office at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636.

Sincerely,
IRB Administration

APPENDIX B

DISTRICT LETTERS OF COOPERATION

Mansfield ISD
605 E. Broad St
Mansfield, TX 76063

March 21, 2018

Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board
c/o Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety
750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701
TAMU 1186
College Station, Texas 77843-1186

Mansfield ISD formally authorize Stephanie Ndiaye, a staff member and a student at Texas A&M, to conduct research at select Mansfield ISD middle schools for her study, "Fidelity to Practice: Response-to-Intervention in Secondary Literacy." Mrs. Ndiaye may come to our facilities beginning on June 1, 2018 and conduct research until her project end date of July 15, 2019.

Study participation is voluntary and participants will be recruited from a list of secondary literacy professionals provided by the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) Director, Staci Buck. Mrs. Ndiaye will conduct a survey, complete interviews, as well as conduct observations of RtI meetings and trainings for all employees who agree to be part of the study.

Mrs. Ndiaye will recruit study participants through the RtI department, by approaching them in person and via email. She will seek participants to respond to the initial survey, which will be conducted using a questionnaire and open-ended questions. The survey will be completed online. Participants completing the survey will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview, which will be done in person.

Stephanie Ndiaye will have no interaction with students and has agreed not to interfere with work activities. Mrs. Ndiaye has also agreed to provide to my office a copy of the Texas A&M University IRB-approved, stamped consent document before she recruits any employees, and will also provide a copy of her published study.

If there are any questions, please contact my office at (817) 299-3682.

Signed,

Joshua Garcia
Executive Director of Instructional Support
joshuagarcia@misdmail.org

Mansfield ISD
605 E. Broad St
Mansfield, TX 76063

August 1, 2019

Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board
c/o Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety
750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701
TAMU 1186
College Station, Texas 77843-1186

Mansfield ISD formally authorize Stephanie Ndiaye, a student at Texas A&M, to conduct research at select Mansfield ISD middle schools for her study, "Fidelity to Practice: Response-to-Intervention in Secondary Literacy." Mrs. Ndiaye may come to our facilities beginning on August 1, 2019 and conduct research until her project end date of October 15, 2019.

Study participation is voluntary and participants will be recruited from a list of secondary literacy professionals provided by the Response-to-Intervention (Rtl) Director, Staci Buck. Mrs. Ndiaye will conduct a survey, complete interviews, as well as conduct observations of Rtl meetings and trainings for all employees who agree to be part of the study.

Mrs. Ndiaye will recruit study participants through the Rtl department, by approaching them in person and via email. She will seek participants to respond to the initial survey, which will be conducted using a questionnaire and open-ended questions. The survey will be completed online. Participants completing the survey will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview, which will be done in person.

Stephanie Ndiaye will have no interaction with students and has agreed not to interfere with work activities. Mrs. Ndiaye has also agreed to provide to my office a copy of the Texas A&M University IRB-approved, stamped consent document before she recruits any employees, and will also provide a copy of her published study. If there are any questions, please contact my office at (817) 299-3682.

Signed,

Joshua Garcia
Executive Director of Instructional Support
joshuagarcia@misdmail.org

APPENDIX C

SURVEY LETTER OF PERMISSION

From: Hyde, Judith
Sent: Monday, October 28, 2019 11:07 AM
To: stefrlove@tamu.edu
Subject: Re: Materials/Content Request Form (Stephane Ndiaye)

Hi Stephanie,

The Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project received your email dated 10/25/2019, requesting permission to reproduce the following:

- Perceptions of Practices Survey

Permission is granted by the copyright holder to print and use for educational purposes with the following conditions:

- An appropriate acknowledgment of the Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project (a collaborative project between the Department of Education and the University of South Florida) is included.
- The material is not used for commercial purposes.

Additionally, please see the technical assistance manual (http://floridarti.usf.edu/resources/program_evaluation/ta_manual_revised2016/ta_manual_revised2016.pdf) for reliability, validity, and citations.

Thank you for your interest in these resources. Please contact me if you need further assistance.

Sincerely,

Judi

Judi Hyde, MA
Communications Coordinator
Florida's Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project
University of South Florida
judihyde@usf.edu
813-974-7448 • EDU 381A (office)

From: "stefrlove@tamu.edu" <stefrlove@tamu.edu>
Date: Friday, October 25, 2019 at 3:55 PM
To: "Hyde, Judith" <judihyde@usf.edu>
Subject: Materials/Content Request Form (Stephane Ndiaye)

Greetings,

I am a doctoral student at Texas A&M University conducting research on perceptions of RTI implementation in secondary literacy. I have attached a request form for your permission to use the

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

(5/30/2017)

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Research Study: **Fidelity to Implementation: Response to Intervention in Secondary Literacy**

Investigator: James Laub

Supported By: This research is funded/supported by Texas A&M University.

Why are you being invited to take part in a research study?

You are being asked to participate because you are a secondary literacy professional implementing Response-to-Intervention.

What should you know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at: James Laub, jlaub@tamu.edu, 979-587-7362 and Stephanie Ndiaye, stefrlove@tamu.edu, 817-966-0419

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Texas A&M Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may talk to them at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu., if

- You cannot reach the research team.
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Why is this research being done?

This research inquiry will study a school district with a well-established response-to-intervention (RtI) program in secondary literacy. The study seeks to determine if a literacy professional's perception of the RtI program has any relationship to how closely to design the RtI program is being implemented.

To accomplish this, the study will seek participants from the district-level, school-level, and classroom-level to measure perceptions about the RtI program in secondary literacy. The study will measure the degree to which the perceptions many or may not have any impact on the fidelity to implementation.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for a 20-minute survey, a possible 45-minute interview, and possibly up to four 45-minute observations over the course of the Fall, 2019 semester.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to enroll about fifteen (15) people in this research study at this site.

What happens if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research"?

- You will be asked to complete a 20-minute survey.
- If required, a 45-minute face-to-face interview will be scheduled at your convenience.
- The 45-minute interview will be recorded and is optional.
- If required, up to four 45-minute observation will be scheduled during the Fall semester of school year 2019-2020, at your convenience.
- You will interact with the researcher only.
- The research will be conducted at your present campus.
- The research will begin approximately on June 1, 2018 and conclude October 15, 2019.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

The research study is completely voluntary. You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

What happens if I say "Yes", but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and other records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot

promise complete privacy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the TAMU HRPP/IRB and other representatives of this institution.

Optional Elements:

The following research activities are optional, meaning that you do not have to agree to them in order to participate in the research study. Please indicate your willingness to participate in these optional activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

I agree	I disagree	
_____	_____	The researcher may audio or video record me to aid with data analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team or TAMU Compliance.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

Signature of subject	Date
Printed name of subject	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	

APPENDIX E

PERCEPTIONS OF PRACTICES SURVEY

School-level Secondary Literacy RtI Program Survey: Associate/Assistant Principal

Informed Consent

Title of Research Study: Fidelity to Implementation: Response to Intervention in Secondary Literacy
Investigator: James Laub
Supported By: This research is funded/supported by Texas A&M University.

Why are you being invited to take part in a research study?
You are being asked to participate because you are a secondary literacy professional implementing Response-to-Intervention.

What should you know about a research study?
· Someone will explain this research study to you.
· Whether or not you take part is up to you.
· You can choose not to take part.
· You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
· Your decision will not be held against you.
· You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at: James Laub, jlaub@tamu.edu, 979-587-7362 and Stephanie Ndiaye, stefrlove@tamu.edu, 817-966-0419

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Texas A&M Institutional Review Board (IRB) - IRB Number IRB2018-1254M. You may talk to them at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu., if

· You cannot reach the research team.
· Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
· You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
· You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
· You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?
This research inquiry will study a school district with a well-established response-to-intervention (RtI) program in secondary literacy. The study seeks to determine if a literacy professional's perception of the RtI program has any relationship to how closely to design the RtI program is being implemented.

To accomplish this, the study will seek participants from the district-level, school-level, and classroom-level to measure perceptions about the RtI program in secondary literacy. The study will measure the degree to which the perceptions many or may not have any impact on the fidelity to implementation.

How long will the research last?
We expect that you will be in this research study for a 20-minute survey, a possible 45-minute interview, and possibly up to four 45-minute observations over the course of the Fall, 2019 semester.

How many people will be studied?
We expect to enroll about twenty-five (25) people in this research study at this site.

What happens if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research"?
You will be asked to complete a 20-minute survey.
You will interact with the researcher only.
The research will be conducted at your present campus.

The research will begin approximately on August 15, 2019 and conclude October 15, 2019.
If required, a 45-minute face-to-face interview will be scheduled at your convenience.
The 45-minute interview will be audio recorded and is optional.

If required, up to four 45-minute observation will be scheduled during the Fall semester of school year 2019-2020, at your convenience.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?
The research study is completely voluntary. You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

What happens if I say "Yes", but I change my mind later?
You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

* 1. ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- you have ready the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

- ○ I agree to participate in the research study. I understand the purpose and nature of this study, and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalty or consequences.
- ○ I do not agree.

* 2. If chosen to participate in a face-to-face interview, the researcher may audio record me to aid with data analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team or TAMU Compliance.

- ○ Yes. I agree.
- ○ No. I disagree.

School-level Secondary Literacy RtI Program Survey: Associate/Assistant Principal

Part I: Implementation Perceptions Ratings

Directions: For each items (#3-8), please indicate how frequently or infrequently the secondary literacy response-to-intervention practices currently occur in your school or occurred during the 2018-19 school year.

Please use the following response scale:
1 = Never Occurred (NO)
2 = Rarely Occurred (RO)
3 = Sometimes Occurred (SO)
4 = Often Occurred (OO)
5 = Always Occurred (AO)
0 = Not Applicable

3. **In my school:** Data, from literacy screeners and other curriculum-based measures, were used to determine the percent of students receiving core instruction (e.g. general education classroom only). The data included grade-level benchmarks.

Never Occurred | Rarely Occurred | Sometimes Occurred | Often Occurred | Always Occurred | N/A

4. **In my school:** Data were used to make decisions about necessary changes to the core curriculum procedures to increase the percent of students who achieved district grade-level benchmarks.

Never Occurred | Rarely Occurred | Sometimes Occurred | Often Occurred | Always Occurred | N/A

5. **In my school:** Data were used to identify at-risk students in need of supplemental and/or intensive interventions.

Never Occurred | Rarely Occurred | Sometimes Occurred | Often Occurred | Always Occurred | N/A

6. **In my school:** The students identified as at-risk routinely received additional (i.e., supplemental) intervention(s).

Never Occurred | Rarely Occurred | Sometimes Occurred | Often Occurred | Always Occurred | N/A

7. **In my school:** Progress monitoring occurred for all students receiving supplemental and/or intensive interventions.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

8. **In my school:** Progress monitoring data were used to determine the percent of students who received supplemental and/or intensive interventions and achieved grade-level benchmarks.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

School-level Secondary Literacy RtI Program Survey: Associate/Assistant Principal

Part II: School-level Problem-Solving Team

Directions: For items 9-19 refer to the typical Problem-Solving Team *(i.e., Student Support Team, Intervention Assistance Team, School-Based Intervention Team, Child Study Team)* meeting in your school in 2018-2019. The questions ask that you think of students who had been referred to the problem-solving team or referred for a special education evaluation.

While addressing each item, think of a typical case in which a student was referred for an reading or literacy concern. Then, please indicate how frequently each of the given practices occurred in your school using the same scale.

9. **In my school:** The target behavior was routinely defined in terms of the desired behavior (e.g., Susie will read 90 correct words per minute) instead of the problem behavior (e.g., Susie reads below grade level).

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

10. **In my school:** Quantifiable data (e.g., reading fluency score, percent compliance percent on-task behavior) were used to identify the student's current performance in the area of concern **and** to identify the current performance of same-age peers using the same data as the student (e.g. benchmarks).

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

11. **In my school:** The Problem-Solving Team routinely developed hypotheses (i.e., proposed reasons) explaining why the target student was not demonstrating the desired level of academic performance.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

12. **In my school:** Data were collected to confirm the reasons that the student was not achieving the desired level of performance.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

13. **In my school:** Intervention plans were routinely developed based on the confirmed reasons that the student was not achieving the desired level of performance.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

14. **In my school:** The teacher, of a student referred to the problem-solving team, routinely received staff support to implement the intervention plan developed by the team.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

15. **In my school:** Data were collected routinely to determine the degree to which the intervention plans were being implemented as intended.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

16. **In my school:** Data were graphed routinely to simplify interpretation of student performance.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

17. **In my school:** Progress monitoring data were used to determine the degree to which the student's rate of progress had improved **and** whether the gap had decreased between the student's current performance and the desired level of performance (i.e., benchmark) **and** whether the gap had decreased between the student's current performance and the performance of same-age peers.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

18. **In my school:** A student's response-to-intervention data (e.g., rate of improvement) were used routinely to determine whether a student was simply behind and could learn new skills or whether the student's performance was due to a disability.

Never Occurred	Rarely Occurred	Sometimes Occurred	Often Occurred	Always Occurred	N/A
○	○	○	○	○	○

19. **In my school:** Is there a system/process for collecting and organizing student academic data, universal screening data, progress monitoring data, and formative/summative data?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please describe:

School-level Secondary Literacy RtI Program Survey: Associate/Assistant Principal

Part III: Open-ended Questions

Directions: Questions 20-32 are open-ended in design to allow you to type a response more specific to your school site. Please be as candid as possible.

Reminder: Your responses are confidential and will not contain any personally identifiable information. The school district, the school site, nor your name will be identifiable in the research study.

Tip: To further ensure confidentiality, please use job titles rather than an employee's name.

20. **District-level Leadership:** Do the actions and/or decisions made by district-level administrators help improve the effectiveness of the RtI program at your school?

If no, please share any barriers you think exist in the district-level decision-making process that interfere with the effectiveness of your school's RtI program.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Comment

21. **District-level Supports:** Does the district leadership team provide adequate support to help you in your role as reading specialist?

If yes, please describe the supports you receive to help implement the RtI program in your school.

If no, please describe the supports that you will need to better support implement the RtI program in your school.

- Yes
- No

Comment

22. **School-level RtI Program:** Who is involved in monitoring the fidelity of your school's literacy RtI program?

Please write the job titles of those involved in monitoring your school's RtI program.

23. **School-level Professional Development:** Does the person who oversees your school's RtI program provide ongoing professional development to support the literacy RtI program?

If no, what barriers exist that prevent ongoing professional development for literacy RtI program?

- Yes
- No

Comment

24. **Universal Screeners:** What literacy screening tool(s) is being used to determine whether students are at risk?

25. **Tier 1:** Our school-team conducts fidelity observations in tier 1 instruction to ensure that effective instruction happens in all classes.

- Yes
- No

26. **Tier I:** What specific instructional routines are implemented in all core academic classes to support students' reading?

27. **Tier II Master Schedule:** Does your school's master schedule include additional time beyond the core literacy block for Tier II interventions?

If yes, please share the amount of time allocated for Tier II interventions.

If *no, what barriers exist that prevent your school from including additional time for Tier II Interventions.*

28. **Tier II:** What is the differentiated intervention program used during Tier II instruction?

29. **Tier III Master Schedule:** Does your school's master schedule include additional time beyond the core literacy block for Tier III interventions (intensive)?

If yes, please share the amount of time allocated for Tier III interventions.

If *no, what barriers exist that prevent your school from including additional time for Tier III Interventions.*

30. **Tier III:** What is the differentiated intervention program used during Tier III instruction?

31. **SPED Referral Process:** Our staff understands the problem-solving model and the referral process.

If no, what barrier exist in their understanding?

- Yes
- No
- Comment

32. **Collaboration:** Is there time scheduled for teacher collaboration on literacy instruction and interventions?
Are all the pertinent teachers and interventionists available for these collaborative meetings?

If not, what barriers exist that prevent time for collaboration?
What barriers exist that prevent all pertinent staff members from participating in collaborative meetings?

- Yes
- No

Comment

33. **Staff Views:** Do you believe the teaching staff views the purpose of the RtI program as "preventative" *(e.g. to prevent students from having academic and/or behavioral problems)?*

Or

Do you believe the teaching staff views the purpose of the RtI program as a way for students to be evaluated for special education services?

34. **Other Barriers:** Are there other barriers, not already mentioned, that are present in your school's literacy RtI program?

If yes, please write the barriers in the comments below.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW GUIDES

Principal/Assistant Principal Interview Questions

Leadership
1. What do you think is your role in ensuring that implementation fidelity happens in the secondary literacy RtI program? Potential Prompts for Follow-Up: - Setting vision for the RtI program tied to academic goals? - Communicating and ensuring buy-in amongst the staff? - Serving as a liaison between district leadership and the school-based leadership team? - Participating in meetings (data-analysis, professional development, common planning, PLCs, etc.) - Allocation of resources to align academic goals? - Alignment with other initiatives that may support RtI?
2. In what ways do you use data to support the school's academic goals?
3. What portion of the following was consistently dedicated to responding to issues related to implementation fidelity? - Staff meetings? - Grade-level team meetings? - PLCs? - One on one meetings with staff?
4. What supports did you receive from the district leadership team that can help implement RtI in your school? Describe the activities you engaged in that support implementing RtI.
5. What is your relationship with your site-based RtI coach/literacy specialist/interventionist? How do you work together to support implementation fidelity? Potential Prompts for Follow-Up: - Collaborative planning and problem solving? - Data analysis and use? - Regularly scheduled meetings? - Specific roles and responsibilities assigned/developed? - Ensuring the professional growth of your literacy coach/specialist
6. What activities would you like to see your literacy coach do to support facilitate implementation? Potential Prompts for Follow-Up: - Professional development? - Data collection, analysis and interpretation? - Communication? - Planning and problems solving of implementation issues? - Parent Involvement
Communication
7. In what ways have efforts been made to involve parents in your school's implementation of RtI? Potential Prompts for Follow-Up: - Communication with parents? - Coordination with parents on interventions? - Soliciting parental input? - Parent participating in school events/activities?

Literacy Professional Interview Guide

The questions in this interview guide relate to implementation of a school's Response to Intervention program. When clarification or further explanation is desired, a follow-up question can be asked by the researcher.

Academic Goals
1. What are your school's academic goals for literacy?
2. How does your school's academic goals relate to its implementation of the Response to Intervention program?
Data
3. How does your school use data to improve student achievement?
4. Is there a system/process for collecting and organizing student academic data, universal screening data, progress monitoring data, and formative/summative data? If so, please describe.
5. Who is involved in the data review process? and how does the decision-making translate to classroom practices?
6. How does the data review process translate into classroom practices?
Leadership
7. Who is responsible for making decisions related to the secondary literacy RtI program at this school?
8. To what extent to the actions/decisions made by district-level administrators improve the effectiveness of the RtI program at your school?
9. Have the district or school-level initiatives/programs in RtI demonstrated efficacy with the target populations (e.g., has research shown that the interventions positively impact student achievement)?
Implementation Fidelity
10. Are procedures in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core literacy curriculum? Of secondary-level and intensive interventions? Of universal screening, progress monitoring, and the RtI decision-making process? If so please describe.
11. Who is involved in monitoring the fidelity of implementation? Has evidence been presented that the RtI program has been implemented with fidelity?
12. Does the person who oversees RtI provide ongoing professional development to support implementation fidelity?
13. How are the results of any fidelity evaluations shared with the staff?
Possible Barriers
14. Does the schedule reflect additional time beyond the core literacy block for secondary level (Tier II) and intensive interventions (Tier III)?
15. Is there time scheduled for teacher collaboration on instruction and interventions? Are all the pertinent teachers and interventionists available for these collaborative meetings?
16. To what extent do you believe the teaching staff views the purpose of RtI as the primary vehicle to prevent students from having academic and/or behavioral problems?
17. What do you consider to be barriers to implementation fidelity at your school?

APPENDIX G

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIPTION

1717 W. 6th St. Suite 310, Austin, TX 78703
+1 (415) 801-0500 | sales@rev.com | www.rev.com

CLIENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

This CLIENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT, effective as of Jan 1, 2020 (this "Agreement") is entered into by Rev.com, Inc. ("**Rev**") and Customer identified below ("Customer", "Client") is made to set forth Rev.com's agreement with respect to certain proprietary information being provided to Rev.com and/or Temi.com by the undersigned Client for the purpose of performing translation, transcription, captioning and other document related services (the "Rev.com Services"). In consideration for the mutual agreements contained herein and the other provisions of this Agreement, the parties hereto agree as follows:

1. Scope of Confidential Information

1.1. "Confidential Information" means, subject to the exceptions set forth in Section 1.2 hereof, any documents, text or other files supplied by Client to Rev.com for the purpose of performing the Rev.com Services.

1.2. Confidential Information does not include information that: (i) was available to Rev.com prior to disclosure of such information by Client and free of any confidentiality obligation in favor of Client known to Rev.com at the time of disclosure; (ii) is made available to Rev.com from a third party not known by Rev.com at the time of such availability to be subject to a confidentiality obligation in favor of Client; (iii) is made available to third parties by Client without restriction on the disclosure of such information; (iv) is or becomes available to the public other than as a result of disclosure by Rev.com prohibited by this Agreement; or (v) is developed independently by Rev.com or Rev.com's directors, officers, members, partners, employees, consultants, contractors, agents, representatives or affiliated entities (collectively, "Associated Persons").

2. Use and Disclosure of Confidential Information

2.1. Rev.com will keep secret and will not disclose to anyone any of the Confidential Information, other than furnishing the Confidential Information to Associated Persons; provided that such Associated Persons are bound by agreements respecting confidential information. Rev.com will use reasonable care and adequate measures to protect the security of the Confidential Information and to attempt to prevent any Confidential Information from being disclosed or otherwise made available to unauthorized persons or used in violation of the foregoing.

2.2. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary herein, Rev.com is free to make, and this Agreement does not restrict, disclosure of any Confidential Information in a judicial, legislative or administrative investigation or proceeding or to a government or other regulatory agency;

provided that, if permitted by law, Rev.com provides to Client prior notice of the intended disclosure and permits Client to intervene therein to protect its interests in the Confidential Information, and cooperate and assist Client in seeking to obtain such protection.

3. Certain Rights and Limitations

3.1. All Confidential Information will remain the property of Client.

3.2. This Agreement imposes no obligations on either party to purchase, sell, license, transfer or otherwise transact in any products, services or technology.

3.3. This Agreement is subject to the limitations of liability agreed to in Rev.com's Terms of Use, found at https://www.rev.com/about/terms ("Terms of Use").

4. Termination

4.1. Upon Client's written request, Rev.com agrees to use good faith efforts to return promptly to Client any Confidential Information that is in writing and in the possession of Rev.com and to certify the return or destruction of all Confidential Information; provided that Rev.com may retain a summary description of Confidential Information for archival purposes.

4.2. The rights and obligations of the parties hereto contained in Sections 2 (Use and Disclosure of Confidential Information) (subject to Section 2.1), 3 (Certain Rights and Limitations), 4 (Termination), and 5 (Miscellaneous) will survive the return of any tangible embodiments of Confidential Information and any termination of this Agreement.

5. Miscellaneous

5.1. This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of Texas governing such agreements, without regard to conflicts-of-law principles. The sole and exclusive jurisdiction and venue for any litigation arising out of this Agreement shall be an appropriate federal or state court located in Travis County, Texas and the parties agree not to raise, and waive, any objections or defenses based upon venue or forum non conveniens.

This Agreement (together with the Terms of Use and any other agreement for the Rev.com Services) contains the complete and exclusive agreement of the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof and supersedes all prior agreements and understandings with respect thereto, whether written or oral, express or implied. If any provision of this Agreement is held invalid, illegal or unenforceable by a court of competent jurisdiction, such will not affect any other provision of this Agreement, which will remain in full force and effect. No amendment or alteration of the terms of this Agreement will be effective unless made in writing and executed by both parties hereto. A failure or delay in exercising any right in respect to this Agreement will not be presumed to operate as a waiver, and a single or partial exercise of any right will not be presumed to preclude any subsequent or further exercise of that right or the exercise of any other right. Any modification or waiver of any provision of this Agreement will not be effective

unless made in writing. Any such waiver will be effective only in the specific instance and for the purpose given.

6.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused this Agreement to be executed below by their duly authorized signatories:

CLIENT

Name: Stephanie LaeNdiaye

Title: Director of Instruction, Dateral Student TAMU

Date: May 25, 2020

Address for notices to Client:

REV.COM, INC.

Nate Baker

Nate Baker

Director of Finance

Jan 1, 2020

APPENDIX H

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Email Recruitment Script

Dear [Name],

My name is Stephanie Ndiaye, and I am a doctoral student in the Teaching, Learning and Culture department of the College of Education at Texas A&M University. I am conducting a research study examining implementation fidelity in the secondary literacy response-to-intervention program and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participated in a 25-minute survey related to implementing literacy intervention at your school site. The survey is anticipated to take no more than 25-minutes.

As a follow-up to the survey, I will choose a select few participants to participate in an interview on your perceptions of the RtI program. If chosen, the interview is anticipated to take no longer than 45-minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Your name, contact information, and place of business will be protected. Any published names will be pseudonyms for study participants. I am attaching the consent form as an attachment to this email. The consent form will give you more information about the study, explain your rights as a participant, and explain the risk and benefits of participating in the study.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at (817) 966-0419 or stefrlove@tamu.edu.

Thank you for your participation,

Stephanie Love Ndiaye (en-j-eye), doctoral student

Texas A&M University

College of Education

Department of Teaching, Language and Culture

Telephone Recruitment Script

S. Ndiaye: Good afternoon, may I please speak with [*potential study participant*]?

If the potential participant is not available, then thank the potential participant who answered and end the call.

If the potential participant is available, ask to speak to that potential participant..

S. Ndiaye: Hi. My name is Stephanie Love Ndiaye calling from Texas A&M University, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture. I am a doctoral student working with Dr. James Laub. Is this a good time to speak with you?

If it is not a good time, try to schedule another time to talk. Thank the potential participant and say goodbye.

If the potential participant says "Yes"

S. Ndiaye: I am conducting a study with secondary literacy professionals on implementing response-to-intervention. Do you have time to hear more about this study?

S. Ndiaye: This study is recruiting participants who are responsible for implementing RtI in secondary literacy. The first part of the study measures the levels of implementation at each school site. The second part of the study involves interviewing participates to capture their perceptions about the RtI program, its fidelity to the program design, and any barriers to implementing RtI in literacy at the secondary level. The study includes a 25-minute survey. A select number of survey participants will be invited to participate in a 45-minute interview and observations, if warranted.

I would like to send you a consent form to look over if you would like more information about what it means to participate in the study. The consent form also explains your rights as a study participant and the risk and benefits of participating. I can email the consent form to you. Is that okay?

If the potential participant says "Yes" ask for their email: _____

S. Ndiaye: Thank you, and I will email you a copy of the consent form. Please look over it. You can contact me with any questions you may have. I'll check in with you in a few days to see check to ee if you're willing to participate. Do you have any questions for me at this time?

Answer any questions the potential participant may have.

S. Ndiaye: Thank you so much for speaking with me about this study and I will be in touch in a few days. Thanks again.

End the call, and follow-up in a few days.

APPENDIX I

CURRICULUM VITAE

STEPHANIE LOVE NDIAYE
603 Marble Falls Court, Arlington, Texas 76002 | 817-966-0419 | stefrlove@gmail.com

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX
Doctoral of Education in Curriculum and Instruction **2016 - Present**
Grade Point Average: 3.7
Expected Graduation: Fall, 2019

Dallas Baptist University, Dallas, TX
Master of Education in Educational Administration **2004**
Areas of Concentration: K-12 Administration, Reading

Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX
Bachelor of Social Science **2000**
Areas of Concentration: Psychology, Sociology, Education
Cum Laude Graduate

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Athlos Academies, Grapevine TX **2018 - present**
Director of Instruction and Assessment
Directly manage a portfolio of K-12 public charter schools, using the continuous improvement cycle, to improve the academic outcomes at existing schools and assist with the creation of academic programs at new schools. Created a leadership development program and a teacher development program that includes professional development, observation and feedback, and data analytics. Both programs provide on-boarding and ongoing professional development to help both leaders and teachers create and sustain a strong instructional culture. Included in this system is professional coaching and instantaneous feedback, as well as data analytics that will allow leaders to monitor and respond to trends in teaching and learning.

Illumination Education, Arlington, TX
Literacy Consultant/Curriculum Developer **2011 – present**
Developed, authored, and edited TEKS-based Literacy curricula, including instructional and assessment materials, in alignment with resources. Developed curriculum guides, syllabi, and other instructional materials for teachers, administrators, and the community. Oversaw and conducted district-level teacher training and professional development, including intensive summer teacher orientation and monthly professional development. (face-to-face and web-based). Monitored student achievement data and interpreted, reported, and acted upon results.

Dallas Independent School District, Dallas, TX
Principal **2008 – 2011**
Led the performance turnaround of a 350-student elementary school, recording substantial improvements in both measurable and intangible areas of evaluation: student attendance, test scores, state assessments, morale, safety, student management, parental involvement, and community involvement.

Fort Worth Independent School District
Assistant Principal **2005 – 2008**
Assisted the campus principal in the transformation of the school culture into a results-oriented collaborative learning community. Evaluated certified and classified staff using PDAS and district-created evaluations.

Fort Worth Independent School District
Assistant Principal Intern **2004**
Assisted with the summer school principal with the overall administration of school summer school for secondary grades 6th – 8th grade.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Mansfield Independent School District, Mansfield, Texas
Teacher – 8th grade Career Pathways, English Language Arts **2013 - 2018**
Teach Career Pathways to 210 8th grade students, AVID Site team, RtI Committee, SBDM committee

Grand Prairie Independent School District, Grand Prairie, TX
Intervention Specialist **2012 - 2013**
Taught English I, English IR, English II, and small group intervention for English I/II and World Geography; School-level leadership: Department Chairperson, Campus Interventionist, RTI Committee member, campus writing program coordinator.

Mountain View College, Dallas, TX
Adjunct Professor – Developmental Reading and Writing **2007 - 2009**
Taught Developmental Reading and Writing

Fort Worth Independent School District, Fort Worth, TX
Teacher – 8th grade English Language Arts and Reading **2002 - 2005**
Taught 180 eight grade students, Volleyball coach

AWARDS AND HONORS

City of Arlington Neighborhood Grant (2 yrs.)	**2019**
Mansfield ISD Education Foundation Grant	**2017**
American Association of University Women Community Development Grant	**2014**
Gear-Tech 21 STEM/Engineering Camp Grant (2 yrs.)	**2012**
Target Foundation Grant	**2010**
Lowes Toolbox for Education Grant	**2009**
Rookie Principal of the Year – Dallas ISD, Northwest Learning Community	**2009**
Cum Laude Graduate – Southern Methodist University	**2000**
Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society	**1998**
High School Valedictorian, Texas Honor Graduate	**1992**

PRESENTATIONS

Summer Institute – Instructional Leadership, MTSS, Observation & Feedback **2019**
Athlos Academies Professional Development Institute

Winter Leadership Institute – Instructional Leadership, Principal Partnerships **2019**
Athlos Academies Professional Development for School Leaders

"Career Pathways Curriculum Integration and House Bill 5 Requirements" **2015-2018**
Mansfield ISD August Professional Development

"ELA: Goodies for Grammar – Lessons, Strategies, and Structures for Deep Integration in the ELA Classroom 4-8"
Mansfield ISD Summer Conference **2015-2016**

"ELA: Reading Across Genres – Content Connections for the ELA Classroom, 6-8"
Mansfield ISD Summer Conference **2014-2015**

"ELA: Reading Across Genres, 6-8"
Mansfield ISD Professional Development **2014**

"Unpacking the Curriculum"
West Orange-Cove CISD Summer ELA/Reading Conference **2012-2014**

"Robotics Curriculum and Instructional Design"
West Orange-Stark Middle School **2013**

"Vertical Alignment Workshop"
WOCCISD ELA Professional Development **2012 - 2013**

MEMBERSHIPS OF PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (TCTELA)
International Literacy Association (ILA)
National Summer Learning Association (NSLA)
Texas Elementary Principal and Supervisor Association (TEPSA)

REFERENCES

Dr. Sylvia Martinez, *Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction*
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(817) 680-4282 (cell)
winstongipson@misdmail.org

Dr. Marc Puig, *Superintendent*
Beeville ISD
(903) 305-4245 (cell)
marcpuig28@yahoo.com