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An exploration of the implementation of a multi-tiered framework for educational reform in a major urban school district

David Baca

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A MULTI-TIERED FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN A MAJOR URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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David Baca

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Linda Purrington, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

David Baca

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Linda Purrington, Ed.D., Chairperson

Carrie Mitchell, Ed.D.

Jonathan Sison, Ed.D.

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VITA

DAVID BACA

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Pepperdine University, Los Angeles, CA 2011

Doctor of Education

University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 2005

Master of Education

Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 1997

Bachelor of Fine Art

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles, CA 2005 to present

- Teacher
- Instructional Coach
- Expert, Instruction and Intervention
- Data Specialist

ABSTRACT

This study focused on a major urban district in Southern California that has recently begun one of the largest K-12 implementations of a multi-tiered framework for educational reform, known as Response to Intervention (RTI), in the entire nation. The purpose of this qualitative and phenomenological study was twofold: (a) to explore the RTI implementation experience of school-based leadership teams in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California; and (b) to investigate experiences surrounding levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to 3 core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) at these same 22 schools.

The researcher collected data by conducting small qualitative focus groups with teams from 22 different RTI Cohort 1 schools. Several key themes emerged in the qualitative data, including that RTI was an effective framework for instruction, the need for an understanding of the big picture of RTI, the need for a strong leadership team including administrative support, that support from the district was helpful, that implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process, as well as themes surrounding levels and fidelity of implementation of the 3 core components.

Findings from this research study supported several conclusions about RTI implementation, including: full implementation takes 3-5 years; strong leadership is required; on-going, differentiated district support is beneficial; and RTI is an effective way to organize instructional efforts for struggling students.

Study outcomes recommend the following for the district under study: maintain focus on RTI as the central reform effort and continue with implementation efforts until full implementation is achieved; continue to invest time, training, and resources towards

building collaborative cultures at school sites; district policy and reference guides should provide an outline of structures, programs, and schedules that detail the logistical items related to the multi-tiered service delivery system; and the problem-solving process needs to be streamlined in order to increase use.

Broader recommendations include that RTI shows promise as a school-wide initiative and, contingent upon further research, should be considered as a viable method of school reform for school districts.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Status of Urban Public Education

"Although there are interesting exceptions here and there, America's big city inner-core schools are broken for the most part and in serious need of physical, psychological, and educational repair" (Sailor, 2009, p. 251). The United States has not fully kept its promise as a first world, democratic nation to provide equitable access to a high quality, free, public education for all. In his first speech on education as president of the United States, Barack Obama was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* as saying, "Despite resources that are unmatched anywhere in the world, we've let our grades slip, our schools crumble, our teacher quality fall short, and other nations outpace us" (Blume & Mehta, 2009, para. 5). Furthermore, Obama added, "What's at stake is nothing less than the American dream" (Blume & Mehta, 2009, para. 5).

Each school day, 7,200 students have their opportunity to fully participate in the aforementioned American dream severely diminished as they fail to graduate from high school. That number translates to 3 out of 10, or approximately 1.3 million students in 2010 alone, that will not earn a diploma (Swanson, 2010). The effects of these statistics are felt most acutely in large urban centers and by historically underserved, underachieving minority groups. The top five "epicenters of the dropout crisis" are: (a) New York City public school system, (b) Los Angeles Unified, (c) Clark County/Las Vegas, (d) Chicago, and (e) Miami-Dade County (Swanson, 2010). While urban centers account for sizable numbers, an urban-suburban graduation rate gap also exists in major cities across the U.S. (Dillon, 2009a). There is a clear sense of urgency to reform urban public schools centers in order to improve graduation rates and academic achievement.

These two performance goals are part of current political legislation that focuses intently on public accountability.

Political Legislation and a Call for Reform

Front and center with regards to national education legislation and fueling numerous reforms efforts, is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which strives to "close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, sec. 1, para. 1). Furthermore, one of the goals of NCLB is "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" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, sec. 1001, para. 1). Specifically, NCLB sets a goal that all students will be proficient in English language arts and math by 2014, as measured by state standardized tests. In order to meet that goal, each state created Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) that detailed increasing proficiency percentage targets. The graphs in Figures 1 and 2 detail California's AMO targets, which are part of the legislation's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) model. AYP refers to the progress that schools make in regards to these AMO targets; AYP also encompasses graduation rates (for high schools) and improvement as measured by an Academic Performance Index (API).

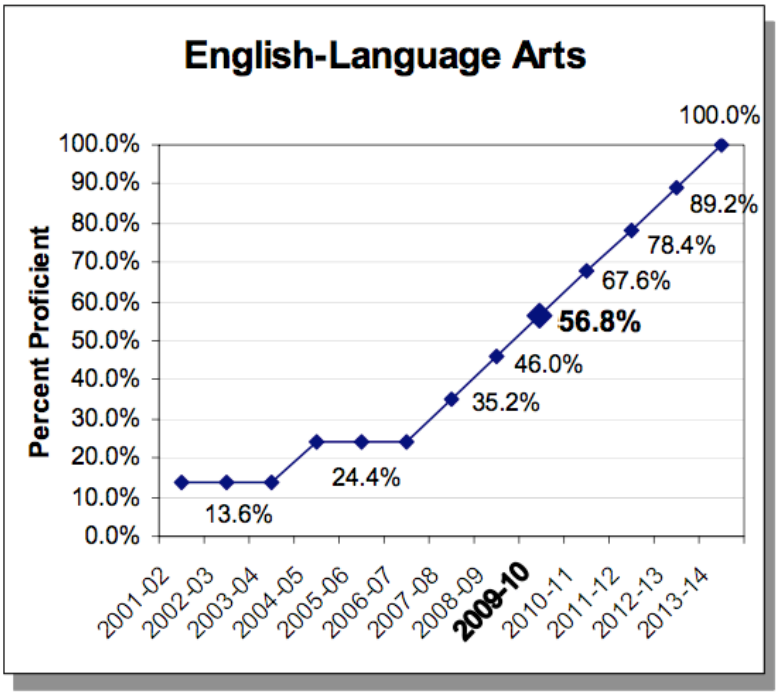

Figure 1. California's annual measurable objectives for English language arts.

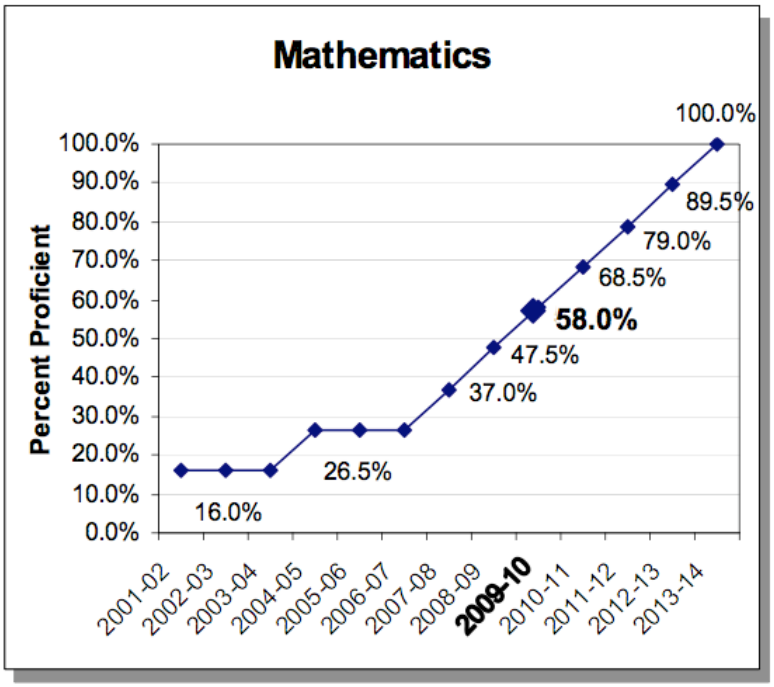

Figure 2. California's annual measurable objectives for mathematics.

Opponents of NCLB cite that this controversial law has had negative effects on education, including but not limited to: narrowed curricular scope, teaching to the test, test anxiety, unrealistic goals, and creating failing schools. NCLB has certainly changed accountability in education, and school districts are responding to the increased demands, which may yield some positive results. Hess and Rotherham (2007) assert, "In some form or other, NCLB was a necessary and inevitable development. For too long, inadequate instruction in essential skills and abysmal performance by poor, black, and Latino children have been tacitly accepted as the status quo" (para. 13). Standardized tests show a disparity in academic achievement among different groups of students. Gaps appear by socioeconomic status, English Language Learner status, and ethnicity. Students from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds outperform their economically challenged counterparts, and white and Asian students outperform African-American and Latino students (Johnson, 2002). These gaps in achievement are not new, and they did not surface when high-stakes testing began. Instead, state standardized tests highlight this disparity and make this information public for the world to see.

Current Reform Efforts

In response to this need to improve our schools, districts across the nation are implementing various educational reform efforts, and there has been substantial support and encouragement from the Obama administration and Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan. Specifically, Duncan has urged state legislators to lift barriers to reform and to rewrite state laws to ensure all policies promote effective teaching, to offer high-quality alternative credential routes, to give districts the ability to increase learning time by lengthening the school day or academic year, and to increase the number of charter

schools with accountability measures (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). These recommendations were further cemented with the "Race to the Top" challenge designed to promote innovation, reform, and excellence in our nation's schools. Race to the Top is designed to spur on innovation by having states compete for 4.35 billion dollars by providing a statewide plan (perhaps including new legislation) for systemic reform. The Race to the Top encourages educational reform in the following areas: (a) designing and implementing rigorous common core standards, (b) attracting and retaining effective teachers (revising evaluation and compensation to reward effectiveness), (c) supporting data systems, (d) using innovative approaches to turnaround low performing schools, and (e) demonstrating education reform through collaboration and support of high-performing charter schools. The nationwide response to this challenge has been substantial and the most salient state-level changes surround: (a) development of common core standards; (b) substantial changes in regards to teacher evaluation, including using student achievement data to evaluate teacher performance and the addition of incentive or merit pay; and (c) the promotion or expansion of charter schools (White House, 2009).

While these reform efforts certainly change the face of education, it is unclear how they will fundamentally change teaching and learning in American schools. As a result, there has been substantial criticism of Race to the Top. Teachers' unions across the country, including the American Federation of Teachers, opposed the prescriptive nature of Race to the Top, as well as the promotion of merit pay and using standardized test scores to evaluate teachers (Dillon, 2009b). Scholars and education historians, such as Diane Ravitch, have been quoted as saying, "What is extraordinary about these regulations is that they have no credible basis in research. They just happen to be the

programs and approaches favored by the people in power" (Harris, 2010, para. 2). One reform effort, that is not directly associated with Race to the Top, aims to shift the ways educators think about teaching and learning, and also has a growing research base to support its efficacy; this effort is quickly gaining momentum.

Response to Intervention

A multi-tiered framework for educational reform, known as Response to Intervention (RTI) or Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI^2), is being implemented widely in districts and states across the country (Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, & Saenz, 2008). "The term RTI has become an important part of the education lexicon" (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006, p. 390). At the same time, there is a lack of consensus around a single definition used to concisely describe this framework. In simple terms, RTI is about improving schools for all kids, including the creation of comprehensive intervention programs that meet diverse student need. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) is one of the most recognized and trusted sources of information related to RTI (Elliott & Morrison, 2008), and the organization defines RTI thusly: "RTI is the practice of (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions to guide instruction" (p. 3). As this definition foreshadows, RTI uses both a scientific approach and scientifically validated instructional practices that are matched to student needs to ensure success (Bender & Shores, 2007).

RTI is different from other reform efforts, including Race to the Top, in that it fundamentally changes the way educators view teaching and learning. In contrast to

superficial reforms, RTI promotes examining all factors and domains that enable or hinder student learning. This framework promotes moving away from focusing on student deficits to a thorough examination of instruction, curriculum, and environment in order to best meet diverse student need. RTI also focuses on the whole child by analyzing the correlation between an academic and behavioral intervention and the students' response to intervention; furthermore, RTI is a method to consistently identify, define, and resolve students' challenges (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). Lastly, RTI has been characterized as a new movement that moves towards collective responsibility and accountability for all students succeeding, including reforming teaching and leadership practices (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009).

When analyzing the reason for implementing a multi-tiered framework for educational reform, at least two possibilities emerge: (a) to meet the goals set by national education legislation, and or (b) to improve educational outcomes of all students independent of standardized test scores. The second of these reasons connects to a moral imperative to help underachieving students. While these two reasons are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the characterization of the reason and purpose for implementing RTI may prove to be important in terms of gaining the necessary support and consensus needed for successful integration of the framework in the district under study.

Urban School District in California

This study focuses on a major urban district in Southern California that has recently begun one of the largest K-12 school district implementations of the RTI framework to date in the entire nation. There are several important defining characteristics of this urban district that impact RTI implementation efforts. Among the

most salient characteristics is the size of the district. According to the district's Fingertip Facts reference sheet, the total student enrollment, including adult education, is just over one million. Geographically, the district spans over 700 square miles. The total number of K-12 teachers is about 30,000 and the total number of employees is over 60,000. Lastly, the total operating budget of the district is approximately five billion dollars. Creating systemic change, such as implementation of the RTI framework, in a district of this size is therefore a massive undertaking.

Need for Reform in District Under Study

At the same time, the district being studied is in need of meaningful reform. First, despite consistent incremental growth, the district has been unable to meet NCLB's accountability demands; several schools are labeled as "Program Improvement" or failing. Second, an achievement gap exists between subgroups of students; subgroups that have traditionally underperformed in relation to peers contribute to not meeting NCLB's goals. Third, due to the lack of improvement as measured by standardized test scores, certain schools are being taken over by charter schools or other groups outside of the school district.

As discussed in the Political Legislation and a Call for Reform section, schools and districts must meet state Annual Measurable Objectives in order to satisfy NCLB's Adequate Yearly Progress demands. In the large urban district in this study, the subgroups that do and do not meet proficiency targets as measured by the California Standards Test (CST) vary by school. District-wide, the subgroups that did and did not meet AYP targets are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

2010 AYP LEA Report for District in Study

Student Sub-group	Met AYP criteria in English language arts	Met AYP criteria in Math
LEA-wide	No	No
Black or African American	No	No
American Indian or Alaska Native	No	Pending
Asian	Yes	Yes
Filipino	Yes	Yes
Hispanic or Latino	No	No
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	No	No
White	Yes	Yes
Two or More Races	Yes	Yes
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	No	No
English Learners	No	No
Students with Disabilities	No	No

Note: Adapted from "Testing and Accountability" by the California Department of Education, n.d., Retrieved December 3, 2010, from http://star.cde.ca.gov. Copyright 2010 by the California Department of Education.

Among the most salient subgroups in this district that did not meet AYP targets are Hispanic/Latino, Black/African-American, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners, and Students with Disabilities. While these accountability demands impact the entire urban district under study, the particular section of the district being studied feels the achievement gap and the underperformance of significant subgroups on the CST acutely. The demographic data of the section of the district under study, also known as a local district, and that of the entire district is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Data

Student Sub-group	Local District(%)	Entire District(%)
Black or African American	2.5	10.9
American Indian or Alaska Native	.2	.3
Asian	2.6	3.7
Filipino	.3	2.3
Hispanic or Latino	94.0	73.7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.0	.4
White	0.5	8.7
English Learners	41.1	32.4

Note: 2008-2009 demographic data obtained from district database.

Two notable subgroups in this local district that did not meet AYP criteria in English language arts or math are Hispanic or Latino students and English learners. Since demographic data for this local district indicates that 94% of students are Hispanic or Latino and 41.1% of students are identified as English learners, this is a predominate concern. Similarly, when comparing CST proficiency rates of this section of the district with both the entire district and the state, there is a need and opportunity for reform.

The ramifications of low proficiency rates and a failure to meet AYP criteria have been significant for the district under study. Districts and schools receiving NCLB's Title I funds, which are given to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students, must meet proficiency goals, otherwise they will be identified as a Program Improvement (PI) district or school. According to the California Department of Education (CDE, n.d.), PI is the formal designation for Title I-funded schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that fail to make AYP for 2 consecutive years. Under these circumstances, PI districts and schools must submit a plan for corrective action. The district being studied is a PI district as a whole and over 350 schools in the district are labeled as PI. Furthermore, in regards to proficiency as measured by the CST, the district under study is below the California

state average at all grade levels for both English language arts and math; in addition, the section of district, also known as a local district, is below the overall district average at all grade levels for both English language arts and math. Table 3 shows proficiency rates for the state, district, and local district.

Table 3

CST Performance Data

Grade and CST Exam	Local District (% Proficient and Advanced)	Entire District (% Proficient and Advanced)	State (% Proficient and Advanced)
Grade 2 ELA	42	49	53
Grade 3 ELA	25	34	44
Grade 4 ELA	44	53	63
Grade 5 ELA	39	48	58
Grade 6 ELA	34	39	56
Grade 7 ELA	32	39	55
Grade 8 ELA	29	37	54
Grade 9 ELA	35	36	54
Grade 10 ELA	31	33	45
Grade 11 ELA	32	34	43
Grade 2 Math	47	54	62
Grade 3 Math	52	59	65
Grade 4 Math	55	63	68
Grade 5 Math	46	55	60
Grade 6 Math	35	39	52
Grade 7 Math	25	34	49
General Math	8	20	27
Algebra I	19	22	31
Geometry	14	14	27
Algebra II	14	16	31

Note: Note: Adapted from "Testing and Accountability" by the California Department of Education, n.d., Retrieved February 5, 2010, from http://star.cde.ca.gov.

Students who attend a Title I-funded school that is identified for PI must be given the option of school choice. This stipulation allows all students attending a Title I PI school the opportunity to transfer to a different public school, including a public charter

school, that is within the district and that is higher performing or is not *persistently dangerous* (CDE, n.d.).

In the district being studied, this option was translated into a "Public School Choice" motion that allows agencies to bid to take over schools – either schools that have failed to make adequate progress, such as PI Year 3+ schools, or newly constructed schools. This motion allows both internal and external groups to apply to run a school as independent or dependent operators. All organizations must be non-profit and must have a proven track record. The school board asserts that the purpose of this resolution is to provide increased options and choices for families, while critics call it the privatization of public education (Riordan, 2009).

The takeover of certain struggling schools may contribute to a sense of low morale, resentment towards NCLB and standardized tests, and a reluctance to fully participate in reform efforts. Fullan (2007) suggests that teachers can suffer both the anxiety and pressures that accompany high stakes testing, program improvement, and probation. Minthrop (as cited in Fullan, 2007) asserts:

> probation pressures may also cause anxiety and concern about professional reputation, perhaps leading to diminishing job satisfaction. Job satisfaction affects turnover and absenteeism, and rather than compelling workers to extend effort and instilling the will to high performance, pressures are sometimes avoided with exit. (p. 21)

Kanter (2004) further explores the idea of struggling schools by looking at confidence and *underconfidence*. Met with repeatedly negative results in terms of student performance as measured by the California Standards Test (CST), schools may become underconfident that any reform effort will work. Kanter asserts that underconfidence

"leads people to underinvest, to underinnovate, and to assume that everything is stacked against them, so there's no point trying" (p. 8).

As this district implements a multi-tiered framework for educational reform, the current political and emotional mood as well as the overall disposition and frame of mind of district employees must be considered.

The District's RTI Implementation Plan

The district being studied is in an opportune position to engage in meaningful reform. The district's vision is to utilize the multi-tiered RTI framework for educational reform to increase academic achievement for all students. In order to accomplish this goal, the district has assembled a team of educational leaders with a proven track record for increasing educational outcomes for underachieving students, as well as some of the nation's foremost RTI scholars. District leadership has created an infrastructure to support successful implementation, including extensive planning and training, including partnering with specialists from outside the district. Furthermore, this district has assembled expert teams to train schools and stakeholders in regards to RTI theory and implementation.

Each local district has organized RTI implementation efforts by selecting cohorts of schools. In the fall of 2009, schools were selected to be a part of RTI Cohort 1 in each local district. The selection process was different in each local district; in some local districts, schools were mandated to participate in Cohort 1 due to low test scores, while other local districts invited all schools to apply. In the section of the district detailed in this research, schools applied to be a part of RTI Cohort 1 without mandates and all schools that applied were selected. RTI Cohort 1 is comprised of a total of 22 schools: 16

elementary schools (including one primary center), 4 middle schools, and 2 high schools. The primary center serves grades Pre-K, kindergarten, and first; as a result, the school does not participate in the California Standards Test and is exempt from meeting NCLB's Annual Measurable Objectives. The rest of the 21 schools in Cohort 1 are all identified as program improvement schools due to not meeting proficiency targets.

Each cohort school established a School-Based Leadership Team (SBLT) that would be responsible for implementing RTI at the school site. SBLT members received 5 full days of training that were spread out over the 2009-2010 academic year, as well as several optional opportunities for additional RTI training. Each school and SBLT also received on-going support from a local district expert who facilitated planning meetings, as well as provided additional professional development to faculty and staff at the school site.

Statement of Problem

The urban district has invested considerable resources and time to ensure successful implementation of a multi-tiered framework for educational reform, including extensive training for schools and utilizing research-based implementation plans from other states and districts. However, the RTI implementation experience of SBLTs in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California , as well as experiences surrounding fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making), have not been fully explored. Therefore, there is a tremendous opportunity to learn from educators who are on the frontlines of this reform effort in order to refine implementation procedures in this urban district.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative and phenomenological study is twofold: (a) to explore the RTI implementation experience of SBLTs in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California; and (b) to investigate experiences surrounding levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) at these same 22 schools. The implementation of RTI is in its early stages and Cohort 1 schools are the first to utilize the framework. Since RTI will be implemented in all schools in the district, the purpose of this research is to study the lived experience, as well as fidelity of implementation, in order to calibrate and improve RTI implementation efforts. An opportunity for future research will be to study the effectiveness of RTI in increasing student achievement.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What is the RTI implementation experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?
2. What is the experience of School-Based Leadership Teams surrounding ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?

Importance of Study

This research topic is opportune in light of the nationwide implementation of RTI as the study proposes to add to the literature pertaining to implementation considerations, particularly for large urban districts and the students that these districts serve. The results of this study may be used to further refine the implementation of RTI and hence increase its effectiveness, which may improve educational outcomes across all students, including English learners, Standard English learners, special education students, and gifted students. The researcher proposes to present research findings to local and central district RTI teams in order to facilitate dialogue around the potential implications of these findings with the goal of improving the design and delivery of services that promote learning and, therefore, improving the educational outcomes of all students in the district. In addition, other educational leaders outside of the district may potentially use the research findings, as schools seek to adopt a multi-tiered framework for educational reform. At the same time, results of the study may not necessarily be generalizable.

De-limitations

There are several de-limitations to this study. This study purposefully focuses on one section of one large urban district in Southern California. Successful implementation of RTI in this particular area will require careful planning, calibration and readjustment of implementation efforts, and unique leadership skills. To that end, the study focuses on SBLTs that are comprised of administrators, teachers, counselors, and other instructional support staff, such as instructional coaches and coordinators. Teachers and non-administrative out-of-classroom personnel may have been asked to be a part of SBLT because of their roles as leaders at the school site (e.g. grade level chairperson or

department chairperson). The study focuses on the lived experience, as well as levels and fidelity of implementation, through this leadership lens and not from the perspective of the general faculty, students, parents, or other stakeholders.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. A major limitation of this study is the willingness of subjects to participate in the study. The researcher will invite participants from SBLTs of 22 schools, which comprise RTI Cohort 1 in one section of a major urban school district, but has no control over how many educators or schools will participate in the study. In addition, the 22 schools represent a fraction of the larger district; Attempts to extrapolate information and conclusions gained from the research to reflect the lived experience of the entire school district, another school district, or the entire state or nation would yield inaccurate results.

Assumptions

The researcher assumes that participants will report their experiences honestly and candidly. Although names will not be used and all participants' responses will remain confidential, there is a possibility that they may skew their responses to achieve a desired effect. This phenomenon is known as a social threat to construct validity (Trochim, 2006). The researcher is a recognized person in the district and can potentially bias the results of the study because participants may want to influence how they look in the eyes of the researcher.

Acronym Guide

The following acronyms will be used frequently throughout this dissertation:

- *API*. Academic Performance Index

- *AYP*. Adequate Yearly Progress
- *CDE*. California Department of Education
- *COST.* Coordination of Student Services
- *CST.* California Standards Test
- *DIBELS.* Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
- *ELs.* English Learners
- *ESEA*. Elementary Secondary Education Act
- *FAPE*. Free and Appropriate Public Education
- *ICEL.* Instruction, Curriculum, Environment, Learner
- *IEP*. Individualized Education Plan
- *IWT.* Individual Work Time
- *LAT.* Language Appraisal Team
- *LD*. Learning Disability
- *LEA*. Local Education Agency
- *LRE*. Least Restrictive Environment
- *LBUSD*. Long Beach Unified School District
- *NASDSE*. National Association of State Directors of Special Education
- *NCLB*. No Child Left Behind
- *PD.* Professional Development
- *PI.* Program Improvement
- *PSP*. Problem-Solving Process
- *RIOT*. Review, Interview, Observe, Test
- *RTI*. Response to Intervention

- *RtI*^{2}. Response to Instruction and Intervention
- *SBLT.* School-Based Leadership Team
- *SLC.* Small Learning Community
- *SST.* Student Success Team

Key Terms and Operational Definitions

California Standards Test (CST). According to the CDE (n.d.),

> The CSTs are a major component of the STAR program. The CSTs are developed by California educators and test developers specifically for California. They measure students' progress toward achieving California's state-adopted academic content standards, which describe what students should know and be able to do in each grade and subject tested. Students in grades two through eleven take multiple-choice CSTs for various subjects. Students in grades four and seven complete a writing assessment—the CST for Writing—as a part of the CST for English–Language Arts (para. 1).

Consensus. General agreement among staff members.

Equity. Equity is defined as "an operational principle for shaping policies and practices which provide high expectations and appropriate resources so that all students achieve at the same rigorous standard – with minimal variance due to race, income, language or gender" (Hart & Germaine-Watts, 1996, p. xx).

High Stakes Tests. High stakes tests are defined as tests that have serious consequences for students, teachers, schools, and or school systems (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). An example of a high stakes test is the CST.

Infrastructure. Large-scale systems that are necessary for implementation of a program (e.g. user-friendly technology and support to accommodate use of data).

Program Improvement (PI) School. According to the CDE (n.d.):

> In California, Program Improvement (PI) is the formal designation for Title I-funded schools and LEAs that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years. All schools and local educational agencies (LEAs) that do not make Adequate Yearly

> Progress (AYP) are identified for PI under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The NCLB Act requires all states to implement statewide accountability systems based on challenging state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. Assessment results are disaggregated by socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group is left behind. Local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals are subject to improvement and corrective action measures. (para. 1)

Response to Intervention (RTI). "RTI is the practice of (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions to guide instruction" (Elliott & Morrison, 2008, p. 3).

School-Based Leadership Team (SBLT). A team consisting of a school principal and some of the following roles: other administrators, coordinators, instructional coaches, and classroom teachers. The SBLT participates in official RTI training and is responsible for guiding implementation at their respective school. Being a part of the SBLT may or may not be voluntary. SBLT size varies and ranges from two to nine people per school.

Tier 1. Tier 1 represents core instruction. Approximately 80% of students should be successful receiving only core instruction and no Tier 2 or 3 services.

Tier 2. Tier 2 represents strategic instruction and interventions (ideally for approximately 10-15% of students).

Tier 3. Tier 3 represents intensive instruction (ideally for approximately 5-10% of students).

Organization of the Study

This research study is organized in five chapters. The first chapter outlines the current status of urban public education in the U.S., current political education legislation, and various reform efforts. In addition, Chapter 1 introduces RTI, and then details the background of the district under study and its implications for RTI implementation. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature pertaining to this study, including the theory and history of RTI, studies on the effectiveness of RTI in regards to increasing academic achievement and accurate identification of students with learning disabilities, and implementation considerations. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology used for this study, including the research design and rationale as well as instrumentation and data collection procedures. Chapter 4 will detail themes that convey the findings of the analysis of collected data and that reflect the lived RTI implementation experience of the SBLTs, including a detailed discussion of the various themes, including subthemes and quotations. Finally, chapter 5 will include conclusions and implications of this study, as well as recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature pertaining to a multi-tiered educational reform effort: RTI. This study will explore the lived experience of SBLTs of 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban district in regards to RTI implementation, including levels and fidelity of implementation. Therefore, corresponding literature will be reviewed.

After defining the framework and exploring its theoretical underpinnings, this chapter will examine the origins of RTI and the evolution of the model into a comprehensive school reform effort. The literature surrounding how RTI may reduce "disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education" (Hosp, 2008, para. 1), as well as empirical studies examining the RTI model, its effectiveness, and implementation considerations will also be explored.

Certain factors regarding the district being studied inform the literature review. Those factors not only include the size of the district, its location, and the demographics of the students, but also include district leadership, district partners in regards to RTI implementation, and the overall approach and purpose of utilizing the RTI framework. While the literature review explores RTI both generally and across the nation, particular attention and emphasis is given to the pieces of literature most relevant to the district being studied.

RTI Theory

Across the nation, states are implementing and defining the RTI model. In California, the Department of Education (CDE, n.d.) has defined the model to include a "systematic, data-driven approach that benefits every student" (para. 1). The CDE has

also squared the "I" in RTI and changed the acronym to RtI^2, which stands for Response to Instruction and Intervention, to more precisely define the model as a general education initiative. RtI^2 integrates all existing resources—including general education, categorical programs and special education—to create a seamless system of support for all students.

NASDSE (2008) and Elliott (2008) cite three essential components of RTI: (a) multiple tiers of intervention, (b) a problem-solving method, and (c) an integrated data collection and assessment system. The second component, a problem-solving method, is especially important because it alludes to the different RTI models. There are at least two distinct approaches to RTI: the standard protocol approach and the problem-solving approach. Sailor (2009) also offers a third approach called "school-wide RTI." This third approach further explains how RTI has morphed from a special education initiative to a general education initiative; this concept will be explored further later in this chapter.

The standard protocol model involves using a predetermined set of standard interventions to assist students who qualify for particular interventions using a set of criteria (Bender & Shores, 2007; Buffum et al., 2009). Students who are struggling in a particular content or skill area all receive the same intervention. Using this approach, standard interventions are often provided by a particular specialist who is trained in that area, which makes supervision and ensuring fidelity of interventions simpler due to the fact that there are a limited number of intervention programs that follow a set curriculum and pacing plan. Measuring the fidelity of interventions is an integral part of ensuring that students' response to intervention is accurate, which is critical as students' responses to various interventions are utilized as part of an evaluation for special education services.

The Problem Solving Model (PSM) has been used for decades and is currently being used in the majority of districts that are using the RTI framework (D. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In contrast to the standard protocol approach, the problem-solving approach involves more individualized decision-making and intervention implementation based on particular student needs (Bender & Shores, 2007). As a result, the problem solving approach will result in a greater variety of research-based interventions. This is due to the fact that the selection and creation of interventions is based on individual student needs, as opposed to using a standard set of interventions.

The theory and research describing RTI and its various components serves as a backdrop for the definition of RTI and its implementation in the district being studied. Each school district is defining and implementing RTI in its own distinct way, yet most approaches and definitions have strong commonalities with the theory described earlier in this chapter. The district being studied is implementing the problem-solving approach to RTI, and the problem-solving process is central to the design and rollout of the RTI framework. This major urban district has outlined the following five key components of RTI:

1. Problem-solving process,
2. Multi-tiered framework to instruction and intervention,
3. Data-based decision-making,
4. Academic engaged time, and
5. Professional development.

The Problem-Solving Process

The problem-solving process involves four steps: (a) problem identification, (b) problem analysis, (c) intervention design, and (d) response to instruction/ intervention (see Figure 3).

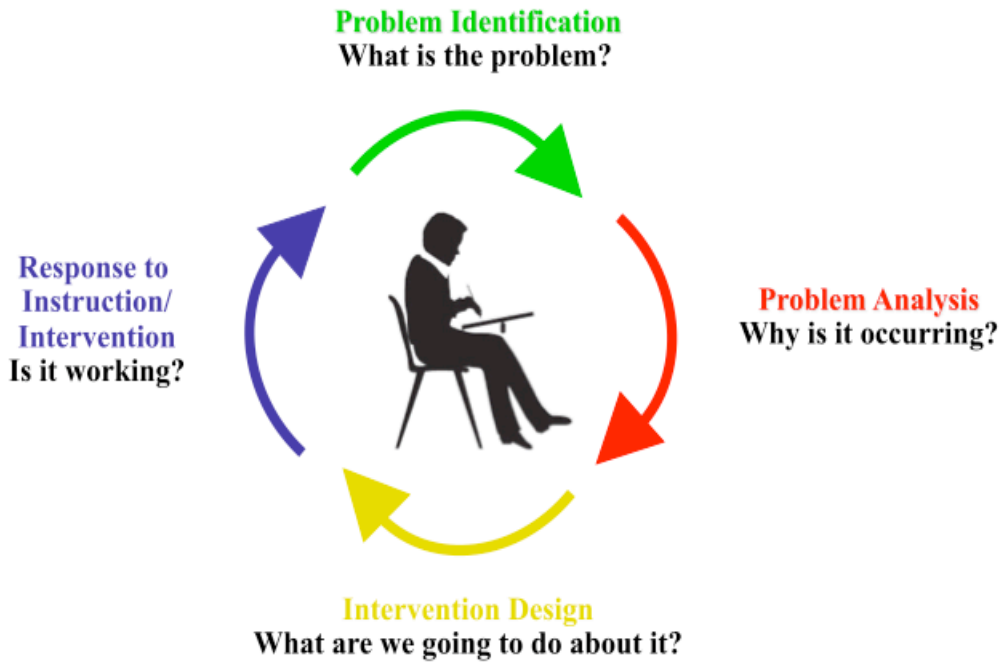

Figure 3. The problem-solving process.

Step one involves identifying the problem and the goal or replacement behavior associated with that problem. Problem-solving teams also identify whether or not the problem is a large group, small group, or an individual issue. Lastly, problem identification also involves determining the severity of the problem, which is known formally as *gap analysis*. Gap analysis involves determining the gap between the student's level of performance, peer level of performance, and desired level of performance.

Step two of the process is the most critical step; it is also the most involved step. Step two involves analyzing all potential causal factors that may be contributing to the problem by looking at four key domains: Instruction, Curriculum, Environment, and Learner (ICEL). For each of these four domains, a problem-solving team develops a hypothesis as to why the problem may be occurring. These hypotheses are then tested through one or more of the following methods: Review, Interview, Observe, and Test (RIOT). Once a hypothesis is validated and the team has settled on a potential reason why the problem is occurring, the team can move to step three, which entails creating an intervention that is matched to the problem. The purpose and necessity of step two is to ensure that the intervention accurately addresses the problem. Even though step two is time consuming, its aim is to spend time in order to save time by ensuring that the selected intervention has the greatest chance of success.

The third step of the problem-solving process is intervention design and can involve a variety of components depending on student need. First, either the intervention needs to be selected from existing evidence-based intervention programs or an intervention needs to be developed. Second, the intervention plan needs to be developed; this involves all logistical items including who will deliver the intervention, frequency, location, etc. Another important aspect of step three involves planning the progress monitoring (e.g. what assessment will be used, how often progress will be measured, and who will be responsible for assessment).

Step four involves measuring the student's response to intervention. There are three types of responses: positive, questionable, and poor. The response is positive if the student's learning rate improves so that the gap between the current level of performance

and the expected level of performance, also known as the benchmark, will close. The response is questionable if the learning rate improves but not to the extent that the student will reach the benchmark. The response is poor if there is no change in learning rate (see Figure 4).

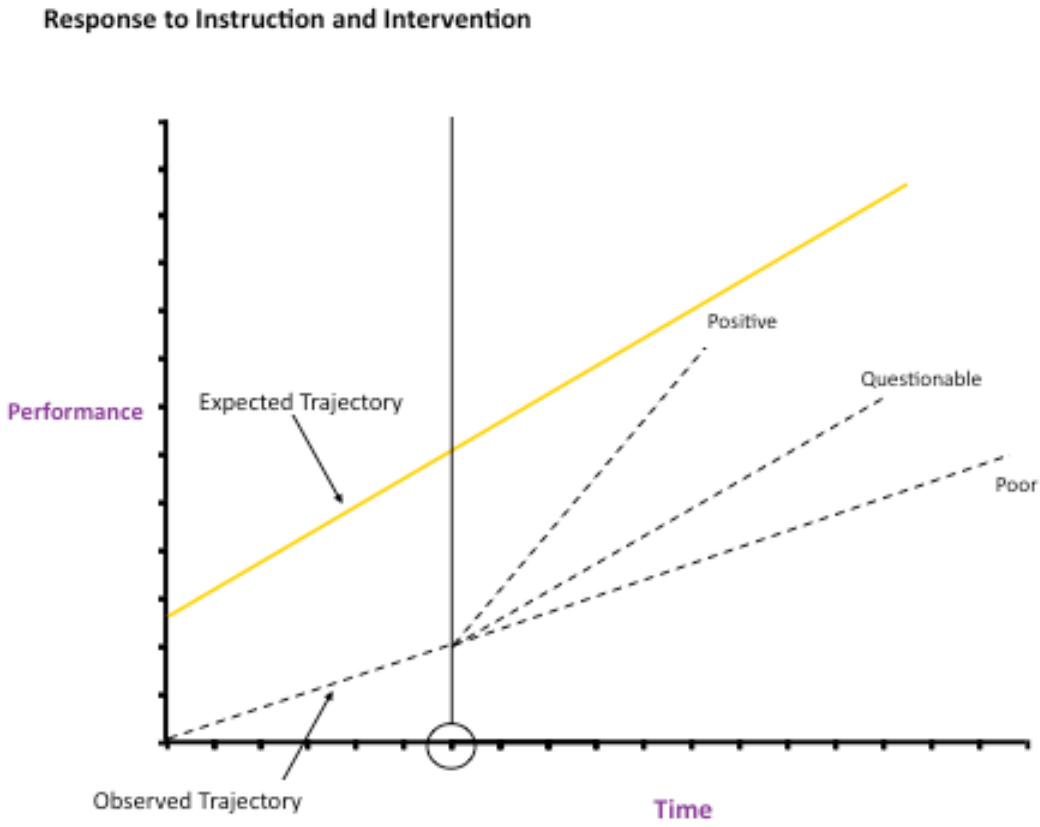

Figure 4. Three types of responses to intervention.

If the response is positive, the educator has two options: continue with the intervention until the benchmark is achieved, or discontinue the intervention to see if the student has acquired functional independence and if improvement will continue without intervention support. If the response is questionable, the educator has two options: check and increase intervention fidelity, or increase the frequency and duration of the intervention. If the response is poor, the educator has two options: check and increase

intervention fidelity, or return to steps two or three of the process in order to create a more effective intervention. The problem-solving process is cyclical and is designed for use at each tier of the multi-tiered service delivery model (Florida Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project, 2011).

Multi-Tiered Service Delivery Model

One of the most consistent and recognizable components of RTI is the multi-tiered service delivery model. Although different RTI models utilize varying numbers of tiers, the most commonly used version is the three-tier pyramid (Bender, 2009; D. Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; see Figure 5).

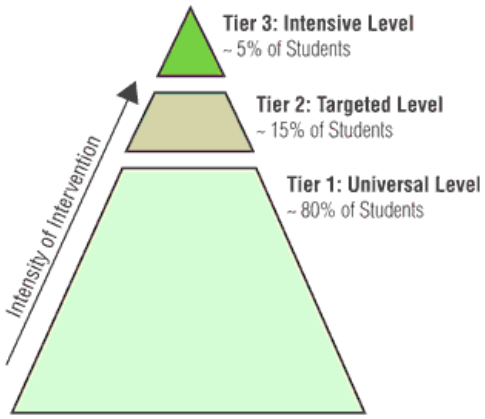

Figure 5. Three-tier pyramid service delivery model.

The base of the pyramid, or Tier 1, represents core instruction that is presented to all students. Core instruction should utilize a scientifically validated, research-based curriculum to meet a broad range of student needs (Elliott & Morrison, 2008). Approximately 80% of students should be successfully learning the core curriculum in Tier 1 (Bender, 2009; Elliott, 2008). Tier 1 includes universal interventions and differentiation to help students meet this goal. If students do not make desired progress in

Tier 1, they receive supplemental Tier 2 instruction. Tier 2 of the RTI pyramid includes about 10-15% of students who need more targeted services and intervention, usually in smaller groups, to learn targeted skills successfully (Casbarro, 2009; Elliott, 2008). Tier 2 instruction and intervention are provided in addition to the core instruction and utilize more frequent progress monitoring. If a student is still not responding to Tier 1 and Tier 2 services, he or she receives Tier 3 services, which encompasses more intensive interventions in small groups or individually. Tier 3 is used with an estimated 5-10% of students, and it requires the most individualized interventions and the most frequent progress monitoring (Elliott, 2008). RTI theory suggests that Tier 3 interventions should be delivered in addition to Tiers 1 and 2, and that all students should have access to the core curriculum. At the same time, Tier 3 may include use of a supplantive curriculum or replacement program from Tier 1 or 2 because the student is significantly below grade level and the student is not able to access the Tier 1 and or 2 curriculum.

This multi-tiered approach to instruction and intervention is not only used for academics but also for behavior with the ultimate goal of one comprehensive RTI model to address both areas. Hence, the same framework is used for both academics and behavior. Universal or Tier 1 instruction is given to all students in regards to clear behavioral expectations; this often includes a School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Plan, which proactively helps to create a positive and safe school culture. For students who are struggling behaviorally, they receive strategic Tier 2 behavior interventions in a small group setting that may focus on social skills or reinforcement of school-appropriate behavior. Lastly, Tier 3 includes individualized supports designed to improve pro-social behaviors (see Figure 6).

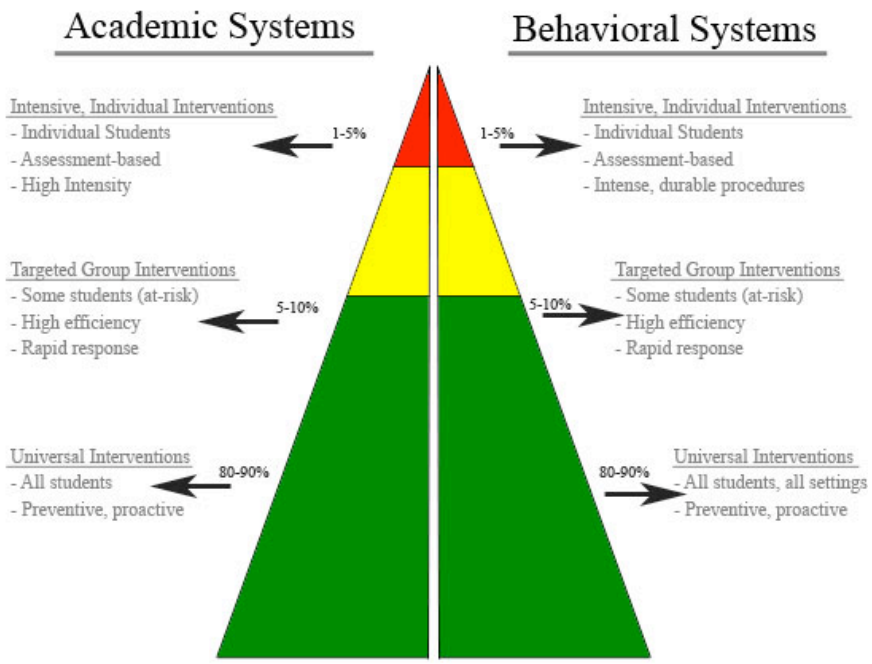

Figure 6. Academic and behavioral systems in the three-tier pyramid model.

Data-Based Decision-Making

The systemic use of data, as well as data systems necessary to gather and organize the data, is essential to RTI. Data are used to identify students in need of intervention and to inform instruction and intervention in all tiers in the RTI model. An assessment, or universal screen, is administered to all students for the purpose of identifying any potential gaps in learning in a timely manner in order to intervene as early as possible. Data informs both placement and instructional decisions in each tier of the pyramid and helps determine specifically what intervention is needed. Data are also used to monitor progress during the intervention and to determine the student's response to intervention. Students are supposed to be able to move fluidly between tiers, not remain tracked for life. Systems must be in place in order to for this crucial component—data-based

decision-making—to be successful (Florida Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project, 2011).

Academic Engaged Time

The fourth key component is academic engaged time, which is defined as the number of minutes per week that students have access to high-quality instruction and engage in behaviors that reflect student engagement (Batsche, 2009). The premise is that increased academic engaged time leads to increased academic achievement. The multi-tiered framework not only offers varying levels of support but also offers varying amounts of academic engaged time based on student need. Tier 2, or strategic interventions, includes extra minutes of instruction in a particular content or skill area, typically reading or math; this intervention occurs in addition to Tier 1 instruction and intervention. Tier 3, or intensive interventions, includes still more academic engaged time because it is layered on top of Tier 2 and Tier 1 services (Burns, Griffiths, Parson, Tilly, & VanderHayden, 2007). In contrast to earlier approaches, this additional time spent on interventions should occur during the school day as opposed to after school or on Saturdays. A major concern is what content is missed during the intervention time. At the secondary level, students might be offered a reading, literacy, or math elective as opposed to an art or music class. At the elementary level, students might miss integrated curriculum time or other content that occurs outside of the reading or math block.

Professional Development

In order to successfully implement RTI, substantial professional development is needed. All district staff must understand what RTI is and why the model is being implemented. In addition, there are specific skills, knowledge, and beliefs that support the

implementation of the framework (Elliott & Morrison, 2008). First, all staff must have a comprehensive understanding of the basic components of RTI, in particular a firm grasp of the multi-tiered service delivery model and the problem-solving process. Once a conceptual understanding of the theory is attained, faculty must have the opportunity to turn this knowledge into skill through practice. Potentially, there are a vast number of new skills associated with RTI, including research-based instructional practices, intervention strategies, and curriculum-based measures, to name a few. Skilled use of the problem-solving process requires ample professional development and guided practice. Lastly, the beliefs and attitudes of staff regarding RTI must be addressed. In order for new skills and knowledge to translate into a meaningful and lasting change in practice, educators must see the need for the new practice or skill and feel that they have the ability to execute this practice or skill effectively.

Core Principles

The last aspect of the theory behind RTI is a discussion of the core principles on which the model is built. Elliott (2008) and NASDSE (2008) both report the following four RTI core principles:

1. Believe that we can effectively teach all children.
2. Intervene early.
3. Use a multi-tiered model of service delivery.
4. Use a problem solving method to make decisions within a multi-tiered model.

NASDSE (2008) adds the following additional core principles:

5. Use research-based, scientifically validated interventions/instruction to the extent available.

6. Monitor student progress to inform instruction.
7. Use data to make decisions. A data-based decision regarding student response to intervention is central to RTI practices.
8. Use assessment for three different purposes (screening, diagnostics, progress monitoring). (p. 20)

While these core principles serve to define the model, perhaps the most salient is the first core principle, which involves the belief that educators can effectively teach all children (Elliott, 2008; Elliott & Morrison, 2008). This principle involves several corollary beliefs. It suggests that all children can learn and that all children deserve equitable access to education. Furthermore, it places the responsibility of figuring out how to best serve students' needs squarely on the shoulders of educators. RTI suggests that student achievement is influenced most by the quality of instruction and use of appropriate interventions, not deficits that are inherently connected to students or educators' preconceived notions about students' abilities (Batsche, 2009).

Origins of RTI

RTI is suddenly ubiquitous and to some the framework may appear to be a new educational trend. However, the problem-solving process, RTI, and RTI-like models have been utilized for decades; knowledge and understanding of this early work is crucial. The literature suggests that the current RTI model is most likely an amalgamation of many different programs; therefore, there are numerous potential origins of the model. One of the first is Stanley Deno's tiered cascade model also known as the data-based program modification model, developed in 1970 (Deno, 1985; Deno & Mirkin, 1977). The cascade model was an early effort to educate special education students in the least restrictive

environment and to move towards inclusion of students with special needs into the general education classroom (Buffum et al., 2009). According to NASDSE (2008), Deno's data-based program modification model focused on improving academic skills and involved: defining problems, assessing students regularly, calculating performance gap, implementing intervention, monitoring progress, and evaluating results and next steps. NASDSE also cites Bergan's Behavioral Consultation Model as another early contributor the RTI model (Bergan, 1977; Bergan & Kraochwill, 1990). The Bergan model followed a similar cyclical protocol to Deno's model but defined the problem behaviorally.

Another early contributor to the RTI framework is the Heartland Area Education Agency (HAEA) in Iowa. In particular, the problem-solving process, which is now considered an essential component of RTI, is attributed to the early work of Iowa's HAEA in the 1990s (Tilly, 2003). The Iowa Problem Solving Model involved the following questions: "1) What is the problem? 2) Why does the problem exist? 3) What should be done to address the problem? 4) Did the intervention work and what's next?" (Tilly, Reschly, & Grimes, 1999, p. 222). This version of the problem-solving model has remained unchanged and is currently being used by school districts across the nation. At almost the same time in 1992, the public school system in Minneapolis, Minnesota implemented the problem-solving model as an integral component of RTI (Bender & Shores, 2007; Marston, Muyskens, Lau, & Canter, 2003).

Kovaleski (2007) asserts that other early forms of RTI models include Pennsylvania's Instructional Support Teams, Rosenfield and Gravois's (1996) Instructional Consultation Teams, and the work of D. Fuchs et al. (2003) surrounding a

collaborative team approach to developing interventions using the problem-solving process. Other notable figures attributed to pioneering RTI are "Doug and Lynn Fuchs, Don Compton, Dan Reschley, and others at Vanderbilt University [who] have been conducting careful scientific studies of RTI processes for over two decades" (Sailor, 2009, p. 6).

Much of this early work surrounding RTI began in the arena of special education at the elementary level, which makes Adlai Stevenson High School in suburban Chicago an important and noteworthy contributor to the origins of RTI. In 1983, large percentages of students at Stevenson High School were being transferred to "lower tracks" and essentially failing. In order to address this concern, the school created "what has become known as the pyramid of interventions (POI), a collective and systematic approach to providing additional time and support to students who experience difficulties in learning" (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 5).

Political Roots

Federal legislation has clearly impacted education and educational reform in numerous ways and RTI is no exception to this trend. Many researchers and scholars point to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in November of 2004 as a pivotal moment in the catapulting of RTI into the current educational landscape (Elliott & Morrison, 2008; D. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Galvin, 2007); however, RTI's political roots dig back even further to 1975.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) was signed into law in 1976 and helped define special education services in the U.S. (Wedl, 2005). This act included mandates such as the right to a free and appropriate

education (FAPE) for students with disabilities and guaranteed an education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was not renewed until the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990, which was reauthorized in both 1997 and 2004.

While each of these public policies reformed the nation's education systems, particularly in the arena of special education, it was not until the reauthorization process of IDEA in 2004 that RTI was specifically mentioned in public policy. Up until this time, the standard procedure for identifying students as learning disabled involved "documenting a discrepancy between a students IQ and achievement;" as a result, "identification typically occurs at fifth grade, so children must wait to fail before intervention can occur" (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007, p. 14). During the reauthorization of IDEA, both the House and the Senate noted the difficulties with the traditional IQ-achievement discrepancy model, and RTI emerged as an alternative means of identifying students with learning disabilities (D. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Wedl, 2005). Carnine (as cited in Wedl, 2005) delivered the following testimony before the House Committee on Education and the Workplace, Subcommittee on Education Reform:

> Given the converging evidence and agreement in the field that we must do something better for our children, the following model is recommended as the basis to improve how we provide early intervention and identification: Response to Intervention Model (RTI). An RTI model would be designed to ensure that children who are indicating a likelihood of failing in the early grades receive scientifically based instruction as soon as possible. The eligibility for special education services would focus on the children who, even with these services, are not able to be successful. The focus of RTI is on responding to the instructional challenges caused by the disability not on giving tests to document the failure of the student. (Wedl, 2005, p. 6)

The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education also recommended incorporating RTI. More specifically, the Commission suggested using

RTI during the identification and assessment process and using data to measure progress (Wedl, 2005). In addition to adding RTI as another option for special education identification, IDEA (2004) also encourages early intervention and permits districts to use up to 15% of special education funds for these early interventions (D. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

While the concepts and practices of RTI have been used as an alternate method for determining special education eligibility, the focus soon began to shift to increased academic outcomes for students with learning disabilities. Once this shift to outcomes occurred, RTI began to morph into a general education initiative with the goal of increased services and support being offered to all struggling students regardless of disability status. So, while RTI and its various components have been used in numerous districts for many years, the work has largely taken place in the arena of special education. In analyzing causal factors that contributed to the shift towards implementing RTI in general education settings, it appears that this shift was propelled forward due to "increased accountability occurring in the context of stable or diminishing resources, it became imperative to find ways to implement RTI for groups of students as well" (Burns et al., 2007, p. 12). Educators soon began to see the multi-tiered service delivery model, the problem-solving process, and evidence-based interventions as a viable opportunity for groups of students to benefit from RTI practices. Today, the RTI model is no longer being used solely to identify potential students for special education services but also to ensure that no child is left behind.

No Child Left Behind and the Evolution of RTI

RTI is now being used "as a framework or model [that] should be applied to decisions for general, remedial and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by student performance data that is close to the classroom" (Elliott, 2008, p. 10). The framework now includes a focus on prevention, early intervention, and proactive action to create increased achievement for all students (Burns et al., 2007; Cummings, 2006). It is important to examine the historical and current educational climate that led to the creation of NCLB and set the stage for RTI being implemented in general education settings in schools and districts across the nation.

Historically, education in the U.S. was limited to the elite. Education was a privilege for few, not a right for all. Over the course of American educational history, the pendulum has swung from focusing on the competition (and perhaps advancement of only the elite) and the achievement of all (or equity). A notable shift occurred in 1965 when the Johnson administration enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). According to Hess and Rotherham (2007), the goal of the ESEA was to create increased opportunities for economically disadvantaged children. "This focus on bridging the achievement gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' was central to the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty" (Hess & Rotherham, 2007, para. 8). In the 1980s, the focus shifted back towards competition as the U.S. began competing for markets against other industrialized, educated nations (Hess & Rotherham, 2007). There was a tremendous focus on rigor and standards during this time. According to Smyth (2008), "Politicians have been attempting to raise the bar toward tougher standards since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*" (p. 133).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was created in 2001 and was signed into law on January 8, 2002. NCLB was not a new law but rather a reauthorization of the ESEA; however, the effects NCLB on today's educational landscape appear to be even more significant and far-reaching. One particularly salient aspect of how NCLB has reformed education is its intense focus on assessment, accountability, and achievement for all students – regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language classification, or disability status. NCLB mandates annual state assessments of students and currently every state in the union is compliant. Therefore, NCLB legislation also represents a major shift not only in increased accountability, but also in the control of that accountability moving from the local and state level to the federal level (Jones et al., 2003). "Proponents of testing often cite at least three major reasons why high stakes tests are needed in public education: 1) to measure student achievement; 2) to provide information about the quality of schools; and 3) to hold students and educators accountable" (Jones et al., 2003, p. 10).

In efforts to meet NCLB's goal of all students being proficient in English language arts and in mathematics, districts are implementing the RTI framework as a comprehensive school reform effort. NCLB's goal of academic success for all students, and the evolution of the success-for-all paradigm greatly impact the manner and rate in which RTI is being implemented across the nation. Many districts are implementing the RTI framework for the chief purpose of bolstering academic achievement of struggling students, closing the achievement gap, and meeting NCLB's proficiency goals.

IDEA and NCLB: Commonalities and Distinctions in Approaches to RTI

In their recent article "The 'Blurring' of Special Education in a New Continuum of General Education Placements and Services," D. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker (2010)

explore two different approaches to and interpretations of the purpose of RTI, what the authors coin as the *IDEA group* and the *NCLB group.* These groups do share common views about salient aspects of RTI, such as early intervention, use of frequent progress monitoring, increasing levels of support, and the need for special education and general education to work together. However, there are distinct differences between these two large, loosely configured camps and their approaches to RTI.

The IDEA group believes that RTI is a more valid and unbiased method for special education identification. One of the main purposes of RTI for the IDEA camp is the identification of learning disabilities. For this reason, the IDEA camp's approach often includes only two tiers of instruction and intervention before special education, which is Tier 3. In order for the disability identification process to be valid, the standard protocol approach to RTI must be utilized, particularly in regards to Tier 2 instruction and intervention. The IDEA approach is top-down and uses a set of stock intervention programs so that the intervention process can be replicated to ensure that a student's response to intervention accurately conveys whether or not a student has a learning disability.

The NCLB group views RTI as a way to improve the academic achievement of struggling students. This view of RTI exists within the larger context of a standards-based reform effort that sets high expectations for all students and insists that all students should have access to high-quality, differentiated instruction and intervention in order to meet state benchmarks.

> According to those considered to be NCLB group members—e.g. Batsche et al. (2005); the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE); Elliott

> (2007); Grimes (2002); Hardman (2007); McLaughlin (2006); the NASDSE (2006); NASDSE and CASE (2006); Reschly (2005); Sailor, McCart, and Choi (2008); and Tilly (2003)—RTI is nothing if not a meaningful operationalization of the 'right' education, a promising bridge between federal policy and local practice. (D. Fuchs et al., 2010, para. 10)

RTI is being implemented as a strategy for meeting NCLB's accountability goals (D. Fuchs et al., 2010; NASDSE & CASE, 2006).

This view of RTI relies on the problem-solving process to innovate new solutions to obstacles that impede student learning and relies on educators at all levels to create and tailor interventions based on student need. This "bottoms-up" approach is used because the ultimate goal is measuring a student's response to intervention for the purpose of finding the right intervention that will increase performance, not necessarily identification for a learning disability.

In short, an important early distinction between these two groups is the purpose of RTI as a vehicle for identification versus achievement. However, there are related issues that stem from these distinctions, mainly where services occur. While both camps recognize the need for special education and regular education to work together, the IDEA group feels that Tier 3 supports and individualized services should delivered in the realm of special education, while the NLCB camp advocates for a blending of special and general education services to help all struggling students. Furthermore, the NCLB camp advocates for a unified system of education in which all educators are collectively accountable for all students, as opposed to only students from particular programs (i.e. special education, English learners, gifted, etc.). This *every ed.* or *one ed*. concept brings

about two controversial topics: funding and full inclusion. RTI uses a percentage of special education dollars for prevention and early intervention with the hope that learning gaps will be identified and closed before there is a need for special education or an achievement gap develops. The every ed. or RTI achievement approach also promotes inclusion and a unified approach to helping all struggling students.

Empirical Studies

All proponents of RTI must be prepared to address this extremely relevant question; on the basis of RTI research, does RTI work? According to some, the answer to the question is both simple and resounding: research has shown that RTI works for almost all struggling children (Bender, 2009). Several proponents of RTI resoundingly insist that there is a substantial body of research that supports the effectiveness of RTI, while skeptics assert that more research is needed on the multi-tiered framework. There are a vast number of research studies that measure certain components of RTI and a small number of studies that measure the effectiveness of various RTI models across the nation, especially the early pioneers of RTI that were previously noted in this chapter. For major urban districts, the resounding question is whether or not RTI will work for certain students: students of color, English learners, and students who live and learn well below the federal poverty line.

Reducing Disproportionate Representation

Early research indicates that RTI may help alleviate the problem of *disproportionate representation* of students of color and English learners in special education. Disproportionate representation refers to the idea "that, all other things being similar, students from different groups should be identified for special education services

in similar proportions" (Hosp, 2008, para. 2). According to Duffy (n.d.), implementation of the problem-solving approach in conjunction with the multi-tiered framework in Minneapolis Public Schools showed a reduction in the number of African-American students in special education over a 4-year period (Marston et al., 2003). Before IDEA (2004), students were identified for special education services using the IQ-achievement discrepancy model, which may contribute to the overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students (National Research Council, 2002). Cultural bias is the predominant concern in regards to disproportionate representation of particular subgroups.

In addition, Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) contend that norm-referenced tests are not reliable if the student's background is *sufficiently unique*. Furthermore, a rule of thumb is that if the norming sample used in the creation of the assessment does not contain a student who shares a defining background characteristic (e.g. culture) with the student being tested, then the test is not a reliable indicator of performance (Reschly, Kinglighter & McKee, 1988; Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2004). However, in the RTI model, assessments are frequent, curriculum-based, and closely tied to instruction. Reschly et al. (1988) assert that assessments that are aligned to instruction are nondiscriminatory.

RTI promotes a more objective approach to analyzing learning problems by examining the instructional context and other environmental factors to determine what else may be preventing academic achievement. RTI calls for an analysis of variables (e.g., teacher presentation style and opportunities for students to respond) in the general education classroom to pinpoint the cause of inadequate progress. In addition, research-based interventions are utilized and students' responses to said interventions are analyzed

before a student can be referred to special education. In conclusion, the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (2005) asserts that RTI holds promise for reducing disproportionate representation and improving outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

English Learners

Early research also indicates that RTI shows promise for English Learners (ELs). According to the California Department of Education (CDE, n.d.), there are over 1.5 million ELs comprising approximately 25% of all students in the state of California. The district being studied serves over 300,000 ELs. The CDE definition of an EL is "a K-12 student who, based on objective assessment, has not developed listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiencies in English sufficient for participation in the regular school program" (CDE, n.d., sec. 2, para. 1). The impact of RTI on ELs is important because of the potential to adequately address their numerous and varied needs. In addition, the subgroup of ELs has difficulty meeting NCLB's AYP goals across the nation (Bender, 2009). Furthermore, ELs have failed to meet AYP goals in the district being studied.

While the research surrounding the effectiveness of RTI for ELs is still emerging, there are some early indicators that point in a positive direction. Linan-Thompson et al.'s (2006) study of RTI's effectiveness in meeting the needs of elementary ELs is one of the influential early indicators. This longitudinal study followed a group of EL students from the beginning of first grade to the end of second grade at 11 schools, measuring the effectiveness of RTI in improving reading outcomes versus the schools' existing instructional programs. The interventions associated with RTI were delivered in English

and or Spanish depending on student need during first grade only. The study yielded significant results in favor of the RTI multi-tiered approach to intervention versus the control group: for the English RTI group versus the control group, 91% of the RTI group and 42% of the control group achieved benchmarks at the end of first grade and 94% of the RTI group and 44% of the control group achieved benchmarks at the end of second grade. For the Spanish RTI group versus the control group, 97% of the RTI group and 70% of the control group achieved benchmarks at the end of first grade and 100% of the RTI group and 92% of the control group achieved benchmarks at the end of second grade. Students who participated in the RTI intervention model were able to maintain their gains throughout second grade even though the intervention only occurred during first grade.

More recent press has been given to the Chula Vista Elementary School District in California for its use of the RTI framework to address the needs of ELs. The district credits the multi-tiered RTI approach with markedly raising standardized test scores in reading and math for ELs (Zehr, 2010). The district has exceeded its state Academic Performance Index (API) goals and has met all of its AYP goals under NCLB. Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services John Nelson III states, "RTI addresses how to change teachers thinking from 'I taught it and it's their fault if they got it or not' to 'I need to keep teaching it and supporting students'" (Zehr, 2010, p. 2).

Long Beach Unified

Perhaps the most salient and relevant case for the district being studied is Southern California's Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), where RTI is currently being credited with increasing student achievement. LBUSD is important for

several reasons. First, the district is in close geographic proximity to the district being studied. Second, LBUSD is also an urban district with similar demographics to the district being studied (e.g., large percentages of English learners and socio-economically disadvantaged students). Next, LBUSD utilizes the RTI framework at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Lastly, Elliott's (2008) article "Response to Intervention: What and Why?" which details LBUSD's success as a result of the RTI framework, has been widely read in the district being studied.

Elliott (2008) described RTI as a proven model for increasing the achievement of all students. RTI's tiered approach to intervention began at the secondary level and was later implemented at the elementary level. Perhaps Elliott's most notable claim is that LBUSD's implementation of the RTI model has helped close the achievement gap and increase academic outcomes for minority and low-socioeconomic subgroups. LBUSD employs universal screens and on-going assessments and has been nationally recognized for its use of data to track students. LBUSD also utilizes the multi-tiered service delivery model. In order to identify the appropriate tiers of service and support for students at the high school level, all eighth graders are screened for potential placement in Tier 2 and or Tier 3 intervention classes. LBUSD looks at CST scores, grades, and placement test scores to make placement decisions.

LBUSD does not call its practice RTI, but rather, "best practice for all students" (Duffy, n.d., p. 6). According to Duffy, LBUSD views its practice, programs, and model as a systemic approach to meeting the needs of all students. This view of the RTI model—or at least of its key components—represents the evolution of RTI as a general

education initiative utilized to meet the needs of all students as opposed to a model that solely serves to identify students for special education.

LBUSD has been repeatedly recognized for growth in standardized test scores, including being a five-time finalist for the Broad Prize for Urban Education, which recognizes improvement and growth in academic achievement. Test scores continue to rise in LBUSD and proficiency levels show double-digit growth in several content areas since 2003, including the following highlights: 64% of fourth graders are proficient or above in English, showing a gain of 27%; 73% of third graders are proficient or above in math, showing a gain of 26%; and 51% of fifth graders are proficient or above in science, showing a gain of 31% (LBUSD, n.d.). While these scores show significant gains, there are no official studies attributing these gains specifically to RTI. So, while the question of whether or not there is proof of the effectiveness of RTI is often answered by pointing to the success of LBUSD, one must dig deeper in order to answer this crucial question.

Supplemental or Intensive Instruction

A great deal of research has been conducted on the effects of individual components of RTI, such as supplemental or intensive instruction and intervention. Particularly in the area of reading, several studies prove the effectiveness of these interventions in improving academic outcomes. Lennon and Slesinski (1999) conducted one such study, beginning by screening 330 kindergarten students to identify those at-risk for reading failure. Selected students were given supplemental instruction in a ratio of one teacher per two students. In comparing the performance of these students versus the control group, students receiving supplemental instruction yielded significantly higher gains in phonemic awareness, decoding, ability to recognize high frequency words, and

beginning writing skills. After following up on the participants 2 years later, Lennon and Slesinski found that those who participated in the study and received supplemental instruction had lower placement rates in special education than other at-risk groups, showing that early intervention may reduce the number of students identified as learning disabled in the area of reading.

Research has also been conducted on supplemental and intensive math instruction. L. S. Fuchs et al. (2006) used an experimental design to study the effectiveness of supplemental math instruction in third grade in 13 schools that participated as either a control or experimental school. The students who participated were identified as at-risk for math difficulty. The study utilized three groups: (a) students who received whole group math instruction, (b) students who received small group (two to four students per group) math instruction, and (c) students who received a mixture of whole group and small group math instruction. L. S. Fuchs et al. found that students who were a part of the third group were most successful, making a case for supplemental instruction and interventions that occur in addition to core instruction.

Comprehensive RTI Model Studies

The following 12 studies utilized a minimum of two tiers of intervention as part of a comprehensive RTI model and contained quantifiable outcome measures with a description of data collection and analysis. These studies are repeatedly referenced and cited in textbooks and on educational websites. The following paragraphs will summarize of each of these 12 studies.

Ardoin, Witt, Connell, and Koenig (2005) conducted the first of these studies; the researchers examined the effectiveness of an RTI model known as the standard-protocol

mathematics model (SPMM). In particular, the study examined the use of the universal screening, and a multi-tiered approach to instruction and intervention. Ardoin et al. explored the degree to which, if at all, a class-wide intervention and or individual intervention improved student outcomes in mathematics. The study took place at an elementary school that was currently not implementing RTI. The students of two fourth grade classes were divided into three differing mathematical achievement groups. The lowest group, comprised of 14 students, took place in this study. The study consisted of three phases: (a) universal screening, (b) a class-wide intervention, and (c) individual and small group interventions. Of the 14 students that participated in the study, 9 responded positively to the class-wide, or Tier 1 intervention. Five students required further Tier 2 intervention, and with these supports showed sufficient improvement.

The next research study focuses on the St. Croix River Education District (SCRED) model of RTI that incorporates the problem-solving process as a key component. The SCRED model is utilized for all students, including both special and general education students. An integral part of this model involves problem-solving teams that meet weekly to collaborate around identifying problems, analyzing them, creating an intervention plan, implementing the plan, and evaluating the plan. Bollman, Silberglitt, and Gibbons (2007) conducted a study that focused on schools from five different districts. The purpose was to examine the correlation between use of the SCRED RTI model and: (a) academic achievement, and (b) rate of special education identification. The results of the study report a 29% increase in proficiency rates over a 6-year period, as well as a 14% decline in the number students scoring in the lowest performance band on the statewide reading assessment. Lastly, Bollman et al. report that

the SCRED RTI model led to a 2% decline in the amount of students who were identified for special education services.

Callender (2007) investigated the effectiveness of the Idaho results-based model (RBM); in particular, the study measured the impact of the RBM implementation on reading achievement and special education placements. A unique aspect of the Idaho RBM is that it incorporates both the standard protocol approach and the problem-solving approach. For example, students who are struggling in Tier 1 receive a standard Tier 2 intervention (standard protocol approach). If the students do not respond positively to that intervention, then a problem solving team convenes to use the problem solving-process to precisely identify the problem and to create a corresponding intensive Tier 3 intervention plan. Forty percent of districts in Idaho had at least one school that had fully implemented RBM. This study focused on 1,400 students in grades K-3 over a 5-year period. The results report that students who attended schools that implemented RBM had higher achievement in reading; in addition, there were 3% fewer students identified for special education in RBM schools.

RTI addresses both academics and behavior. However, most empirical studies focus on the former, which makes Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, and Lathrop's (2007) study on the Behavior Support Model (BSM) noteworthy. BSM utilizes the multi-tiered approach to address students' behavioral needs. Similar to the RTI model used for academics, students receive increased support as they move up the tiers (from Tier 1 to Tier 2 to Tier 3). All teachers and school personnel are responsible for Tier 1 interventions, including a school-wide positive behavior support plan and school-wide behavior expectations. The study focused on the effectiveness of Tier 2 and Tier 3

behavioral interventions in terms of percentage of discipline referrals, teacher perception of behavioral performance, and observations of student behavior. The sample size is quite small as only 10 students between the ages of 7 and 8 at one elementary school were involved in the study. Tier 2 involves strategic interventions that were developed and implemented by the general education classroom teacher as well as a check-in system. Tier 3 in the BSM involves intensive, individualized behavior support plans. The results of the study are as follows: four students responded positively to Tier 2 interventions, six students required Tier 3 interventions, two students did not complete the study, and the remaining four students all responded positively to individualized Tier 3 interventions in all categories (referrals, teacher perception of behavior, observation).

The next study focuses on the Pennsylvania Instructional Support Teams (IST), which is noted as an early pioneer of the problem-solving approach to RTI. The implementation of the IST was large-scale in that over 500 districts in the state implemented the model. Kovaleski, Gickling, Morrow, and Swank's (1999) study focused on 117 schools and 492 students participated in the research. The purpose of the study was to examine the correlation between levels of IST implementation and student performance as it relates to time on task, task completion, and task comprehension. The researchers found that students in schools with high levels of IST implementation showed significant improvement in regards to engagement, completing tasks, and understanding of tasks in comparison to students at schools with low levels of implementation. The study also found no significant difference between student performance at schools with low levels of IST implementation and schools that had not implemented IST at all, which makes a strong case for high fidelity of implementation.

The Minneapolis Problem-Solving Model (MPSM) is one of the earliest models of the problem-solving RTI model that incorporates all key components of the current RTI (or RtI^2) model that is being implemented nation-wide, including the three tier intervention model. The study examines special education identification rates, including disproportionality, and was referenced earlier in this chapter. However, the study does not include the effectiveness of the model in increasing academic achievement for all students, which would be beneficial given the wide-scale implementation—and the chief purpose behind this wide-scale implementation—occurring presently. At the same time, the MPSM was implemented in elementary and secondary schools, which is relatively uncommon. The study examined referral and identification rates before and after implementation of the model. Marston et al. (2003) found no significant difference in the percentage of students that were identified for special education; however, a significant finding was that implementation of the MPSM may have led to a reduction in over-representation of African-American students in special education programs because identification rates for this subgroup in Minneapolis schools were less than state-wide rates.

The next study focuses on a method called the tiers of reading intervention (TRI) model, which focuses on improving basic reading skills using the three-tier model. An important note about the research regarding TRI is that university personnel delivered Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, which may have impacted results. Nonetheless, O'Connor, Harty, and Fulmer's (2005) study involving 400 students from grades K-3 that participated in Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions resulted in clear findings: improvements in reading achievement and reduction in special education referral rates.

Another study focuses on the Illinois Flexible Service Delivery System (FSDS) Model. The FSDS model is similar to both the current RTI model and to many of the models previously discussed in this section in that it incorporates the multi-tiered service delivery model and problem-solving teams. At the same time, Peterson, Prasse, Shinn, and Swerdlik's (2007) study is unique—and has incredible relevance to the study detailed in this dissertation—because it involves surveys that measure the perception of the model's effectiveness and satisfaction with FSDS. The study focused on 26 schools that had implemented the model for at least 2 years and that ranked as having satisfactory implementation of the model. Another noteworthy aspect of this study is that it incorporated parents' perspective. Peterson et al.'s analysis of participant surveys revealed staff members' perception that students improved academically and behaviorally as a result of the FSDS the model, and the staff of these 26 schools was satisfied with the implementation of the model. According to the surveys, (a) administration ranked the highest in satisfaction levels; (b) school psychologists and social workers ranked second; (c) special education teachers ranked third; (d) and general education teachers ranked fourth in levels of satisfaction, yet were still more satisfied than not. The study also found that the majority of parents were satisfied with the process and, importantly, reported that parents were involved in the FSDS process.

Yet another study focuses on the Ohio Intervention-Based Assessment (IBA) model. In particular, Telzrow, McNamara, and Hollinger's study (2000) examined fidelity of implementation and the potential correlation to effectiveness of the model as measured by student outcomes and staff survey ratings. The study honed in on measuring the fidelity of individual components of the problem solving process and found that step

one, identifying the problem and setting goals, was implemented with the most fidelity, while step two, analyzing why the problem is occurring through hypothesis development and validation, was implemented with least fidelity. While the study reported overall positive student outcomes based on implementation of the IBA model, there was not a significant correlation between fidelity of individual steps (or components) of the problem-solving process and student outcomes.

The next study focused on the Exit Group Model (EGM), which utilizes four tiers of intervention. Using the EGM, students who do not respond to evidence-based Tier 1 instruction and intervention receive 10-week intervention intervals in Tier 2, Tier 3 as needed. This model also utilized an additional tier of highly intensive intervention, or Tier 4. After each 10-week intervention interval in that particular tier, students may either exit the intervention program and return to Tier 1, or receive more intensive intervention. If students do not respond positively to these 30 weeks of supplemental instruction (in Tiers 2, 3, and 4), the student is evaluated for potential special education identification. Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, and Hickman's (2003) research focused on the effectiveness of the interventions in terms of reading outcomes and also measured how many students exited the program after each tier of intervention. The sample size was 45 second grade students who were struggling in reading according to a universal screen. According to the findings, the EGM model was successful in improving student outcomes in the area of reading; all students who participated in the intervention showed improvement. Over half of the 45 students exited the intervention program after Tier 2 and Tier 3 services and over 90% of these students maintained their success and functional independence in Tier 1.

Another research study focused on the Albany Response to Intervention (ARTI) model. ARTI uses the standard protocol approach and focuses on literacy for students in the primary grades. Vellutino, Scanlon, Zhang, and Schatschneider's (2008) research followed a group of 462 students who were identified as at-risk in regards to literacy development at the beginning of kindergarten. Identified students received Tier 2 literacy interventions throughout kindergarten. At the beginning of first grade, students were assessed again to see if they were still at-risk. Students who were still at-risk received Tier 3 literacy interventions throughout first grade. Classroom teachers, who received additional training and support, delivered all interventions. The findings of this study showed that of the original at-risk students, 84% were at benchmark in the area of reading by the end of the first grade; again, some of the students received only Tier 2 interventions in kindergarten, while others also received Tier 3 intervention in first grade. Additionally, this study concluded that RTI was a more effective approach to identifying students who may be at-risk for reading disability than traditional testing measures alone.

The last of these comprehensive RTI studies is an examination of the System to Enhance Educational Performance (STEEP) model. The STEEP model utilizes the standard protocol approach to RTI to determine whether or not students are eligible for special education services. The study focused on elementary schools, particularly in the area of literacy and classroom management. To this end, all teachers were trained in specific literacy and behavior management strategies in order to provide universal, or Tier 1, intervention within the general education classroom. Students who were not successful in Tier 1 were given further individualized interventions (Tiers 2 and 3). If students were still not successful, then they would be evaluated for special education

identification. The purpose of the study was to measure STEEP's impact on the number and accuracy of special education referrals. VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson (2007) found that using the STEEP method yielded fewer referrals for special education evaluation and that these referrals were more accurate, meaning that of those referred, a greater percentage of students were deemed eligible to receive special education services.

Synthesizing the 12 comprehensive RTI studies detailed above, two distinct key themes emerge. First, the predominant purpose and findings of these studies was to measure the effectiveness of RTI as an alternate means of identifying students for special education. Second, while the second key theme is measuring the effectiveness of RTI in increasing academic outcomes, more research is needed in this area. Most of the studies focused on reading at the elementary level and in small to medium-size districts. Torgesen's (2009) recent study on the outcomes associated with the large-scale implementation of TRI in Florida's Reading First Schools focused on 318 elementary schools from the kindergarten level through third grade. This study revealed that RTI contributed to lower rates of identification for learning disabilities and fewer students having serious reading difficulties but did not examine the model's impact on overall academic achievement.

More Research Needed

The district being studied is implementing RTI at all levels for the chief purpose of increasing student achievement and proficiency levels. However, the evolution of RTI into a general education initiative that serves to bolster the academic achievement of all students at all levels seems to have preceded a large research base to support widespread implementation of the model. There is a need for more research examining the

effectiveness of RTI in improving academic outcomes and the effects of the comprehensive model when fully implemented in general education settings (Kovaleski, 2007). Bradley, Danielson and Doolittle (2007) also cite a need for additional research examining RTI at the middle and high school level. Lastly, more longitudinal research utilizing control groups is needed to adequately measure the impact of RTI over time.

However, Bradley et al. (2007) contend, "ideally, large-scale implementation of any new innovation would be preceded by significant research and development efforts" (p. 11). Bradley et al. further assert "that policy often precedes and drives research and development" (p. 11) and that the "momentum around the potential benefits of RTI has created a critical mass of professionals willing to forge ahead despite the unanswered questions surrounding the details of implementation" (p. 11).

Implementation Considerations

Hoover et al. (2008) surveyed state departments of education to examine RTI implementation rates. Of the 44 states that responded, 100% reported that they are implementing or planning to implement some form of the RTI model; 16 were planning on doing so and 28 were already implementing RTI at some level. As state initiatives or plans trickle down to the district level, successful implementation of RTI involves numerous considerations. First and foremost, a change in educators' mindsets regarding teaching and learning must occur. A traditional perspective on teaching and learning views targeted instruction and time as constants and learning as the variable, meaning that the type of instruction (whole group) and the amount of time given to master a skill or standard remains the same for all students and the variable is how students respond (or learn) to this one-size-fits-all approach (Buffum et al., 2009). In contrast, RTI suggests

that targeted instruction and time are the variables and that student learning should be constant; different students will require differing instructional strategies, interventions, and time to master the skill or content. This view of teaching and learning represents a large paradigm shift from traditional perspectives.

Implementation of a new model such as RTI requires change. The magnitude of this change increases during the three phases of RTI development: the development of a consensus of need in regards to adopting RTI, the creation and establishment of an infrastructure to support RTI, and the implementation of RTI (see Figure 7).

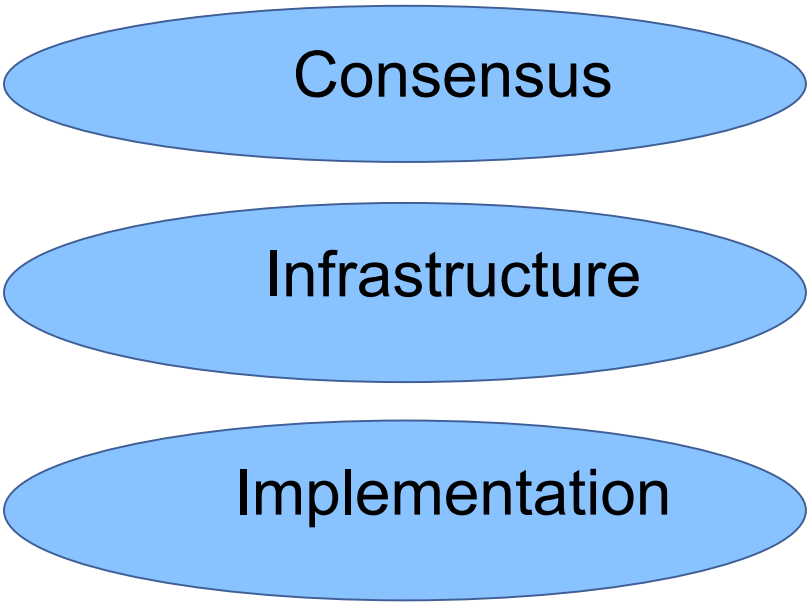

Figure 7. Three phases of RTI development.

Building consensus around RTI involves several critical steps. First, all stakeholders must be identified and an action plan must be developed in order to ensure effective communication. Stakeholders must understand the core components of RTI, the benefits of RTI, as well as the rationale behind implementation. Collaboration begins at the consensus building level and input should be garnered from all key players. After an understanding of the scope of RTI implementation is attained, structures to support

systematic planning must be developed (Elliott & Morrison, 2008). After substantial work has been done in the consensus-building phase, educators should have a clear vision of where the district is heading and why. The next step is figuring out exactly how to get there.

Creating the infrastructure to support implementation of RTI on the district level involves building a district leadership team that contains diverse representation from various departments and or programs. The next step involves defining roles and responsibilities in regards to RTI implementation. Another crucial component of this phase is connecting existing instructional initiatives to the various tiers of RTI. Tier 1 involves high-quality, research-based, differentiated instruction and most likely connects to all existing initiatives. Existing intervention programs connect to Tier 2 and or Tier 3. After identifying how existing initiatives and programs connect to the RTI framework, the district can then identify any outstanding needs, such as intensive interventions. During this phase, the district also examines student performance in relation to the performance goals of the tiered system. Again, the goal is that 80% of students will be successful in Tier 1, that a maximum of 15% of students will require Tier 2 services, and only 5% will require Tier 3 intervention. Districts must compare and contrast the current state with this desired state in order to clearly establish goals. A corresponding professional development plan is then created.

The last phase is implementation. During this phase a multi-year action plan is created. Time becomes a critical factor during this phase. All phases of implementation may span anywhere from 3 to 5 years (Elliott & Morrison, 2008). The action plan includes sufficient professional development, as well as ongoing support,

communication, and feedback. Implementation also involves evaluation and refinement of the action plan based on feedback from stakeholders. Fullan (2007) refers to the final part in the change process as *institutionalization*, where implementation must be maintained, sustained, and built over time.

While it is suggested that these phases occur in sequential order, consensus building must occur throughout all phases of development. The complexity of the change process increases throughout the process, and during the final implementation phase the change may move from first-order to second-order, which necessitates news skills and knowledge and a break from the past (Galvin, 2007; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Effective leadership during all phases of implementation necessitates an understanding of organizational change, an ability to maintain focus on the objective, and an ability to clearly articulate a need and purpose for the reform. In order for RTI to be successfully implemented as a general education initiative, it cannot be characterized as a program or curriculum, but instead as a comprehensive school-wide positive reform effort that will create better outcomes for children.

Summary

This chapter explored the literature pertaining to a multi-tiered educational reform effort: Response to Intervention (RTI). The CDE (n.d.) defines the RTI framework as a "systematic, data-driven approach that benefits every student" (para. 1). While there are numerous approaches to this framework, the most widespread approach to RTI involves at least three essential components: "1) multiple tiers of intervention; 2) a problem-solving method; and 3) an integrated data collection and assessment system" (Elliott, 2008, p. 12). The origins of RTI lie in the arena of special education. Some of the early

pioneers of this model include: the Iowa Problem Solving Model (Tilly, 2003); Pennsylvania's Instructional Support Teams; Rosenfield and Gravois's Instructional Consultation Teams (Kovaleski, 2007); Deno's Data-Based Program Modification Model (Deno, 1985; Deno & Mirkin, 1977); and Bergan's Behavioral Consultation Model (Bergan, 1977; Bergan & Kraochwill, 1990). After the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, RTI loudly emerged as a promising alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model, also known as the *wait to fail* identification system. Once the focus of RTI began to shift to student outcomes, RTI soon evolved into a larger educational reform effort designed to improve academic achievement for all students and, for some districts, as a strategy to meet NCLB's (2002) accountability demands. While research is still emerging about the effectiveness of RTI, studies show a reduction in special education referrals and increased student achievement, particularly in the area of reading. In addition, research shows that RTI may help alleviate the problem of "disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education" (Hosp, 2008, para. 1). However, additional research in examining the effectiveness of RTI at all levels in general education settings is needed. At the same time, districts are embracing RTI's potential to improve student outcomes and to reform methods for assisting this nation's neediest students, and are forging ahead with implementation. Successful implementation of the RTI should involve an understanding of the theory behind the multi-tiered framework and the infrastructure and support systems necessary to sustain it, careful planning among a variety of stakeholders, an understanding of organizational change, and time.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The study explored the RTI implementation experience of school-based leadership teams (SBLTs) and investigated their experiences in regards to fidelity of implementation with respect to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What is the RTI implementation experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?
2. What is the experience of School-Based Leadership Teams in regards to ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?

Research Design and Rationale

Since this study intended to explore the lived experience of educators who served as members of SBLTs during the first year of RTI implementation in a selected school district, the researcher employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach to research design. This approach allowed the researcher to explore and understand the experiences of both individuals and groups in relation a particular experience or set of experiences.

Specifically, the study attempted to gain an understanding of school leaders and their experiences surrounding RTI and its implementation in the district being studied.

A phenomenological approach necessitates that the researcher set aside judgments about what is real or accurate in pursuit of understanding participants' perceptions of the lived experience or phenomenon. Phenomenological inquiry traces back to Edmund Husserl, who developed a philosophy grounded in subjective openness, as well as the concept of epoche (Creswell, 2009). To this end, the researcher proposed to engage in "disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

The researcher collected data during the 2010-2011 school year, specifically in the spring of 2011, by conducting qualitative focus groups with teams from 22 different schools. Utilizing the focus group approach, the researcher interviewed participants in pre-existing groups: each school's leadership team. The face-to-face or virtual face-to-face focus groups allowed the researcher to build rapport and reduce the feeling of formality in order to make participants feel comfortable. In addition, the researcher was able to interview leaders in small teams, as opposed to individually, which helped to create greater comfort and yield additional information due to the interaction of group members (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In addition, the focus group approach is expedient given the number of schools and participants that were offered the opportunity to participate in the study. The procedure of collecting data through focus groups is useful because the related lived experience spans over a year and thus cannot be directly observed; hence, the focus groups afford participants the opportunity to provide historical information (Creswell, 2009). The questions were semi-structured to allow the

researcher to ask follow-up questions for increased clarity or greater detail in explanation. The limitations of this approach include the fact that the focus groups provide indirect information that is filtered through the views of the participants.

Sampling Procedures

The most essential criterion for creating a sample for any research study is that the participants have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). In pursuit of that goal, the sampling procedure to be used is purposive in that the participants will be offered the opportunity to participate in the study based on the following inclusion criterion: they are currently SBLT members of an RTI Cohort 1 school in the section of the district being studied. Cohort 1 schools are the first schools to implement the RTI framework in the district; 22 schools applied to be part of the cohort and all were selected.

Sample

The sample was a purposive and non-experimental one in the sense that participants fell into three pre-existing groups: (a) elementary, (b) middle school, and (c) high school educators. RTI Cohort 1 is comprised of 16 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 2 high schools. All 22 schools were invited to participate in the study. Approval for this study and access to participants was requested and obtained from the district and its research review board, from the district superintendent (Appendix A), and from the principals of each individual school that may participate in the study (Appendix B). Permission was granted by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Participants

In addition, the same 22 principals that granted permission were also asked to participate in the study; principals had the option of appointing a designee if they chose not to participate in the study. Ultimately, 19 principals participated in the study. Also, principals were also asked to identify two additional key SBLT members who were integral to RTI implementation. SBLT members include administrators, instructional coaches, coordinators, and or teacher leaders. The researcher initially planned to interview entire teams, but the district research unit was concerned about the large number of participants and required a reduction in the number of participants, which is why the researcher ultimately asked for three participants per school. After obtaining permission and potential participant names and contact information from principals, the researcher sent recruitment letters (Appendix C) and informed consent documents (Appendix D) to selected SBLT members. Again, only principals and or designees and two additional key SBLT members who were integral to RTI implementation as selected by the principals were invited to participate in the study. Once SBLT members indicated a desire to participate in the study, the researcher set up appointments to meet with each of the 22 RTI Cohort 1 schools' leadership team members who were willing to participate in the study. Approximately 66 educators were invited to participate in the study, and 50 actually participated.

Human Subject Considerations

The researcher complied with both Pepperdine GSEP IRB guidelines and the research guidelines of the district under study. Participants were required to give informed consent by signing the informed consent document before participating in the

study. The researcher reviewed both the recruitment letter (Appendix C) and the informed consent document (Appendix D) orally and offered participants the opportunity to ask questions in order to ensure clarity of understanding.

Two critical considerations for this study are confidentiality and security of data. In order to ensure confidentiality, no individual or school names were used during data collection; instead, schools and participants were assigned research numbers that were only known to the researcher. All information regarding the identity of the participants was kept private and confidential. In addition, no subject responses were linked in any way to individuals in order to protect subject identities. All data, including audio recordings, transcripts, and research materials, were kept secure using password-protected computer files and locked file cabinets. All hard copies of transcripts will be destroyed 3 years after the conclusion of the study when research materials are no longer needed. Maintaining confidentiality and security helped ensure that the risk to participants was minimal. Risks of participation included possible boredom, fatigue, and or slight discomfort reflecting on lived work experience. The researcher provided coffee, soda, water, and snacks in order to minimize these risks. Overall, the degree of risk and or discomfort should be no more than in daily life, such as talking to a stranger while taking public transportation or standing in line at the grocery store. The researcher incentivized participation by providing participants with a $25 gift card of their choice.

The researcher explained to participants that they would have the opportunity to request transcripts of the focus group by telephoning, emailing, or sending a letter to the researcher. Upon request, participants had the opportunity to review their focus group transcript statements for accuracy and to return any recommended revisions related to

their *individual statements only* to the researcher. In other words, Participant A may only recommend revision for statements made by Participant A. In order to maintain confidentiality, codes were used for schools and subjects. Schools were assigned a number (e.g. School 1) and subjects were assigned a participant letter (e.g. Participant A). All communication and documents regarding member checking were kept secure using password protected email, computer files, and locked filing cabinets. Lastly, participants were informed that they could obtain a copy or summary of the study's findings by writing a letter, emailing, or telephoning the researcher.

Data Collection Setting and Procedures

The researcher set up appointments to interview each school's leadership team in the focus group format. There are two options for the focus group: face-to-face or virtual face-to-face (using a computer webcam and a virtual communication tool such as Skype). The researcher began by reviewing the research purpose, informed consent, confidentiality, and logistical items (Appendix E). After a careful review of all items involved in informed consent as described in the Human Subjects Considerations section, the researcher reiterated that all responses are confidential, that no individual or school names would be used, that research numbers will be assigned, and that responses would not be linked to individuals in order to protect subject identities. Given these protections, participants were asked to report their experiences honestly and candidly. The researcher outlined the purpose of the research, logistical items such as potential duration of the focus group (45 minutes), and the fact that the focus groups would be audio recorded. The researcher also outlined the questioning process, including number, type, and general subject of questions, the fact that there might be additional prompts to explain or clarify

thinking, as well the protocol for sharing responses. Each team member was expected to respond to each question even if the response was to briefly indicate agreement or a desire to not comment on a particular question. The participants were then offered the chance to ask the researcher any questions about the process before the focus group began. The focus group consisted of asking the proposed questions and follow-up questions in the order indicated on the proposed instrument.

There was a total of 22 small focus groups and no more one focus group per day; the data collection spanned approximately 7 weeks. The researcher audio recorded the focus groups. The focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes per group. Participants were given an incentive by selecting their choice of a $25 gift card, which they could keep even if they chose to dicsontue participation. Participants were also reminded that they would have the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy, as well as request a copy or summary of the research findings. Lastly, the researcher sent all participants a thank you card.

Instrumentation

The current proposed instrument is comprised of 17 interview questions (Appendix F). The instrument's proposed interview questions are grounded in the RTI literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2. The current research questions and proposed interview questions are the result of extensive revision and review by experts in RTI, education, and educational scholarship; this will be discussed further in the Expert Review of Instrument Content section, Credibility section, as well as the Pilot Testing section below. Table 4 outlines the current research questions, the proposed interview questions, and the literature source grounding for the proposed interview questions.

Table 4

Proposed Interview Questions

Research Question	Proposed Interview Questions	Literature Source Grounding
1. What is the RTI implementation experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?	1A. How might you describe your experience in regards to RTI implementation? 1B. How might you describe the process of implementing RTI at the school site? 2A. What might be some positive aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI? 2B. What were some "moments to celebrate" in regards to RTI implementation? 3A. What might be some negative aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI? 3B. What were some obstacles to implementing RTI? 4A. What were some strategies that the team may have used to overcome these obstacles? 4B. What advice might you give an SBLT member who is about to begin RTI implementation?	Bender, 2009; Buffum, Mattos, &Weber, 2009; Ehren, Ehren, & Proly, 2009; Elliott, 2008; Elliott & Morrison, 2008; Galvin, 2007; Sailor, 2009; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003

(table continues)

Research Question	Proposed Interview Questions	Literature Source Grounding
2. What is the experience of school leaders in regards to ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?	1. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of Component 1, a multi-tiered system of service delivery? 2. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 1, a multi-tiered system of service delivery? 3. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 1, a multi-tiered system of service delivery? 4. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of Component 2, systemic use of the problem-solving process? 5. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 2, systemic use of the problem-solving process? 6. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 2, systemic use of the problem-solving process? 7. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of Component 3, systemic use of data-based decision-making? 8. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 3, systemic use of data-based decision-making? 9. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 3, systemic use of data-based decision-making?	An important source that grounds these proposed interview questions is the Self-Assessment for Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI), developed by the Florida PS/RTI Statewide Project and based on the IL-ASPIRE SAPSI – Loyola University Chicago, both of which focus on levels and fidelity of implementation. In addition to the above grounding, the following research, articles, and texts describe RTI core components, levels and fidelity of RTI implementation, and thus provide additional grounding for proposed interview questions: Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Elliott, 2008; Elliott & Morrison, 2008; Telzrow, McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000

All 17 questions are open-ended in order "draw out the participant's views and opinions" (Creswell, 2003, p. 188) and to allow participants to provide greater range in response as well as increased detail in explanation. A concerted effort was made to ensure that all questions utilize tentative and exploratory language, and plural forms in order to reduce the affective filter of interviewees (Costa & Garmston, 2002). The first eight interview questions correlate to the first research question that explores the lived experience of schools during implementation of RTI. The first two interview questions deal with the overall experience and process of implementing RTI, and the rest of the interview questions related to the first research question attempt to potentially garner both positive and negative experiences as well as strategies and advice for overcoming any potential obstacles. The focus group questions are arranged in pairs (e.g. 1A and 1B) and were designed to ask the same question in two slightly different ways in order to ensure reliability as well as to provide another opportunity to interact with the query in hopes of yielding additional data. The distinctions between paired questions may yield different responses. Question 1A asks about participants' experiences during RTI implementation (which may include personal experiences such as training or support that occurred away from the school site) and question 1B asks participants to describe the process of implementing RTI at the school site (which may focus more on the process and less on personal experience and may focus only on experiences that occurred at the school site). Question 2A is constructed to be very open and seeks to elicit information regarding positive aspects, experiences, or items related to the implementation of RTI; the inclusion of all three nouns (aspects, experiences, or items) gives participants a wide array of choices. Question 2B refers to moments to celebrate, which specifically narrows to recall

a particular positive event or moment in time. Similarly question 3A is more general (again utilizing aspects, experiences, or items), while 3B narrows to specific obstacles. Question 4A elaborates on question 3B by specifically asking for strategies to overcome the obstacles surfaced in the previous question. Question 4B broadens the scope again and asks for implementation advice in a more general sense.

The second research question deals with the experience of school leaders surrounding ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools with regard to three core components (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making). Nine interview questions are associated with this research question, three questions for each of the three core components of RTI. Each set of three questions follows a similar format: (a) describe level and fidelity of implementation of each component, (b) participants' experience surrounding ensuring fidelity of each component, and (c) advice surrounding ensuring fidelity of that component.

Expert Review of Instrument Content

The researcher assembled two panels of experts to review versions of the proposed instrument. The first expert panel was comprised of district personnel who have been extensively trained in RTI and are responsible for both training schools and facilitating the implementation of RTI. All four initial panel members have the same title: Expert, Response to Instruction and Intervention. The panel was asked to review the proposed interview questions (Appendix G) in relation to the purpose of the study and in relation to the overarching study questions. The panel was asked to review each interview

question for appropriateness and clarity. Figure 8 represents an excerpt from the document used by the panel of experts to review the proposed instrument.

Instrumentation Validity

Dear Expert Panel:

My research will include focus group interviews that explore the ***lived experience of SBLT members in regards to RTI implementation****.*
I am asking that you please review these questions for appropriateness and clarity. Please mark suitable descriptors. Also, please feel free to annotate the questions. Thank you.

Questions:

1. How might you describe your experience in regards to RTI implementation?

___ Appropriate (Comments: _____)
___ Inappropriate (Comments: _____)
___ Clear (Comments: _____)
___ Unclear (Comments: _____)

2. How might you describe the process of implementing RTI at the school site?

___ Appropriate (Comments: _____)
___ Inappropriate (Comments: _____)
___ Clear (Comments: _____)
___ Unclear (Comments: _____)

3. What might be some positive aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI?

___ Appropriate (Comments: _____)
___ Inappropriate (Comments: _____)
___ Clear (Comments: _____)
___ Unclear (Comments: _____)

(continued for all questions)

Figure 8. Instrumentation validity document excerpt.

The researcher then met with the panel to dialogue around the instrument content. Based on expert review, as well as input from the researcher's dissertation committee members, two research questions (3 and 4 in Appendix G) and four corresponding interview questions were deleted. The first deleted research question dealt with perceptions about the effectiveness of RTI; it was omitted because it was not found to be germane to the purpose of this study. The second deleted research question dealt with overall attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in regards to RTI, which was also found to be not directly relevant to the study's purpose; in addition, the interview questions associated with this research question relied too heavily on indirect reporting of others'

perceptions. This first round of expert review resulted in the second draft of proposed interview questions (Appendix H).

Attempting to gain necessary permissions from the research review board of the district under study was the catalyst for the next round of revisions and expert review. The review board sought additional clarification surrounding the second research question, which dealt with levels and fidelity of RTI implementation in regards to the three core components (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making). In addition, the review board was concerned about the interview questions taking too long in focus group format. Including follow-up questions, there were 19 proposed interview questions associated with the second research question. The second panel of experts, comprised of two education practitioners and scholars both of whom have earned doctoral degrees in educational leadership, focused on the second research question and the corresponding interview questions in terms of credibility, clarity and concision. The second expert review resulted in a revised focus and clarity in regards to the second research question. The revision focuses not only on levels and fidelity of implementation but also focuses more on how to ensure fidelity of implementation, including the experience of leaders surrounding fidelity, which is an important distinction. The revised proposed interview questions associated with research question 2 were narrowed down from 18 to 9 questions.

Pilot Testing

There were two rounds of pilot testing. The second batch of proposed interview questions (Appendix H) were initially pilot-tested with a team of educators whose backgrounds are similar to those of the SBLT members who were invited to participate in

the study. The goal of initial pilot testing was to further check for instrument clarity as well as to further refine the focus group procedures. The researcher used cognitive interviewing to accomplish this task; pilot participants were asked to say out loud their thinking about a particular question, prompt, or direction. Using this *Think Aloud* method, pilot participants vocalized their thinking in order to refine both the questions and the process (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004). The participants reported that overall the questions were clear and gave feedback to the researcher in regards to describing to future participants how the questions built on each other as well as highlighting distinctions between questions.

The biggest changes that occurred as a result of pilot testing were the procedures and protocols for the focus group. The first finding was the need for visual prompts in regards to questions. During the pilot testing, the researcher did not give participants printed copies of the questions due to the fact that he wanted the participants to focus on one question at a time and not think ahead to future questions. A suggestion that surfaced was to visually display the questions in a PowerPoint presentation with one question per slide to ensure both visual clarity and focus. The next finding was that a structured protocol was needed for sharing responses to questions. Without the protocol, it was difficult to ensure balanced participation. The result is that the researcher now proposes to utilize a rotating round-robin format where a different person began sharing after each question and all participants were required to share, even if only to indicate agreement or a desire to not comment. The duration of this pilot focus group was 56 minutes.

The goal of the second round of pilot testing was to further check for instrument clarity, to refine procedures, and to see if the length of the focus group would change

with fewer questions (18 instead 27) and fewer people (2 instead of 3). The second pilot focus group was comprised of two school administrators. Both participants reported that the questions and procedures were clear. The duration of this pilot focus group was 44 minutes.

Credibility

Creswell (2003) stresses the importance of using one or more techniques to ensure research credibility. The researcher proposes to utilize several techniques to allay concerns about the credibility of this study, including: (a) thick, rich description, (b) peer debriefing, (c) member checking, (d) identification of potential researcher bias, and (e) inclusion of disconfirming or contrary evidence (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, the researcher included a comprehensive description of phenomenological data analysis, including the "recording of significant statements and meanings, and the development of descriptions to arrive at the essences of the experiences" (Creswell, 1998, p. 236); how the researcher provided a thick, rich description as well as data analysis techniques will be detailed further in the Analytical Techniques section. Second, the researcher engaged in a peer review process with one or more fellow doctoral students, which afforded the researcher the opportunity to discuss the research process, including peer review of coding approaches, potential themes, and conclusions. As stated in the Human Subjects Considerations section, the researcher utilized member checking and participants were offered the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of focus group transcripts. In addition, the researcher maintained a separate journal to identify any potential bias. The journal was used before and after each focus group to identify, acknowledge, and reduce any potential researcher bias. Lastly, the researcher set out to

provide disconfirming or contrary evidence to any potential findings or themes that reflect the lived experience or essence of the phenomenon.

Analytical Techniques

The researcher utilized Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach to analyzing the data. Table 5 provides a general outline of this approach:

Table 5

Data Analysis and Representation Process

Step	Description
Data managing	• Create and organize files for data
Reading, memoing	• Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes
Describing	• Describe the meaning of the experience for the researcher
Classifying	• Find and list statements of meaning for individuals • Group statements into meaning units
Interpreting	• Develop a textural description, "What happened" • Develop a structural description, "How" the phenomenon was experienced • Develop an overall description of the experience, the "essence"
Representing, visualizing	• Present narration of the "essence" of the experience; use tables or figures of statements and meaning units

Note. Adapted from *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches,* by J. Creswell, 2003, p. 148 Copyright 2003 by Sage.

The qualitative data collected from focus groups was subject to data reduction, preparation, and analysis. All focus groups were audio recorded; recordings were transcribed into a Microsoft Word Document for further analysis. Data were organized and prepared systematically throughout the study at each data collection interval. After the data is organized the first step is known as epoche or bracketing, where the researcher sets aside judgments or preconceived experiences in order to understand the participants'

experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Next, the researcher read through all of the qualitative data to get a "general sense" of the information and to begin to ponder its potential meaning (Creswell, 2009). The researcher next began rereading the text, making margin notes and forming initial codes. Initial codes and memos that represent emerging patterns and themes were developed for each of the following topics:

1. Overall experience (Questions 1A, 1B)
2. Positive experiences (Questions 2A, 2B)
3. Negative experiences/obstacles (Questions 3A, 3B)
4. General implementation strategies/advice (Questions 4A, 4B)
5. RTI Component 1: Level and fidelity of implementation (Question 5)
6. RTI Component 1: Experience with fidelity of implementation (Question 6)
7. RTI Component 1: Fidelity advice (Question 7)
8. RTI Component 2: Level and fidelity of implementation (Question 8)
9. RTI Component 2: Experience with fidelity of implementation (Question 9)
10. RTI Component 2: Fidelity advice (Question 10)
11. RTI Component 3: Level and fidelity of implementation (Question 11)
12. RTI Component 3: Experience with fidelity of implementation (Question 12)
13. RTI Component 3: Fidelity advice (Question 13)

The researcher then provided a description of his initial understanding of the experience. Next, the researcher listed significant statements, known as horizontalization of the data, for each of the 13 aforementioned topics, giving all statements equal weight (Creswell, 1998). Statements were then be reduced to eliminate repetitiveness and then clustered into themes or "meaning units" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). This was

accomplished through a cyclical "in vivo" coding process that uses participants' own words to form these units (Saldana, 2009, p. 75). The next step entailed writing a textural description "of the experience—what happened—including verbatim examples" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). The researcher then constructed a structural description of how the phenomenon was experienced, and sought to consider multiple meanings and perspectives. Next, an overarching description of the lived experience or essence was developed and represented in a qualitative narrative that conveys the findings of the analysis. This qualitative narrative was accompanied by tables of statements and meaning units. Finally, the larger meaning of the lived RTI implementation experience of SBLTs of 22 schools, which comprise RTI Cohort 1 in one section of a major urban school district, were extrapolated and interpreted.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative and phenomenological study was twofold: (a) to explore the RTI implementation experience of SBLTs in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California; and (b) to investigate experiences surrounding levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) at these same 22 schools.

Two overarching research questions guided the study. The first research question is as follows:

1. What is the RTI implementation experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?

Eight focus group questions were asked to gather data in order to explore this first research question. These eight focus group questions are as follows:

1A. How might you describe your experience in regards to RTI implementation?

1B. How might you describe the process of implementing RTI at the school site?

2A. What might be some positive aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI?

2B. What were some "moments to celebrate" in regards to RTI implementation?

3A. What might be some negative aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI?

3B. What were some obstacles to implementing RTI?

4A. What were some strategies that the team may have used to overcome these obstacles?

4B. What advice might you give an SBLT member who is about to begin RTI implementation?

The study's second research question is as follows:

2. What is the experience of School-Based Leadership Teams surrounding ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?

Nine focus group questions were asked to gather data in order to explore this second research question. These nine focus group questions are as follows:

1. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of a multi-tiered system of service delivery?
2. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of a multi-tiered system of service delivery?
3. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of a multi-tiered system of service delivery?
4. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of systemic use of the problem-solving process?
5. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of systemic use of the problem-solving process?

6. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of systemic use of the problem-solving process?
7. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of systemic use of data-based decision-making?
8. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of systemic use of data-based decision-making?
9. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of systemic use of data-based decision-making?

This chapter is organized into four sections. Section 1 reviews the research design as well as the process for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Section 2 details the findings of the focus groups and includes themes, textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and essences for each school and focus group question. Section 3 provides themes, textural descriptions, and structural descriptions for individual interviews; individual interviews occurred when only one person from a Cohort 1 school participated in the study. Section 4 presents an overarching description of the lived experience and conveys the composite findings of the analysis.

Review of Research Design, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore the lived experience of school leaders during the first year of RTI implementation in a selected school district. This approach allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of school leaders' experiences surrounding RTI and its implementation in the district being studied. The researcher collected data by attempting to conduct small qualitative focus groups with teams from 22 different RTI Cohort 1 schools. Approximately 66 educators

were invited to participate in the study; 50 of these educators participated in the study, and at least one person from each of the 22 schools participated. At 18 of the Cohort 1 schools, at least two people participated, thus creating a mini focus group; at 4 Cohort 1 schools, only one person participated, thus creating an individual interview. Lastly, while there was the option of either face-to-face or virtual communication, all focus groups and individual interviews were conducted face-to-face.

The focus groups began by outlining the research purpose, and all items related to informed consent and human subject protections. The researcher reiterated the fact that the focus groups would be audio recorded and that all responses would be confidential. The researcher then outlined the questioning process, including number, type, and general subject of questions. The researcher then asked each of the interview questions in numerical order and participants responded. Systematically throughout the data collection process, audio recordings were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document for further analysis. After all of the data was prepared and organized, the researcher engaged in the époque process, where the researcher sets aside judgments or preconceived experiences in order to understand the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The next step in the data analysis involved identifying key themes from initial codes and memos that represent emerging patterns in the transcripts. In order to identify themes, the data was subject to horizontalization and clustered into "meaning units" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). Next, for each focus group question, the researcher identified key themes and developed a textural and structural description, as well as an overall essence for each school that participated in the study. Lastly, a composite thematic

analysis, textural and structural description, and essence were developed, which conveyed the overall findings of the data analysis.

Focus Group Findings

This section details the results of the coding and thematic analysis methods that were used to explore the RTI implementation experience of SBLTs and investigate experience in regards to fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components of RTI. Key themes were developed for each research question. In addition, Section 2 details the lived of experience of SBLTs by providing a brief textural and structural description, as well as an overall essence, for each school and each research question. Creswell (2003) explains that the textural description describes "what happened", whereas the structural description describes "how" the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 2003, p. 148). Lastly, by combining the textural and structural description, and looking for commonalities, the researcher arrived at the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Question 1. Research question 1 explored the RTI implementation experience of the SBLTs in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California.

School 1: Themes. In regards to research question 1, five key themes emerged. The themes for School 1 are: achieving consensus was an obstacle; broad-based participation is necessary for successful implementation; RTI was an effective framework for instruction; redefining roles/collective responsibility needed for successful implementation; and support and professional development from the district was helpful.

Achieving consensus was an obstacle. One key theme that was evident for School 1 is the initial lack of buy-in and skepticism from school staff. Participants reported that staff believed that this was a district initiative that would not last for long. Participant B reported, "They believed it was something that was going to go away, which was the problem with implementing it." Similarly, Participant A reported:

> Well, at first it was, a lot of the teachers were hesitant about RTI because they felt that it was another flavor of the month and you know, this is something the district was going through, it was required, we were required to do it but I don't think a lot of the teachers believed in this.

Broad-based participation is necessary for successful implementation. Related to the concept of buy-in was the theme of limited participation. Participant B reported the following:

> You need to buy in. And you need to buy in outside of the SBLT. That's real important. SBLT can be, can work and be an advisory group and even be the operational group, to move the understanding of RTI but it has to be outside of the SBLT and people, the whole school, has to do their surveys. The whole school has to, you know, teachers have to know what's going on all the time, even if they don't want to hear it and they're bored by it. And that's just not teachers, administrators have to be in it. It cannot just be the seven people who can talk about it because it will end there. It's not a secret that people are trying to keep. RTI isn't a secret that I know I don't want to share with you. It has to be everybody.

Participant B added:

> But the problem is…that what we did was we implemented with a small group of people and so, it became really about us and not about the kids or about the larger group or the movement of the school. So that was an issue.

Participant A reported that strides had been made toward "accepting" RTI:

> I think, actually, they're coming to a point in which they feel that this could actually be very beneficial to the student and to them, for their work, too.
>
> Well, actually no, a moment to celebrate is that we're actually moving into the accepting of the RTI. That's the main thing that we actually want to make sure that everybody comes along with this whole movement and I think that's

> something to celebrate about is that we're almost there one hundred percent. Not a hundred percent but we're almost there.

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. Participants A and B both reported that implementation of RTI facilitated collaboration and helped build a collective understanding of instruction and or a framework for instruction. Participant B reported the following:

> I think we had a lot of aha moments in actually using data, you know, getting the technology tools, getting the materials…working with different protocols and dialoguing with, you know, dialogue and discussion with members of our group and actually coming to an understanding with what each one of us thought it was and where we thought we were going and what our vision was for RTI. I think that was really positive. Umm, it brought our understanding of instruction closer to a center because we were in very many different places. So, and understanding what exactly were specific student needs. [B]elief surveys, the perception surveys, I think were a good groundwork to initiate conversation but what it really was, was we had an opportunity to talk to each other about it.

Participant A reported the following in regards to teacher collaboration:

> For example, when they have students, they want to see a certain part, they look at the number, the data of the student but sometimes we have to go beyond and they see the social aspect, the family background that is impeding the student to be a successful student. Again, the idea that the student, the teachers feel empowered in making decisions and feeling that you know, they have an input when it comes to helping other students and helping actually their peers, to see when they have the other problems or they have experienced certain things and they can bring their input into that.

Redefining roles/collective responsibility needed for successful implementation. Participant B's advice surrounded the idea of redefining roles, or decompartmentalizing roles, to move towards collective responsibility for both implementation of RTI and ensuring that students are successful. Related to this is the idea of focusing on academics, behavior, and attendance, and how they are all interconnected. Specifically, B reported:

> The problem that people have doing, trying to implement something like RTI that's school wide, that's academic, that's behavioral, that's vertical, that's horizontal, is that they say okay, this my role and this is what I'm going to do

> within my role to support RTI. It doesn't work that way. It has to be linked. So whatever you're doing instructionally has to be linked to whatever you're doing with discipline, which has to be linked to whatever you're doing with psychology and the behavioral and the social aspect of the kids. A lot of people misunderstand it. Either it's a problem solving process, just to look at a small problem or a large problem and solve it or, then that's the only way they see it, just to solve whatever problem they have, and it's not. It's a way of looking at the problem and then figuring how to compartmentalize the problem with action steps. And I think people don't see it that way. And the other thing is, or they see it as like a huge thing, a structural thing. This is what we do with this and these kids, this is what we do with those kids, this is where we place kids. It's not about placement thing. It's not a responding to issues thing. Because when you do that, you compartmentalize it by roles. And when you, if you have roles, well that's not my job, I'm not going to do it. And next thing you know, it's not going anywhere because—you know, the ball doesn't even have to be dropped for it to not work.

Support and professional development from the district was helpful. Another theme that surfaced was support from the district RTI team. Participant B reported that this support was assisted with implementation efforts. Participant B reported, "I think we're ahead of other schools in all of, in central [district], in all of [district] that are implementing RTI because we had more support from the local district. I think that was really important." Participant B went on to state the different types of support that the school received from the local district:

> What we did was we did a lot of working together and [RTI expert] actually sat down with us and dialogued through the data. She guided our conversation, gave us guiding questions, provided us with very explicit ways to look at data, explicit data, she provided explicit data and broke it down for us. So, really, she helped us overcome a lot of the obstacles within the team…[W]e also had a chance to validate our different perspectives because we had people who were looking at behavior issues, people who were looking at instruction issues, people who saw obstacles that were operational, you know, such as teacher buy in, student understanding, programming issues.

Textural description. Participants A and B both reported many experiences related to the implementation of RTI. Participant B reported that the school had done independent research on RTI and had presentations on the problem-solving process;

however, this early work left teachers "confused" and without a "common language or a process". B reported that the school received support from the local district, and that the support helped with implementation and was important. B reported collaboration among the SBLT in regards to vision, data, and instruction. At the same time, this collaboration and knowledge didn't necessarily extend to reach the entire staff. B reported that the staff still has an incomplete understanding of the RTI framework. Lastly, B reports collaboration and support from local district around collaboration and data analysis.

Participant A reports that his experience has been positive and that the school has been able to understand what RTI means and how to implement it. A reported that the school needs to apply standard protocol approach to RTI. A acknowledges teacher resistance in the beginning and repeatedly cites how teachers are beginning to see the value in RTI. A reported that public relations is important to the success of RTI; in particular he reported that a clear purpose and everyone being part of the solution is needed. He also reported that it might be helpful to chunk the information and move step by step.

Structural description. Participants A and B are educators at a large, comprehensive high school. Participant B has been an active participant in the implementation of RTI but reported experiences as an analytical observer. B reported her experiences and those of her colleagues, but it wasn't abundantly clear how she felt about those experiences until the end of the focus group, where B reported the following:

> I like RTI as a process…I'm afraid that it's going to become like everything else that we do, which is as something we just create as a system and then it's going to get taken out of the sun. It's, I remember when we did the principles of learning. All of a sudden, it just disappeared and people forgot about it and no one talks about it ever again like it never happened. That's what I'm afraid of. That's my worst fear.

The uncertainty about the future of RTI in the district and at School 1 may contribute to a lack of personal investment in the implementation process.

Participant A has been an active participant in the implementation of RTI and seems to have experienced the implementation more positively than Participant B. At numerous points throughout the focus group, Participant A reported a positive shift in teachers embracing RTI and the benefits of RTI, stating, "I think, actually, they're coming to a point in which they feel that this could actually be very beneficial to the student and to them, for their work, too." Participant A added:

> Again, the idea that the student, the teachers feel empowered in making decisions and feeling that you know, they have an input when it comes to helping other students and helping actually their peers, to see when they have the other problems or they have experienced certain things and they can bring their input into that.

Essence. Overall commonalities in experiences for School 1 are that there was an initial lack of buy-in from school staff despite the work from the SBLT. During the process of implementing RTI, collaboration occurred among the SBLT and among teachers in regards to instruction and data analysis. School 1's overall experience with RTI was positive but work remains in order to achieve full, successful implementation.

School 2: Themes. In regards to research question 1, four key themes emerged. The themes for School 2 are: RTI helped ensure accurate placement; greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation; strong SBLT and administrative support is essential; and achieving consensus was an obstacle.

RTI helped ensure accurate placement. The first key theme that surfaced for School 2 was around programming and placement of students, which involves placement

in intervention courses that meet their needs. This issue is of particular concern for secondary schools. Participant A reported the following:

> Well, for me, as far as implementation goes, it was a real eye opener for counselors to realize how to uh, properly place students, you know? We had hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of kids that were improperly placed, you know? So that was a—how do I go about that? How am I going to—you know that takes so much more time, that type of thing.

Participant B echoed this theme of RTI helping to focus on accurate placement, stating, "For us, it was the acknowledgment that some of our students were misplaced, that we can go somewhere if we place them in the right place, in the right interventions."

Greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation. School 2 surfaced an important key theme around the understanding of the big picture that is required for successful implementation of RTI, which requires an overall vision, including structures and systems needed to support the framework. Participant B reported that this understanding was lacking at School 2. B reported:

> It was more of a- the professional development piece and the modeling piece, that was not there for us, for somebody to visualize and see how it would take place and how to put it into tiers. That was the most difficult part of the implementation process.

Participant B shared some of the strategies that the school used to build understanding:

> The strategies that we tried to use was more in the information part, piece. Having them understand what the RTI was instead of going into the full implementation process. They needed to have some background as to what RTI was, RTI squared is. And when we first started, we went in gung-ho, this is what we're going to do, without having them with that background knowledge and that created a big pushback. And I think that's what we needed to do at the beginning, just giving them that informational piece.

Strong SBLT and administrative support is essential. Related to the understanding theme was the need for a strong SBLT that had a deep understanding of the framework and could create the necessary vision, structures, and systems. Participant A reported:

> Piggybacking on that, it had to do with, you really have to have a strong team that really understands and buys into the RTI model and the framework. And visualizes so that it starts from the bottom up. It's not just coming down. And from the bottom up, I mean, the proper placement of the students, the proper PD and everything that comes with that framework. That ultimately became an obstacle for us because it wasn't a real understanding of what RTI really was, even coming from the team.

Achieving consensus was an obstacle. Adding to a lack of understanding around the framework as an obstacle, participants also reported that there was difficulty achieving consensus. Participant A reported:

> I think some of the negative experiences that we, was the pushback we got from some of the old guard who have been doing this for forty years or twenty years and you know, I've always been successful. Well, have you looked at your data lately? But that pushback you get because they think they're doing a good and you know, most of them are working hard, they're just not working smart. You know?

Participant A added, "Well, the main obstacle is to get a buy-in, school wide. It's very difficult to get everybody to buy in, school wide."

Textural description. Participants A and B are both educators at a large comprehensive high school that is divided into Small Learning Communities (SLCs). Both oversee the entire school but report experiences mainly in regards to one SLC. Participant A reported how RTI helped reform practices related to placement, differentiation and instructional strategies, and data analysis. A reported that RTI is an "investigative process":

> You know what, I think what I would say on that is RTI is not a program. It's a process. You know, it's an investigative process on where that child is or at and what can you do to move him along that timeline of, to proficiency. It's not a

> program. It's not something—if you don't do the process, it's not going to work. You have to do the process.

Participant B reported that the leadership, collaboration, and vision needed for successful implementation did not occur. Also, due to a limited understanding of RTI, systems were not implemented to afford proper implementation. B reported that now some tools are in place to help with implementation. Also, B reported that RTI helped with accurate placement and programming, and helped teachers reflect on the effectiveness of their instruction.

Structural description. Participant A seems to have experienced RTI implementation positively and appeared to have integrated the RTI framework with existing practices. Participant B seems to have experienced RTI implementation negatively due to a lack of collective understanding of the framework, as well as a corresponding vision and systems to achieve implementation.

Essence. Overall commonalities in experiences for School 2 are that structures are necessary for successful implementation of RTI. For example, RTI helped with accurate placement and programming. Building consensus was an issue. RTI helped teachers reflect of the efficacy of their instruction.

School 3: Themes. In regards to research question 1, five key themes emerged. The themes for School 3 are: RTI was an effective framework for instruction; RTI promoted collaboration; time is an obstacle; redefining roles/collective responsibility needed for successful implementation; and implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process.

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. The first key theme that surfaced from School 3 was how RTI provided an effective framework for instruction and

intervention. RTI helped organize existing efforts and create a structure. Participant A reported:

> It has been 2 years now, that we have been going through the trainings for RTI and I feel like for once, everyone in the whole school and every program that we have is nicely shelved for me, or nicely packaged where I know where everything belongs and before it was just like we had so many things going on, but now I know, oh that's Tier 1. That's Tier 2. There's even conversations now, maybe next year that should be Tier 2, so…the implementation has made a big difference in the language and how we speak to each other, but mostly for me personally, how it's been organized in a way that I understand where everything that we do, where is it, as far as RTI.

Participant B reported that RTI helped build a common language and was a "clear" framework for instruction. Participant B also reported that this understanding took time:

> For me too, I think that through the years, not years, through the months that we've been implementing RTI, it's been clarified more and more because at the beginning, it was very, not that it was disorganized, it was very clear from the beginning. But I think that having a common language at the school site, because now, been very, very important in the sense that now, I'm not trying to figure out what this particular organization looks like or what, where are we in the implementation? So it's nice to have clarity. And just to add to that, I think that pretty much, it created a framework for me, also, just to know you know, it's very clear and uh, it really made my job clearer as well because I know that my charge at the moment is to work with Tier 1 core instruction so therefore I feel, you know, there's where I am, as far as support for the teacher. So, implementation, it has created a very clear framework for me.

Participant D echoed both the sentiment of RTI creating a common language and the idea that a common language and understanding takes time, stating:

> Yeah, I was going to add to their points that it felt, I mean the experience on the process felt very stop and go, as in now I see it but next month I may not see it because of those, how the theory or the framework looks like, I understand it intellectually, but then, on the school side, the reality is confusing. It's like, well, what is this? Or that sense of I got it but the next time I didn't get it, until lately its much more clearer. So the process has been, maybe messy in terms of point A to point B to point C. There's up and downs, but all going positively forward.

Participant D further reported the positive outcome of taking time to build a collective understanding:

> Just, right from her comment, these are our kids, that it's a we and us rather than individual students, that and the language when we were talking about programs or things, the language, common language is we understand each other better, I hope, and it's the framework, so these are both positives, no matter what else comes our way or happens, we know that there's a anchor right to help us all build upon.

Participant A further specifies one way that RTI precisely impacts practice by providing a framework for instruction. Participant A reported:

> The positive aspect of this was that we were struggling with workshop time and struggling with differentiation of instruction until RTI came into the picture and it seemed like it just fell into place and then we were aware of what we were offering during workshop time. I see that as a real positive because it was very confusing for the teachers before. We have, if I can go into the moments to celebrate, when we look at our data and we see it just getting better and better, it makes us know that we're on the right track and that we're making progress and the students are showing progress and it makes the teachers then want to do more of the workshop things that we were doing with differentiating instruction and meeting the needs of our students.

RTI promoted collaboration. Another theme that surfaced was how RTI promoted productive collaboration, which involved improving instruction through dialogue and sharing best practices. B reported:

> And I think another part of the process that I really thought was important is that, that honesty part in really being honest with our grade levels and our colleagues, talking about how where we are in our craft. Having open conversations and being, having, in building that trust within one another to be able to understand if you're saying something, you're saying it because you really know what you're talking about or you really, your intentions are to make me improve as a professional and not to criticize me, so I think that that was another great aspect of RTI, that it really made us think about our craft and made us think about where we are as a school and how we can better collaborate.

Time is an obstacle. The theme of time as an obstacle surfaced for School 3 in regards to the difficulty of scheduling intervention during the school day. If a student receives intervention, s/he must miss another subject or activity. B reported:

> And I'm just thinking also, the negative aspect also would be the time and because we all, we wish we could have students here 24 hours, right, so that we could get them to where they need to be but I think that's the most important part, especially when we're talking about, you know, Tier 2 being outside, you know, that extra scoop, and when do you give them the extra scoop if, we already, our schedule's already pretty tight and compacted, so that's another.

Redefining roles/collective responsibility needed for successful implementation. Another theme that surfaced for School 3 was the use of manpower. Redefining roles and looking at how to best maximize the use of human capital is an important component of RTI. Participant D reported:

> Well, I think that, to begin with, especially with manpower, I think that we have to yet again shift our thinking and our way that we see each position as we speak just because it's going to require different people to do different things that we may not be comfortable doing now and so, or just it's out of the comfort zone so you have to come up.

A also noted the need to make changes in order effectively utilize manpower:

> But the manpower has been an obstacle, where sometimes if we had a little bit more manpower to come in into a classroom to help. We've been able to do that with the teacher assistants but I can see where next year we can organize so much better where the manpower moves kind of like an ambulance, and moves from grade level to grade level at the same time, rather than spreading it out and kind of doing a little hit and miss.

Implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. The last theme that surfaced for this school was that implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. Participant A began by discussing the importance of doing research in order to inform implementation efforts:

> I would tell them to first have a clear understanding and do the reading and the research and read some books together. That's kind of what we did. We read

> some books and discussed them and kept thinking well, what does that look like and had a lot of questions and reflections on it. And then we started implementing.

However, the focus group quickly shifted its focus to the importance of continually making changes and revising plans. Participant D reported, "I go back to the drawing board whenever as often as necessary. Not be afraid to say, well, I thought I knew that but now, what does it look like? It changes in your mind." Participant C concurred, stating, "You have paradigm shifts." Participant D added, "And that's okay, to accept that, as long as we need to constantly go back and not feel like failures because that happens to us."

Participant A discussed the importance of not waiting until everything is perfect before implementing and, instead, making "shifts" during implementation, stating:

> But we also didn't wait until we were perfect or until we knew how to do it. We…just said, let's use it for SSTs, or LATs. We just kind of put it out there and we were okay with experimenting and seeing if we were on or not and then like, made our little shifts and kind of said well that didn't work, so let's do it this way. So not being afraid of just implementing it.

Textural description. Participants A, B, C, and D are all educators at a RTI Cohort 1 elementary school. All participants report numerous experiences in regards to RTI implementation. Participants reported a great deal of learning in regards to utilizing RTI as a framework for instruction, including common language and a way of organizing all of the existing programs, interventions and efforts. Again, participants reported that this collective understanding did not occur easily and that it took some time. Participant D stated, "So the process has been, maybe messy in terms of point A to point B to point C. There's up and downs, but all going positively forward." Participant B reported that RTI helped promote collaboration, including using data and evidence, and affording open

communication and honesty around instruction. Participant A reported that RTI helped with differentiation. Participant D also noted the importance of sharing learning with the entire staff and that this requires time and is on-going. Participant A also reported:

> And then a lot of conversation with the SBLT members, really knowing what our purpose was for the implementation of RTI. And going out to the different grade levels and sharing this, so it was like we're only becoming strong in our understanding as leaders then sharing that information out as much as possible in supporting the teachers.

Overall, participants reported a lot of learning and research that informed their implementation, and that they constantly made adjustments, changes, and modification along the way but were not afraid of making mistakes or learning.

Structural description. Participants A, B, C, and D all experienced RTI implementation as a learning and growth process. All participants from School 3 experienced RTI positively; even when discussing obstacles, participants framed the obstacle as an opportunity to grow. For example, Participant C reported the following about organizing the tiers of instruction:

> I think that one of the things, if I can remember, is like thinking, just what falls into what category. We thought, oh, that's extra but you know, now in retrospect we didn't realize that it was extra but we thought it was extra because it was something out of the classroom but now we know that it's not extra because every single student is getting it so it's just, that's Tier 1. So, I think that, I mean, not to say it was a negative thing, but it was just an aha! Like it made us think, oh, wait a minute, we have to rethink everything we know, as we know it, refining it. So it's not necessarily a negative aspect, it's more of a, oh let's start working on other things again.

Essence. Commonalities of experience in regards to RTI implementation include an understanding of an effective framework for instruction and intervention, common language, and the experience of being willing to learn and continually revise plans based on new information.

School 5: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 5 are: broad-based participation is necessary for successful implementation; support and professional development from the district was helpful; and a strong SBLT and administrative support is essential.

Broad-based participation is necessary for successful implementation. The first theme that surfaced for School 5 is a clear focus on getting both the SBLT and whole staff trained and involved in RTI implementation. Participant A detailed how this started with selecting an SBLT and getting them trained, stating, "The first thing comes up is selecting a team first from the ground floor, to start with the implementation process. Then once the team has been selected, then comes the professional development - getting everybody trained." Participant B went on to explain that after the SBLT received training, the next step was to provide professional development to the entire staff, stating:

> Training of the team, understanding what was expected of them and then implementing that and incorporating it in our professional development…on Tuesdays our professional development times. As with anything, I think there is always resistance, but for the most part, once it was explained and the faculty began to see how it could work, people realized that they were already doing a lot of this, especially…at the first tier, the lower tier.

Participant A went on to further elaborate on how the SBLT created an implementation plan that included broad-based participation of staff:

> I first started - from an administrative role - I first started working with my administrative team in the areas that we needed to look at so far as student data is concerned. And we started making some decisions about what things we needed to have in place in order for this to happen. Then we thought about how we were going to roll it out to the staff as we received training in RTI, and the things that we needed to do and have ready - how we were going to do it, when we were going to do it. Creating an action plan, we looked at, you know, a time line of scheduled activities, and in working with our district office we were able to get support in all of the areas so far as training is concerned.

Support and professional development from the district was helpful. Another theme that surfaced in the quote above is support from the district. Participant A stated, "working with our district office we were able to get support in all of the areas so far as training is concerned." Participant A also discussed the District training that the SBLT received, as well as district personnel facilitating training at the school site, stating:

> The special days that we participated in, we received specialized training in all aspects of RTI. So we wanted to have like a general - a general working knowledge of what RTI is for ourselves first, and then looking at well, how can we roll this out to our staff? How can we get everybody on board with this process? So we looked at our facilitators from the local district and asked for school support from there. So we started with a small team of people, training them on Saturday, and having them to come to some specialized sessions, where that they could become knowledgeable of the process.

Participant B added additional detail about how district personnel trained staff members on Saturdays:

> We had those trainings and we trained more people who were not just on the team so that by the beginning of September we probably had about 25, 30 people who understood what it was we were supposed to be doing and tried to implement it and would call and ask or ask for scores and we constantly presented through PD and through online or just visiting classes - okay I see this. What does your data show? It shows, for example, students need more work in sentences. Can I ... We'd like to see more of that so that next time that came up, we knew what was going to be targeted and to move on. So that - I - I think that that really is a moment to celebrate because our district supported us in terms of finances to support additional PD's, to support us during the summer for 24 or 26 hours worth of RTI and many people signed up for that.

Participant B concluded the theme of district support and professional development by touching on the importance of the Cohort training days that occurred the district office:

> So a lot of the success for RTI, a lot of the success for our scores improving came from the team because those of us who were committed and went - was it - was it - once a month. We had 10 trainings. We came to every training. We came; we worked.

Strong SBLT and administrative support is essential. A key theme that came up repeatedly for School 5 was the need for a strong SBLT and administrative support. Participant C reported the importance of having an informed leadership team that is up-to-date on current research and literature. C reported:

> Definitely…whoever is on the leadership team has to be committed enough to believe in the work; and be willing to research it; and go outside of the box; and read the books that are out there, read the research; and bring in professional books; and have discussions, and talk about it; and be willing to really dig into it because, if the leadership team is not well-informed, it cannot possibly come out to the rest of the school. The team itself has to be very well-informed and - and very much their hands really wet with the information to be able to deliver it effectively. Because you want to deliver it in the right way, because if it comes out wrong as to you know, one more thing we have to do as opposed to, hey we're already doing this, we're just tweaking it a little bit.

However, Participant A responded in a manner that suggested that a "strong SBLT" also means having unity as a team:

> In schools, not just only this school, people have to be hand-picked. Everybody will not ... I - I look here and I see questions of implementation to fidelity. We talk a good game at the top, but what's underneath the surface? Am I really focused on that? Do I really clue in to what is to be done?

Participant A further added details about what is necessary in order to have a strong SBLT, stating, "We have to build trust. We have to build relationships. And if we can't build those two things, the work that we're doing here is null and void because it will never get implemented to fidelity." In addition to trust and relationships, Participant A added that there is a need for cohesiveness, collective responsibility, and keeping the focus on what's best for kids:

> If there is one who can't get it, or he falls down any sort of way, I need that team member to go down with that person so it could nurse it until it gets to the level that it needs to be. When teams win, everybody wins. It's not a one person who wins. If the team loses, the whole team loses, takes responsibility for it. So that is a big, big topic for any team to learn is that there needs to be cohesiveness within the team. It can't be when you see me this way, this is how I am. When I

> see you out there with staff members, I must be able to - to trust that the process is being discussed and implemented as it should be. And we need to constantly have those conversations around what's good for children. Keep it off of the I, me, you kind of thing, but it's for the child.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are all educators at a Cohort 1 middle school. All participants talked about the extensive professional development that accompanied RTI implementation. The SBLT received training and also delivered training to the school staff. Participants A and B reported that the support from the district was integral to RTI implementation. All three members reported the importance of getting the staff involved in implementing RTI through training and development, and detailed the various related trainings. Participant C spoke to the importance of having an informed SBLT and involving teachers in the process. Participant A explained that cohesiveness within the SBLT was crucial.

Structural description. Participants A, B, and C experienced RTI implementation in different ways. The tension and politics related to implementation were apparent. While all participants seemed to feel that RTI implementation was a good thing and that it was necessary to execute a carefully constructed implementation plan, there were underlying tensions within the SBLT.

Essence. Commonalities in experience involve extensive training and collaboration around RTI implementation. Also, all participants experienced some tension within the SBLT, which emphasizes the importance of a strong leadership team and administrative support.

School 6: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 6 are: RTI promoted collaboration; understanding of RTI vision,

structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation; and strong SBLT and administrative support is essential.

RTI promoted collaboration. When asked about positive aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI, Participant A spoke to the theme of collaboration thusly:

> I would say the collaboration itself, among the team, is really positive. Like people you know … We did not have that much chance before to look at our work and our data and talk about finding you know, solutions, you know, trying other strategies to help us to reach our goals. So I - I - I would say this is the most, you know, positive aspect that I know is collaboration with o - with others.

Greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation. As the focus group continued, the participants from School 6 had difficulty answering some of the questions related to RTI implementation and eventually the theme of the importance of a greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems surfaced. Participant A reported:

> For me in the beginning, it - the idea was not uh, clear to most of the faculty, and I don't know if something else needs to be done in the beginning of every school year to let everybody know that's what we're doing. That's our focus. That's our vision for this year. Uh, I personally did not see this a lot in the beginning and I wasn't part of the RTI trainings.

Participant A further added:

> That's why I…know what's going on there, but as a school, the school level in the beginning, this idea was not clear for me as a person. I don't know if it was clear for others or not, but for me, it - it was not there.

Participant B reported a similar experience:

> …the same for me, I think. I wasn't part of the first - the first team year meetings - but I did hear about it through my division, and so that helped me to understand and to kind of make sense of it. But when we did go this year, some things were barely clicking, and we're kind of barely kind of getting the idea of it.

Strong SBLT and administrative support is essential. The next theme that surfaced for School 6 was the importance of a strong SBLT and administrative support. Participant B spoke to the difficulty of trying to lead without administrative support. B reported:

> …it can be a burnout, and…we're trying to get other people involved, but you're still the person carrying the ball. And I think you know trying to get leadership like trying to get like, administrative leadership to say, this is what we need to do and take a stand at it so that we can carry it out. I think it's standing up to the plate.

Participant B concurred in regards to the need for administrative support and how a lack of leadership impacts implementation efforts. A reported:

> And - and in other words I would say the decision - the decision making process is not up to us as members. We would like to do stuff but again, we - we feel like, can I start this or no. Yes our administrators would listen to us, but it has to be coming from them. And I think this is not effective sometimes. You know you feel like, I'm tired, I don't know what to do.

Textural description. Participants A and B are both educators at a Cohort 1 middle school. Both participants joined the SBLT for year two of implementation. Both participants report experiences related to implementation and mainly reported being unclear about implementation efforts. Participants reported the need for a professional development plan and accompanying training for school staff. Both participants noted the need for strong leadership and administrative support.

Structural description. Participants A and B experienced RTI implementation with a sense of ineffectiveness and were frustrated by their inability to positively contribute to a fuller implementation. Both participants seemed to attribute the lack of implementation to a lack of clear vision, leadership, and administrative support.

Essence. Commonalities of experience are related to RTI training and a lack of transfer to participants' school site. Overall, there was a lack of clarity about RTI vision

and implementation efforts from these two SBLT members. Both participants noted the need for strong leadership and administrative support in order to achieve full implementation.

School 8: Themes. In regards to research question 1, two key themes emerged. The themes for School 8 are: greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation; and it is crucial to focus on Tier 1.

Greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation. The first key theme that surfaced for School 8 is the need for an understanding of the big picture and clarity around vision, structures, and systems. Participants reported that there was a great deal of information surrounding RTI but things remained largely unclear during the first year of implementation, and it wasn't until year two until things became clear. Participant B reported:

> It felt a little bit overwhelming at the beginning, trying to put the picture together and not until year two, towards the end, that's when it started to make sense, especially when the models were presented in terms of…the different tiers and problem-solving, and what was the other one where you had to go back and forth and between... the program as designed... So it was a little bit too much, and it began to be a lot more clear in how those particular components were gonna be... You know, the importance of how it was developing in response to intervention.

Participant C reported a similar experience in regards to information overload. Participant C also reported that relaying information to staff also involved a lot of frontloading. Participant C also spoke to the importance and difficulty of integrating RTI with current and past practices, while maintaining a clear understanding of the framework:

> Hearing a lot of information initially, and it seems like at first maybe... It felt the staff, we were spinning our wheels. Because you have to front-load a lot of information, you have to gather all that information, and so getting to the actual work seemed like it took a bit of time, in terms of doing a lot of the norms of

> collaboration, the trust, all that stuff, it seemed like initially we didn't get until a lot of the meat and potato stuff until much later.
>
> For me, it was…something completely uh, different and new, in trying to understand different components, and keeping in focus with what we were already doing, and trying to blend those things together, without really understanding. The RTI component was a little bit difficult at first, but now we understand a little bit more so, a bit easier to keep in focus.

Participant B corroborated the experience of an initial lack of clarity surrounding RTI but finally seeing the pieces coming together during year two. Participant B further reported:

> And I also think that having some kind of a visual way, like the bigger picture, in terms of the structure, as to, eventually we're gonna get here, but this is where phase 1, phase 2, phase 3, this is how they all come together. So for those people that need to see the bigger picture, it makes a little bit more sense, and not trying to put the pieces together as you go along in the process, because that was a little hard for me, I was like, OK, where are we going with all of this? And at some point it seemed that it was all separate. And then, once it was coming closer to the end... It was the big "Ah-ha!" seeing how all of this is coming out together. But I thought it would have been helpful for me to see something in terms of, some kind of visual representation for phases.

It is crucial to focus on Tier 1. Another theme that surfaced for School 8 is the importance of focusing on effective core instruction. Participants gave advice surrounding the importance of focusing on Tier 1 and also reported experiences surrounding their work at the school site. When asked about obstacles to implementing RTI, Participant A reported:

> Tier 1! Really looking at Tier 1 instruction. I think that a lot of the changes have been made outside of Tier 1, and that we still need to keep that as our main focus, because the majority of the students won't benefit from the other tiers.

Participant C echoed the need to focus on core instruction:

> focus, first and foremost, initially, on good Tier 1 instruction. Focusing on intervention in the classroom, and focusing on that so that you start to build a foundation of good first instruction. Because if they don't get that there, they're gonna gravitate toward Tier 2 and Tier 3, prior to having intervened with them.

> And I think, the classroom is the main concern. Because we do have things in place for Tier 2 and Tier 3, but there's just too many kids in those two tiers, because we're not doing enough of a good job in Tier 1. And changing the mindset, that 80% of the kids should get it after you do the first instructions. Because, if 30% get it, then teachers feel they've done a good job and its OK, but it's not OK: 80% should get it based on whatever it is. And you have the capacity to do it, so that first, good teaching is still an area of concern, in terms of the tier.

Participant A went on to further explain the intricacies that make focusing on Tier 1 a challenge:

> Well I think also the process of us being able to implement the tiers is one thing. But then when it looks at working with the belief systems of the staff and the surveys that we've done, that would be the part that I think we still have a long way to go. It's that idea, can all children learn, and it would be interesting take that survey again soon, but from conversations and discussion that I've been a part a- of, that foundation of belief is not there.

Participant C added additional experiences and considerations in trying to keep the focus on Tier 1, stating:

> Tier 1 instruction, I think it's very, very hard to get people to unlearn bad practices, and for them to understand what good first instruction is in terms of student engagement, being very purposeful in what they do, that people going through the motions and following the program, and doing what's in the book, or using the computer for math, or using all the different components, using the textbook... But, without a sense of purpose. It's been really difficult. People have learned certain things and they like to do it because they're used to doing it, not because it's effective.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are all educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants reported experiences related to their RTI training and implementation. Participants reported that initial training and implementation was difficult due to a lack of clarity about the overall vision, structures and systems needed, but that during year two, understanding was achieved by the SBLT. Participants reported extensive work around RTI implementation at the school site, including implementing a multi-tiered service delivery model and delivering PD at the school site around RTI and

data-based decision-making. School 8 SBLT members noted the importance and difficulty of focusing on and reforming core instruction. Participant A noted that belief systems were an obstacle to effective Tier 1 instruction and Participant C also added that unlearning "bad practices" was a challenge.

Structural description. Participants A, B, and C all seemed to experience RTI implementation as somewhat difficult and confusing at first, but as the pieces came together they felt more positively about the potential of the framework to improve instruction and outcomes at the school. Similarly, participants noted the challenge of focusing on Tier 1 instruction but also embraced the need to do so.

Essence. There are several commonalities of experience for School 8. Again, all participants experience information overload and a lack of a big picture understanding of RIT initially, but as time progressed things became clear and participants saw the potential in RTI. Despite extensive strides toward RTI implementation, the need to continually focus on Tier 1 was reported.

School 9: Themes. In regards to research question 1, one key theme emerged. The main theme for School 9 is that a greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation.

Greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation. The predominant theme that surfaced for School 9 was the need for clarity around systems, structures, and vision in regards to both RTI implementation and the trainings. This involves umbrella theme involves several items. First, the team reported experiences related to training. Specifically, Participant C

reported lacking an overall understanding of the problem-solving process and how it fit into the larger RTI framework:

> I think a negative experience for me was…I remember the whole problem solving method and just diving into that for two, three different sessions at a time. And trying to really understand it and not really get, grasping the examples being given with the data analysis. And, and all of that you know information it was like, a, a very convoluted sometimes where I felt that we, we weren't moving forward. And, and then all of the sudden was it year two it became a lot clearer, or towards end year one it became a lot clearer.

Participant A reported a similar experience about a lack of clarity in regards to the training and where it was heading, although both Participants A and C reported increased clarity during year two. Participant A reported:

> Yeah, I agree. I think that the negative, uh, aspect, experience that we had was that our team really came in into the training thinking okay year one, Tier 1. And so I guess our expectations were it's all going to be about Tier 1 and how we move along. So…we kept expecting that every time and, and we thought are we missing something because it, we felt we weren't getting it. So that kind of set us back a little bit as far as well how do we go back to school and share something that we're not really understanding because we're not getting what we thought it was supposed to be. So it wasn't until towards the end of the first year that you know we were being more outspoken. And I guess as conversations started where we started understanding the process and at the beginning of year two where it was more clear, then it, it started making sense. Then it, it was, uh, kind of a sign for us okay let's go because now we understand. But the first year was, was difficult.

Next, the team reported the importance of connecting RTI to prior work at the school site and a need to ingrate this new reform. Participants A, B, and C all reported the need for systems and structures to support smooth implementation. A reported:

> I don't think…it was as systematic. It was really going back and looking at what we were doing and but he had just said you know how kind of managing and said how can we bring it in and present it so that it's not an, an added thing. So it wasn't very systematic. We had to step back and kind of analyze and, and every, you know reflect on what, where we were and how we could kind of start bringing in those pieces.

Participant B reported a similar experience:

> I think as, as a teacher my experience was that it wasn't systematic yet because it wasn't systematic that I couldn't really make connections. I mean if it was confusing to me it, it was probably indicative of how staff was serving the information.

Participant C noted a similar experience and reported a specific system or structure that could assist with implementation:

> And, and piggybacking on that I think if, if it were a little bit more systematic I think we'd have like a flow chart. I think we developed, we started developing as, as SBLT a flow chart so what happens when the students are not achieving? How can we now move them into Tier 2 and, and then what do we do with those we're doing some progress monitoring, we're doing some assessment? How do we then get those students into Tier 3?

In addition, participants reported their efforts in working to create a collective understanding of the RTI vision, systems, and structures with the staff. Participant A reported:

> I agree, I think that there was time for the SBLT team to, to really meet and discuss and, and it was really open. So we were able to have people who if they weren't seeing it and they disagreed that they felt comfortable sharing it, sharing it. And I think in that process it made us again reflect on, on how we were addressing things. So that, uh, we did listen to teachers', uh, concerns. And because of that I, the disconnect that some of the teachers may have been feeling. You know our team went ahead and, and, and planned and did the pyramid in a sense like the teacher went back and, and run back through the whole explanation process so that we had that common language, we have that common understanding. And I felt there was a celebration because of teachers. I mean it wasn't us sharing it was the teachers putting things in place or putting them in the pyramid, the things that we had done. So, eh, to me it was a celebration that yes, you know we were on the right path, we were all maybe not at the same time but the understanding was there.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are all educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants from School 9 discussed experiences related to training, including the difficulty in seeing the overall training plan. Many pieces regarding the framework fell into place during year two. Participants noted the importance of

integrating RTI to past practices, as well as the need for concrete systems and structures. Lastly, participants reported experiences related to relaying information to staff and building a collective understanding of RTI.

Structural description. Participants from School 9 largely experienced year one of RTI implementation as a complicated and confusing endeavor, and it was not until year two that clarity around the vision, structures and systems occurred. This need for greater clarity extended to the overall training plan as well as clearly delineated steps to take in order to achieve full implementation.

Essence. Commonalities of experience include trying to integrate RTI implementation with past practices at the school site and working collaboratively to build a common understanding of the overall RTI vision, structures, and systems. In addition, participants shared both positive and negative experiences around district training.

School 10: Themes. In regards to research question 1, two key themes emerged. The themes for School 10 are: redefining roles/collective responsibility needed for successful implementation; and a greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation.

Redefining roles/collective responsibility needed for successful implementation. A key theme that surfaced for School 10 was the idea of collective responsibility for all students. Specifically, Participant A reported:

> Well I think it certainly brought to light to many teachers that we're responsible for all kids. And that we can't wait…there isn't anybody else out there to fix them. I think it also took away the mindset of some people that, well we have to test them.

Participant A also spoke to the idea of redefining of teacher roles as someone who intervenes' with struggling students in the core classroom and providing a wider

continuum of support that involves several different general education services for struggling students. Participant A reported the following about this shift:

> You know it's either they, they make it in the general ed classroom or they're special ed. That has not completely gone away, but I think people are starting to realize that it is the general ed teacher's job to intervene and give as much support to that student then maybe before they had done. I think you know we- we came a long way with understanding how to work SST's and all of those things but now we're back to the idea that for- effective first teaching is what has to occur for all kids. And so I don't think we're completely there but I think certainly the idea of well I'm just gonna take this kid and put him over there, it isn't prevalent anymore, which I think is a great thing.

Participant B concurred, stating, "Yes that, I have to agree on that."

Greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation. Another key theme that surfaced for this school is the need for systems and structures to support implementation. Participant A reported:

> I guess the most important thing that is crucial to implementing anything an-and it's really just how I think: systems. Systems is extremely important. You can bring everything else in later but understanding the system is probably uh, the first thing that you need to do. You need to know who the players are. You need to know how you're going to do it and when you lay it out that way although you have an inner struggle because it tends to look like it's very top-down, people really feel good about that. Because n- they okay how is it, okay now I just, I have to put it in between my this and my that and they can handle that. When, I think when you deliver it another way it's very crazy. Now about the content and how we're gonna do it, definitely collaborative. But the system, the SBLT has to understand it so they can take it out to the field or to the teachers and that relieves a lot of tension. That would be my number one piece of advice.

Participant A further added:

> Well I think there was…direction from the district but I think where uh, the implementation was a little muddied sometimes was getting the staff to understand that this is now the law and these are things that we need to do. So it was that that kind of push and support concept that we had to deliver to the staff. And I think to a certain extent we ourselves are still grappling with how does this look like. Because on the one hand there was a lot of well you can do it like this and like this and like this and like this and then on the other hand I think some of us wanted to just… step one step two step three. So it was it was a mix of both worlds I guess.

Participant B reported a similar experience, stating, "I would definitely agree with that. It was difficult, I would just say that only because it was hard to know where to begin."

Textural description. Participants A and B are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participant A was new to the school during the second year of implementation and Participant B was an SBLT member for year one and two. Participants reported not having a clearly defined structure for implementation during year one. At the same time, RTI brought about a sense of collective responsibility for all students being successful and changed services, such as the way students are referred to special education. Another positive aspect of RTI that A and B reported were increased intervention and differentiation during Tier 1 or core instruction, including the use of paraprofessionals. Participants A and B noted that obstacles included scheduling and technology for data use. Participant A noted the importance of systems and Participant B remarked on the importance of maintaining a unified team approach.

Structural description. Participant B found the implementation process somewhat overwhelming and confusing:

> For me it was…a little overwhelming to tell you the truth, because we didn't really know what RTI really was, although we heard through special ed descriptors what it was a little bit about. The fact that we did get to go to the district for cohort meetings was helpful because it explained a lot of things, but overall it was a little bit confusing.

When asked about what advice to give an SBLT member who is about to begin RTI implementation, Participant B responded by stating, "Run, no [laughing] I'm just kidding." Participant A's experience during year two seemed to have been more positive, and A was able to create systems that integrated both RTI and her vision for the school.

Essence. Commonalties of experience for School 10 involve the desire for clear structures to support implementation. Both participants also reported positive ways that RTI has impacted instruction and intervention at the school site.

School 11: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 11 are: RTI was an effective framework for instruction; support and professional development from the district was helpful; and implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process.

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. One key theme that surfaced for School 11 is that RTI was helpful in providing a framework for instruction and intervention. Participants also noted the receptiveness of staff to the framework. Participant A reported, "I think it help unify the school's ideas about intervention especially bringing a team together that was more cohesive in their understanding and how to go about it. And it helped us really move in a good direction." Participant C added the following:

> I just found that the in working with the staff that the teachers were really receptive to what we were trying, and really open to experiment with us and - and really didn't hesitate to dive in to whatever we were asking them to do.

Participant B added how RTI has afforded teachers a framework for addressing student needs:

> Now it's not, oh I don't know what to do with these kids, these kids a sort of that term is sort of disappearing and now they're looking at data and just addressing a standard addressing what was right, what wasn't right.

Support and professional development from the district was helpful. Another theme that emerged was that the team had on-going support from the District. Participant C stated, "We felt very supported in terms of if we ever had any issues, along with what

[name] said, but then if we had issues [name] and with the others that supported us, very helpful." Participant A described a similar experience:

> I think very positively the support we received as far as [name] or whomever was helping us along the way, because it did clarify some of the aspects that we didn't use in the past. And I think…as…things arose was also helpful to…move forward because there was further explanation. And it and it was consistent. Consistency…was key.

Implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. Another key theme that surfaced for School 11 was not being afraid to implement and make adjustments as needed. A reported:

> And I think for us it wasn't as wait and see as they train us, because I know as I talked to other people, well we haven't started yet. And for us it was, we went, we're gonna do something, we're gonna start, we're gonna implement, and we did it.

Participant A added, "So it wasn't a question of lets wait and see, it was like dive in, get it done, and see what's gonna happen." Participant B discussed how the team made revisions and how implementation has changed:

> I think it also metamorphasized because…it wasn't static. It didn't stay the same from when we started. You know and we did have per- different personnel but it's changed. And I think the teachers have liked to see the change and the growth, because it doesn't look like it looked last year. So it's gotten better in effect.

Participant C reported a similar experience, stating, "If we didn't do something perfectly that's okay. We'll tweak it, we'll fix it, we'll change the terminology if we went slightly awry in our path."

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are all educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants reported receiving training, support form the local district, and several experiences related to implementation at the school site. Participants reported that the staff collaboratively planned how to best implement RTI.

Structural description. Participants A, B, and C experienced RTI implementation overwhelmingly positively. Participants reported a positive training experience, positive support from the district, and a smooth implementation at the school site that included buy-in form the teachers. Participant C reported:

> I never sensed any negativity about the process. The people just, when we would meet in grade level then we got back here it would be, whatever it takes. I want my kids to succeed and what is that going to take?

Essence. All participants reported similar experiences, and findings listed in the textural and structural descriptions apply to the entire team. The uniformly positive and smooth RTI implementation experience is noteworthy.

School 13: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 13 are: RTI was an effective framework for instruction; implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process; and reading simple books on the change process was a consensus building strategy.

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. Participants from School 13 reported that RTI was an effective framework for instruction. In particular, RTI helped focus instruction, improve rigor, and promoted the use of data to drive instruction. Participant A reported:

> My experience has been a positive one with the whole RTI implementation at this school. And, from the teacher's perspective, it helped us narrow our focus, look at our needs and become the experts of what our needs were from student level, to grade level to class.

Participant B went on to explain how RTI set the stage for interventions within the core and using data to drive instruction:

> I agree and, and continue on with that line. The first year set the basis for people, people's awareness and attempts to do what they could in the classroom and work

> with what we were proposing, and having more of an awareness of tracking data and, and I think that that has continued on.

Participant A went on to describe how, as a result of RTI implementation, public accountability increased rigor at this school:

> I feel that the rigor increased because of RTI, uh, part of that awareness is also that we were held more accountable with our data because we really used data to drive the instruction, it was public information. And everything was done during the meetings, and so, everyone knew what every grade level was doing and thinking and their areas of weakness and strengths.

Participant B concurred and added that these practices have continued throughout year one and two of implementation:

> And the other thing that I think continued on was, uh, was the dialogue at the grade level. Where I think that the Tuesday meetings this year were a lot more focused and I just think that…people kept up on the continuum of…really driving instruction with the data throughout the meetings that, we, the grade levels had this year, too.

Participant A went on to detail how during the consensus building process, teachers had an epiphany that change needed to occur and latched on to the pyramid framework aspect of RTI, stating, "I feel the teachers had that moment to say, alright, what I'm doing is not working, let's do this. And it was about pyramids. That was our vocab, our word of the year." Participant B added, "That was the word of the year." Participant A went on to report, "Pyramids, pyramids, how's your pyramid, what kind of pyramid do you have? So…everyone was on the same board with that idea." Participant C added details surrounding ways in which the RTI framework has impacted instructional practices and ended with the statement the school has experienced "gains" in student achievement:

> For me as an administrator here at [school name], I feel that the idea of the three tiers, that's very positive. One of the things when it comes to Tier 1, what comes to mind is the IWT [Individual Work Time] and that something that was started

> before I got here. But that have continued this year when it comes to the Tier 1, the differentiating instruction, helping in the classroom, the, you know, I do collect the IWT plans every Monday I look at them and I do visit to make sure that it is happening in the classroom. On what it is that is being differentiated for our students. One of the things, children learning center last year. So we continued with this idea of the learning center, and the having, you know, the TAs working with the student's one on one.
>
> So yes, differentiating all the different tiers and the positive aspects that to differentiating instruction for students. And we've seen some gains, and you can tell.

Implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. Another key theme that surfaced for this school was that implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. Participant A reported:

> Well, looking at, our year of implementation, I think we tried a lot of different things and we revised them as we went, based on teacher response and student response. The learning center, was re, you know, that got revised over and over. And then the core assessments that the, that the TAs were working with the teachers on, and using as a basis for IWT, that also went through lots of revisions. I think…we had a year of really trying to refine the practice of what people were actually doing and what was working and what wasn't. And…I think we, we pretty much covered the bases eventually, but…it was a process.

Participant C added details about the process of implementing and revising:

> It wasn't something that I feel that I was told, when they said, now you guys are doing this because you guys have to. It was more of, let's look at what you've been doing, lets see, has it worked. Has it not? Let's put your thinking in these frames. Where is your thinking at? So we said okay, so what's next. So I think it was part of a lot of the strategy that were taught at the meetings, at the local district meetings, that were brought back and implemented and, for me, I can only speak for myself as a teacher, that that's the way I took it. Oh this is where my teachings at, therefore what do I need to do to bring it up.

Reading simple books on the change process was a consensus building strategy. A theme that surfaced for School 10 was that the whole staff engaged in professional reading around simple books on the change process as a consensus building strategy. Participants A, B, and C reported that this was an effective strategy. Participant A stated:

> The process, well, I think being something, the new model for people, for teachers, there was a little resistance in the beginning. But as we read different professional readings and…we were able to apply different scenarios with what's going on right now in this, what, what's going on in this school. I feel the teachers had that moment to say, alright, what I'm doing is not working, let's do this.

Participant B later added:

> I think, as though, what comes to mind when I think of strategies is the, that it was, okay remember the articles we read, but I also like the connections we made with other readings with other short books like, what was the name of the book?

Participant B later recalled that the book was *Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions*, and noted that they also read *Who Moved My Cheese?: An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*.

Participant C recalled that they read *Our Iceberg Is Melting* and two other books.

Participant C summed up this strategy thusly:

> Just reading those books and making that connection to what we're doing already, it made sense, you're right, we can't just sit here. There is, we have move because things are changing and it, it made, I feel that as a practitioner, it made me as a professional more reflective and it helped refine my thinking of how I do things.

Textural description. Participants from School 13 reported experiences around RTI implementation at their elementary school site. Participants reported how RTI has been an effective framework for instruction and some of the ways that practices have changed, including increased focus in instruction, increased rigor, using data to drive instruction, and public transparency around data and goals. The SBLT reported that implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. The team also gave insights about how to build consensus among staff through reading simple books about the change process.

Structural description. Participants from School 13 experienced RTI implementation as a beneficial and productive way to reform teaching and learning at their school. Participants even viewed revising implementation efforts as a positive experience, and viewed RTI as an effective framework for instruction.

Essence. Commonalities of experience include extensive work towards implementation and reporting that RTI promoted an increased focus on instructional efforts, which yielded positive results. Participants shared experiences related to how they achieved these positive results, including ways of building consensus and continually improving implementation efforts.

School 14: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 14 are: support and professional development from the district was helpful; academic growth as a result of RTI implementation; and implementation was smooth.

Support and professional development from the district was helpful. The first key theme that surfaced for Participants A and B from School 14 was that the support and trainings from the District were helpful. Participant B reported, "Well with the process I would, just add, that going to, through, with the cohort, with the training, really helped us to implement it from year one." Participant B also reported that the SBLT collaborated around implementing key ideas from the trainings:

> I think having our RTI team work together really well, and, and, come back from the training to implement RTI at our school. And just, with them, seeing the progress that the students are making and then wanting to do more, and more, and more and keep doing it and keep making it better.

Academic growth as a result of RTI implementation. The most salient key theme was surfaced repeatedly throughout this focus group that RTI produced positive results

for this school. Participant A began by discussing the results that the team has seen at the kindergarten level, stating, "Well for me, it's been great. I had the opportunity to work with a specific grade level. Kindergarten, and uh, we've seen very positive results in terms of the implementation." Participant B went on to add that the results produced by interventions could be "seen across the grade levels":

> And just school-wide, we, I was saying, we, we have really great implementation across the grade levels, not just in K. But we have another learning center that services grades one through five and we've also seen phenomenal progress over there.

When asked about moments to celebrate in regards to RTI implementation, Participant B reported, "Just looking at the progress and the data. That's something to celebrate." Participant A added, "for me, I'm having the opportunity to exit students that were part of those groups that needed help, that were at risk at the beginning. So those were moments of celebration." Participant B further remarked, "And then our other learning center too. She exits students all the time and they celebrate, they get a book, they get a pencil, a bookmark and… Cause, they…made it. And usually they don't…return once they exit." When asked about advice around RTI implementation, Participant B again, reported that a key to getting buy-in was sharing results:

> I would just talk about the results that we have gotten. Like for instance, with our *Language!* class, with our *Language!* classes, because at the beginning of the year I identified the students who needed *Language!*. Just when I look at the progress they've made, they've grown like grade levels, all of them. So, it's like, I would, advise them, to look at the data and keep looking at it, cause you're going to see results like that.

Participant A concurred, stating, "I'll second that."

Implementation was smooth. Another key theme that surfaced for School 14 was an incredibly smooth implementation. In addition to positive results, positive training

experiences, Participants A and B reported an overall smooth implementation. Participant A shared her experiences with implementation efforts, stating, "Well for me it was easy, since I was given the opportunity to work with a specific grade level and the teachers…welcomed the help, the assistance I was able to provide in the classroom." Participant A went on to share that another positive aspect was the "openness" from faculty:

> The openness, I suppose from the teachers. The buy-in from the teachers that RTI is something that…helped to differentiate instruction in the classroom and we have some people outside the classroom that can provide support as well to help the students being more successful.

Participant B added that the SBLT wanted to continually do more and keep improving implementation efforts:

> I think having our RTI team work together really well, and, and, come back from the training to implement RTI at our school. And just, with them, seeing the progress that the students are making and then wanting to do more, and more, and more and keep doing it and keep making it better.

When asked about negative aspects in regards to implementation, Participant B reported, "I don't think there are any negative aspects to it. It's all been positive," and Participant A agreed.

Textural description. Cohort 1 elementary school Participants A and B reported implementation experiences and ways in which RTI has changed practices at the school site. Participants reported receiving helpful training and working as a team to implement RTI. Participants also reported that interventions produced academic growth, which further propelled implementation efforts.

Structural description. The overwhelmingly and unequivocally positive experience of Participants A and B was remarkable. Repeatedly, participants remarked

how the results were something to celebrate. In addition, school staff was open to implementation efforts and there were no negative aspects to implementation.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for School 14 include reporting the success of various interventions, including differentiation in the core classroom. The SBLT implemented ideas and structures from the training to a receptive staff.

School 15: Themes. In regards to research question 1, four key themes emerged. The themes for School 15 are: academic growth as a result of RTI implementation; reading simple books on the change process was a consensus building strategy; RTI was an effective framework for instruction; and broad-based participation is necessary for successful implementation.

Academic growth as a result of RTI implementation. A key theme that surfaced during the focus group for School 15 is that academic growth occurred as a result RTI implementation. However, Participant A was new to School 15 and reported seeing growth at her former school, which is also a Cohort 1 school. Participant A reported:

> I feel that at, in year one at my previous school, I believe that the RTI was partially responsible for, we finally got over 700 in AYP, I mean API. And we met AYP and safe harbor and I really believe it was that focus of this is what we do at Tier 1, this is what we do at Tier 2, this is what we do at Tier 3 and that, let's look at the data. I had already been doing data meeting with teachers, but it got better, with the Tier 1, Tier 2. That framework, I just think, and I saw that here at [school name] too. The first data meeting I had with teachers was sort of, iffy. And then after that, they got, they got really good. By the end of it, it was really deep, were people were really digging into what worked, what didn't work or whatever. So, that's what I see if, from, from year one at least, that's what I think contributed to the success that I had at the previous school.

Also, Participants B and C also reported seeing progress at School 15. Participant A reported:

> For me a moment, a moment to celebrate is now they're serving and going over end of the year DIBELS, looking at, like our first graders, who started in January,

> we had a list of, like the attendance of first graders, and there was like, classes that have 10, 12. And now, in the DIBELS, they, there's like, they are down to 1 or 2 intensive students only.

Reading simple books on the change process was a consensus building strategy.

A theme that surfaced for School 15 was the strategy of reading books on the change process as a way to build consensus for RTI Implementation**.** Participant C explained how the text connected to the work of RTI at the school site:

> One of the things that I think what helped, even with me being as a RTI cohort one and going to the meetings, it was a book we read. The Iceberg. So that really, it was like, when I was reading, when I first started it, okay it's a simple book. But then, it was, it had a lot of in depth so it was basically, and we did an activity of, okay, we're all at one point, we're not all no-no's, or we're not all, you know a certain other penguin. At one point we will be every different character in that book. So that was, and the whole staff read it, so it was something that brought us together on a common ground, in order to understand RTI.

Participant A shared that both schools (her former and current school) read simple books on the change process as a consensus building strategy. Participant A further elaborated on the connections between the text and RTI:

> I would agree cause I did that at both schools. We read, *Our Iceberg is Melting*, and it makes, it's a perfect connection and it, I think that really helped people, in fact, we talked about, we sort of shifted from pyramids into icebergs. Now what is your grade levels iceberg and we talked about that. It's still the same connection, so I think that helped because whatever they were saying about whatever, it's sort of, you read the book and you're like, oh, this, you know, they could, they were able to make connections to it and we were able to move forward, so it sort of stopped some of that other stuff that was going on.

Participant C added, "And you know and it also brought…a clear understanding because people that we thought, oh they're going to sign up as being a no-no, they didn't sign up. No one was a no-no." Participant A agreed with this sentiment, further detailing the rationale and purpose behind reading *Our Iceberg is Melting*:

> I think everybody should read *Our Iceberg is Melting*. I truly believe, because it's so simple and it, it just makes it clearer for people that we all have to work together as a team and if you, what's, what we've talked about was the, the iceberg, the part that's on top looks beautiful and the underneath part is the issue. And that's our issue at the school. Everything looks beautiful, but what's underneath. Why are the kids not reading fluently? Why? Really digging into what is it. And is, do the kids need Tier 1 intervention, Tier 2, Tier 3? I just think, I would recommend that book to every school. Every RTI school should read that book because it just, it's a simple fable, but it, it really brings it to life.

Participant C explained how grade levels created their own icebergs and examined different perspective throughout the school:

> And one of the things that also…helps is by grade level creating their own icebergs. Because it gave, it gives you a different perspective. Even though we're all at the same school, we all have the same issues with, you know, Johnny or Abel or you know Maria. But there's different perspectives. Because, people assume, okay they're fifth grade so, they're more independent, but yet, children behave sometimes like first graders. So, I think, and also, us as an ILT [Instructional Leadership Team] going through the process of our own iceberg. Because we have the whole picture.

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. Another key theme that surfaced for School 15 is that RTI helped create a structure or framework to organize instructional efforts. Participant A reported:

> I was at…a different school for year one, as compared to year two. So, we spent a lot of time in year one focusing on Tier 1 instruction and IWT in particular. So that was the focus in year one at this school that I was at. That's what we spent most of the time on. We did a couple of presentations with the staff, but we really focused on Tier 1, IWT, that's your responsibility in the classroom. We had a learning center. We talked about Tier 2, and we did do like after school and Saturday intervention. Tier 3 and the language program Tier 3. So we just tried to set a framework so teachers understood where- what their part was because when we first presented, teachers thought IWT was Tier 2. So we were trying to explain, no, that's your responsibility, it's part, actually, the core programs, so… That was my experience of the year one implementation.

Participant B went on to discuss how RTI created a learning center to house interventions, but that it was also necessary to continually focus on core instruction:

> Here at [school name], uh, year one, it was, uh, we started the learning center like a semester before the first of last year and we start with the learning center. First time we've had a learning center. We had the first semester, we had like, pull in, push in. And then we had a real learning center last year. And what I have experienced with that is, like, teachers expect to, like, to go to learning center and it's taken care of, you know, it's like, not my responsibility anymore. This year I see more it's been the focus with IWT, they have to turn in plans, so there trying to push for, to start with Tier 1 in the classroom.

Participant C added how practices had changed from the first year of implementation to the second year:

> The difference, I felt from last year and this year, there was more, clear expectations. And it was clear of what the responsibilities were at each tier. So it wasn't, oh, automatically you go and have a LAT [Language Appraisal Team] or they're going to go into special Ed. It was more clearly defined.

Broad-based participation is necessary for successful implementation. Another key theme that surfaced for School 15 is the need for broad-based participation and understanding of the RTI framework. Particularly in year one of implementation, participants reported that information was not shared with faculty. Participant C reported:

> I think our obstacle, last year compared to this year, was, I don't think the staff was informed about the RTI. It was, basically we met as an ILT, and the ILT decided to implement RTI. Uh, staff… We went to the training, the RTI trainings, but, it was never brought back to the staff. So, it was like what happened, in Vegas stays in Vegas. Until we had, if I'm not mistaken, two opportunities to share out with staff, this year. So, were they literally made their own pyramids. And even making, it was an ah-hah moment because even making the pyramids, they assumed, okay, because a pyramid, you know, starts wide at the bottom, even if I have 25 percent, it's still gonna be, be the bigger piece. So that, even that, was a challenge. Yet, when we met again and we looked at data again, it was, they were, they were accustomed to it, so they had a clearer picture on it.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participant A was at another Cohort 1 school last year and is new to School 15 for year two of implementation. Participants noted academic growth as a result of RTI implementation. Participants reported reading *Our Iceberg is Melting* as a

consensus building strategy and also as a way of understanding the RTI framework. Overall, RTI helped organize instructional efforts, such as organizing tiers of intervention. Participants also reported the need for collective understanding of the framework for all faculty members and that this improved from year one to year two.

Structural description. Participants reported different experiences from year one to year two. Participant A had positive experiences during both years but changed school sites. Participants B and C reported that the first year of implementation was somewhat confusing and unproductive, but during year two and with new leadership, their experience improved.

Essence. Commonalities for Participants A, B, and C involve working with faculty in regards to implementation, including building consensus, having teachers plan Tier 1 interventions, and building an infrastructure for Tier 2 and 3 interventions at the school site. SBLT members also shared that implementation efforts improved during year two, which yielded positive reform for their school.

School 16: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 16 are: implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process; achieving consensus was an obstacle; and RTI was an effective framework for instruction.

Implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. A key theme that surface for School 16 was the need to continually revise implementation efforts. Participant A reported:

> I think we create these interventions or we create these, you know, to target each tiers and sometimes maybe negative is we don't get, you know, I think we're hoping for too much and it's not really producing, so even though we're still struggling with our… with our students, you know, we'd want them to be a

> benchmark but they're not. I mean, you know, they're not there yet. So it's like… so it's, you know, it's a work in progress.

Participant C added that there is a need for flexibility and fluidity in regards to revising implementation efforts:

> So that part I really like, but it's true, implementation is very different when you actually have to do it than when you're just reading about it, and what I like though is… what I… what I liked, I think about our implementation is that we were fluid about it. We were like, okay this isn't working, okay let's change it a little bit… not the whole thing, but let's tweak it a little bit and see if this… maybe more teachers will buy into it, but yeah, sometimes it's really hard when not everyone buys into it.

Participant C added that a lack of understanding could contribute to an ineffective intervention, which will then need future revision:

> I found that, at least for me, was negatives…and not negative that… How would I put it? It turned out to be negative because of the lack of understanding, I think, and the teachers of what is our work, especially for intervention teacher, is their understanding of what is it that she was trying to do. I think it was…their expectation was different than our expectation, so sometimes it became negative. No, not that the work wasn't being done, but in that sense…I mean the work was still being done, but negative in the sense that unfortunately to just to not understand. So I think we need to work on that.

Achieving consensus was an obstacle. As certain quotes in the previous theme foreshadowed, achieving consensus was an obstacle for School 16. Participant A reported:

> Well-well, implementation… yeah, implementation is a lot more difficult than, you know, what we read in an article. I mean, ideas are good, but then how to get everybody to buy into the same concept is-is lengthy. I wish that it could be, uh, a process that could be streamlined a lot quicker sometimes, but-but it's not, so, I think in our implementation, I think because we've… the team has gone to the trainings, uh have a little bit more background with it. But I think in terms of the process of at the school site, we've talked a lot about it and we've thrown the triangle. Everybody knows the triangle. But still there's still a lot of, I think there's a lot of work that we need to do in terms of coming in and planning, more PD, more… this is why we're doing this. They're not, you know… so that we can all get on the same page.

Participant C concurred with this sentiment. Participant B went on to add:

> It's been…kind of like an uphill battle because…the ones that do go to the meeting, the ones that hear this information, I mean it sounds sound. It sounds strong. It sounds like it's something that will work, but then when you come in to try to implement it at the school site you have a lot of resistance or confusion from everyone else who has not been to those meetings that they want to challenge the-the core principles of what RTI is, which you know is that Tier 1, good first teaching and are we really in agreement of what first teaching looks like, and when you try to you know, bring the data to say are we doing good first teaching and it contradicts with the opinion, gut feelings and all the just held beliefs that teachers have, then-then they contradict and then it comes to that point where it's kinda like is RTI gonna be as accepted or bought into or… as-as quickly as, you know, some… it is at-at the team level that went to that training?

Participant A added some next steps and advice around building consensus:

> And-and I think like, g-giving more opportunities for…to engage teachers, well us as a school in conversation around that, which brought like the Adaptive Schools training that we attended and just to give them more opportunities to start talking. Because, you know, that's the only way were gonna come…we're gonna bridge that.

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. Although consensus was not fully achieved at this school, participants reported that RTI helped build a framework for instruction. Participant A reported:

> I think something positive that I have felt is, like, it's given us a framework to kind of put the… our work in, so, you know, that everybody, you know, everybody has that same terminology and kind of understands the tiers and, you know, what we're trying to do and how we're trying to work them. So I think that's been positive.

Participant B agreed with this statement. Participant C summed up by adding that progress has been made:

> And then getting used to it too. I mean, just the fact that they've… more willing to open up their doors. Like when the intervention has… teacher has to come in. So… it's true. It's just having the common knowledge and being willing to open be to it.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants reported attending trainings, doing research, and reading about RTI. Participants noted that implementing RTI at the school site was a completely different experience than just reading about it. Participants reported implementing universal screens and various interventions. Also, participants reported that certain interventions needed revising. School 16's SBLT discussed the importance of giving ample time for the faculty to dialogue about RTI and related items. Participants also noted two obstacles, scheduling and money, and the need for flexibility in order to overcome these obstacles.

Structural description. Participants from School 16 experienced RTI implementation as somewhat of an "uphill battle." Participant B reported that implementation was "rough." The SBLT struggled with building consensus and a common understanding of RTI despite their hard work to implement the framework. A positive aspect that was noted was increased dialogue among various stakeholders about RIT and the need for RTI.

Essence. Participants from School 16 have embraced implementation efforts, including building consensus and a common understanding with staff members. Participants have also implemented universal screens and various interventions but have discovered that implementing RTI is difficult in practice.

School 17: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 17 are: support and professional development from the district was helpful; implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process; and it is crucial to focus on Tier 1.

Support and professional development from the district was helpful. One key theme that surfaced for School 17 is that support and professional development from the District was helpful. Participants reported that the school started "from scratch" and that there was extensive learning that occurred during the first year of implementation. Participant B reported:

> The program, uh, and I think given we were in year one, it was also a sort of - it was a learning curve. Not only by us at [school name], but also by the district. I think they were sort of figuring out…the things as we went along. But nevertheless, you know, we've – I felt that, you know, the support that we were being given…was good support. And there was just…you have to come to the understanding that RTI is not a program but a process. And that was sort of hard at first because we sort of looked at it as like "okay just tell us, you know, the whole – tell us what to do…

Participant A affirmed this sentiment and interjected, "Tell us what to do." Participant B continued:

> And then – and we'll – we'll follow through. And, but other than that, you know, the support has been there. And, you know, there's regular and constant, you know, uh, PD, you know, through the technical assistance. Assistance days, as well as, uh, you know, the regular meetings that are scheduled during course of the year. I think…the fact that we have a team at the…local district level that can provide, you know, the oversight. The professional development. It is crucial piece, a crucial component.

Implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. Another key theme that surfaced for this school is the need to continually revise implementation efforts. Participant B reported:

> Yeah. And, and I would – what I would add to that is, it was an evolving process. You know, what we started in the first year is not necessarily true what we're doing now because it's, you know, it's a learning curve. And you know, you – you look at the needs of your school and, therefore, you modify and you change as you go along.

Participant B went on to add details about the team's process in regards to continually revising implementation efforts:

> Yeah. Uh, if I could speak directly…to the team, you know RTI team. I think they're a group of teachers that were very flexible, and – and very ingenious in continually refining the process. I think that's how we – that helped us overcome the obstacles. You know, it was, you know, week after week of meetings, you know. We met on a regular basis, and if something wasn't working you know, they would quickly bring ideas up, "okay let's change this, let's do that." And so they're a very adaptable group. They weren't set in their ways and – and they looked at problem solving, uh, you know the – the – the – the things that needed to be fixed. And I think that went a long way in, uh, in helping, uh, the school be where it is now as far as the implementation of the process.

Participant B went on to explain that implementation and interventions efforts take time and revision:

> What advice. You know the – the biggest piece I – I would say is that is – is just to give it time. You know it's not an overnight fix. It – it's a – it's a long process in as much as the kids have gotten to where they are over a number of years, all that takes some time to correct, you know the – the – the deficiencies that they have. And so – so if they're going into this and thinking, you know, "okay all I got is this two weeks for this kid," I think they're - they're mistaken. I – I think they need to – it's a long-term process and they need to be cognizant of that. And that, you know, they need to be flexible in understanding that, you know they're not going to get it down. It's not – there's not – it's not a scripted process so you – you – you figure it out as you go based on the needs of your school. And – and you sometimes you get it right, sometimes you get it wrong, but that's simply part of – that's, you know, part – impartial of – of the process. Yeah.

Participant A also advised around the need for honesty and flexibility in regards to revising efforts:

> To me, it's you have to be honest. You have to be honest with your team either way, you know. You have to be honest when it's working and you have to be honest when it's not working. And it – it can't be about *you* were wrong or, you know, it's the team. We are the RTI team, this didn't work, who cares who came up with the idea, you know. This – this didn't work, so how we can refine it? Because I found that when we're trying to save our ego, or trying to shy away from the truth, then it just takes longer to get to where we need to be. So being honest with ourselves, and being honest with our team, having an open communication, and – and being flexible I think is all you can do.

It is crucial to focus on Tier 1. The last key theme that surfaced for this school was the need and difficulty of focusing on core instruction and intervention. Participant B reported:

> trying to get teachers to understand…that…there needs to be a Tier 1 intervention…the class. And teachers…understand that but necessarily that's not in practice. Again as I was saying, you know it was: "okay, my Tier 1 didn't work, here you go [name]...Fix him for me." Right? And – and we're moving away from that to…where…we're looking at the data, what didn't I do that had this child understand.

Participant A further added details surrounding her experience around trying to ensure that Tier 1 is implemented with fidelity:

> To me, the negative aspect is the dilemma that I always face when I know Tier 1 isn't being implemented and I know that the data doesn't support what the teacher is saying and I can't say, "really are you kidding me?" You know? Because it's not my job. It's not my job to tell the teacher, "your Tier 1 isn't in place. Don't send Johnny to my – to my room. Don't expect me to come into your room."

Participants discussed some of the ways that the school focused on Tier 1 instruction and intervention. Participant A described professional development that focused in core interventions that should occur before a student is referred for Tier 2 or 3 interventions:

> Well our professional development geared towards that. For example, we had an RTI process and we had to walk them through, you know so, it's week 3 you can't just say, you know "picked up Johnny." You know – "what is the data that you're having, how many times did you…" You know what I'm talking about, you know. So I went to plan A, B, C, and D, now I'm going to talk to you, now we're going to meet. Oh my gosh, they wanted to throw tomatoes at me, you know? And like, really? You want me to do all that? Might as well keep Johnny. You know, that was one. But we did a lot of professional development, and I think that what helped the most was team teaching. Because then I didn't have to say it, they kept each other in check.

Textural description. Participants A and B are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants reported experiences related to the implementation of RTI.

Participant B reported that they "started from scratch," received training and support from the District, and worked hard at figuring out how to best implement the framework at their school site. Participants noted that their interventions were achieving results. At the same time, funding and resources were obstacles to ensuring that all struggling students received interventions. There was also a need to consistently provide Tier 1 interventions by core classroom teachers, and teachers received professional development in this area.

Structural description. Participants A and B experienced RTI implementation with some uncertainty, but overall had a positive experience. Participants appreciated the autonomy and flexibility given by the district to implement RTI according to school needs, but the lack of a clear, defined implementation plan was somewhat unsettling. Nonetheless, School 17 viewed this work as needed reform and embraced implementation.

Essence. Commonalties of experience for Participants A and B involve receiving training and support, but collaboratively planning how to best implement RTI at their school site, including revising implementation efforts. Participants reported training staff on providing Tier 1 interventions, as well as creating and delivering Tier 2 interventions. In addition, participants reported informal use of the problem-solving process as well as full implementation of data-based decision-making, although fidelity remained a challenge.

School 18: Themes. In regards to research question 1, # key themes emerged. The themes for School 18 are: implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process; RTI helped promote collaboration; and academic growth as a result of RTI implementation.

Implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. The first theme that surface for this school was the learning that occurred throughout implementation and the numerous changes that occurred as a result of the learning. Participant C reported on her experiences, stating, "I went in and researched it, looked it up, and to be honest everything I read does not match what I actually…did and what I actually learned on the job, or actually doing it." Participant B concurred and shared:

> Slow beginning, we didn't know where to start. And then the second year got much – it was much better. We started earlier and we had an idea what to do. But still with some parts of the implementation, we were learning, I mean…

Participant C interjected, "Tweaking along the way." Participant B continued, "Tweaking, uh-huh. Even until the last month of meeting training." Participant C reiterated the importance of continually revising implementation efforts:

> And there will still be more. I'm sure they're…still going to be more. But every time I think…it's just gotten better and better. We've made it easier on ourselves, easier on the teachers, and easier on the students.

Participant A added that revising implementation efforts was, in fact, positive:

> I think the fact that one of the positive things is that it confirms that it's okay to change. If it's not quite working, if it's not quite right, it's okay to change it. It's, we're not going to get it right all the time, the first time; every time. And it's okay to change it because we need to change it to make it meet whatever the needs are, and the needs of students change.

RTI helped promote collaboration. Another theme that surfaced for School 18 is that RTI promoted true collaboration and reflection among faculty. Participant C reported that the purpose of collaboration was to work together in order to increase growth and to make instruction more purposeful:

> The way I see – I see it as, I've always considered myself a very purposeful teacher. You know, I thought I was anyway. But I think RTI really focuses in on the purpose and, uh, the way you're teaching. Like are – are y - there – there was no doubt about it. You were either going to see growth, or you weren't going to

> see growth. And it makes you really reflect. [name] and I spent many times, I know the first year, "what are we doing wrong? There isn't any growth. Okay, what can we do now?" So we really have those conversations, which were not conversations we had before. We- Before we were just doing the work, getting the scores, and imputing them, and moving on. Now we're actually sitting, having conversations, "okay what do I have to do next? Cause these scores need to go up, what can I do next?" So yes it's become very purposeful.

Academic growth as a result of RTI implementation. Participants shared that the tiers of intervention were producing gains in academic achievement such as reading levels, and that these results helped to get faculty members to buy-in. Participant B reported:

> I guess like right now, I mean this week we finished the benchmark testing the first graders. And [name] doesn't even know this yet, but September – October when we tested, okay, they were, you know, not even reaching level one – level A. Many of them reading – they were still in reading behaviors. And – and then we tested again in January, February, they moved from RB to A or to B – the highest ones. Oh boy, by the end of the year I thought, we're going to get into C or D. But then I realized, how much they grew in the last four, five months. I got – we have a lot of level I, Js, and Ks now beyond. I never thought we were going to make it to the level I.

Participant C reported that these results were a way to build consensus around RTI:

> For buy in I think…[name] was really good at – at us when we finished testing right away, he prints out reports and shows – immediately shows the teachers the results. And when they see those reds becoming yellows, becoming greens, I think that also made an impact, too. Showed the teachers you know what, something is happening, it is working. So that helped I think, reinforce the positive.

Participant B concurred:

> Yeah, and when I presented our reports to them I said, "okay you're doing wonderful, look at the progress that this student made." And something that you're doing here in the classroom is working very well, so let's continue working together.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C from School 18 reported starting slowly in regards to RTI implementation and revising efforts along the way. Participants

reported that after revision RTI implementation efforts produced results. Furthermore, sharing the results with faculty increased buy-in. Also, RTI promoted collaboration and reflection. Participants noted that time and resources were obstacles to implementation. There wasn't enough time to meet as a problem-solving team, and in some cases there wasn't the resources or "creativity" to be able to teach a particular concept or skill are differently.

Structural description. The SBLT reported that RTI implementation was a positive learning experience. Participants' advice was to meet regularly, maintain open communication, and to be open-minded and patient. The leadership team from School 18 embodied their own advice and learned a great deal during RTI implementation. Participant C reported:

> It was much better, thank goodness. I think it – so far I think it's been a very positive experience. Very much so, and I agree with [name] in that, didn't know what to expect, but we were very open to it and we know that change was a coming, and yeah. And so far it's been a very positive experience.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for Participants A, B, and C from School 18 involve learning while implementing RTI and continually making revisions and changes to implementation efforts, which the team viewed positively. These revisions produced results, which spurred on implementation efforts and built consensus.

School 19: Themes. In regards to research question 1, one key theme emerged. The main theme for School 19 is that a greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation.

Greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed for successful implementation. The major key theme that surfaced for participants from School 19 is the need for an understanding of the big picture related to RTI. Due to a lack

of clarity around the big picture from District trainings, implementation efforts slowly took root. Participant B shared her experiences with training:

> I think…being part of Cohort One…everything has its pros and cons, I think one of the difficulties in its implementation was the fact that it was decided to spread out the training throughout the school year, and so there were some pieces missing that I think needed to be done earlier in order for things to fall in place easier; I think for teachers I think the SBLT team understood a little bit more where we're going, but I guess we weren't as effective as we would have liked in communicating that to our staff because we didn't have the pieces to complete that, if that makes sense? So there…was a little bit of…difficulty in implementation at the very beginning of the process, I know we're beyond year one, but…that was a challenge.

Participant A also brought up her training experience and noted that during year two the introduction of the Standard Protocol approach made more sense:

> Well one thing was when we, let me see, what was that part called, when we came back for the second year and they told us "Oh, wow, look at how this could really work" and we had been putting it together, and I, I forgot what that was called...

Participant B interjected, "Yeah, I know what you're referring to." At this point in the interview the researcher asked if the participants were referring to the Standard Protocol approach. Participants A and B confirmed that this was the case, and Participant A shared that they "could have used that...in year one, really." Participant B summed up that the sequence of the trainings did not contribute to a deep understanding of the framework:

> I think the sequence of the PDs were not...I mean I'm sure they had their rationalization as to why they presented things in a particular order, from central, but I think that hopefully they've modified some of that stuff with some of the subsequent cohorts because I don't think the order really made a lot of sense to those of us going through it.

Textural description. Participants A and B from School 19 are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants reported that they received training, and although the training was helpful, it was spread out throughout the year and lacked coherence, which made understanding the big picture problematic. Nonetheless,

participants reported that the learning center and a push-in program for kindergarten provided effective interventions. Another successful aspect of implementation was the school's use of data chats with teachers that utilized the problem-solving process. Another area of focus was differentiation in the core. Lastly, participants noted the importance of connecting to prior practice. Overall, participants reported that implementation efforts improved during year two.

Structural description. Participants A and B experienced RTI implementation as somewhat of a frustrating yet beneficial experience due to the lack of coherence around training, early implementation efforts, and an understanding of the multi-tiered system. Overall, implementation at the school site was experienced more positively and the leadership team reported beneficial changes that occurred as a result of RTI.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for School 19 include that the participants received training, which was somewhat disjointed and confusing; however, extensive work towards implementation occurred, including tiered interventions, data chats, and use of the problem-solving process. Implementation efforts improved during year two.

School 20: Themes. In regards to research question 1, four key themes emerged. The themes for School 20 are: support and professional development from the district was helpful; RTI was an effective framework for instruction; redefining roles/collective responsibility needed for successful implementation; and RTI helped promote collaboration.

Support and professional development from the district was helpful. The first key theme that surfaced for this school is that support and training from the District was helpful. Participant A reported:

> First thing that comes to mind is the support…that we got from the district. I think that without it, you know it's almost impossible to implement something like this and even with all the support and throughout the first year and the second year and those meetings that we get technical support or something, what … those half days? I went to some of them and, and they're very good.

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. Participant A shared his experience with RTI as a necessary and effective framework for instruction at this school site:

> Overall, you know, I am so in to RTI, you know, as a structure to deliver instruction and curriculum that I don't know how, how else I would run a school, to tell you the truth. As a principal, you know, I don't, you know, I don't know how else … how more efficiently and effectively I could run a school without that kind of a structure or a structure like that.

Redefining roles/collective responsibility needed for successful implementation. Another key theme that emerged is the need for collective responsibility for all students. For School 20, this was initially somewhat of a struggle but ultimately there was consensus around the need to share students in order to effectively meet their needs. Participant B reported:

> Uh, you know, in the self-contained classroom, you know, teachers take ownership of their children and, and it is, you know, "my students", you know, and, and "How could, could I have somebody else responsible for this? I am responsible." So that, that, uh … it, it is sort of an obstacle, you know, but, uh, but it's something that, that could get in the way.

Participant C shared the positive aspect of collective "ownership":

> I think one positive, um, goes kind of, um, what he just said about that, as a grade level, it makes you really trust your colleague and really take ownership as a school. You know, it's not just my 24 kids but I want to make sure that every kid here is learning and it's getting that optimal, you know, education. And so, as a grade level, we are able to really focus and look at that data and see, okay, you know, it's communication. This student is here but he … guess what? You know what? He already passed this year. He shouldn't belong here for the next X amount of weeks that we still have left on this rotation. You know, let's move. So it brings abut communication and ownership and, I mean, it's done wonders.

Participant B reported this sense of collective ownership extended to data analysis and creating grade level intervention plans:

> I think a positive aspect has been, uh, consensus building in terms of as a grade level. Where you're looking at data and using it in terms of determining what the need is and working together to hopefully provide, uh, provide the students with that type of intervention to help them achieve academically. So that has been, uh, something that I've noticed here has been a success at this school site in terms of teachers saying, you know, "This is the data. It's not your students or my students but it's our students collectively as a grade level." So that's been something that's very … that's been very positive.

RTI helped promote collaboration. Continuing along the lines of collective responsibility was the related theme of increased collaboration as a result of RTI. Participant A reported:

> Yeah one, uh, very positive aspect of the whole thing is, is, is, uh, being forced to work in groups. Maybe it's not the best word that I could have found, 'forced' you know, but you have no choice. And, uh, and different groups grow in different directions. Uh, uh, kindergarten, you know, are-are like, like, you know, soldiers that they will do grade level interventions, you know, with IWT in reading and language arts, you know, and writing. And that's pretty difficult because, uh, in, in a, uh, it takes a lot of planning. It requires a lot of, you know, to agree on that may to compromise on things that might not … you know, if you were not with that pressure you would not do because it is easier to do it by yourself, you know. So, uh, uh, it's been great to, uh, see these professionals, you know, uh, uh, grow in different directions and with great results.

Participant C added collaboration included scheduling times for various interventions and coming to consensus around intervention plans:

> In kindergarten, it was a lot of communication and planning and getting together and creating, "Okay, what time works, what time doesn't work?" and looking at our other things that we have, you know, with music and drama and we were doing science and library. So it was really a lot of rough drafts of scheduling and, you know, as a grade level coming to a consensus of what worked well for everybody.

Participant B shared his experience around collaboration:

> I think, uh, in terms of first grade, one of the strategies we used was to create smart goals, making sure to be very specific with our focus, not trying to bite

> more than we could handle, and just really adhering to that smart goal for the duration of time that we had, uh, specified and then seeing if what we implemented, uh, was successful and if not just revisiting that and seeing…looking for new ways to improve on what we had started.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are elementary educators. Participants reported receiving training and support from the District. Participants reported extensive collaboration among the SBLT and among teachers, including extensive use of data, strategic planning, and sharing students in order to provide interventions. A sense of collective responsibility for all students and for implementation was reported.

Structural description. Overall, participants experienced RTI implementation as incredibly positive. Participants reported that there was major improvement to the school and that RTI was empowering for students. Overall, the collaboration that occurred at the school site was productive and participants were proud to share implementation efforts. Participants spoke to balancing the need for careful planning with a sense of urgency to implement RTI and to help struggling students.

Essence. Commonalities of experience include productive collaboration around how to best implement interventions in grade levels, including setting goals, creating plans, and sharing students. Overall, RTI implementation greatly changed practices in regards to instruction and intervention in a positive way.

School 22: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 22 are: multi-tiered system was in place prior to official RTI implementation; it is crucial to focus on Tier 1; and broad-based participation is necessary for successful implementation.

Multi-tiered system was in place prior to official RTI implementation. One striking theme that surfaced for School 22 is that a multi-tiered system, Road Map to Success, was already in place prior to official RTI implementation. Participant B reported:

> Well, prior to the district, uh, formally going through or implementing RTI, we had what we, uh, uh, termed, uh, the Roadmap to Success. And it was a multi-tiered – it was based on the current research on RTI Squared. And the research and developing our system according to that plan. Okay, so…we focused on Tier 1, first instruction. And then we had on the behavioral and academic side layers of intervention, uh, that we were building upon behaviorally bringing in outside sources – I mean, building our foundation here at school with, uh, the funding that we had available. Counseling, um, full-time psychologist, um, and then from the outside, bringing these resources such as [name of social service agency], social service agencies, okay. Um, mental health services. Academically, we looked at, you know, focusing on Tier 1, first instruction, strengthening that. Okay, and then, uh, we brought in, uh, uh, Tier 2 program. We didn't call it a Tier 2 program. We didn't have the RTI district language, but we did have the next level.
>
> So we had, for a couple of years, prior to district bringing in, you know, the language of RTI, we had the same model based on the same research, okay, but we called it Roadmap to Success. Okay, so our teachers were familiar – familiar and once the district brought in the vocabulary, the language of RTI Squared, it was just making the transfer, okay, letting our staff know, this is what we have been doing.

Participant A added that building a common language and connecting terminology from Roadmap to Success to RTI was critical:

> Well basically having a strong leadership team going to the first cohort professional development at our local district offered us for the first year. I think that was important, because we already have those tiers in place, to them just connecting the terminology, they was Tier 1, that's Tier 2, Tier 3. And having that clear language.

It is crucial to focus on Tier 1. Another key theme that surfaced for Participants A and B is the need to continually focus on Tier 1. Participants noted that this was

important due to the high numbers of students who required Tier 2 and 3 services.

Participant A reported:

> Well, basically that we don't have – we don't want to have a lot of the students in those tiers, Tier 2 and Tier 3, and that's just reality. That it needs to be something, uh, a courageous, conversation you have to have with your teachers, with your leadership team, with everyone. And, you know, we do have such percentage in Tier 2 and Tier 3, what are we going to do to trickle them down to Tier 1?

In addition, Participant B noted the importance of not looking at Tier 2 as a solution to ineffective core instruction; instead, effective core instruction must take place for all students and then, and only then, should intervention be considered for struggling students. B reported:

> I think some negative aspects is – is making sure that teachers truly understand that – I mean, some get caught up in Tier 2 – I found that some of them were getting caught up in tiers two and three. That the goal is good first instruction and I think this model was starting to get some of our teachers off track with that, to focus on the intervention. Well, there's no intervention if there's no first instruction and you don't – and that you have found that these students need intervention. Okay, so that was one of the things that we – I had to bring them back to 'no, it's what you're doing in the classroom, first instruction, not pulling them out, you know, it is your responsibility and what you are doing, that first instruction has to be strong, has to be powerful, it has to be effective.'

> *Broad-based participation is necessary for successful implementation.*

Participants A and B discussed the importance of sharing information with faculty and making sure that everyone is aware and involved with implementation efforts. Participant A noted the importance of having grade level chairpersons attend training at the district. A reported:

> I think another obstacle coming from the, uh, an educator's view is having had grade level chairs or teachers attending this professional development that the local district gives to the leadership teams only and to our principals, I think that's important for them to come back and also have the same idea or they get the same thing we get so it – it could be more and the more the merrier, the – it - it's more like everybody's understanding the same thing.

Participant B added, "Just for an opportunity for more buy in." Participant A reported the need for sharing of information in manageable chunks:

> Kind of bringing back information from the district and try to disseminate it in a way where it's not something so drastic for everyone to listen to. Try to bring it into like the ac- how would I understand this information I just received? To – so I think, kind of, bringing it back but not everything at once, and, kind of, break it out throughout the year.

Textural description. Participants from School 22 reported that a foundation was built and that the multi-tiered system, including Tier 2 and 3 interventions, was already in place prior to official RTI implementation. Therefore, making explicit connections to prior practices and ensuring clear and common language around the tiers was needed. Participants shared that increased data use and SMART goals occurred at the school site. Participants shared a great deal about the need to continually focus on effective Tier 1 instruction. Also, having grade level chairpersons attend training and sharing information was valuable. Participants shared that implementation is a process and that efforts must be tailored to meet the needs of the school site.

Structural description. Participants A and B from School 22 had a unique experience with implementation efforts due to the fact that tiers of intervention were already in place. Participants seemed to adjust to new terminology easily and without friction. The team shared a sense of clear purpose in regards to focusing on core instruction and using data.

Essence. Commonalities of experience involve working with faculty to connect prior practice and understanding to RTI implementation. In addition, both participants cited the need for a consistent focus on core instruction.

Research question 2. Research question 2 investigated the experience of SBLTs in regards to ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making).

School 1: Themes. In regards to research question 2, five key themes emerged. The themes for School 1 are: inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2; inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3; strong leadership and administrative support is essential; and trust is necessary for successful implementation of the PSP.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1. Participant B reported strong implementation of multi-tiered system for ELA and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) but cites need for improvement in math and behavior. Participant B reported:

> I think we did, actually I think we're doing really well in English Language Arts and I think that's, you know, we're really looking at a multi-tiered system, we're looking at the placement, the curriculum, you know, we've moved from just talking about who are these kids? I think in our other subject areas, we keep, we buy intervention programs, we don't know how to use them, we just do them and then we don't understand that different kids have different needs.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2. In regard to the problem-solving process, Participant A reported that there was not a clear understanding, and therefore implementation of the problem-solving process:

> That actually, that's an area that I think we definitely need to look at because we have encountered that, well I have encountered when we did our training that we were not able to take the teachers from thinking that what it is the problem, the actual problem. They thought that there was a problem but they didn't look for what caused the problem. Right away, they wanted to go into the, oh what can we

> do to fix the problem? Even though they didn't have that, that knowledge as to what is causing the problem.

Participant A further reported that the lack of consistent implementation with fidelity might have been due to the fact that the process requires educators to reflect honestly about their teaching, including ways in which they are contributing to the problems that students are facing:

> And I think that situation, they felt disempowered or perhaps because of the lack of knowledge or they just didn't want to look deep down as to what exactly was happening and it's hard for them to look into their own way of teaching. I think that was the hardest thing and maybe they didn't have the, I guess, the guts to actually say, you know what, it's actually my teaching what is affecting the students. That's the actual problem, not the student himself or herself.

Participant B also reported inconsistent implementation of the problem-solving process; it is used in certain areas or departments but not by all, stating, "it's not systemic and that's the problem." Participant B also noted that there was a lack of fidelity because the problem-solving process was not used as intended:

> And I think that the problem with…the problem solving process, they think it's just a protocol. So, they want to replace it with like, peeling the onion. Which is obviously not related, it's a totally different way. It's completely different. So, you know, you're taking a cycle and thinking it's a protocol. It's not. It's a cycle of work. It's a cycle of how you move something.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3. In regards to component 3, data-based decision-making, Participant B reported growth in regards to implementation of this component but an overall lack of fidelity due to misconceptions around how to best use the data. Participant B reported the following in regard to fidelity of implementation of data-based decision-making, "if you gave me a 1 to 100, I think we went from being a 20 to 30 to being a 60 to 70 in using data." Participant A reported that

more staff members are accessing data, but not necessarily using it to make data-based decisions:

> Well, actually, I think that's actually a very, that's a part that I feel that a lot of teachers have been able to do in the sense that they are actually now more knowledgeable as to how to access data. In our case, we have my data and they've been able to have that information. I guess, what my concern is sometimes even, and it's my own concern, too, is that sometimes we have the data and they keep asking so what do we do with this data? We have it now, what?

Participant B also reported the need for increased understanding and implementation of data-based decision-making:

> They think of it as something, oh, look, I have data, I know this is a pig. It has four legs, it's got a snout. That's what the data tells me. The data helps people classify but they don't understand that they're supposed to use the data to grow things, not to just classify things. I think that's a very clear misunderstanding of what data based decision-making is. It's not classification. It's not data used to classify, it's data used to grow and change and so, that's a huge issue.

Strong leadership and administrative support is essential. The theme of leadership and administrative support first surfaced in regards to a lack of support being responsible for a lack of fidelity in regards to implementation of a multi-tiered system of service delivery. Certain classes weren't implemented due to programming issues or a lack of curricular resources. Participant A reported:

> Well, at first, I think that one of the issues that I have, that we have experienced with implementation is the fact that sometimes we don't have the support, I guess, the administrative support of implementing those classes because of X situation. We don't have the number of students, we don't have the resources and I think that was one of the biggest challenges that we encountered but as time progressed, we were able to make some of those changes.

Participant A went on to explain that the strong leadership and administrative support needed also encompasses advocating for students and services that they need:

> Well, actually I think it's, again, it's patience and actually stand your ground because sometimes you're going to have, you're going to encounter situations with some individuals are going to be against you, not because they don't like

> you, just because they don't have the resources. But still, you have to push on to make sure that the students get the right services in order for them to improve their academic lives and academic careers. Patience and again, be able to experience, step by step, what RTI is really all about.

Trust is necessary for successful implementation of the PSP. Related to the theme of strong leadership is the ability to build professional relationships and the trust require to effectively establish component 2, the problem-solving process. Participant A reported:

> Well, it's kind of a little bit hard because I needed to make them feel comfortable about being able to express themselves and to actually analyze their own way of teaching and that was the hardest part. But once you get through that hurdle of saying you know what, perhaps it's the student's lack of academic skills but it's also part of my way of teaching and how am I going to compensate for that? So I think that's, once they get comfortable and you build that relationship with the teacher to, in which she feels comfortable in telling you how he feels and you feel comfortable objectively how he or she is teaching. You get to the point in which both of you feel comfortable with each other and when you treat yourself, each other professionally and that's when you actually get things done, because that makes a big difference.

Textural description. Participants A and B both reported many experiences related to the implementation of the three core components of RTI. Participant B detailed the extensive work that occurred with establishing a multi-tiered service delivery model for English language arts and high school exit exam preparation. At the same time, B reported that component 1 was not fully implemented in all areas or subjects. Participant B reported that the problem-solving process was used by certain groups, but that the process needed refinement in order to be implemented with fidelity. Similarly, B reported that the school had made strides towards implementation of component 3, data-based decision-making, but there were some misconceptions and refinement was needed in order to achieve fidelity of implementation.

Participant A reported that administrative support was critical in order to achieve full implementation of a multi-tiered system of service delivery. Participant A also

reported that the problem-solving process was not fully implemented with fidelity; in particular, teachers had difficulty with step 2, problem analysis, because it required them to reflect on their own teaching. Similarly, A reported that the school had made strides in regards to data-based decision-making but work still needed to occur in order to achieve full implementation with fidelity; in particular, teachers were now able to access data, but what to do with the data was still a challenge.

Structural description. Participants A and B of School 1 are educators at a large, comprehensive high school. Participant B seems to have experienced the implementation of the three core components of RTI positively but can quickly pinpoint the next steps needed in order to refine fidelity of implementation. However, Participant B reported the items that needed to be addressed but not necessarily a plan of action to address said items.

Participant A experienced RTI positively and spoke to both the promise and challenge of RTI in regards to changing teacher practice. Participant A reported the emotions involved with the problem solving process, how it can feel "disempowering" from the point of view of teachers, and the trust and rapport needed in order to successfully change instruction to meet students' needs. Similarly, in regards to data, Participant A reported both the strengths and opportunities. Participant A was invested in the work and identified clear next steps:

> But at the same time, we need continue more with this because we have new teachers coming in or teachers who haven't been trained on RTI, so therefore we can actually, I guess, build capacity in the sense that those teachers who have been trained already in RTI can actually teach the newcomers or those teachers who have less experience when it comes to its implementation or even the knowledge of what RTI means.

It is clear that A is an advocate of RTI and views the framework as a viable method of school reform, stating, "I think RTI can, if done right and in this school, could have a very positive effect on both teachers and the students and also the community."

Essence. Overall commonalities in experiences for School 1 in regards to implementation of RTI's three core components are that substantial work has occurred towards implementation of all components and that refinement is needed in order to achieve fidelity of implementation in all components. Both participants reported that the school had worked a great deal on implementing and refining data-based decision-making, but effectively using the data to make decisions and modifications to instruction was not fully achieved.

School 2: Themes. In regards to research question 2, six key themes emerged. The themes for School 2 are: inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2; trust is necessary for successful implementation of the PSP; inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3; monitoring is a key to fidelity; and strong leadership and administrative support is essential.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1. Participant B attributed the lack of consistent implementation and fidelity to a theme that surfaced in regards to research question 1 around a lack of understanding around the RTI vision, systems, and structures. B reported:

> The level and the fidelity of the implementation, at least for us, wasn't there again, for the reasons that we were not, even though we were going to meetings and trainings, the understanding was not there. It wasn't, I think for us, it wasn't broken down into the very bottom of what RTI was. We went through the meetings, we went through the presentation and at the same time, we're thinking, we have to go with the structure that we have now and kind of weed in into what

> we have with RTI squared, not having the proper knowledge of what it really is. Now that I have it, I mean, I could have completely done the implementation completely different. But I think that was the fear of the administration team, and not having that knowledge, the fidelity wasn't really there.

Participant A also reported inconsistent fidelity of implementation but attributed this to the number of students requiring Tier 2 or Tier 3 services outnumbered the number of services offered at this school. A reported:

> Yeah, I think for us, the fidelity of the implementation had something to do with our pyramid kind of being upside down. And I think, after a while, they were getting the idea of where they were, they need what they had to do as far as proper placement, how to do the strategies and things of that nature. It was the number of kids that we had at, you know, in the top tier that hurt us as far as that would go, you know. But, I know they had a very good idea of what they needed to do.

*Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2***.** There were two key themes that surfaced for School 2 around the problem-solving process. Overall, there was inconsistent implementation and fidelity, but participants reported that a salient aspect of effective use of the problem solving process was the need for trust.

Trust is necessary for successful implementation of the PSP. Participant B reported the following:

> In a place, you have to make sure that there's trust involved, because there's so many people coming together, so many different services that are being provided that everybody has to trust to say, you know, this is what I need to do to improve, this is what I need to do to be part of the team or to put out there for other people. If you don't have the trust, the system doesn't work. And sometimes you have to refine that system and making sure they're using the problem solving process is part of that. But trust, I think, is a good way of going here.

Participant A echoed the need for trust and the need to focus on what is best for students:

> I don't think there's any doubt about that. The team has to trust one another and understand that what they're doing is for the best interest of the child and leave adult issues out of it, to a certain extent.

Participant B summed up by reiterating the need for trust and for advocacy around what's best for kids:

> But, getting to know the data, getting together to review the data and again, having that trust that some of this is going to be in the negative way but having those positive intentions that this is for the benefit of the students and having that openness within the group to be able to self-reflect on that.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3. Two key themes also surfaced in regards to component 3. Overall, there was inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to data-based decision-making despite the various forms of data mentioned by participants, such as referrals, suspensions, and dropout rates. Participant B reported:

> I think for us, that was the new, new way of looking at our instruction. Not only instruction for the teachers but looking at referral systems, the number of suspensions, the number of detentions given the type of interventions given. But making sure that everything was in place so that everything will go smoothly and using data is the only way that you can do it to make sure that there's systematic growth.

Participant A added:

> Yeah, I think the use of data whether it be the educational data that we're getting or the data that we're getting from dropout or from referrals or from suspensions or anything that can help us make a good decision about that child's future is important.

Monitoring is a key to fidelity. Discussion of component three also surfaced the need for monitoring interventions as a key to maintaining fidelity. Participant B reported, "That you're not only monitoring the data that's coming in but the intervention itself." Participant A concurred:

> Yeah, the accountability that you have to have there is, needs to be active. You have to be active. You have to go into classrooms. You have to see what's going on with those kids and what's happening in the classroom.

Strong leadership and administrative support is essential. The last key theme that surfaced for School 2 is the need for strong leadership. Participant B reported:

> It definitely doesn't hurt having strong leadership that is focused on that and making sure that it's implemented. And providing everybody who's involved with tools, like [name] said, to be able to accomplish all those goals. In schools, especially like this one, you have so many different issues coming in from instruction, from the learner, to the community, the environment and making sure that everybody who's involved has those tools to be able to come together, implement it, looking at every aspect of the issue and finding the solutions other than, you know, coming with a quick solution, which is either a suspension or an OT [Opportunity Transfer] and something like that.

Textural description. Participants A and B both reported many experiences related to the implementation of the three core components of RTI. Both reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1. B reported that a lack of understanding of systems contributed to this, while B reported that an inverted pyramid, or large percentages of students requiring Tier 2 and 3 interventions, contribute to inconsistent implementation of a multi-tiered system of service delivery. Both participants reported that the problem-solving process was used in certain arenas, such as the referral process, but did not report systemic use of the problem-solving process by all staff. Participants noted the importance of trust in effectively using the problem-solving process. Both participants spoke to the importance of analyzing multiple forms of data and having systems in place to mange data.

Structural description. Participant B experienced the implementation of the three core components of RTI from a systems perspective and reported trying to align systems and services in regards to all three components. Participant A again integrated the RTI with existing practices and reports experiences that address the three components. However, both A and B do not explicitly address fidelity of implementation of

components 2 or 3. This suggests that their experience with components 2 and 3 was somewhat nebulous. Overall, there was a lack of ownership and commitment to RTI implementation, indicating a lukewarm experience.

Essence. There are many commonalities in experiences for School 2 in regards to implementation of RTI's three core components, and all three key themes detailed above relate to both participants. Full, consistent implementation was not achieved for any of the three components. Advice that surfaced from these participants was the importance of strong leadership, monitoring, trust for effective use of the problem-solving process and the importance of analyzing multiple data points.

School 3: Themes. In regards to research question 2, six key themes emerged. The themes for School 3 are: it is crucial to focus on Tier 1; full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2; problem-solving process requires time and patience; full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3; and it is imperative to establish a culture for effective data use.

It is crucial to focus on Tier 1. The first key theme that surfaced for School 3 around a multi-tiered service delivery model was the need to focus on the foundation of the pyramid, Tier 1. Participant A reported:

> We felt like Tier 1 was crucial in the foundation of the rest of the pyramid. We though, if we're going to do this right, we're going to do Tier 1 right. Because otherwise where are we into Tier 2 and Tier 3 if we cannot resolve the learning and the teaching that's taking place in Tier 1. So, we were, we were very determined to look at our programs and to see how they were being delivered and taught and how the children were learning because we felt that that's, that's where we could fix it and my advice is, we would start to have a strong Tier 1.

Participant D also advised beginning implementation efforts with a clear focus on core instruction: "And start as we said also building strong foundation for the Tier 1. Just begin there."

Full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1. School 3 achieved full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1 because the school not only had all programs in place but had also done extensive work around ensuring fidelity. Participant C began by discussing ensuring fidelity in Tier 1:

> I think I want to agree with [name] that it was important to insure the fidelity of the programs in Tier 1 in order to be able to really feel comfortable looking at the Tier 2 and Tier 3. And that is difficult right there because different people do the programs differently sometimes, so having that common, common fidelity, common teaching ground, really, really makes a difference to that core instruction.

Participant B went on to detail the needs of the school and how the team worked on achieving fidelity of implementation for Tier 2 and 3 interventions. First, B reported:

> Well, making sure to begin with that we were clear on the way that the programs were intended. For example, we had "Read Naturally," and we needed to be clear as to what it was and when we were going to, what kids were going to receive those services. So insuring fidelity if the person who was you know, if I wasn't clear on how to use it, how to level the kids, how to use it correctly, with fidelity, the teachers weren't very clear.

Participant D went on to further explain how the team ensured fidelity:

> We provided a lot of demoing and training from our coaches to make sure everybody, you know, you know what it looks like and we're here to support, so they got support to whatever wasn't clear to be implemented, so there was quite a lot of that offered to anybody who needed it, I think.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2. SBLT members from School 3 reported experiences regarding the implementation of the problem-solving process. Participant D began by detailing how the problem-solving process is used at this school:

> We used it in a variety of, I don't know if I would describe it as fully in implementation at all levels by everybody but it's definitely in a variety of training sessions, data based, it's there in our teams, you know, student study teams and other teams.

Despite the problem-solving process having been used at a variety of arenas within the school, consistency of use was an issue. Participant A reported:

> I think we have stopped because when we were using it, I could see where we were moving forward and resolving things and making progress because we were using it and then maybe we got a little too busy. I haven't, we haven't used it for a while, have we? As far as the leadership team. I don't know about the grade levels.

Participant D also reported a lack of consistency in regards to sue of the problem-solving process:

> So I guess it's the consistency at this point and the, it's not automatic, is like, we still have to think and plan to make it happen instead of being there all the time with us thinking, us meeting everybody.

Problem-solving process requires time and patience. The SBLT at School 3 reported great detail around implementation of the problem-solving process. Participants surface the time and patience required to use the problem-solving process as intended. A reported:

> I think it was a process that we didn't have a lot of patience with at the beginning. It was time consuming and we're like uh, okay, hurry up, like remember it would take time to go through each step and I remember being a little impatient with it at the beginning. But when we got all the way to the end and I saw the outcome and the results, I thought wow, this thing really works and the more we do it, the faster we can go through these areas without having so much discussion. So at the beginning it was a really slow process and I thought, oh no, this isn't going to work. We don't have time at the school side to be going through this problem solving process every time.

In addition to the pace of the problem-solving process and the time required, Participant D also spoke to the depth of the process and the patience and intention needed for successful use:

> To me, there's the superficial or the apparent simplicity of the process that most of us would recognize as something we used before. The difference being, when you really dig in and understand the depth that you're going, it's then, wait a minute, that's a lot, a lot more work but so meaningful, so yeah, it's on the one hand you can have those charts and everybody, you know, posted in meetings and we're all, I think, recognize, oh yeah, we need to follow that. Like again, in our trainings, as you dig in, you might get stuck along the way or get impatient with the lack of time. So it's like the two sides, I guess, of the coin.

Participants from School 3 went on to detail how use of the problem solving process produced incredible specificity in regards to the intervention needed, and overall how the process is effective, and ended with the patience needed to engage in the recursive process. Participant D reported, "Going once around might be easier, but that keeping going with the same issue, right? It's…keeping at it, just, regularly."

Full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3. Participants A, B, C, and D reported full implementation and fidelity in regards to data-based decision-making. Participant D reported:

> I think we've come a tremendous way in that area and all areas. We, I mean, rarely you have you know, conversation at any level without some sort of data. I'm not saying it's just data, hard data. It could be obviously a variety of data but that's part of the conversation and the language. I find that we are definitely at a good level of implementation with that.

Participant A detailed the journey of achieving full implementation in regards to Component 3:

> Well, we were afraid to bring in too much data into any PD or grade level meeting. We would block off the names, and we would like be so sensitive to it. And then I don't know what happened but we got over it and we just brought it out and just passed it out and everybody started talking about it. It was uncomfortable for some, but for others they embraced it and they loved it and they wanted more and they were going and digging up for themselves and then it was like a challenge of how they could be better and not that we were being critical and looking at their data. Kind of like, it was almost like you were crossing that fine line, that boundary, like where you know what? You're going too deep or you're getting too close. I don't want you that close. But that feeling is gone, where now I feel like people bring it. They bring it to me and they say,

> look what's happening in my classroom and so I know now they're being really reflective and they're comfortable. Whether it's good or bad, they're feeling a lot more comfortable with their data.

Participant A further explained how practices in regards to data use have changed:

> Because before the ones that had good data felt embarrassed, like they didn't want to be showcased and I could tell that they would you know, like, kind of like please don't you know, let anybody know those are mine. But then, it's like everything just popped and the bubbles we were in are gone and people are now very free with their data. I'm not going to say one hundred percent, but we have a large percentage of teachers that are very comfortable with good or bad data and wondering and even asking each other, well how did you do it? Everybody got a comprehension and they passed and I didn't get that in the same unit so now in their planning, the data's going into their planning. So now they're planning according to the data and I look at them when they're planning and they're listening to like a particular teacher who's doing really well in an area, when that teacher speaks about what she did, everybody's listening and then I go to the classrooms and they're following what they're doing.

It is imperative to establish a culture for effective data use. In terms of how to create this comfort around data use, the team reported a great deal of advice and experience. The overall theme that surfaced is the importance of establishing a culture for effective data use. Participant D reported:

> And then, the fact, we said that earlier, too. Make sure the environment and the way you do these meetings where the data shared, that it's a safe place, that it's always looking at the positive, what we're learning from each other, and these are our kids too. Kind of the tone and be emphasizing that part because then it happens because people feel safe in continuing the process.

Participant B shared that a leadership team must assess and build a culture for effective data use:

> And I was just saying, take it slow because you really can't expect, if you have a culture of where there's really no trust, then you can't just showcase everyone's work or everyone's scores or data thinking that it would, because it might backfire. So just taking it slow and knowing, being very aware of the culture of the school and the staff.

In terms of how to build or change a culture, participants reported that Cognitive Coaching and Adaptive Schools training assisted the team. Participant C reported:

> And just a last thing for me to add is, I think cognitive coaching and being able to paraphrase and being able to lead the conversations has, and reading the BMIRS [Behavioral Manifestations of Internal Response States] of your, of the people, you know how far you can push it and when you need to bring it back.

Participant A also reported training experiences that were integral to implementation of Component 3:

> But, something that helped our RTI, especially looking at data was the five days we spent with [name] on Adaptive Schools and the one day with [name] really, you know, a whole staff on how we have discussions and dialogue and just all the different roles everybody plays in these conversations. When I go into the grade level meetings, you see it, you see them in action. It's pretty amazing and so we had to have that groundwork or that foundation in order to put the data on there.

Participant B added, "The icing on the cake." Participant C reported details about what the training and culture look like in action:

> Yes, and I think, just to add, I think that's important because when we do see our teams, they know the difference, they know their norms of collaboration, they know how to, you know, I want to put this idea on the table. I want to probe for specificity and they use that language that has helped with all of this, setting talking up, being able to discuss this.

Textural description. Participants A, B, C, and D are all educators at a RTI Cohort 1 elementary school. All participants reported numerous experiences in regards to implementing the three core components of RTI. Participants reported information about all three tiers of instruction and intervention indicating that School 3 has achieved full implementation of component 1. Participants A and D spoke to the need to focus on Tier 1, or core instruction. Participants report inconsistent implementation of component 2, the problem-solving process, and that it requires time and patience, which made systemic use difficult. School 3 has achieved full implementation and fidelity in regards to component

3, data-based decision-making, and reported that a key to effective data use was training and ways of working that contributed to a building a safe, collaborative culture.

Structural description. Again, participants from School 3 experienced the implementation of RTI as a positive learning experience. The time and patience required by the problem-solving process made this component the most challenging for the team. The team perceived the multi-tiered service delivery model as a way to first focus on the fidelity of Tier 1 before considering Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. Participants reported incredible growth and pride around their data-based decision-making efforts, levels of implementation, and the culture built as a foundation for these efforts.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for this team is a desire to continually refine implementation efforts and an understanding of what is required in order to do so. The school achieved full implementation with fidelity of components 1 and 3, and inconsistent implementation of component 2.

School 5: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 5 are: full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3.

Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 1. Participants reported full implementation of a multi-tiered service delivery model in terms of creating master schedule and infrastructure for the three tiers. Participant A reported**, "**As the administrative team, we sit down; we looked at it; we called other people in to help us to take a look at my CL-16, look at my master schedule, look at

where we're placing kids." Participant A further elaborated on the infrastructure building process:

> I got a lot of assistance from people in the district so we could look at this stuff together. I had three other administrators last year. This year I'm down by one of those administrators, but we called people to help us look at this. I had it - um my instructional specialists and oh it was like clockwork. I mean, very bright, very smart, and I would say from that standpoint in embracing the information and the process we had it down pat. I wouldn't say that we are experts in what we're doing, but we knew the people to call. We knew the people to give us the assistance. Uh our local district provided assistance as well as central district in helping us to refine and fine tune what we were doing. So I was very confident in that aspect.

However, the fidelity of those tiers was unclear. Participant A referred to the Coordination of Student Services (COST) team when asked about fidelity of this component. A reported:

> My COST team again, is working very well, but I would like to see it, touch upon some improvements and to keep that focus on this process. And I believe that - I'm saying that because of the levels of training that they've had. Some of them one or two meetings. Some of them maybe just like a half day of it, and not really um - what's the word I want to use - not really into what it means, and how it's supposed to be done.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2. In regards to the problem-solving process, participants reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity. Participant B spoke to the importance of having everyone trained, using a common language, and to trust in the process:

> I think again, it goes back to training. I think again, that in terms of a team, that if - if that is the case and we all need to be trained in the same way to talk the same talk. And - and - and again, that whole level of trust needs to be such that if the team agrees to do it this way, then this is - and - and - and we need to go out and do it, come back and tweak it, and say it worked, it didn't work, etc. And - and - your … As the team member mentioned, you - you - you have to sort of put everything else to the side. One - not one person is all-knowing.

Participant A reported the need for a constant focus on both using the process and following the steps:

> The more you have it out there, for example these charts that are here, you have to constantly focus on that, and whenever you're meeting in your teams or whatever, you have to constantly make sure that this is the process I'm using. For example, in COST team, the [ICEL by RIOT] chart, when we're doing a problem analysis on a child, we need to make sure that we're following the steps and not be misled to something else, when we know what we have to do. These are the steps in the cycle and this is what we need to be able to uh resolve for this particular child. It's staying on task. It's keeping the focus.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3. Similar to Component 2, participants reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to Component 3, despite extensive training around data systems. Participant A reported:

> One of the things that I'm very happy about for our school community is that we're beginning to use the MyData system, and can go in and look at the different reports. Uh, we can just about pull up data any way we wanted and structure it in graphs, charts, whatever; and we can look at where our deficit areas are. We can look at the areas that we're doing very well in and I think that the school community is beginning to embrace that. We've had training and if we don't use it, it kind of dies out. So we need to consistently be trained and use it.

Participant B also reported the need for accurate data-based cession-making:

> I think too, that when you're using data, it needs to be accurate and people who interpret it, need to interpret it accurately. And that when they - when we make decisions about, for example, like let's say scheduling or whatever, it ought to be about not just success rate, but how and the - the teacher or the - the uh personnel uses the data to help move instruction.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C reported extensive work around implementing the three core components of RTI. They reported that while training has occurred and structures are in place, consistency and fidelity remain a challenge. Participants reported extensive planning, collaboration, and support around creating a master schedule that encompasses a multi-tiered system of instruction and intervention. Participants reported various teams, such as the COST team using the problem-solving

process. Lastly participants shared training around data systems and experiences around data-based decision-making at the school site.

Structural description. In regards to implementation of the three core components, participants felt that fidelity could be improved and the way to achieve that fidelity was through training, collaboration, and teamwork. There was notable tension among the team, which suggest that the experience at School 5 was uncomfortable.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for School 5 are that trust and teamwork are essential in order to have a high functioning SBLT capable of leading full implementation of the three core components of RTI.

School 6: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 6 are: inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1. School 6 reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity to all the three core components, although they did report experiences and practices that showed partial implementation. In regards to multi-tiered system of service delivery, participants reported that implementation and fidelity were at the beginning stages. Participant A reported, "I would say…we're not perfectly there, but honestly we're starting. We…look at the data." Participant A added:

> We look at programs to meet those multi tiers. We use strategies to deal with students who are having difficulties. But are we done? Of course not. Are we perfectly in the right place? I still would - we're still are struggling with this.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2. Participants reported similar experiences around implementation of the problem-solving process. Instead of examining why problems are occurring, staff wants quick fixes or "consequences." Participant B reported, "I'm thinking that needs…a lot of work still…I'm thinking we need a lot of work in that because we're still a school that looks at we want consequences." Participant B further added, "I think it has to do with time. It has to do with the responsibility of having so much. I just think it's something that we need to kind of take a little bit more time with." When asked for advice around implementation of Component 2, Participant A replied "I don't know 'cause that's where we're kind of stuck. I think that I'm not quite sure."

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3. School 6 also reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity to component 3. While participants reported a lot of data use within the leadership team, the use of data-based decision-making was not systemic, particularly among all faculty members. Participant A initially reported fairly high levels of implementation, stating, "I would give ourselves…a grade of three out of four." Participant B agreed that data use was prevalent but added that there was a need for more broad-based participation among the faculty, adding:

> Yeah I think we - I think we do refer to the data a lot… I think we do…I think like the administrative team, they meet and they look at a lot of things too, um but I think sometimes even…we maybe - we do bring it out at some of the PDs but I think - I don't know if we do it frequent enough…you know like to the faculty.

Participant A concurred with this sentiment.

Textural description. Participants reported experiences and perceptions related to levels and fidelity of implementation of the three core components of RTI. Participants reported inconsistency of implementation for all three components.

Structural description. Again, Participants A and B experienced RTI implementation with a general lack of clarity as to the overall vision and goals of implementation. It seems as if RTI implementation has been a fairly confusing experience and that participants have not been actively involved in leading implementation efforts despite being SBLT members.

Essence. Commonalities of experience include inconsistent implementation of the three core components and a general lack of clarity about the overall implementation vision at their school site. In addition, both participants noted the need for strong leadership and a clear implementation plan.

School 8: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 8 are: full implementation but inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 1. Participants from School 8 report having all tiers of instruction and intervention in place, but providing consistent fidelity of instruction and intervention in Tier 1 to be a challenge. Participant B reported the success that is occurring in the learning center, where group of students receive Tier 2 and 3 services. B reported:

> I think we do have a do model as to what [name] is doing here, because we can take from its small scale, you know, working with smaller groups, and begin the transfer over to the classroom. Because in the [core] classroom it's been really hard to get that core, first good instruction in place, where the teachers are actually going through the process of analyzing the data very frequently to determine, what else do I need to do, do I need to change programs, do I need to regroup, do I need... What do I need? You know, we have a really good model that's working for [name], but then carrying that over to the classroom.

Participant C also reported to the need to focus on the fidelity and effectiveness of core instruction. Participant C also spoke to the fact that due to the quality of core instruction, too many students require Tier 2 and 3 services:

> And I think, the classroom, is the main concern. Because we do have things in place for Tier 2 and Tier 3, but there's just too many kids in those two tiers, because we're not doing enough of a good job in Tier 1. And changing the mindset, that 80% of the kids should get it after you do the first instructions. Because, if 30% get it, then teachers feel they've done a good job and its OK, but it's not OK: 80% should get it based on whatever it is. And you have the capacity to do it, so that first, good teaching is still an area of concern, in terms of the tier.

Despite the struggle to improve core instruction, all three SBLT members reported that fidelity in regards to component 1 has improved. Participant B reported:

> So now that we're like, towards the end of the school year, I think that our level of fidelity has gone up, in terms of how much more the response to intervention, and in terms of the teachers providing the first intervention in the classroom, I think is so much better than what was.

Participant C agreed that more teachers are providing intervention in the core classroom before considering other services, stating, "Or the mindset now, where, oh, I have to intervene. I have to be doing something with these kids, before they, before I refer them out." Participant A also agreed, stating, "I agree with both in that I believe the level of fidelity in the model has gone up, where more classrooms are seeing, paying attention to their schedule, and starting it [interventions] on time."

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Participants from School 8 reported inconsistent implementation of the problem-solving process. Participant C spoke to the fact that the process had been used within the SBLT but not consistently with the entire staff:

> I think individually, the intervention coordinator, coaches, myself, we do tend to use the process individually, but collectively as a school, I don't necessarily think it's there. I think we've done some work on that, in terms of there's teachers

> understanding that they have to figure out what the issues are with the child, and they have to correct it, but I don't think it's... It hasn't been consistent protocol...

Participant A added that the process required a facilitator to guide teachers through the process and because teachers could not utilize component 2 independently, the school was at an *approaching level*, noting, "I agree. At a whole, I would say, we're at an approaching level. Because, I would say, there's a very limited number of people who would accurately be able to go through the problem-solving process, at this point, independently."

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 3. The team reported similar levels of implementation in regards to data-based decision-making. Participant C began by describing ways that the school used data to make decisions:

> Well I think the fact that the kids that we see, we see them based on the data. In this facility, in the past, I used to use teacher observation, but the data must reflect that. The fact that you have student in Tier 3 intervention based on data, and teachers might feel otherwise, we've stuck to that fidelity in terms of that data.

Participant B reported that the use of data-based decision-making was "superficial" and that the use of data was not meaningfully impacting instruction:

> And I do think that this point, it's still I feel that it's superficial, it's not still having a clear understanding, and asking those difficult questions, but as well I know, you know, but they're still not where they should be, and I already did instruction, so it must be the kids. And, so I think it's... The use of data is still very superficial. You know, the coach told me, or the principal told me, and so therefore we'll erase it, go there under so many words, you know, that's not really making them own the data in order to make a difference.

Participant A also noted that an obstacle to full implementation is trusting the that the data is an accurate reflection of student ability and of teachers' instruction:

> Just to add that, school-wide, the sense that, do we trust the data? That a teacher will look at a SOAR [Student Online Assessment Report] report and if it's their only measure that they've taken in six weeks, either all of the students' abilities are in that report, or the opposite, where that report doesn't mean anything, so why am

> I going to use this data. So I think, that's one of the roadblocks, that's making it hard for us to implement the data-based decision making.

Textural description. School 8 participants detailed extensive work in regards to implementing the three core components of RTI. SBLT members reported implementing all three tiers of instruction and intervention, including a successful learning center, but reported that focusing on core instruction remained a challenge and a focus. Despite use of the problem solving process by the SBLT and staff, component 2 was inconsistently implemented at this school. Similarly, while data-based decision-making is used at the school site, it is not done so consistently.

Structural description. Participants experienced implementation of the three components positively—they are hopeful in regards to the potential of RTI to reform instruction at the school—but have also struggled with the amount of work to be done in order to achieve full implementation. Work remains to be done in order to achieve full implementation of all three components. Participant A reported the following in regards to RTI:

> I wish that we had had this a long time ago. I feel like, I don't wanna say, too little too late, but I feel like we could've stopped so much of what has happened, a long time ago, had we had this knowledge and resources and support. That's supposed to be positive [LAUGH].

Again, participants view the framework as an effective reform effort but recognize that fully realizing implementation efforts and bolstering student achievement at a struggling school is arduous work.

Essence. One commonality of experience for School 8 was that all participants are invested in RTI implementation. In addition, participants report both strides made

towards implementation and work yet to be done in regards to each of the three components.

School 9: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 9 are: full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and full implementation and fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1. In regards to the level infidelity of implementation of component 1, a multi-tiered system of service delivery, participants from School 9 reported that all three tiers were in place but that the fidelity was inconsistent. Participant A reported the difficulty of ensuring fidelity to Tier 1 interventions. A reported:

> Well, well I think again we have the, the three tiers. We have everything in place in a sense but having said that as far as the fidelity of it, our, our teachers understand it, understand it and they're able to speak to it. For example Tier 1 we know it's, it's in the classroom and that's where intervention should happen and that's where we're doing IWT [Individual Work Time]. And they all understand that. But is it happening everyday, no. So that's the fidelity part of it so what I recommend if it's not been monitored regularly and sometimes it's hard to be there everyday. But if it isn't happening that it kind of make that, you may not have that fidelity.

Participant B also added details around why fidelity of intervention is difficult in the core classroom:

> There's, uh, an awareness, you know, from coming from a teacher I understand the tiers. But the challenge in the classroom is how do I do it, how do I put all this together? I understand it, I value it, I, you know I can speak to it but, I don't know how, you know how do I address six kids that are having this issue and then this one kid that has this issue. So it's all those pieces putting them together. I think that's where a fidelity--the intent is there but the how is not.

*Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2***.** Participants from School 9 reported that component 2 posed the greatest challenge in terms of implementation.

Participants reported that a deep understanding of the problem-solving process is required not only of the leadership team but also from teachers in order to fully implement this component. Participant B was a classroom teacher during the first year of implementation and joined the leadership team for the second year of implementation:

> As a teacher that's the part that I understood the least as far as the way that it worked, uh, with RTI. And I think…in the Tier 2 training or the second year implementation I came to maybe one or two meetings where it was becoming a lot more clear but because I was getting more of the training here. But even having a deeper understanding of the problem solving, I've seen it, I see the posters, I understand the cycle but it's, the fidelity. I mean it's, it's basic understanding, it's not really learning how to implement it, um, from the year one training that I received I wasn't really clear on that.

Participant C shared that the problem-solving process is used by the leadership team and that teachers were in some ways dependent on the expertise of the leadership team in order to engage in the complex process:

> And at the same time, I think a lot of that, the problem solving happens with that SBLT. I think, uh, the, the teachers opening the problem solving process with the ICEL, thinking about that. That's, that's the part that, where our fidelity probably dropped.

Participant A concurred with this sentiment, and Participant C further added:

> You know with, with the student, like the teachers feeling that it's the whole ICEL you know ICEL by RIOT, how are we going to get there. And so it's kind of like I'm placing my, my, I'm depending on you as a SBLT team to do it for me.

Full Implementation and fidelity of component 3. School 9 reported full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3. Of the three core components, they achieved the highest level of fidelity with data-based decision-making. Participant B detailed the various ways in which data-based decision-making is used at the this school:

> I, we use data for everything. We have even next year, this year we had a Tier 3 class a placement for next year we're having two. So it's all done by data, looking at data, talking to the teachers, making sure that it's all making sense, you know making sure we're talking to the parents so that they know we're, we're--because

> of this your child will. And it's not asking it's letting them know we'll be in this class, we'll have to change tracks, we'll have to do this because this is what your child needs. And we provide all that data for them. I learned intervention services through that. Our teachers are very good at looking at their data and being able to say okay this is what, what I marked inside, this is what we need to do. And that's when they work with the, uh, literacy coaches as far as that. Our Title Three coach, uh, does that and just looking at the ELL data and making sure well what do we need to do to make sure that these students are, are ready to reclassify. So we're very close to our data.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C reported numerous experiences and perceptions related to the implementation of the three core components of RTI. SBLT member reported full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1. Participants from this school reported that component 2, systemic use of the problem-solving process, was the least implemented component. Lastly, participants reported the school achieved full implementation of component 3.

Structural description. Participants spoke to the three components more positively than they did of their overall implementation experience, which focused more on their experience with training. While their overall experience with implementing the three core components was lukewarm, reporting experiences from their school site, such as data use, was reported with more certainty and enthusiasm.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for School 9 include substantial productive work towards implementing components 1 and 3, and a common experience of the difficulty of building capacity in regards to component 2.

School 10: Themes. In regards to research question 2, four key themes emerged. The themes for School 10 are: monitoring is a key to fidelity; full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3.

Monitoring is a key to fidelity. A key theme that surfaced for School 10 was the importance of monitoring interventions as a key to fidelity. Participant A began by discussing organization of systems and structures, such as a paraprofessionals or teaching assistants providing scheduled intervention in the core classroom and then went on to discuss monitoring:

> From an administrator's perspective, and I don't like to start sentences like that because I'm a teacher first and foremost, but I think that one of the reasons that it went quicker in terms of implementation was because two things. Number one, you had a paraprofessional that was coming into your classroom that was ready to go. So you could not- not be prepared. There was a couple of instances when I visited classrooms that I had to remind people that well the paraprofessional is here, you need to be doing the same thing. So once I did that a couple of times everybody got on board. The second piece that I think definitely sped things up was the monitoring. I think there was very close monitoring and I made it a point to monitor all three levels.

Participant A was new to the school during year two of implementation and discusses how this may have been to her advantage in regards to maintaining fidelity of interventions through frequent monitoring:

> We had Tier 3 intervention at seven o'clock in the morning. And so I made sure that I at least visited those uh, classrooms at least three times a week. And it was hard to do because of the fact that they were in forty-minute blocks but I you know gave it, gave it the best shot. So people knew I was coming and so if that was my role in the implementation well then I did that. And I think though a certain extent it played a big, a big piece because going back to what I said, they don't know me yet. So they don't know if this is consistently what I always, always do. So that definitely I think gave it a little nice kick start.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1. Participants from School 10 reported implementing all three tiers of instruction and intervention but struggled to describe fidelity of implementation. Participant A reported, "Well we got to all three levels and uh, fidelity um, hmm help me [LAUGH]." Participant B added:

> I kind of look it…as year one, Tier 1 and year two, you know, Tier 2. Um, year one um, you how far did we get? We got to two tiers, a little bit of three in the second half of the year.

Participant B went on to detail how School 10 specifically addressed fidelity in Tier 1:

> Now Tier 1 in year two, which is this year, I think we got much further. We had a foundation, a basis of a foundation. And then uh, with the new administration she brought in the paraprofessional component to Tier 1. So there was a lot of focus. I feel we got very far in Tier 1 of the implementation of RTI. I think they were hesitant in the beginning but were very happy that uh, support was there. Not only paraprofessional wise uh, but administrative wise and out of, out of class wise and each other wise too, grade level wise I guess I should say.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Participants from School 10 reported that the problem-solving process was used for individual data chats with teachers but not necessarily systemic use. Participant A reported:

> Well, well for me I think it goes back again to the idea of the data chats with the teachers. So the problem solving uh, process was used individually I guess. It was very personalized from my perspective as sitting down and talking to teachers…I think as it as the team the SBLT we used it often because we, we would come back with the data and we would go through it and we would talk about it and hash it out and…we'd continue to improve on it.

Participant B added that while the data chats utilized the problem solving process and while teachers had awareness of the process, it was not used with fidelity in other instances. Participant B reported the following in regards to the data chats and use of the problem-solving process:

> I think that's the best…example of the problem solving process as it was implemented here or being used here. I think as teachers we have an overall sense of yes, what is the problem, why is it happening, what should we do about it and is that working you know, through data and all that but I don't think we exactly go through those steps with fidelity.

Participant A added the following about consistency and fidelity of implementation: "I guess that I don't I don't think they're there yet. They used it because they had to, they were with me. And so I required that of them."

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3. In regards to data-based decision-making, participants reported full implementation but fidelity was more difficult to discern. Participant A noted that increased data use is a national trend independent of RTI. A reported:

> Well I think as a general rule and…outside implementation of RTI I think just the whole educational system has just gone more towards that direction anyway. I mean I've been a teacher uh, for 22 years and I think that definitely in the last couple of years we used that tremendously.

Participant A further added:

> I remember year one teaching, you'd look at CST, uh, then you would put it away and you did nothing about it. But certainly that isn't the case anymore. I mean I hear people saying things like well CST's you know that's already 6-month-old data… which is not stuff that you ever heard before. Again going referring back to my data chats, that's what I kicked off the year with because that's all I had. And a lot of the- the teachers said well that's old data, well alright where's new data? Give me some new data, do you have something that that we can look at. So I think definitely the mindset has changed tremendously on that.

While data use is prevalent at School 10, participants noted fidelity of implementation is not systemic because teachers are not necessarily engaging in data-based decision-making independently. Participant A reported:

> So I think in everything we do now we back it up with data so it's become very comfortable. Again I go back to, it's comfortable because it's presented to you but they were not yet at a point where we search for the answers ourselves.

Participant B further added that data-based decision-making could be refined in certain groups, stating, "Also you know it's…this whole thing about the dialogue and discussion portion that…keeps going on and on and on and we never make a decision."

Textural description. Participants A and B are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participant A was new to the school for the second year of implementation, and Participant B was part of the SBLT at School 10 for both years of implementation.

Participants reported experiences related to the implementation of the three core components of RTI. Participants reported full implementation but inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 1, with a focus on achieving fidelity in regards to Tier 1 interventions through paraprofessional support. Participant A also noted that monitoring was a key to fidelity. This school primarily implemented components two and three through individual data chats with teachers, which incorporated the problem-solving process and data-based decision-making. While data use was prevalent in many arenas within the school, neither component 2 nor component 3 achieved fidelity of implementation.

Structural description. Full implementation of the three core components of RTI did not seem to be a pressing goal for this school. However, participants proudly shared the aspects of RTI that aligned with the school's goals, such as Tier 1 intervention and individual teacher data chats.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for School 10 involved full implementation but inconsistent fidelity for components 1 and 3, and inconsistent implementation and fidelity for component 2. The school's vision for school reform included RTI, but RTI was not the central framework or force driving reform.

School 11: Themes. In regards to research question 2, four key themes emerged. The themes for School 11 are: full implementation and fidelity of component 1; full implementation and inconsistent fidelity of component 2; the problem-solving process requires time and patience; and full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation and fidelity of component 1. School 11 jumped into RTI implementation and, in particular, embraced implementation of the multi-tiered service delivery model. Participant A reported:

> And I think for us it wasn't as wait and see as they train us, because I know as I talked to other people, well we haven't started yet. And for us it was, we went, we're gonna do something, we're gonna start, we're gonna implement, and we did it. So it wasn't a question of lets wait and see, it was like dive in, get it done, and see what's gonna happen.

Participant C added, "And if we didn't do something perfectly that's okay. We'll tweak it, we'll fix it, we'll change the terminology if we went slightly awry in our [LAUGH]." Participant B discussed how this approach led to full implementation of component 1:

> And I think our goal this year was to give everybody the experience of tiering their instruction. So we had some grade levels that just couldn't wait their turn. They say well we're gonna do it on our own and we, you know so we help them. We meet with them. And they were meeting amongst themselves sharing kids and you know uh, getting needs met so by the time we did get to them we were more of uh, uh, uh, on call to what they needed because they already knew the process. And others you know you did have to uh, work with them and show them what it really meant and also implementation uh, everybody knows what it is here and uh, some people jumped right into it.

Participant A went on to detail some of the structures that were in place to assist with implementation efforts:

> Well I think because we have grade level groups already in place and the facilitators went to the training, they were the leaders they were pushing it forward. So when we discussed what about lets do when we started doing what we called, we had a different names for it, we had …

Participant C added, "Leveling. Tier time [LAUGH]." Participant A continued, "Tier time. So, but once they were involved in it and they, they did all the planning out. I think that was the buy in, because they were part of it, they were helping to lead it."

Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity of component 2. Participants reported several experiences related to the implementation of the problem-solving

process, but overall did not achieve full implementation. Participant A began by explaining how the process connected to prior practice at the school. A reported:

> Well I think because again with the seven steps I think they were used to looking at the problem. And if whether you wanted to call it a problem or the task or the data, they were kind of used to looking at that. So I don't think it was that difficult for them because they were used to that type of thing.

At the same time, Participant B reported that the complexity of portions of the problem-solving process, posed a challenge to school staff, stating, "And, RIOT, that one part of the using the formula to, that was, we still have work to go on that one [LAUGH] because it is uh, quite detailed." Participant B further added how the problem-solving process facilitated investigating all different factors that could be contributing to a problem, such as attendance, behavior, or academics. Participant B reported that initially this was a challenge:

> No the, the only time we had issues was when groups, well I'm thinking of our grade level groups and we had them over there, didn't understand, that you have to look at everything. So some kids, oh yeah well this kid is in you know, of course he's low he belongs in this. And they were still with that low group and all of us think because he's never here, I say well then that's a different issue. This child s- you have to start checking attendance. This, and then they found patterns in attendance, they found patterns in illness, they found … I said okay now is it an academic question, is it a social question, and then people started to actually look at the different avenues that are affecting the kid.

Participant C also noted how multiple perspectives, facilitators, and district support assisted in implementation of the problem-solving process:

> And multiple personalities I think was beneficial too because they would have these conversations with, with the principal and with the different people and then [name of District support person] would come in and have … and I just think hearing it from a new perspective, maybe feeling a different level of responsibility to doing it when [name of District support person] was here. I think they felt a different level of, oh expectation about how they needed to participate. So it was just nice to see the different personalities and how the how the teams interacted with that.

Participant A also identifies next steps to achieve fidelity of implementation of component 2:

> And I think from the school part, as far as we really do have to do more of the COST. We try to do it within the SST model, but it's just you know having that separate type to look at those other issues.

The problem-solving process requires time and patience. Another theme that surfaced for School 11 in regards to component 2 is creating systems and time in order to ensure fidelity. The leadership team reported setting aside numerous days for teams to collaborate around using the problem-solving process. Participant A reported:

> Making sure you have the time set aside. I think the fidelity to it is key for the time. Make, if it's not a sub day, is it built under your bank time. It has to be you know systemically built in.

Participant B agreed and added, "Yeah especially if you're starting out you need that time."

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3. Participants reported full implementation but inconsistent fidelity in regards to data-based decision-making. While data use is systemic, staff was not consistently able to pull their own data and use it to effectively change core instruction. Participant A explained the role that certain members of the SBLT played in supporting teachers:

> Well I think we're fortunate because I was lucky enough to have two people helping me so we did constantly you know have uh, a cycle… [I]f we had a periodic assessment, the data came out if we you know every time. So it was just, it was cyclical, it was done, so that was very helpful. Granted because of they have…the ability to pull it out for them. We have some that just don't know how to pull anything out. And they need assistance.

Participant A went on to report how a next step is to get teachers to effectively analyze data in order to make decisions about how to best modify core instruction to meet student need:

> And I think we really need a probably continue working on, and maybe with a new reading series and learning how to use the math series better, and with this other resource now they can really get the that I think is a continuing problem and an issue for us.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C from School 11 reported full implementation and fidelity of component 1. The most notable aspect of this is how grade levels and teacher leaders embraced the multi-tiered service delivery model and were actively involved in designing how the grade level would organize efforts to achieve implementation. This level of ownership and buy-in was noteworthy. In regards to component 2, the SBLT reported full implementation and inconsistent fidelity despite extensive work, time, and support; teachers did not yet have the ability to engage in all steps of the process independently. Similarly, participants reported full implementation but inconsistent fidelity in regards to data-based decision-making, where although there was extensive work, teachers were not yet able to systematically, independently utilize this component.

Structural description. Participants form School 11 embraced the RTI framework and made significant strides towards full implementation of the three core components. The optimism and efficacy of this team was apparent in the way that they enthusiastically implemented components and identified next steps to further refine implementation fidelity. Overall, the SBLT experienced RTI favorably and viewed the framework as a productive reform effort.

Essence. School 11 embraced RTI implementation at all levels. The leadership team was actively involved in leading implementation efforts and the staff followed suit. All three components achieved full implementation, and work remains in order to achieve fidelity for components 2 and 3.

School 13: Themes. In regards to research question 2, four key themes emerged. The themes for School 13 are: full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; the problem-solving process requires time and patience; and full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1. Participants from School 13 reported that the multi-tiered system of service delivery was fully implemented, but challenges remained in regard to achieving fidelity of implementation. Participant A detailed how changes were made to improve fidelity in the learning center, which housed Tier 2 interventions:

> Well, looking at, our year of implementation, I think we tried a lot of different things and we revised them as we went, uh, based on teacher response and student response. Uh the learning center, was re, you know, that got revised over and over. And then the core assessments that the, that the TAs were working with the teachers on, and uh, using as a basis for IWT that also went through lots of revisions. I think we, I, we had a year of really trying to refine the practice of, what people were actually doing and what was working and what wasn't. And I, I think that I think we, we pretty much covered the bases eventually, but I, you know, it was a process.

Participant B went on to give each of the three tiers a rating in regards to fidelity. On a 10-point scale with 10 being perfect fidelity, Participant B gave Tiers 1 and 2 a score of seven and indicated that Tier 3 would receive a much lower score:

> For me, okay, this year coming to [school name] for the first time, I would even give it different levels and different fidelity, maybe, numbers, each tier. But, I, um, [name] said if I was to give it a, maybe a number, I would say about a seven when it comes to the implementation of that Tier 1 and the fidelity of the IWT. Um, when it comes to the Tier 2, um, I, [name] really is the one, who um, did the learning center and worked with the TAs. Um, obviously I'm seeing it from the other side, I've been observing a few times but uh, I feel, I mean, it's been rather successful with the TAs and the students. So maybe a seven or an eight. Something that we are going to, you know, continue redefining and working on for next year. And Tier 3 has been totally an experiment. Uh, it's been more of

> an observation. Interesting you know, um, we got a consultant to assist us with our Tier 3 because it was so crazy and the data was all over the place. So as, what [name] said, we're very excited about completely changing the model and using it as, it's intended for next year.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. In regards to the problem-solving process, participants reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity. Participants A and C reported that although the formal steps were not used, some type of problem solving did occur when analyzing data. Participant A reported:

> As far as a formal process, not as far as we probably should. But um, as far as, um, really working on solving problems, we did a lot of that. We had, based on, um, the needs that came up for our students, there were, there was a lot of dialogue in that department.

Participant C added, "Everything was very, isn't the word subjective, everything was not, I think it was more this is what the number show, so it was very concrete, and everything would go back to the data."

The problem-solving process requires time and patience. Another key theme that surfaced for School 13 is the need for time and patience in regards to the problem-solving process. Participant C noted that use of the problem-solving process takes time and that the size of the group may be important, stating, "You spend time, that you really put the time into it. And have meetings, small meetings, small groups and use different real life scenarios that are happening in the classroom. To start with something small and then go deeper." Participant B reported the need for more time in order to engage in the problem-solving, stating, "I think we need more time for this type of reflective practice. I think…it's been beneficial for this process, has been beneficial for our faculty." Participant A added that small groups add to increased trust and safety, to honestly reflect on one's own practice, noting, "my advice would be to keep the meetings very intimate.

Small group settings because that's the only way you feel comfortable. Largely affective filter and you'll be able to hear people's…ideas clearly."

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3. School 13 reported extensive work around data-based decision-making and also that substantial work around data had occurred prior to implementation of RTI, which served as a foundation. Participant A reported:

> We've really worked on data based decision making a lot. And, I think over the last couple of years, especially the teachers have, have done a lot more, um, data analysis and um, working from that standpoint, cause actually for the last three years we've started analyzing data together and its, and, um, it's I think, it worked together with the work that we've done with RTI to get a little more intense and get a more attention to it.

Participant C added the need to frequently meet to analyze data in order to make data-based decisions:

> Because what happens, yet because, I mean, I know, she generated data from Tier 1, I generated data from Tier 2. Then we had our psychologist who had data for Tier 3, what not. So there, we met once, but we need consistency while we need, we need to meet frequently to look at, so that we're not just generating numbers.

Participant B also added the need for focused progress monitoring as a key to fidelity of component 3:

> Well if we really look at data and analyze data and you know, and I know with [name] doing psychomotor, they've been doing next steps. Been looking at data from right from the beginning. We've been tracking students. Definitely focused monitoring. That we've been doing with these students, not only in Tier 1, in Tier 2, uh, not so much in Tier 3 even though we should. Uh, but the progress monitoring would be, eh, really important I guess, um, part of that fidelity.

Textural description. School 13 is a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants A, B, and C reported experiences and perceptions around implementation of the three core components of RTI. Participants reported full implementation of component 1 but inconsistent fidelity in regards to the three tiers; in particular, Tier 3 posed a challenge in

terms of fidelity, and the team looks forward to improvements for next year. SBLT members reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2, although they did engage in the process in a less structured manner. Participants reported full implementation but inconsistent fidelity in regards to data-based decision-making and cited the need for focused progress monitoring in order to achieve fuller fidelity.

Structural description. In regards to implementing the three core components of RTI, participants' experiences were favorable and there was some thoughtful planning around how to best improve future efforts. For example, although the school's Tier 3 program posed a challenge, the group viewed it as an "experiment" and look forward to next year's refinements. Participants noted the importance of time for reflection, the problem-solving process, and data analysis, and longed for more time for these activities in the future. Overall, the group was optimistic about their efforts and RTI.

Essence. This school engaged in extensive, focused work around RTI implementation. The SBLT reported strengths, opportunities, and clear ideas around next steps to refine implementation efforts. Overall, the school achieved a fairly high level of implementation and reported seeing related results.

School 14: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 14 are: full implementation and fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and full implementation and fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation and fidelity of component 1. In regards to the multi-tiered system, participants reported full implementation and fidelity. Participant B reported:

> I'd say that we got pretty far where, were implementing all three tiers. We have our, our classroom instruction is Tier 1. And then, the teachers are all doing IWT

> for Tier 2. And for Tier 3 we have our learning centers and we have our *Language!* program in two grade levels. And then, seen grades four and five and the whole grade level teams, for language arts.

Participant A added that teachers were able to use some of the strategies used in interventions during the core curriculum, which might actually prevent students from needing intervention:

> Well I was going to add that um, for me, it's been um, it's been, uh, a great experience because, like I said before, since I was working specifically with kindergarten, um, I had an opportunity to also work with the teachers and they um, wanted to, um, know more strategies that they could use during IWT in the classroom that maybe they weren't using but I was using in my learning center. That way it would prevent students from going to the learning center or being pulled out.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. School 14 achieved inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to the problem-solving process. Participants initially reported high levels of implementation; however, the more that participants shared, the more apparent it was that practices at the school site primarily related to effective data use and data-based instructional planning. Participant A reported the following about her experience with the problem-solving process:

> Well I got really far because um, I was able to use the different assessments that we were, um, using like MONDO and DIBELS and that was really honing in to what students were missing, was that the letter of recognition, or the, the, the names of the letters, or the letter, letter sound correspondence. Um, so, I think I got really far and the level of fidelity was, was very high in terms of that because I was able to really find out, like, this groups doesn't need more of this or this group, um, lacks this, you know, so.

Participant B added that these practices were occurring elsewhere at the school site. Participant B reported, "I think they did the same off in the other learning center too. From doing the MONDO and the DIBELS, they're really pinpointing what the kids need." Participant A added, "So there was a lot of, um, pre-assessment monitoring, um,

um, assessing at the end as well." Participant B later shared that the school uses Schmoker's model and SMART goals instead of an RTI-specific version of the problem-solving process:

> Well what we do here for our grade level meetings, we have them every week during bank time, is, so we use the Schmoker's model. And so, that's what they do. They, they make smart goals and they, they find out through the data what the, the whole grade level needs to focus on. And then they create lessons based on that need and with their smart goal, as soon as they need it, then they, look at the data again and see what they need to do the next time. So I think, pretty much, all our grade levels are doing that and one of our leadership team members is with each grade level.

Full implementation and fidelity of component 3. When discussing the problem solving process, Participants A and B reported numerous data-based decision-making practices such as creating targeted interventions based on data, entering and exiting intervention students based on data, and analyzing data and creating SMART goals to focus grade level planning. In addition to those practices, Participant B reported the following in regards to component 3: "I think we really made a lot of progress with that, since we became cohort one. That's just, everything had to be data after that. What do you think?" Participant A added, "I agree. That constantly looking at the data and making sure that it's because of the data, that you're making those decisions." Participant B added detail about the use of data-based decision-making by grade level teams:

> Well I think it helps to be with a, a grade level team. So, and then we have our, our leadership team meetings where we all report back, but. Just for me personally, working with my grade level team, I know that they're focusing on data because I'm right there with them and then, the feedback I get from the other team members. I know they're doing it in all grade level teams. And then, as a, a school, we had trainings with you so they, they learned how to look at MyData and use that data. And in the summer we do our, our looking at the CST data.

Textural description. Participants A and B described their Cohort 1 elementary school's experience with implementation of RTI. School 14 reported full implementation

and fidelity of components 1 and 3, and inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2. Participants reported that they were satisfied with the structures in place at the school site to support RTI.

Structural description. Similar to the experiences related to research question 1, Participants A and B from School 14 had an incredibly positive experience in regard to implementing the three core components. Although the group did not achieve full implementation of the problem-solving process, participants reported that the process being used at the school site met their needs.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for School 14 include implementation of a multi-tiered service delivery model that yields positive results. Participants reported that faculty consistently engaged in data-based decision-making. Lastly, the school utilized a version of a problem-solving model, but not an RTI-specific version that encompasses component 2 in RTI literature or as defined by the district under study.

School 15: Themes. In regards to research question 2, six key themes emerged. The themes for School 15 are: full implementation and fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; full implementation and fidelity of component 3; monitoring is a key to fidelity; specificity of language is a key to effective data use; and focusing on growth is a key to effective data use.

Full implementation and fidelity of component 1. Participants A, B, and C report full implementation and fidelity of the multi-tiered service delivery system during the second year of implementation—but not during the first year. Participant A reported, "We have all three tiers in place. So I think, this year. Yes." Participants B and C both

simultaneously added and clarified, "This year." Participant A went on to clarify what the different tiers looked like at this school:

> Well I think for, for the Tier 1, for IWT we did classroom visits, we did classroom demos, we did PD's on what IWT looks like, um, for Tier 2, for the learning center at least, um, you know, they, they went to the MONDO PD. It was all data driven, you know.

Participant B added that the school administered the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment to the entire school, stating, "We DIBELed the whole school." Participant A went on to add additional detail about the tiers of instruction and intervention. In addition, Participant A discussed how the school ensured fidelity:

> The whole school was DIBELed. Exactly, we did, you know, exactly. So there's three DIBELS or whatever, and then for, um, also for Tier 2 we did after school and Saturday intervention this year, which we had not done the previous year. And, we had people apply and they attached data to their application showing how they've made a difference in, how they moved children. And then they went to specific training. You were either working with really low students or you were working with the one that needed a push to proficient. And then with the Tier 3, um, having teachers express interest in language. So I didn't make anybody do it. I said who are interested and then they went to training and then we said, okay, these are the four teachers and they were like okay. And then we did support for them. The person from Cambium or Voyager came. So I think that's, that would be how, how I think we tried to insure that they were doing what they were supposed to. And collecting IWT plans too.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Participants reported a lack of systemic use of the problem-solving process. Participant A reported:

> We don't have systemic use of the problem solving process here [LAUGH]. It was introduced. We did PD to every track, every track did the problem solving process with their own data, with their grade level, or whatever, so it was an introduction. Um, however, do, we, we don't do it systematically, that's all I have to say, and, it was not that way at my other school either. We didn't, we did one activity at my other school on the problem solving process.

Participant C added, "I think we're cohort one when it comes to problem solving." Participant A joked, "We may need to go back." Participant C followed this by stating,

"No, we're cohort three with the problem solving. Because you know what, it wasn't, it wasn't clear. I mean, I can tell you what it is, but I can't really grasp it and internalize it." Participant B went on to describe that the problem-solving process is used during specialized meetings, such as Language Appraisal Team (LAT) meetings and SST meetings. Participant B reported:

> I feel that we tried to use it when it comes to LATs and SSTs cause I do monitor as much the kids in the learning center and then, those, we didn't see any growth, we would schedule a last SST, bring the parent in, trying to form an action plan to see them. And then we had follow ups to see if that action plan actually did help.

Participant A went on to describe that the problem-solving process was used informally at the school site and that the attempts to address all steps was confusing for faculty:

> And I think that there's been like, informal. You know, I meet with teachers, they choose two students to target, then we meet again. We talk about what worked, what didn't work. But as far as actually going through the process, I think we problem solve, but we don't use the template, or we don't use the four steps, or the seven steps, or whatever on a regular basis. And um, so… that's what I would say. That. And I think, um, myself when we first were introduced to it in year one, I was like, my gosh, that just seemed like there was too much, and we modeled it for the school last year, like Wiz and ILT, picked what our problem was and modeled it and the staff was just sort of like… So it was, it was, it was hard to wrap your mind around it.

Full implementation and fidelity of component 3. Participants from School 15 reported full implementation and fidelity of data-based decision-making. Participants A and B began by discussing some of the ways that they use data to make important decisions. Participant A first began by sharing that data is used for placement in interventions, which occur in the learning center:

> Well from what I've seen, the kids, the only way you get into the learning center is based on data. The only way you got into language two or three intervention was based on data. The only way you got into the Tier 2 after school and Saturday intervention was data. They only way you got picked to teach after school or on Saturday was based on data. So I feel like, we've done, we've do a lot with data. Retention is based on data. Like, we have people all of a sudden

> out of the blue want to retain students. Well you didn't do the data that's involved and all the work leading up to that. So I feel like we use, we don't make random decisions.

Participant C went on to detail other ways that the school utilizes data-based decision-making:

> We make more important decisions based on data. Because before, okay, you want to retain him when he has blue eyes, okay go ahead. You know, um, and now we're looking at it, I think with a clearer picture. Saying, really, does, does Tony really need another year of first grade, when we know nothing is going to change. I mean, there's other factors, that as a school, we don't have control over. You know, the, he's not being sent to school. Then we go through SARB we go through other things, but we look at data.

Participant B also shared how policies have changed regarding referrals for special education testing, including the use of interventions and data-based decision-making:

> Yeah I think also, like before, differences were like, right away we'd throw a kid to special ed. Get assessed, assessment, assessment. Now it's like, oh no, you haven't had at least three or four LATs or SSTs and look at data every time and see there's been any change and comparing that data, before we do a referral for assessment.

While these instances of data-based decision-making at School 15 show some degree of implementation of component 3, it is teacher practice that indicates that this school has achieved full implementation with fidelity. Participant A discussed the journey of getting teachers to systemically engage in data-based decision-making, which adds another key theme.

Monitoring is a key to fidelity. Participant A reported the following advice and experience around ensuring fidelity of implementation in regards to component 3:

> Well I think it's just keeping at, hammering away at it. Cause I know my first data meeting with teachers were not so great, you know. That's not the right word, I don't know how to phrase it, but, um, I did most of the talking and I did most of the pointing and I did most of the questions. After that, teachers were coming to me with, they brought their own data. They brought student work samples. They typed things up. They typed up an analysis, they, they wanted to

> share with me. So it just got I think just, I, like they, could see I was relentless. But I think just because they knew, whenever she says data meetings, like, she's not kidding. And it doesn't get canceled. And I had people who weren't ready, and I said, okay, when are you ready. Tomorrow after school, tomorrow morning, like you, so there was no way out of it.

Participant C talked about the importance of clear expectations, consistency, monitoring and modeling as keys to achieving fidelity of implementation:

> I think, you know, with the teachers, it was the modeling, I mean. You probably did all the talking the first meeting because we weren't used to looking at students in that manner, so after they, it's the coaching process, you know, it was like, okay but I'll do the talking, but now it's your turn to share and, and what I've noticed because in the mornings, I, I'm faxing over my IWT, even though the teacher was going to be absent they knew that, okay, it's due on this day, it's going to be turned in. And you know, a way of escaping, you know, we behave like children sometimes, adults, and they'll say, well I'll be absent and I don't have to turn them in but the expectation was regardless of whether you're absent the day we're meeting for data, it still has to be turned in.

Specificity of language is a key to effective data use. Another theme that surfaced for this school is that a key to effective data use is using specific, "laser-sharp language" to describe the data. Participant A reported:

> Well I think, I mean, I remember having conversations with people that were like, oh you know my class is so low, or this student is so low, or so, I think when you focus on this, that, that eliminates that kind of language, cause what the heck does that mean. You know I had someone say to me that my class is so low, and I said, no your class is not, the Language! class is so low. They're like, oh. You know, so, come on. So it, I think it, it eliminates generalities. You can't just say I have a low class, I have a good class. How did the kids do on the, I just had a conversation with a teacher today, how did the kids do on the science assessment. Oh, they did well. What does that mean? The whole class scored proficient, like, what does, so trying, trying to get, to, um, have more laser sharp language when you talk, so. I think if you can, if people are going to start, if you're going use data then you need to work on that language. What does it look like when we're, when we're using data. We can't say that's a good class, that's a bad class, that's a low class, that's a high class.

Focusing on growth is a key to effective data use. Another theme that surfaced is the need to focus on students making growth, regardless of the level from which they're

starting. The district under study is piloting a growth model approach to teacher evaluation, which may help teachers focus on growth. Participant A reported:

> And also I think it helped to, I don't know if it helped, but the whole [newspaper name] value added thing that was, that was all horrible and AGT [Academic Growth over Time] is all horrible or whatever. However, meeting with teachers who do have classes with students who are lower performing, when they see growth, I mean I had teachers who were depressed, but by the end of the year they were glowing because there was growth. And so, really, I feel like it's important to focus on growth. Not did your whole class score proficient, but what, where were they at the beginning and that's the beauty of the monitoring log because they see unit one to unit five or the LPA [Literacy Periodic Assessment] number one to number three and you're like oh my gosh look at my, my kids improved. And it's all about improvement and growth. And so that has to be the mindset I think. So if there's a way to get that imbedded in people's minds that it's about growth.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants reported full implementation and fidelity of components 1 and 3, and inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Participants shared several strategies and keys in regards to achieving fidelity of implementation in regards to component 1 and especially component 2.

Structural description. In regards to experiences related to the implementing the three core components of RTI, participants reported mixed experiences. In regards to component 1, participants found implementation efforts beneficial in organizing a framework for instruction. Although participants reported informal use of the problem-solving process, component 2, participants found the process to be complicated and superfluous. Lastly, the most striking changes occurred as a result of component 3, data-based decision-making, and the culture change and results were both positive and satisfying to the participants

Essence. Commonalities of experience for School 15 working with faculty to create a multi-tiered service delivery system and informal use of the problem-solving process. In addition, participants reported extensive use of data-based decision-making at the school site.

School 16: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 16 are: inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 3.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 1. Participants reported that although the school had interventions in place for each tier, consistency of implementation and fidelity remained a challenge. Participant B explained that the school identified students needing different services and had the multi-tiered system laid out, but delivering those services consistently was problematic. B reported:

> I thought we had 'em down. I mean, we identified the kids, but I think in terms of being consistent in terms of what the tiers were and-and the kind of intensity of the intervention. How… I mean, we knew the kids that were in Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3, but then in terms of like, how intensive the intervention would be like the Tier 1 vs. Tier 2 vs. Tier 3, that's something that I don't think we implemented fully because it kinda felt that what was good for Tier 3, people felt was good enough for Tier 1. And-and there was like a-a, you know, with the time it takes to do a Tier 3 intervention, you can't do that for the whole class. It has to be dedicated for-for the small group, and even the outside people that were providing that Tier 3 or that Tier 2, they were uh, expected to also work with Tier 1. And so, just really who's going to service each of those levels and what-what… how much time really can be dedicated to the people at each… at each tier. But we knew the kids. We knew who they were.

Participants A and C concurred with this sentiment. Participant A went on to discuss the importance of understanding and follow-through as keys to successful implementation of component 1, stating, "I think…just going back is getting everybody to understand what

it means to be at each tier because we did have services at each tier." Participant B concurred with this statement. Participant A further added:

> And we have the students identified. So… but, again it's-it's the fidelity of… it's that implementation. I mean, how well did that intervention teacher… you know, was… you know, given with everything that's going on, you know, able to every day give that targeted instructions if it was a Tier 3, you know, student. And you know, and how-how, you know, were the teachers, you know, willing to, you know, flex their schedules to allow, you know, the students to leave the class to get… to go to the learning center, you know. Um, those are-those are the types of things that I think make it difficult when comes to-to that implementation piece. Um, how do you get the sys… it's like, you know, just like putting in your rituals and routines at a school site so that everybody knows the ins and outs and how everything is gonna work. And so… you know, I-I think that's where we're still rolling. So I think we're-we implemented, we've targeted, we kinda know what we want, but how well it's getting done and how well are the students responding?
>
> You know, so kind of… you know, so… that would be my advice, to… look at what they have, what are the-the resources they have at the school site, and what would be something that they can do? And then what is the knowledge that their team-team members have? Because if some of the team members don't have the knowledge to be able to do something, then I-I wouldn't take that step.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. School 16 reported that they did not implement systemic use of the problem-solving process. However, the school used the process in different ways throughout the school. Participant A began by reporting that the process was used within the leadership team. A reported:

> Well, I really tried to use the problem solving process and… with our DSL team, you know, because that was comprised of our grade level chairs, which are… you know… and then our support staff. And I kinda tried to like… okay, this-this is the situation or this is… how are we gonna solve this? Did it work? I don't know. I mean, I think the problem solving process is something we've been… it's a name, but it's something we've been doing all along with all the inquiries and all the type of cycles and things. You know… So it kind of just correlates to how we try to look at things anyway. But… Do we need to do more work? I would say yes.

Participant B went on to add that successful use of the problem-solving process includes challenging beliefs, a willingness to grow, and the ability to develop and or deliver interventions:

> Well, part of the problem solving process also goes back to that, you know, the deeply held beliefs that teachers come with because you have to really be able to go past, you know, emotions or-or go past, you know, per-personal… You know, if-if you think you're inadequate as a teacher you have to get past that to say, okay maybe I do need to develop certain areas. Maybe I do need to focus on interventions a little more. Maybe I do need to make sure my IWT happens every day for the time that I need it, or do I need to increase the time for that intervention?
>
> Because when you get to problem solving process it's like… and-and if-if one of the outcomes is you want to increase the instruction intervention but you're not prepared to do that, then the problem solving process becomes a waste of time because you don't get past the discussion part into the implementation part because you're not either capable, willing, or-or knowledgeable enough to do the intervention that you've decided to come up with. So I think some more, uh just I guess, what I had mentioned earlier, like building capacity, building ability, building knowledge… the primary foundations of that, when you get to that part we do have staff that is capable of carrying out the whole process to the very end.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 3. Despite extensive data use and growth in terms of effective data use, the school did not achieve full implementation of data-based decision-making. Participants shared that the school added universal screening in order to inform intervention efforts. Participant A discussed data use by faculty members at the school:

> With our teachers, I think that, um, they… we've had… we had them present data. I wanted them to do it actually three times this year. They only were able to do it once, but nevertheless it was still a powerful experience because they had to look at data, put something together and present it. Well was it-is it the level that, you know, some of us present? No. But at least was something that they presented.

In addition to the data use and presentations detailed above, Participant A discussed the importance of the purpose and rationale behind analyzing data, which was not clear to all faculty members:

> Because then they were able to see okay, well this is why I need to look at data, because I need… I need to come out… It needs to tell me something. So what is it telling you and how is that informing instruction? And I think that's what we always have to come back to, because we-we've gotten a lot of, there's too much data, you know, why are we doing this? You know, what I observe in the classroom is a lot more valid than this number. You know, so-so those are the belief systems that we're trying to, you know, that we're struggling with. But it's a process because if we're gonna bring everybody onto the same page when it comes to data, then it's what we have… Those are the challenges that we have to move with.

Participant B talked about the need to move from collecting data to using the data to make decisions:

> Uh-huh. Well, you know, I-I don't know if ties into the second question, but it-it-it kinda goes into like, um, we were very good at collecting data, we were very good at, you know, teachers actually assessing the kids. Um, we didn't have a problem with, you know, including… even data in interventions… collecting more data through interventions. And whether if it was during school or after school, we have tons and tons of data.
>
> Uh, but then it came down to… when it came to have a conversation about how was the program effective, you know, we would always as a staff go back to opinion, go back to feeling, go back to what I saw in the classroom and-and, you know, a lot of things that, you know, I would've… you know, hopefully in the future like to see us kinda… how do you tie in those emotions to actual data? To be supported by that data. Say, well I feel this because I saw this in my class, and then they produce this data to show that it supports it. To make it a stronger statement as to how to-to help the kids or how to improve instruction as a whole.

Participant A agreed that teachers feel like they already know their students' needs and do not necessarily need the data to give them additional information. While systems are in place to collect and analyze the data, effectively using the data remains a challenge. Participant A reported:

> Because a lot of the feelings that, you know, a lot of what was shared with myself because teachers are always coming to my office and they'll tell me, you know, we work too much. There was too much analysis, too much analyzing data all the time, you know, and where I already know where my kids are at. I'll ask them well, what's your child's ELD level? They won't even know. So, you know, things like that. You know? You know, there's a little mismatch there. So that's like, that's food for thought because if we have our systems in place in terms of

> what the assessments will be, how we're gonna… how it's gonna be collected. Now we have to guide more into that discussion piece of how that impacts an instruction. I think that's where we're at… that level.

Participant C agreed and went on to discuss the need for capacity building around data-based decision-making:

> And I, and-and I completely agree with that because I think that I was doing a lot of the data presentations, I was doing a lot of like, you know, the an-analyzing a lot of the work with them or for them, and then when it came down to having those conversations where I disagree or, you know, someone would say I don't think the data's telling me this or-or they're challenging the data as being accurate or actually telling them what the child was producing. Then it… I think if we do more of approach where the teachers are collecting their data, analyzing their data, having that dialogue, and then doing that… more of those presentations where they share out and then come to an, uh, you know, uh-uh-uh an agreement as to what the area of need is and then how do you target that area of need and actually implement the things themselves, um, it-it-it-it would be more meaningful and actually, you know, help, you know increase, you know, their ability do a lot of that data analysis and discussions and dialogues.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C from School 16 reported several experiences related to the three core components of RTI. In regard to the tiers of instruction, the team reported identifying which students needs different tiers of service and organizing all three tiers of intervention. However, even though the school implemented various interventions, the team was not sure how effective different interventions were and advised a more focused approach of providing one or few effective interventions at each tier. In regards to the problem solving process, the team reports inconsistent implementation and fidelity. At the same time, participants reported that the leadership team uses the steps of the problem-solving process. When teachers engaged in the problem-solving process, the team spoke to the need for honest reflection, challenging belief systems, and building capacity to create and execute interventions. With regard to data-based decision-making, participants report that effective data use and

trusting the data was a challenge for faculty. Therefore, implementation was inconsistent and lacking fidelity.

Structural description. As the focus group shifted towards discussing the three core components of RTI, in particular components 2 and 3, it was evident that the team from School 16 felt that although implementation was difficult work, it would be beneficial for the school. Participants A, B, and C, experienced implementation as arduous, slow, but productive work for their school.

Essence. Commonalities of experience at School 16 were that the SBLT collaborated around how to best implement RTI's three components. All three components required revision in order to achieve full implementation with fidelity. Nonetheless, the group embraced implementation efforts and those efforts began challenging beliefs and reforming practices at the school site.

School 17: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 17 are: inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 1. In regards to the multi-tiered service delivery model, School 17 reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity. In particular, the school was unable to implement Tier 3 services. Participant A reported the following about the implementation of component 1:

> Very comfortable with Tier 1, very comfortable with Tier 2. I don't know about Tier 3, okay? Again, we don't have the manpower to say, you know, we're going to save this time because then if we save that time, that was Math time and, you know, so… It's just you would honestly need a third person to take care just of Tier 3. And it's not cost efficient because what are they going to do in the

> meantime while they take them from Tier 1 and two, what are you going to do in the meantime for Tier 3?

Participant B affirmed this sentiment and further explained:

> Yeah, uh, fidelity to the implementation again, I would echo what she said. You know, Tier 1 and Tier 2 are – are, you know, the easier of the ones to – to implement. You know, um, I think what we've struggled with is again the resources to be able to implement Tier 3. You know, we rarely, uh, have we had the opportunity, uh, to have one-on-one remediation, or even, like two-to-one, or three-to-one. It's just not in the cards. Um, and so for the most part we have not been able to do that, so you know we – we've – we've…Given the limited resources, we've – we are fo - I don't know if we are necessarily focused, you know, our work in this way. It's just what we had the opportunity to do to Tier 1 and Tier 2. You know, we've never said, you know, "let's not do Tier 3." I don't think we've ever explicitly said that. But you know, if we had the opportunity we would definitely want to do that, of course.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Participants A and B both reported informal use of the problem-solving process, especially around analyzing data to identify needs, develop interventions, and to measure the effectiveness of those interventions. However, despite some use of the process by the leadership team, there was not systemic use of the process by faculty. Participant B reported:

> That was I feel has been a much harder sell. I don't – you know, in my own perspective, and I'm not sure if [name] can echo this. I don't know that we've done a very good – and I don't mean this as a criticism – I just don't know how well we've implemented that into the hearts of our teachers, for them to use the problem solving process. You know, I do know that, um, we show them the data and the data speaks for itself, um, but do they – do they enter into a problem solving process? Probably not, you know? Um, and I don't know – and I don't believe, you know, there's been a deep fidelity to that.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3. Participants A and B reported full implementation of data-based decision-making but questioned the fidelity of implementation. Participant B reported:

> The level of fidelity? Again, you know, we… I – I've shared – I share data all year long. I – I had, you know, quarterly meetings with – with my staff just – just, you know, to share that data with them. Um, and you know, the – the

> expectation is that you know, they use the data to inform their instruction. Now can I see that on a daily basis? Um, I guess to some degree, only the teacher can know that, you know, okay yes, I'm modifying my instruction based on the data that I have. You know, I am not able to – as an observer, I'm not really able to tell that, yes, he or she is modifying their instruction based on the results on their test, um, because I don't know the kids well enough, nor their classroom data to know exactly, you know, that they should be doing something differently, or how many times they're going into this lesson, um, based on – on the data. But again, you know, we've made it very, very clear that, you know, data informs instruction. That data informs decision making.

Participant A went on to detail some of the planning days that utilized data-based decision-making but questioned whether or not teachers could engage in the process independently:

> A lot of – we, again had the funds to have half day planning sessions with the teachers that we did the – the teaming. So it was a lot of, "let's assess" but not let – "you assess your kids, and you assess your kids," but, it's "we're going to asses our group that we're working with, and we're going to come together at that time, we're going to look at the data, and we're going to refrain, uh, so that you're intensive is not as intensive, so you're not now reading show vowels. Now intensive sounds like reading long vowels." So it was a lot of group work. On their own? I don't know.

Participant B also noted some of the strengths in regards to how the school has implemented component 3 for Tier 2 services:

> You know I think we – we've used the data very, very strategically to say, okay, you know, "we need this group here, we need this group…" And that – that's a testament to the ladies that – that have been actually implementing the – the – the Tier 2, uh, intervention. It's just – it's how we do business. You know, we – we would never consider, at least now, you know, we would never consider going into something to say, "okay let's just try this, let's just – give me – give me five kids that you think are struggling, and let me have at it." No. It's very strategic.

Textural description. Participants A and B are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school who reported experiences related to implementing RTI's three components. The school achieved inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1 and 2, and achieved full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3. In regards

to component 1, participants reported strong Tier 2 interventions in place but no Tier 3 interventions due to limited "manpower." The SBLT reported the weakest implementation efforts around component 2, despite informal use of the problem-solving process by the leadership team.

Structural description. Participants A and B made a genuine and concerted effort to implement all three components. In particular, participants felt badly about not having Tier 3 services in place. During the focus group, there was a sense of care and passion about the work, and also some concern and frustration with not having fully implemented all three components despite their efforts to do so. In that sense, implementation was somewhat unsatisfying, although worthwhile.

Essence. Commonalities of experience include hard, diligent work towards implementing RTI's core components. Both participants worked extensively around implementing Tier 1 interventions with faculty, as well as creating and revising Tier 2 interventions and services. Both participants also worked to instill systemic use of data-based decision-making faculty-wide.

School 18: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 18 are: full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1. In regards to the multi-tiered system of service delivery, School 18 achieved full implementation but inconsistent fidelity. Participants reported having all three tiers of services in place but

suggested that refinement was needed in order to ensure that all students receive needed interventions. Participant C reported:

> Well I think we got pretty far. I think we got pretty far. I think we just, uh, we need to keep practicing and doing it, but I think we've gotten pretty far. We – we did the in-classroom right away. Uh, we started with the pull outs also immediately with [name] and I, and the aides. And even more so this year with the aides too. And then we also have the *Language!* – the – the last tier. So, I think we have. We got pretty far.

Participant B also shared that a goal would be for more faculty members to be involved in delivering Tier 2 and 3 interventions:

> Yeah we – we were doing the tiers two and three, I would like to see more. Maybe that's going to come later, but we would like – I know I would like to see more of the Tier 2 intervention in the classroom or by teaming up by teachers, something like that. Not just us in charge of tiers two and three.

Participant A went on to detail the importance of focusing on Tier 1 instruction. Also, Participant A shared some of the reasons that teachers were reluctant to send students out for intervention or to team-teach:

> Sometimes I feel like we – we've done pretty well in that Tier 2, and that Tier 3, now that we understand it, but it's that core instruction, that Tier 1 that still seems to be – because we're not having 80 percent of our students proficient, which is, you know, 75, 80, at that – that core. And um, and still resistance to – to a real collaborative a real team approach of, it's okay for me to – to switch out some kids. They're not, it's not just my class. Um, there are second graders, or there are third graders, so let's figure out how to do things differently. I think that's still where we have some resistance. And, um, and part of it also is the fact that, you know, it sounds kind of political, but is the fact that teachers are going to be judged. And that's the reality, we're judged based upon, and if these are the students assigned to me on my roster, the performance of these students is going to determine how people perceive my – me as a teacher. As, uh, my value my worth as a teacher.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Participants reported that they did not get very far in regards to implementation of the problem-solving process due to its complexity. Participant C reported, "Well…the truth is I think that's probably

one of the areas we…struggle with. We're still growing…I don't think we have developed a very systemic way of using the problem solving process." Participant A shared some suggestions and experiences in regards to the problem-solving process:

> On a personal basis, I mean on a personal level, I just think it needs to be streamlined. It just seems so long to – to solve a problem, it seems like the – the – that worksheet becomes a problem, you know what I'm saying? It just seems like it really needs to be streamlined. Okay we have this problem, okay one, two, three what do we need to do let's talk about it, let's plan for it. But it seems like it becomes a whole meeting worth of filling out a – a sheet of paper to solve a problem. I don't know, I just think it needs to be streamlined and wouldn't be so difficult.

Participant B added, "or, we would have to meet every week to – to see progress monitored about these previous problems, and then face new ones then." Participant A added that the complexity of step 2 made the process a tough sell for staff, stating, "there's that…ICEL by RIOT piece which also makes it very lengthy, and has not been well received, I think, at our school, by staff so - to be a systemic use."

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3. In regards to data-based decision-making, participants reported full implementation but refinement needed in regards to fidelity. Participants B and C discussed experiences using data-based decision-making for Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Participant B reported:

> Um, we used it constantly to change groups, to actually take some students out, we could have traded them from some – from the other language – okay you're talking too much already. So, we need – we need to replace this group with another one. Okay, this student. We use data to make changes throughout the year. We didn't wait until the next benchmarks, so. Um, we were very, I think, consistent, at least [name] and I were very consistent at using the data for.

Participant C added additional detail around how data practices have changed:

> And we began – we began from a very rustic place. First year? Remember first year we were just inputting it in the computer, we were working with the kindergarteners, and – and it was really awesome just to do it that way. But then once we were able, through MONDO, and – and DIBELing, and we had- had it

> all online, makes it all very quick and accessible, it was much, much better of course that way too. But yes – I – I agree with [name]. We're on it when it comes to that – at our level. Now, at the classroom level – I'm not sure. I – I would have to loop Ms. – defer to [name].

Participant A went on to share that school-wide teachers are using data with increased frequency and know how to make data-based decisions but refinement is needed:

> And you know – and I think that we teachers have – do look at their data a lot more. I think maybe what I had the biggest question is, the data piece that they used to – to collect and gather their – their data…

Participant C interjected, "What they're measuring?" Participant A continued:

> At the quarterly. The – the assessment tool that they use, um, to collect data. They constantly talk about how it's not the most appropriate one, and yet I think what we really struggle with is, um, well then, which is a meaningful one? Where can you g- what data collection piece can we use that would provide you meaningful data, and because of time or different – it's like, "Oh I don't know. Okay so I guess we'll go ahead and use the periodic assessment still to gather our data." But I think in terms of looking at it, and looking at how students perform, they know how – teachers, I think all teachers know how to use it. It's just, um, is it the right piece to- tool to collect from? Um, and I think we're struggling with that monitoring how do we do – do some quicker, shorter assessments.

Textural description. Participants A, B, and C are educators at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participants reported full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of the multi-tiered service delivery system, and discussed that focusing on core instruction as well as promoting a sense of collective responsibility for all students were still challenges. Due to the complexity of the problem-solving process, component 2 was not consistently implemented. Lastly, while component 3 was fully implemented, increased fidelity was needed and the school set the goal of using reliable progress monitoring assessments in order to make timely and accurate data-based decisions.

Structural description. Participants from School 18 experienced implementation of the three core components of RTI differently depending on the component and roles

served at the school site. For example, all participants experienced implementation of component 1 as beneficial for the school and its students; at the same time participants were aware that work still remains to achieve broad-based participation and fidelity. SBLT members found component 2 to be tedious and unnecessary. In regards to component 3, participants A and B found data-based decision-making to be an empowering growth experience and were confident about implementation. At the same time, Participant A shared a faculty-wide perspective that while staff had knowledge and skills, there was room for growth; overall, Participant A found implementation of component 3 to be a work in progress.

Essence. Participants from School 18 collaborated around implementing the three components of RTI. The team made strides in implementing Tier 2 and 3 interventions and effective data-based decision-making. However, work remains in order to achieve school-wide consensus and fidelity of implementation of all three components.

School 19: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 19 are: full implementation and fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation and fidelity of component 1. Participants A and B from School 19 reported full implementation and fidelity of the multi-tiered system of service delivery. Participant B reported:

> Oh, we've implemented all three. We've done all three. We have Tier 1 happening in the classroom, um, our Tier 2 is our learning lab and this year we added Tier 3 with our language program. Our SDC teacher is teaching fourth and fifth grade using the...her special ed. kids plus gen. ed. kids who we brought into the mix that fit the criteria and would benefit from that and actually have

> benefited quite a bit, the data demonstrates that, um so I would say with significant fidelity.

Participant A agreed with this sentiment. Participants A and B went on to discuss that fidelity of implementation for Tiers 2 and 3 was easier than ensuring fidelity of core instruction. Participant B reported:

> I think 2 and 3 were easy, because I think we have outstanding teachers there in 2 and 3. Number one is a little harder, Tier 1, because again, it's about the good first effective instruction in "my" classroom, as an individual teacher for "my" children, and there are levels of skill among teachers. So, the really good ones, I hate to use that word but it's true...The really outstanding teachers do it flawlessly and with minimal, if any support required. Um, you know, and so on down, right? Your average people need a little bit of hand holding, but they're, they're pretty good to go... And then we have our strugglers that just say, "Can you do it for me one more time?" and you know, if you turn your back for a second...Then they're back to their routine, so, you know, in terms of our experiences, understanding who our people are and where the support needs to be, given...consistently.

Participants A and B added that in addition to consistent support for certain teachers, another approach to ensuring fidelity was collaborating in grade level teams. Participant A reported:

> And meeting and having them to meet the grade level so that others that are being successful are able to also let them know about their success, you know, "I did do it like this." And you know, "This is my data, this is what it shows."

Participant B added, "Right, because this is why grade level collaboration is so imperative."

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Participants A and B from School 19 reported that implementation of the problem-solving process was more difficult than component 1; overall, the school achieved inconsistent implementation. Participant B reported that the team made a concerted effort to move towards

implementation and received support from the district, but the complexity of step 2 was an issue. Participant B reported:

> That's much harder. Um, I think we, as my coach had mentioned earlier, um, you know we went very thoughtfully with fourth and fifth grade through the process, and we did do, our, our expert did come back from our trainings and did do our PD with our whole faculty, um, but that whole ICEL by RIOT was a lot for them to digest.

Participant A interjected, "If they could just take a part of it." Participant B continued:

> The acronyms, and the whole thing, the way it was all presented all together and just like all this, and they're like "Whoa, whoa, whoa." I mean it was just really over many, many peoples' heads so that was hard, for our individual teachers to then turn around and go back and say "Ok, I've got a grasp of this, I can do it." And, and honestly speaking, I mean even for us as an SBLT this was really, this was really, I don't want to say new completely because I know it's not, but um, it, it, it was a different way, of going through process and so um, it was tough. It was tough, I mean I believe that we gave it our all and, but we have, I mean, a ways to go still...

Participants A and B discussed that the data charts included use of the problem-solving process and that all faculty members participated. Nonetheless, teachers were not yet able to go through the steps independently. Participant A reported that they did well in some areas, such as math and their data charts, and Participant B agreed. Participant A continued:

> So everybody, everybody went through the data charts. So everybody did get a chance to, to kind of go through the process. Now whether they're ready to go through it on their own, or just...But with our guidance, you know, we're not a flat line, we're still growing in the process.

Participant B further agreed that the school was still making progress towards a fuller implementation of component 2, stating, "Yeah, we've done more group type of stuff and we're moving towards that individual, building that individual capacity to be able to do it on their own or as a grade level." Participant A added, "Yeah, yeah. We're not there yet," and Participant B agreed.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3. Participants A and B reported full implementation of data-based decision-making but inconsistent fidelity. Participant B reported his sentiment that they have accomplished a lot. Participant A added, "We do that pretty well." Participant B continued, stating, "I think our teachers really do understand the importance of data, how we really..." Participant A added, "How to apply data." Participant B continued:

> Right, they all use MyData, we've done PD on MyData, um you know, how all of those, you know data sets really influence ultimately what, what our children achieve on the CST which is a direct correlation obviously to our grade level standards, you know, um this year we did a little bit more with the progress monitoring piece, bringing that into it, so that, that's...

Participant A added that "some of the grade levels did very well with that." Participant B agreed with Participant A, stating that some of the grade levels "really bought into it, really liked it and so um, so I would say we're making good progress there." Participant A added:

> Well, you know you never get one hundred percent buying into it because people are at different levels, but I think the majority of our teachers, we, we've been exposing them to the data, and really having some of those hard conversations around the data and really looking what that data means as far as your instruction, so I think uh for the majority of our teachers I, I, I'd say, you know...

Participant B added that they "take ownership of it." Participant A clarified that although the majority of teachers utilize data-based decision-making to inform instruction, not all teachers are at the same level of proficiency or use:

> I can't tell you that everybody does that...It's always somebody else's thoughts still, but I think that the majority and some of our grade levels are stronger I think in that area than others, and um, I think that over time that there'll be more and more...That will buy into it.

Participants A and B summed up experiences related to component 3 by adding that there has been substantial growth. Participant B expressed the opinion that "improvement has happened…across the board" with which Participant A concurred.

Textural description. Participants A and B are elementary educators in the section of the district being studied. Overall, participants discussed that implementation efforts were continually improving. At the end of the second year, participants reported that the school has full implementation and fidelity of component one. While tiers 2 and 3 were easier to maintain fidelity, consistent support and grade level collaboration helped ensure fidelity of tie 1 instruction. Despite the report that all teachers utilized the problem-solving process, SBLT members reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Lastly, School 19 achieved full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 3, data-based decision-making

Structural description. Participants experienced implementation of the three core components of RTI as a positive growth experience. Throughout the part of the focus group that surrounded research question 2, participants kept remarking on the progress being made towards implementation. Even for component 2, which was the most challenging to implement, participants reported that they were still growing and making progress towards building capacity.

Essence. Participants reported a team approach to implementing the three core components and made a concerted effort to address all three of the components. Component 1 was most successful, followed by component 3, and component 2 was the biggest challenge.

School 20: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 20 are: full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and full implementation and fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 1. Participants from School 20 reported full implementation of the multi-tiered service delivery system; however, fidelity of implementation was inconsistent. Participant C discussed levels of implementation:

> We…implemented all, I believe, three levels and it went, um, fairly well. Um, students were able to move in and out of their … the tiers and I mean, we were on top of that, making sure that we were using our data to guide to where exactly we had to move the students into the … into their tiers.

Participant B added additional detail about what the tiers look like at this school site:

> In terms of fidelity, uh, the implementation of the tiered system at, uh, grade level, we did implement, you know, that Tier 1. Good first teaching in the classroom, taking a look at ourselves, our practice at our, uh, independent work time, how successful we were in implementing that. Uh, Tier 2 we did, um, send students out to a learning center environment to receive that additional support and resources. Uh, as far as Tier 3, I believe we had some students participating in an alternate program during their language arts block to receive, uh, services to match, uh, their needs.

Participant A discussed the complexity of ensuring fidelity of interventions in terms creating buy-in, consistency, ensuring that the intervention are matched to student need, and aligning intervention efforts with core instruction:

> Our after-school program was, towards the end of the school year. Uh, the fidelity is, you know, kind of … disappears, you know, as we scale the, uh, tiers. Uh, I'll say that for the most part, Tier 1 is well-established. Tier 2, uh, you, you know, is like on and off. And Tier 3, you know, we could definitely implement it towards the end of the school year.

> You know, you cannot get into your own mode of "Yes, I do my own little thing here." You know, it, it is, it is heavy duty business, you know, when you are, uh, trying to match what is the, uh, instruction that a child needs, uh, um, you know, at this particular point and how you integrate that in the context of the Tier 1 so that the child is not lost completely.

Participant B summed up the school's experience with fidelity in regards to component 1 thusly:

> So if anything, that was one of the greatest challenges with, uh, the fidelity; making sure that we were consistent with it and we were doing as we had initially, uh, discussed and planned and agreed to do.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Despite a strong beginning to implementing the problem-solving process, SBLT members reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity. Participants B and C discussed how the problem-solving process was used in grade level planning meetings. Participant B reported:

> I think as a grade level, we started with the problem solving process. We identified a need and we discussed, uh, reasons as to why that might be occurring. And then we came up with a plan to attempt to mediate the need, uh, of students by providing intervention and towards the end, after the data results were in, we looked at them, we analyzed them and then we saw areas where we needed to, uh, explore a little more in terms of other options or strategies that we can use to, to reinforce skills that we're lacking in certain areas.

Participant C went on to report:

> I think for our grade level, we kind of did the same thing, I mean as we met, um, because we were doing it in six-week rotations. So we would see and if we didn't see an improvement with a specific group or specific area then we went to think, "Okay, obviously what's been the mode of delivery for this instruction? Um, what can we do?" So, obviously this is not working, what else can we do? And whether we changed our, you know, mode of, um … and ways of implementing, sometimes we even switched teachers, maybe another one has more of an effective approach and so we went back and forth and we … six weeks, at least, to make sure that everything was going according to how the students should be moving.

Participant A shared some of the reasons that that contributed to an inconsistent implementation of the problem-solving process:

> Yeah, the, uh, the, uh problem solving, uh, approach, uh, model was, was, uh, tested in, in the COST sessions. And, um, I remember how I diligently, you know, tried the first cycle and many kinds of, you know … it kind of goes, you know, down the drain. You know, uh, I don't know why but, but teachers become, like, they know what they … you know, what these students need and they know, know what to give the students. So, uh, going through the formalities of creating the, the, uh, hypothesis and, and agreeing on to which one to attack and concentrate and all that, you know, it's like, you know, um … It, it's not a waste of time, you know, but, but it's something that I don't see, you know, that's where, you know, the fidelity, uh, uh, lacks. You know, that, that … I think that we need to stick to it. Uh, and, uh, and just do it as a process.

Full implementation and fidelity of component 3. In regards to data-based decision-making, participants reported full implementation and fidelity. Participants A, B, and C reported that data-based decision-making practices were used by all teachers. Participant B reported:

> I think for our grade level, uh, everyone was eager to use data to help us drive our instruction so that made the process, uh, run smoothly. It helped us build consensus in terms of, uh, what needs we were going to address first. So that data was really a support to our grade level, uh, rather than an obstacle.

Participant C concurred:

> Yeah with our grade level it was the same thing because sometimes you have a child that might be lacking skills in, across the grade level. Um, and let's say just language arts, there's certain sub skills that still they, they lack and it's looking and building the consensus of which ones take priority. You know, which ones are really critical to moving this child out of the tier and sometimes you would look at the data and say, "Well if he, he or she learns this, it might help them with this." So, yeah, our, our team was eager to learn and use the data because it showed our progress and it showed how effective we were working and so, yeah, we didn't have a problem.

Participant A also reported, "we have no issues with the use of data." Participant C shared advice around how to frame data use to ensure fidelity of implementation and, again, cited the need for collective responsibility for all students:

> With RTI, it's being in charge of everybody, you know, not just your classroom. So making sure that, as a grade level, if we're teetering towards the lower spectrum of the scores, making sure that as a grade level, you know, that you make the effort to bring those scores up and not use it in a negative way because some teachers are … that's what they're afraid of; the negativity that they're going to get by sharing those scores as a grade level.

Textural description. Elementary educators A, B, and C reported experiences related to the implementation of the three core components of RTI. Participants reported extensive work, collaboration, and planning in regards to implementing component 1, and although the school achieved full implementation, fidelity was an issue. Next, despite using the problem-solving process in grade level collaboration and by the COST team, the formality and involved nature led to inconsistent implementation. Lastly, School 20 achieved full implementation and fidelity of component 3, and reported complete buy-in around using data to make decisions surrounding effective instruction and intervention.

Structural description. Participants A, B, and C experienced RTI implementation positively. Participants viewed the grade level collaboration around providing tiers of intervention for students as necessary and important work. Similarly, participants saw the need for increased fidelity of component 1 as crucial to meeting students' needs. Even in regards to component 2, which was not consistently implemented, participants wanted to continue and improve use of the problem-solving process, even if in a less formal manner. Lastly, the use of data-based decision-making was experienced as positive and beneficial to all participants

Essence. SBLT members from School 20 were incredibly committed to RTI implementation and to reforming practices at the school site to benefit students. Grade level teams analyzed data and used the problem solving-process to plan and coordinate tiers of intervention to ensure that all students in the grade level were successful.

School 22: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for School 22 are: full implementation and fidelity of component 1; full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 2; and full implementation and fidelity of component 3.

Full implementation and fidelity of component 1. Participants reported full implementation of the multi-tiered service delivery model, especially due to prior efforts, but reported that maintaining fidelity was increasingly difficult due to curricular and budgetary changes. However, at the time of the focus group fidelity was largely achieved despite these changes. Participant B reported:

> You know in the past, I think we, you know, there's a high level of fidelity. Um, we implemented the, you know, multi-tiered system fully and every year it - you know, my thing was just getting it cleaner and cleaner. Okay, um, it was clear to see, you know, why these students were moving up, where they were going and then where we went next. I thought this – the s-system of, you know, the delivery of services was, uh, it was efficient and it was effective.
>
> Even as the district brought in different programs, brought in MONDO and, you know, and they DIBELing, you know, I was able to pull people and it was still, we still had a - a clear, you know, line of services that were outlined, data, you know, driven, it was data driven. Next year's going to be a little different. We've got a different program and no funding for certain things, so… And tiers two and three are, you know, mostly going to be handled in the classroom with this new program, because it's part of the program, so we'll see, you know, where we go with this system.

Full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of component 2. Participants reported full implementation but inconsistent fidelity of the problem-solving process. Participants A and B discussed the strategies that they used to achieve full implementation. Participant B shared that the problem-solving process was largely embedded into data analysis:

> Well, data analysis was systemic. I mean, we – as I said earlier, um, after the quarterly assessment and a whole group faculty meeting. Okay, analyzing, what

> did – what did we do well as a grade level? What did we not do well in? Looking at the grade level and sharing strategies to develop, uh, an action plan, instructional improvement plan. And then looking at our own practice, and I spoke to that a lot.
>
> You know, getting them to really be honest about, you know, who they are as instructors, you know, in that ICEL you know, kind of, framework helps with that. But systemically, that's what we would do as a whole – as a whole group, you know. So data analysis is embedded into our problem solving – into our model. It is problem solving model that we, you know, have gotten more and more and more, um, familiar with and we will continue as we have looked at and been able to pull up, even different sources and different ways of aggregating.

Participant A shared that another strategy was beginning the problem-solving process as a group and then having teachers continue the process individually:

> I think also besides just looking at the data, since it's a problem solving process of having like a cycle of identifying, first the problem and saying okay, this is a problem. Such as for – just off the top of my head, uh, first grade is had the problem is, um, sight words, so first identifying the problem and being aware that the teachers are going through the whole cycle of, 'okay we've identified the so we, first as a grade level, what are we going to do to solve that problem?' And then, kind of, discuss that, find strategies, find ways to approach the problem, so the plan can become proficiency or could become better at whatever area of need that is. And then individually, go through the whole process. Because I feel it's the process, like a cycle process and first you need to first look at the – what is needed? What are we lacking? What is not going okay? What skill's missing? Like, once again, it goes back, this is the data, this is what it shows, now what is the problem? And how am I going to solve the problem?

Participant B also shared the thinking behind their strategy, stating, "It's been a process of getting them into the problem solving process, without saying 'it's a problem solving process.'" Participant A concurred with this. Participant B elaborated on this method of implementation:

> It's doing rather than saying. You know, they're going to learn by just doing it. We're going to take them through this process, we're going to do a lot of data analysis, but I'm going to set up, you know, the – I'm going to set the stage so that, you know, and the time, and the place, for them to do it. And then I'm going to walk them through step by step and then give them the time and give them directions on what they're doing. So, rather than saying this is what we're going to do – because sometimes they just look at things and you can shut them down,

> they feel overwhelmed. It's – It's almost like having to trick them into, like you do little kids. You know, like show them, you just, let – teach them how to do it, you know later one we can learn, you know, and connect the terminology with it.

Participants A and B discussed the implementation process, as well as different levels and speeds of understanding. Participant A shared, "Because no one just told you, this is, you know, and they're learning the process slowly. I mean some grade levels will go – be faster than others and we understand that." Participant B added, "And we have some superstars and some folks that are just into technology." Participant A summed things up thusly: "And some who just need that time. But I think just the comfort zone – having them all at that comfort zone where they all feel good working and going through the whole process."

Full implementation and fidelity of component 3. Participants reported extensive use of data-based decision-making and significant efforts to ensure fidelity. Participant B began by discussing the different levels within the faculty:

> I say this, you know, about half of my staff, I like to see everyone, you know, taking that data and, you know, r-really understanding it and seeing how it can improve my instruction by knowing exactly what my students, you know, students are doing. And I think they just need time, there needs to be time to really look at it and they have to be walked through it. When you're looking at a whole group and a whole group of adults –You know, with their own learning and what they feel about teaching and that some of them feel like their experts and you can't tell them anything – And then you have your novices are the ones in the middle and they're just hungry for everything and their following you, it's just being able to walk – walk them. You know, the fidelity comes, I think, you know, you- a lot of staffs are made up just like mine. You have a variety, you know, of levels and age groups and, you know, the veterans and the novices.

Participant A concurred with this sentiment. Participant B went on to detail her experiences surrounding ensuring fidelity of implementation at her school site:

> But you have to – to get one hundred percent fidelity, you know, to get everyone onboard, it means the leader has to walk – walk everyone through. It-uh,

> someone on that team, the expert on that site, but I think the – the – the site administrator has to drive that effort, or else you won't have everyone onboard.
>
> It's looking at data on the wall you know, as a group. You know, and pointing out things and guiding them through the process, okay. And then letting them go on their own, you know, and doing it. And I think we have gotten a tremendous amount of – you know, as far, eh, uh – our implementation is – is improving. It's getting better and better, okay. And I – we have full fidelity, you know, we have full implementation, but at different levels.

Participant A concurred with this sentiment.

Textural description. Participants A and B from School 22 shared their experiences and strategies related to implementation of the three core components of RTI. In regards to component 1, participants reported full implementation and fidelity, but due to curricular and budgetary changes felt that maintaining fidelity was becoming more and more difficult. Participants shared many strategies for implementing component 2, including embedding the process in data analysis, starting the process whole group before moving into individual use, and using and modeling the problem-solving process without calling out terminology until after participants are used to the steps. Lastly, in regards to component 3, participants reported full implementation and fidelity, and shared how they supported all teachers in order to achieve high levels of fidelity.

Structural description. Participants experienced implementation of the three core components as beneficial and productive work. They viewed implementation efforts as a long journey and were resolute in their efforts to achieve full implementation and high levels of fidelity for all components. Their advice around implementation was to be strategic and supportive in order to meet faculty at their different levels of expertise.

Essence. Commonalities of experience for School 22 include connecting past practices at the school site to new language and ways of working that are connected to RTI. In addition, SBLT members reported working with all teachers to achieve high levels of implementation and fidelity for each of RTI's components, particularly through scaffolding and differentiating use the problem-solving process and data analysis.

Individual Interview Findings

Although the researcher had planned to conduct small focus groups consisting of two to three participants from each school, there were four Cohort 1 schools in which only one person participated. Due to the fact that only one person per school participated, these findings are limited and cannot be extrapolated to convey the experience of the entire SBLT or school. Nonetheless, the researcher deemed that it was important to capture as many different experiences from as many Cohort 1 schools as possible. Section three details the findings of these individual interviews.

Research question 1. Research question 1 explored the RTI implementation experience of the SBLTs in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California.

School 4: Themes. In regards to research question 1, three key themes emerged. The themes for Participant A from School 4 are: strong SBLT and administrative support is essential; RTI helped us focus on academics, attendance, and attitude (behavior); and technology and funding were obstacles to implement certain interventions.

Strong SBLT and administrative support is essential. The first theme that surfaced for the participant from School 4 is the need for strong leadership in order to implement RTI. Participant A reported her experiences related to this theme:

> I think that my situation was unique in that I was a first year principal, and on top of trying to become acclimated with the school, I was also being introduced to the RTI implementation and part of it was a bit overwhelming in the sense that you're having a lot of new vocabulary, a lot of concepts and um, items to implement. So when I would attend the meetings, she would sit there and it was like, okay, you get the meeting but then I think part of the implementation challenge was not having a strong leadership team to come back and bring it on site. And then there were times when I would ask for the RTI support and you would have someone come out and work with us, but for someone to really implement it well, it seems as if you first of all, you need to have a strong leadership team, and you need to make sure that the concepts are really solid.

Participant A elaborated further:

> And so a person has to be grounded in their first experience before they can add another layer in. So if I had a better foundation as a principal, I think the RTI implementation would have been more successful.

RTI helped us focus on the 3 As: Academics, Attendance, and Attitude (behavior).

Another theme that surfaced for Participant A from School 4 is that RTI helped the school to focus on the 3 As: Academics, Attendance, and Attitude (behavior). Participant A reported the following in regards to implementation of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) that occurred as a result of RTI implementation:

> So, what the dean, number one, we're coming up with alternatives to suspensions so he's had, last year we used [school name] dollars and we had a [school name] store after school where kids could buy things. This year, as well, [name] has come up with a little thing called the [school name] Bees. So when you see a child doing something well, you give him these tickets, they can use it to cash in Friday after school and buy things.
>
> We also have had you know, like award assemblies, honor roll, we're having gift cards, we're having certificates. Like for attendance now, we have a trophy for a hundred percent and then um, also, too, for kids that are doing well, I am using some money that I received from a grant so we buy things for kids and so for the perfect attendance, last time she gave like basketballs or whatever, different types of things like this. And so we are coming up with other things that we can use to try to reward the kids so that way it'll be positive versus negative all the time.

In regards to academics, Participant A also reported the school is celebrating academic success, and increased data use. A reported:

> At least from talking about RTI and looking at data, we're starting at least to have teachers pay attention to that. They are now looking at their periodic assessment data and they're posting the proficient and advanced. Those kids, the first year of school, you know, we didn't really honor their progress except for every once in a while. Now you have more teacher's posting it, making it public. Teachers are coming to me saying, oh, you know, these kids did well, I had fifty percent proficient or advanced or even like we had our special ed teacher, she had one proficient, she had one advanced and then she had kids that were basic. So for someone that's in special ed, that they're proud of their data and they're sharing it, so we're starting to see some things starting to happen from that perspective.

Technology and funding were obstacles to implement certain interventions.

Another theme that surfaced was that technology demands and the money required to implement certain intervention programs were obstacles for this school. Participant A reported:

> We ran into a problem when we were trying to do the multi-tiered approach for our ELA. You just need to make sure, number one, you have all the materials and the teachers are trained and especially for Reading 180, like number one they told us we had 120 licenses on site. We only had sixty. They wanted us to implement a program. You needed basically almost a lab configuration type of situation and we spent and I didn't have anybody on site designated to deal with it so you had a teacher using his conference period trying to set up the computer lab for Read 180 and then once he finally tried to get it up, he found out what was missing, we're going back and forth between the Scholastic people and also too, we didn't have a server but you didn't have money in the account to buy it so instead of a budget adjustment, I'm coming out of pocket, so I'm coming up with twelve hundred dollars to buy a server, so we can implement a program.

Participant A further added:

> How can we provide support because if I'm trying to run a whole school then that's something that gets done but it may not be the priority that's necessary yet the district is looking and saying, how come you haven't implemented Read 180? What's going on? So it looks like a negative on my part, when you know, we're doing the best we can on the site.

Textural description. Participant A is an educator at a Cohort 1 middle school who reported being a new principal. Participant A reported that School 4 did not have a strong leadership team, which hindered implementation efforts. Participant A reported

that School 4 was taking baby steps the first year, but during year two of implementation, some strides were made in the areas of positive behavior support, attendance, and academics. Participant A reported that implementing certain interventions wasn't possible due to technology, costs and training. Participant A reported that extensive support from the district would be needed for successful implementation.

Structural description. Participant A from School 4 was overwhelmed by RTI implementation and unable to find time for RTI amidst all of her other responsibilities. Overall it was a negative and daunting experience. Participant A reported:

> You want to make it that it's just all integrated and that's something that, I think, when you're an outsider looking in for the first time, it's hard to make that all happen. So I can say from 2 years, now I can look back and say oh, this is how I can put it in and make it work but as I said, as a first year principal, coming and being pulled in a lot of different directions, I understand the support and how RTI worked but I had a lot of other things that were on my plate and it just made it difficult to implement it effectively.

School 7: Themes. In regards to research question 1, one key theme emerged. The main theme for Participant A from School 7 is that it is imperative to establish a culture for effective data use.

It is imperative to establish a culture for effective data use. The major theme that emerged from part one of the interview was the importance of establishing a culture for effective data use, and, in general, building a Professional Learning Community. Participant A reported:

> When you come into a school where the culture of looking at data is not prevalent, it's just something that they didn't do, and if they did do, they weren't comfortable about it, because it is a discussion that is unsafe for many, many teachers. So when I came here two years ago, I realized I have to establish some teams, collaborative teams, because I wanted to go with that Professional Learning Community model, but in doing that, I have to make it safe. So that when the teachers meet, for different reasons, they're comfortable with talking

about the problem and possible solutions to the problem, and those steps they're gonna take to resolve them, without feeling threatened.

Participant A further added that shifting the culture included creating an environment where staff felt safe sharing their views:

> And my big mantra was, I don't want you to have parking lot conversations, because that's just gossip, and it doesn't lead to resolving anything. So I want us to be able to surface any issues that are there to be surfaced, and those that we can address right away, we will, and those that need to be tabled because we have to do some more research on it, we'll do that too. But I don't want you to go away with unresolved issues that lead to just gossip in the parking lot, because then we get nowhere. I wanted to have transparent conversations, clear, transparent, safe conversations about our data, and about every other issue.

Participant A went on to discuss that although culture shifts are occurring in regards to the conditions necessary for effective use of data-based decision-making, changing a school's culture takes time:

> But I don't think... That takes time, you know, the culture is shifting in that direction, but it takes time, and I don't think that we have the expertise or teacher leaders within each PLE [Personalized Learning Environment] to lead discussions about that. In our learning teams, the first step in our seven steps is to identify the students' needs. Well they weren't using data, to identify the student needs, and they weren't using the protocol either, to say, OK, this might help us solve this. I would ask, in different groups, how would you identify that as a problem, a student need? Oh, I'm assuming it is... I said, what do you mean? I've been teaching here for 25 years, and I assumed that this is what's going on. So I got the level of not looking at data, and I don't think that they're still doing that. And this is a major problem, of getting them past that barrier, or whatever it is that's holding them from looking at data and being comfortable with making some decisions, you know... That's going to take more time.

Textural description. Participant A is an educator at a middle school that participated in Cohort 1 for a year. After the first year of implementation, the school experienced a change in governance and the school is no longer directly affiliated with the district. Participant A reported doing a lot of research before official RTI implementation. Participant A also reported that RTI changed the school by creating

intervention during the school day and spoke to the ongoing challenge of offering targeted intervention that meet specific student need. Lastly, Participant A reported the work done around creating a culture for effective data use and that it takes time to do so.

Structural description. The fact that RTI implementation efforts continued despite a change in governance indicated that Participant A experienced RTI positively and views RTI as a worthwhile reform effort. Participant A is cognizant of the fact that reform takes time and is resolute that it can and will occur at her school.

School 12: Themes. In regards to research question 1, two key themes emerged. The themes for Participant A from School 12 are: *RTI was an effective framework for instruction; and strong SBLT and administrative support is essential.*

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. The first theme that surfaced for Participant A from School 12 is that RTI was an effective framework to address areas of concern for the school:

> We just found it [RTI] as a way to… you know, a program to implement, not a program, but it just, what is it, a framework that would help the school become more efficient and effective in all of our areas of concern. Um, we had concerns as far as academics, attendance, and for our behavior. Like everything was haywire basically and we couldn't understand okay what is it that's causing all of this? We're working so hard but we're getting so little result for what we we're doing.

In addition, Participant A reported that that RTI helped focus on instruction and on factors that teachers can control:

> And it, I guess it helped everyone look at their own practices first instead of putting the whole student first. So it was okay what am I doing? So I think that was a very positive, the most positive time out of like the whole implementation it was, it was that shift from okay what's wrong with the students to okay what can I do or what have I been doing?

Strong SBLT and administrative support is essential. The next theme that surfaced for Participant A from School 12 is the need for a strong leadership team and administrative support. In particular, Participant A reported not having the school "leader" lead the school through RTI implementation:

> Um, but that's when also like, I guess the most important thing that like the…down part of the rollercoaster was not having our leader be the one who really guided us in this venture, or the journey. Um, even though we have strong a-a strong admin team that really ran with it, I feel like if it doesn't come directly from the leader it won't go as far as it can. Of the potential, like it won't reach it's potential.

Participant A further added:

> Yeah it's I think before we even roll anything out as a school it's, the leader needs to know about it like the back of their hand basically it's, like I felt like I was the one running with it the whole time and um, it's the support from the leader that I was seeking a lot of the times. And when they're, one time, when teachers had questions about any policies or procedures they would come to me, but I felt like I wasn't the one to make those decisions.

Textural description. Participant A is an educator at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participant A shared that the school engaged in research around RTI, and the district trainings helped the school refine implementation efforts. A reported that RTI facilitated teacher reflection and a focus on instructional. A also reported that the school leader was not actively involved in implementation efforts, and that she was responsible for creating an implementation plan, which included policies and procedures.

Structural description. Participant A is an advocate of RTI but found the experience to be filled with ups and downs. A reported that RTI implementation was like a "rollercoaster," with both positive and negative experiences. Positive experiences included reflection and moving away from deficit thinking, while a lack of administrative support with implementation was negative.

School 21: Themes. In regards to research question 1, one key theme emerged. The main theme for Participant A from School 21 is that achieving consensus was an obstacle.

Achieving consensus was an obstacle. The major key theme that surfaced in regards to research question 1 for Participant A from School 21 was that achieving consensus was an obstacle and that the school did not get very far in regards to implementation. In addition, Participant A discussed that she would like to take implementation efforts back to the beginning:

> I don't know how to…we are implementing it. It's not as structured as I think it should be. And, um, as far as the process, everybody's not on board with it yet. So I think there might have been another way … I, I'd like to really go back to square one and start over again.

Participant A went on to report that faculty does not have an understanding of RTI and that consensus has not been achieved at this school:

> I think a negative of some things is that everybody doesn't … they haven't bought into it yet and I think that's because they really don't understand it yet. They need time to, to see how it's relevant in their classroom. It's like changing a paradigm.

Participant A further described the school's faculty and some of their perceptions around RTI:

> We have a lot of veteran teachers at this school and to them, this is a whole new thing. They don't realize it's differentiating instruction. And they don't realize that, um, they have responsibility. They think that you put a name on the list, the intervention teacher gets them and that's the end of it. So, um, the obstacle I think is just getting them to understand where it fits in their whole instruction, program structure.

Participant A added that reading books and research related to RTI would be an appropriate next step for the school:

> But I think that people need a chance to really read the research. Read why it's necessary 'cause they don't understand that either. And if you do that before you get in and say, "This is what we're gonna do." I think that might help.

Textural description. Participant A was new to School 21 for year two of RTI implementation. She reported that the school did not get very far in terms of RTI implementation and that understanding and buy-in were obstacles. She reported that although the SBLT attended trainings and used to meet frequently, meetings have become less frequent.

Structural description. Overall, Participant A experienced RTI implementation as a negative and confusing experience due to the fact that previous implementation efforts were not successful and that she was unable to steer them in a more positive direction. Participant A reported, "they were already in part one and I'm kind of swimming to catch up with them but I don't…well, that's about where I am as far as my personal experience." Participant A relayed that she'd like to redo implementation efforts, stating, "So I think there might have been another way…I'd like to really go back to square one and start over again.

Research question 2. Research question 2 investigated the experience of SBLTs in regards to ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making).

School 4: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for Participant A from School 4 are: full implementation, but inconsistent fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3.

Full implementation, but inconsistent fidelity of component 1. Despite the difficulties with technology that Participant A spoke to earlier, Participant A reported that all three tiers were implemented but not necessarily to fidelity:

> I think that the tiers were implemented; it's just the depth in which we were able to be successful with the full process. So they're working on it but I can't say it's fidelity. You would have to have somebody else come in from the outside, because, something else too, we need to have a mock or mini trainings on what's happening as far as the actual implementation of the programs for the administrators because I haven't had READ 180 or AAL or DRWC or whatever you want to call it, or ELS. So I can't say exactly how my teachers are performing unless I look at the data, so that's why I can't say the fidelity of it. But we do have you know, the base and we have the um, the base program. We have the one hour and two hour pullouts for the kids who are actually being removed and they don't even have the actual for a class because they're doing level three.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2. In regards to the problem-solving process, Participant A reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity:

> It's not systemic at our school site. You know, I've shared the chart with the teachers. We used it at the beginning of the school year. We used it again, maybe midway but it's not systemic because it's not something that we all use and were familiar with and it's something that needs to be built in so, I'll admit that.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3. Participant A reports increased data use in multiple arenas but an overall lack on consistent implementation and fidelity. Participant A reported using data for scheduling, attendance, behavior, and academics:

> Well, at least uh, something that was unusual for our school this year, is that with the help of [name], we used data to construct our master schedule and that had not been done before. In the past, all we did was just have a slot and you just threw kids in. So, that's something that we can that we use and then too, uh, we're looking at data because our attendance, we have a PSA counselor and our data is for attendance is around 97%. We even have homerooms that are a hundred percent, you know. And so, we're constantly looking at that. Teachers are now looking at their periodic assessment data. Unfortunately I didn't meet with people

> like I thought I would do. As an AP, I was able to meet with my department but as principal that didn't happen.

Participant A went on to report that the progress that was made towards data-based decision-making has been altered:

> You know, so I just have to see how they follow up on it and a lot of the things, we were thrown off guard. When you think about, say March, the whole school just, everything just changed. Everything just changed. So, at least the progress we're making was sidelined because we were starting to have department meetings twice a month after school. But, the morale and the momentum has stopped.

Textural description. Participant A is an educator at a Cohort 1 middle school. A reported full implementation of component 1, but that the tiers of instruction and intervention were not implemented with fidelity. Participant A reported that there was inconsistent implementation and fidelity of components 2 and 3. Participant A reported obstacles and challenges to implementing the core components,

Structural description. Participant A reported a desire to focus more on fidelity of RTI implementation, but found it difficult to do so. Overall, implementing the three components of RTI was an overwhelming experience. Participant A reported:

> Um, the thing about it, I just wish we could've been, like you say, to fidelity because I would go to some of the meetings and you know, it'd be fresher in your mind. Ooh, this is something we can come back and implement because I've gone to other schools and I've seen like the Adopt-a-School model charts up and you can tell that they've been meeting and they've been implementing but you have to have a school that's, I hate to say it, that's functional versus dysfunctional, or you have to have schools with solid foundations in place. Because if you don't have solid foundations of what your academic program or you don't have solid foundations with attendance and kids that are ditching or you know, in-house dynamics because adults cannot get along, all of these things, you don't have time for that.

School 7: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for Participant A from School 7 are: inconsistent implementation and fidelity

in regards to component 1; full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 2; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1. In regards to the multi-tiered service delivery model, Participant A spoke to the difficulty of building a common understanding around the different tiers and, therefore, implementing them. A reported:

> That was a bit daunting. First, I needed to wrap my head around what those multi-tiers were, and how that would apply to a school like [school name]. I had to have a clear understanding in my head, and then I had to make sure that my administrators did also. We see that our students are at whatever level they are, but our main goal is to teach them the grade-level standards-base program, with scaffolds, wherever necessary. Explaining the multi-tiered components to my administrators and leadership team, because an interesting conversation about what is grade-level core, and we had the discussion again about the essential standards, and what is it we want our students to know and be able to do.

In trying to implement the multi-tiered model, a productive conversation around effective core instruction developed among the leadership team, but the challenge was sharing this school-wide. Participant A reported:

> So it became about what to teach and how to teach, conversation within the leadership, and it was a really good conversation, but, and I'll go to the difficult part, we weren't successful in taking that to the whole faculty. That conversation didn't happen at that level school-wide. And it didn't happen because the whole idea of the leadership team was so that each content leader within the team –we had a curriculum leader, or a content leader, from each content area, even one from special ed,-- they were supposed to take this conversation to their departments, and talk about it there. But their level of comfort just wasn't there, and there wasn't enough time to keep revisiting it. You know, it would've been great to really have the time to get the instructional leaders to the point where they're comfortable enough to talk about it and facilitate discussions within the peers' groups. That was very hard.

Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 2. Implementation of the problem-solving process was mostly successful at School 7. Participant A shared that as a result of going through the problem-solving process with

faculty, the school was hosting their first ever literacy festival. Since one of the causes of low reading scores was a lack of access to books in the community, teachers envisioned and created a literacy festival to meet this need. Overall, Participant A reported repeatedly using the problem-solving process with teachers. However, the problem-solving process is not used systemically by teachers yet, which indicates inconsistent fidelity of implementation. Participant A reported the following about the problem-solving process:

> I'm very comfortable with this one. As I described earlier, I embraced it. I really found the problem solving model, particularly that protocol with the fishbowl, as very efficient, clear way to present a problem, and to initiate the discussion about this is how what we think is causing it, etc. I, um, I think that I'm very comfortable with that, and I think that my teachers would be able to replicate that, because of the simplicity of it all. So I'm very happy with the problem solving model, and I don't know if I'm supposed to go beyond that, but I sort of said, I wanna get really, really comfortable with doing it this way. And I think that for our purposes, it has served us well.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3. Participant A reports that work towards implementing data-based decision-making is ongoing:

> The data-based decision making is difficult. It is a point of, um, getting comfortable, knowing what to collect, what kind of data to collect, knowing what to zero-in on, and being comfortable to talk about it. We get far when we are able to compare. And my vision is, that teachers together for content area look at data and say, wow, what kinds of things did you do to get those results? I want them to be able to have that discussion.

Participant A went on to discuss the importance of effective data use and reported next steps to move towards full implementation of component 3:

> You know, we also collaborate as learning teams, because I want them to meet by content area, to really hone in on their craft, and that's why the data discussion is important for me. Because sometimes you see a bunch of numbers and you get overwhelmed. So I want them to be able to use this data as information. That's going to take a long time to learn it, but I think that as we get used to data as... Demystify it, so that it's not such a big mystery and not such a daunting thing, that it's your enemy, because it's not, data is your friend, you have to be able to use it

> as information, this is information, OK? And that's something that I want to spend a lot of time on, this coming year, school-wide.

Textural description. Participant A is an educator at a middle school that participated in Cohort 1 for 1 year. Participant A reported numerous experiences in regards to integrating the three core components of RTI, including inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1, despite productive conversations and planning within the SBLT; full implementation and inconsistent fidelity of component 2, including a moment to celebrate in regards to the literacy festival that was born out of the problem-solving process; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3, despite extensive work around building a culture for effective data use.

Structural description. In regards to the three components of RTI, participant A reported an overall productive and beneficial experience. While work remains in order to achieve full implementation, Participant A is optimistic and resolute that it will occur.

School 12: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for Participant A from School 12 are: inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 1; full implementation and inconsistent fidelity of component 2; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 3.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 1. Participant A reported extensive planning around implementing the three tiers of instruction and intervention. A began by discussing school-wide plans for implementing component 1. A reported:

> Uh, I think our, there's fidelity to our plans for implementation as far as what our expectations for ourselves were as a school. Um, I think we had fidelity as far as school-wide implementation. As far as like the office building policies, procedures, routines, and how we go about as far as uh, how we deal with our academics and behavioral problems and how we deal with our attendance. I think

> we've streamlined our process as far as COST. When do we, when do students hit Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 kind of thing. Um, as far as classrooms, I feel like most of our classrooms have fidelity to the core instructional program, but as far as once we got up to Tier 2 and Tier 3 I can't say that every single classroom provided um, interventions or targeted interventions. I know the effort was there and teachers wanted to do it, but I think they felt, everyone's very busy and I think dealing with a lot of regular classroom issues and they didn't have the time to get to the targeted planning.

In addition to consistent implementation of Tier 2 and 3 interventions within the classroom due to a lack of time and planning, Participant A reported that implementing Tier 3 services was a challenge due to a misunderstanding of where Tier 3 fits into the framework:

> Um, but as far as setting up school-wide Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions um, I think we got as far as Tier 2. Because there was still confusion that a lot of our teachers believe that Tier 3 was special education when realistically it isn't. Um, so that, I think because there wasn't a clear understanding of what exactly is Tier 1, what exactly, well no they knew Tier 1 but what is exactly Tier 2 to them and what is Tier 3. Um, we couldn't get that squared away. But the attempts as far as the um, we started but it hasn't been completely finished, yeah.

Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity of component 2. In regards to the problem-solving process, Participant A reported full implementation but inconsistent fidelity. Participant A detailed the various forums that utilized the problem-solving process. A reported:

> I think that's one thing we implemented quite well. Um, we used a problem solving process throughout entire planning and creation of our the single plan for student achievement. Um, but we used the problem solving process for our grade level meetings, for our school site, for our leadership, um, for our intervention meetings, for our staff meetings.

Participant A went on to further describe how although all staff were involved in the problem-solving process, the steps were followed with inconsistent fidelity at this school:

> I mean I don't think we followed the exact format because it was quite lengthy and we couldn't get through the whole thing at every meeting, but the process of going through and looking at okay, what does the data say? What do we have?

> How do we you know our action, who's going to take care of the actions and um, I think we made sure that we didn't just make blind guesses as far as okay this is the solution. We went through the whole process and had everyone involved in that process.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 3. In regards to data-based decision-making, Participant A reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity. Participant A reports that most teachers implemented component 3 in their classroom and that all out of classroom personnel utilize data-based decision-making:

> Um, I would like to say that most of the teachers use it in their classroom, as far as how they plan their lessons or differentiate instruction, but I know that it wasn't everyone, but probably seventy percent of our staff. It was something that they've been doing, and I think the goal was to try to get everyone to do it, but I can't say that everyone did it. As a school we… I guess… How do I separate it? So in classroom and out of classroom, out of classroom we definitely implemented with fidelity but only about seventy percent in classroom.

Participant A also shared the progress made towards implementation as well as some of the challenges that remain:

> So when we gave them a new way to look at the data and target students more specifically they were excited about it. Like, oh this will help me even more instead of guessing this is exactly what I need to do. Um, especially when we brought in DIBELS and other forms of assessments and data for the teacher they, they were pretty excited about seeing all the different ways they can see or view their students and what their students needed. Um, it's still, it's still today like pulling teeth for s- a certain percentage of our teachers, because they've always been pretty standoffish with data. Um, they know what it is and they know why we use it but they feel like there's no connection to their teaching.

Textural description. Participant A is an educator at a Cohort 1 elementary school. Participant A reports several experiences related to implementation of RTI's three core components. Despite extensive infrastructure building by the SBLT, Participant A reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity to component 1 due to a lack of planning time and a misunderstanding of Tier services. Participant A reported that the problem solving-process was utilized systemically but fidelity to the process was

inconsistent. Lastly, for component 3, Participant A reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity despite work towards effective data use.

Structural description. Participant A approached implementation of the three components in a very measured and steady manner. A reported brining back information from trainings and immediately implementing new ways of working. A was able to report strengths, opportunities for growth, and advice around how to effectively implement RTI with optimism.

School 21: Themes. In regards to research question 2, three key themes emerged. The themes for Participant A from School 21 are: inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 1; inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2; and inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 3.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 1. Participant A from School 21 reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to the multi-tiered model, although some grade levels have in place different tiers of instruction and intervention. A reported:

> Okay, well first, I'm concerned they're still at the Tier 1, good first instruction. But, um, every, everybody isn't familiar with the pyramid and, and the, uh, suggested, uh, percentages. Um, every class implements Tier 1 in different degrees. Uh, as far as, uh, individualized instruction, some classes more so than others.

Participant A went on to detail the different services at certain grade levels at School 21, "In one grade level, we've gone all the way to Tier 3, that would be fourth grade. But in the other grades, it's more a Tier 2 for, for, um, kinder, first, second and third."

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Participant A reported that the school used the using the problem-solving process for SST meetings, but implementation beyond that was minimal:

> Okay, we've gone … that's used pretty much in, in, uh, in our SST process, the cost process. But as far as school wide, we didn't get very far. They've been introduced to that and when we talking about our, uh, discipline foundation policy and at our whole discipline, we kind of used it a little bit to a certain degree there. But that's as far as it got. As far as our teachers could really use it as a tool in their own instructional programs, uh, we haven't done much yet.

Inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 3. Participant A reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity of data-based decision-making:

> The level of fidelity of implementation … it's not that good here, to be honesty with you. I'm just starting to really … I don't want to say I'm starting to use it. The challenge for me has been I've always had someone pull the data for me and I could just look at it and then I can. Now I'm sending my time trying to learn how to pull that data because I don't have the support that I used to have before. And then as far as teachers on the staff here, it's very hard for me to get them to understand that you can't make decisions if you're not looking at the data. There's … it's a little bit better than … it's been fine over there, but over here with these veterans, they, uh, you know, they don't see the need. They want to make decisions but they don't want to base it on anything.

Participant A also discussed her experiences with trying to change practices and move the school towards implementing component 3:

> It's very hard. It, it's, it's very hard. Using data is a technical thing and it's hard for me as a veteran myself because I haven't done that throughout my whole career so I'm trying to learn how. And I understand the need, and I understand how to do it and I understand the purpose and everything but I don't have the vocabulary or the, the language to talk to them about the need. I can't, I can't, um … I don't like I met … like for instance, if I had to explain it, I'd get somebody like you to come and try to do this because you understand, you can explain and share it with others and as they say, that when you can do that, then you truly do understand. So maybe I don't understand as well as I do. Um, so that's where I am with the experience.

Participant A offered advice around getting folks to effectively use data to make important decisions, stating:

> I guess, just have to keep at, I think 'cause that's about where I am. Just, you know, I'm still learning all of the ropes and everything. Just, just keep at it and gradually get people … because this year I have a little bit more who are saying to me than I did last year though, um … or I should say the beginning of the year because the beginning of the year they didn't want to and now more people do and are willing to look and actually make decisions and see where they can't make the decision if they don't have anything to ground it on so.

Textural description. Again, Participant A was new to School 21 for the second year of RTI implementation. Participant A reported that the school had inconsistent implementation and fidelity of all three components of RTI. At the same time, certain components and parts of components were implemented. Different grade levels offered different tiers of intervention. The problem-solving process was used for SST meetings. Lastly, some teachers were beginning to use data more effectively.

Structural description. Participant A experienced implementation of the three components of RTI as fairly overwhelming. Participant A reported assessing the situation at the school site and learning from others, stating:

> Over here it's been … I haven't made demands with … as far as this … I came on just trying to see where they were and giving … and, and following the intervention lead so to speak because they were part of Cohort one and just trying to figure it out myself. Especially in terms with cohort one, I wish I was part of that cohort one now 'cause I now a little better about what I'm supposed to be doing at this point in time.

Composite Findings

This section presents an overarching description of the lived experience and conveys the findings of the analysis.

Research question one. Research question 1 explored the RTI implementation experience of the SBLTs in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban

school district in southern California. Tables 6 and 7 present the composite findings that correspond to research question 1.

Table 6

Key Themes for Research Question 1: Schools 1-11

Key Themes	1	2	3	4*	5	6	7*	8	9	10	11
Achieving Consensus Was an Obstacle.	X	X									
Broad-based Participation is Necessary for Successful Implementation.	X				X						
RTI Was an Effective Framework for Instruction.	X		X								X
Redefining Roles/Collective Responsibility is Needed for Successful Implementation.	X		X							X	
RTI Helped Ensure Accurate Placement.		X									
Greater Practitioner Understanding of RTI Vision, Structures, and Systems is Needed for Successful Implementation.		X				X		X	X	X	
RTI Promoted Collaboration.			X			X					
Time is an Obstacle.			X								
Implementing and Revising RTI is a Recursive Process.			X								X
Support and Professional Development From the District Was Helpful.	X				X						X
Strong SBLT and Administrative Support is Essential.	X	X		X	X	X					
It's Crucial to Focus on Tier 1.			X					X			
RTI Helped Us Focus on the Three A's.				X							
Technology and Funding Were Obstacles to Implement Certain Interventions.				X							
It's Imperative to Establish A Culture for Effective Data Use.			X				X				
Academic Growth as a Result of RTI.											
Implementation Was Smooth.											
Schools Used Books to Build Consensus.											
Multi-Tiered System Was in Place Prior to Official RTI Implementation											

Note. *Denotes Individual Interview.

Table 7

Key Themes for Research Question 1: Schools 12-22

Key Themes	12*	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21*	22
Achieving Consensus was an Obstacle.					X					X	
Broad-based Participation is Necessary for Successful Implementation.				X							X
RTI Was an Effective Framework for Instruction.	X	X		X	X				X		
Redefining Roles/Collective Responsibility Needed for Successful Implementation.									X		
RTI Helped Ensure Accurate Placement.											
Greater Practitioner Understanding of RTI Vision, Structures, and Systems is Needed for Successful Implementation.								X			
RTI Promoted Collaboration.							X		X		
Time is an Obstacle.											
Implementing and Revising RTI is a Recursive Process		X			X	X	X				
Support and Professional Development From the District Was Helpful.			X			X			X		
Strong SBLT and Administrative Support is Essential.	X										
It's Crucial to Focus on Tier 1.						X					X
RTI Helped Us Focus on the Three A's.											
Technology and funding Were Obstacles to Implement Certain Interventions.											
It's Imperative to Establish A Culture for Effective Data Use.											
Academic Growth as a Result of RTI.			X	X			X				
Implementation Was Smooth.			X								
Schools Used Books to Build Consensus.		X		X							
Multi-Tiered System Was in Place Prior to Official RTI Implementation											X

Note *Denotes Individual Interview

Composite textural description. All 50 participants are educators at a Cohort 1 school in one section of the district under study. All participants were SBLT members and had the opportunity to participate in 5 full days of district RTI training per year, or a total of 10 days over the course of 2 years. In addition, there were several other forms of support form the district, including optional workshops at the district, as well as school site support and professional development for faculty.

All participants were involved in implementing RTI to some degree. Participants represented many roles at the school site, and the most common were principal, intervention coordinator, instructional coach, and teacher leaders. All participants shared information with the staff and were involved in consensus building efforts at their respective school site. One commonality that related to all participants was collaboration. Participants reported collaboration within and among the SBLT, with faculty, and with district personnel in order to figure out how to best implement RTI. All participants were involved in implementing RTI and all schools made some progress towards implementation. Experiences among the 50 participants from 22 schools were expectedly varied.

Composite structural description. How RTI implementation was experienced by participants was also varied. One school reported an overwhelmingly smooth implementation and unequivocally positive implementation experience. Many schools reported that they struggled with a big picture understanding of implementation efforts during the first year. Many participants also noted the need to continually revise implementation efforts. Overall, most participants viewed RTI implementation as a worthwhile experience and beneficial reform effort.

Composite essence. Five themes emerged as the most common experiences in regards to research question number one.

Table 8

Most Common Key Themes for Research Question 1

Key theme	Number of schools for which theme applies
1. RTI Was an Effective Framework for Instruction.	8
2. Greater Practitioner Understanding of RTI Vision, Structures, and Systems Is Needed.	6
3. Implementing and Revising RTI Is a Recursive Process.	6
4. Support and Professional Development from the District Was Helpful.	6
5. Strong SBLT and Administrative Support is Essential.	6

The most common key theme was that RTI was an effective framework for instruction. Participants reported that RTI helped organize instructional efforts, including how to improve core instruction and provide a comprehensive intervention program. In many cases, this involved a common language and understanding among the entire faculty. For some schools, RTI became a galvanizing force to reform practices and to improve student achievement.

The next four most common themes all applied to six schools. The theme of a need for a greater understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems largely stemmed from participants who, especially during the first year of implementation, were unable to see the big picture. Participants to whom this theme applies needed more clarity. The next common theme is experiences related to the fact that implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. For these schools, participants viewed continually modifying implementation efforts as both crucial and empowering. Another common theme is that support and training form the district was helpful. This theme involves both the training

days at the district, as well as on-going support at the school site for the SBLT and faculty. The last common theme is the need for a strong SBLT and administrative support, which encompasses a few different subthemes. The most notable related subtheme is a lack of strong leadership at the school site around leading implementation efforts, often from the principal or other administrators. For one school, the principal needed more support form the SBLT. Lastly, for one other school there was a lack of cohesion and notable dissention among the SBLT.

Research question 2. Research question 2 investigated the experience of SBLTs in regards to ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making). Tables 9 and 10 present the composite findings that correspond to research question 2.

Composite textural description. All 50 participants reported experiences related to the implementation of the three core components of RTI at their respective school sites. Patterns of experience emerged around levels and fidelity of implementation of each of the components. In regards to component 1, participants reported extensive work around creating, delivering, revising, and ensuring fidelity of Tier 2 and 3 interventions. School also discussed efforts at improving core instruction and instituting or improving Tier 1 interventions. Some schools noted that is crucial to focus on Tier 1. In regards to component 2, school reported experiences around using the problem-solving process within the SBLT, for certain meetings and teams within the school, and with faculty. Many participants reported that the involved, complex, and formal nature of the problem-solving process made consistent use and fidelity a challenge. Participants also shared

their experiences and strategies around implementing component 3, data-based decision-making.

Table 9

Key Themes for Research Question 2: Schools 1-11

Key Themes	1	2	3	4*	5	6	7*	8	9	10	11
Full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1.			X								X
Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 1.				X	X			X	X	X	
Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1.	X	X				X	X				
Full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2.											
Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 2.							X				X
Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3.			X						X		
Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 3.										X	X
Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3.	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			
Trust is Necessary for Successful Implementation of the Problem-solving Process.	X	X									
The Problem-solving Process Requires Time and Patience.			X								X
Monitoring is a Key to Fidelity.		X								X	
Specificity of Language is a Key to Effective Data Use											
Focusing on Growth is a Key to Effective Data Use											

Note. *Denotes Individual Interview

Table 10

Key Themes for Research Question 2: Schools 12-22

Key Themes	12*	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21*	22
Full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1.	X	X	X	X				X			X
Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 1.	X	X					X		X		
Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 1.	X				X	X				X	
Full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2.											
Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 2.	X	X									X
Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 2.		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Full implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3.			X	X					X		X
Full implementation and inconsistent fidelity in regards to component 3.		X				X	X	X			
Inconsistent implementation and fidelity in regards to component 3.	X				X					X	
Trust is Necessary for Successful implementation of the Problem-solving Process.											
The Problem-solving Process Requires Time and Patience.		X									
Monitoring is a Key to Fidelity.				X							
Specificity of Language is a Key to Effective Data Use				X							
Focusing on Growth is a Key to Effective Data Use				X							

Note. *Denotes Individual Interview

Composite structural description. Different perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of the three core components of RTI were connected to levels and fidelity of implementation. Participants reported that components 1 and 3 were the most beneficial to their school site and found efforts related to the implementation of these

components to be necessary and gratifying, even though there were obstacles. Component 2 was seen as the most difficult of the components to implement consistently. Due to this, some participants felt that it was unnecessary, frustrating, and overly complicated.

Composite essence. The most common themes that emerged related to research question number two surrounded levels and fidelity of implementation. Tables 11, 12, and 13 detail the levels and fidelity of implementation for each component for all schools.

Table 11

Most Common Key Themes for Research Question 2: Component 1

Level and Fidelity of Implementation	Number of schools for which theme applies
1. Full Implementation and Fidelity	6
2. Full Implementation but Inconsistent Fidelity	8
3. Inconsistent Implementation and Fidelity.	8

Overall, component one was the most fully implemented component in the 22 Cohort 1 schools. Fourteen schools reported full implementation, although 8 of those schools did not achieve fidelity of implementation. In particular, schools noted that core instruction and Tier 1 interventions were the most difficult to attain fidelity. Eight schools did not achieve consistent implementation of the multi-tiered system. Some schools were unable to implement Tier 3 interventions due to manpower or funding. Other schools struggled to maintain consistency of implementation of one or more tiers.

Table 12

Most Common Key Themes for Research Question 2: Component 2

Level and fidelity of implementation	Number of schools for which theme applies
1. Full Implementation and Fidelity	0
2. Full Implementation but Inconsistent Fidelity	4
3. Inconsistent Implementation and Fidelity.	18

Component two was least implemented component, although all participants reported using the process in some manner. Participants often reported that they engaged in an informal version of the problem solving process for certain meetings or when analyzing data. However, 18 schools reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity of component 2. Many participants reported that the formal and complex nature of step 2 of the problem-solving process, problem analysis, was overwhelming for teachers; in addition, adherence to the formal process required time, patience and trust. Four schools achieved full implementation, where the entire faculty regularly engaged in the process and was familiar with all four steps of the problem-solving process. However, no schools reported systemic use where teachers had the capacity to engage in the process independently.

Table 13

Most Common Key Themes for Research Question 2: Component 3

Levels and fidelity of implementation	Number of schools for which theme applies
1. Full Implementation and Fidelity	6
2. Full Implementation but Inconsistent Fidelity	6
3. Inconsistent Implementation and Fidelity.	10

All schools reported focusing on data but reported varying levels of use both within the faculty and across school sites. Data-based decision-making was an entrenched practice within the SBLT for the vast majority of schools. Six schools reported systemic, effective use of data-based decision-making by faculty and therefore achieved full implementation and fidelity. Six schools reported systemic use of data-based decision-making as a school but inconsistent fidelity across faculty members. Lastly, 10 schools reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity despite using data effectively in certain areas at the school.

Summary

This chapter detailed the findings related to: (a) the RTI implementation experience of SBLTs in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California; and (b) experiences surrounding levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) at these same 22 schools.

For research question 1, five key themes emerged in this chapter including that RTI was an effective framework for instruction, the need for an understanding of the "big picture" of RTI, the need for a strong leadership team including administrative support, helpful support form the district, and the fact that implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process For research question 2, nine key themes surrounding varying levels and fidelity of implementation surfaced.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The study explored the RTI implementation experience of school-based leadership teams (SBLTs) and investigated experiences in regards to fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California.

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What is the RTI implementation experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?
2. What is the experience of School-Based Leadership Teams in regards to ensuring fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components of RTI (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making) in 22 elementary, middle, and high schools in a major urban school district in southern California?

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach to research design, and the researcher collected data by conducting qualitative focus groups with 50 SBLT members from 22 different RTI Cohort 1 schools. The instrument used was comprised of 17 focus group questions (Appendix F) that were grounded in the RTI literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2; all 17 questions were open-ended in order "draw out the participant's views and opinions," and to allow participants to provide greater range in response as well as increased detail in explanation (Creswell, 2003, p. 188).

Integral to the research process was a peer review process that occurred with both a work colleague and a fellow doctoral student, which afforded the researcher the opportunity to discuss the research process, including peer review of coding approaches, potential themes, and findings.

Discussion of Salient Findings for Research Question One

In regards to research question 1, five themes emerged as the most common and therefore the most salient for this study. These five themes are as follows:

1. RTI Was an Effective Framework for Instruction.
2. Greater Practitioner Understanding of RTI Vision, Structures, and Systems is Needed.
3. Implementing and Revising RTI is a Recursive Process.
4. Support and Professional Development from the District Was Helpful.
5. Strong SBLT and Administrative Support is Essential.

This section will provide a discussion of each of these noted themes, which represent the most salient findings for research question 1.

RTI was an effective framework for instruction. The most common theme for research question 1 is that RTI was an effective framework for instruction. This theme clearly surfaced during at least eight different focus group transcripts and while all of these schools reported that RTI helped organize instruction and intervention efforts, each school and participant reported nuances as to how RTI impacted practices. First and foremost, was the idea of cataloguing and examining existing intervention efforts to see where they fit in the multi-tiered service delivery system. In examining distinctions between interventions and trying to determine whether they were Tier 2 or Tier 3, schools

gained greater clarity around the purpose and implementation of certain interventions. Bender (2009) reports that districts across the nation have begun this work by cataloguing existing interventions and organizing them in tiers. Ehren, Ehren, and Proly (2009) refer to this as assessing what building blocks are already in place.

Using the three-tiered model also exposed gaps in services and schools responded by implementing new interventions in order to create comprehensive support systems for students. Schools reported a vast array of new intervention programs. Interventions ranged from pre-packaged, research-based programs to teacher-designed interventions based on individual student need. Several elementary schools reported implementing *Language!*, a Tier 3 English language arts program that focuses largely on foundational reading skills. Schools also implemented a variety of new Tier 2 interventions; some of these interventions were delivered by interventionists in a learning center or intervention room, while some schools utilized a team-teaching approach and swapped students during certain times throughout the day and interventions were delivered by core teachers. Overall, implementation of RTI greatly expanded intervention efforts at Cohort 1 schools.

In addition to adding or revising Tier 2 and 3 interventions, schools also reported an increased focus on core instruction and intervention. RTI literature advises that approximately 80% of students should be successful in core instruction (Bender, 2009; Elliott, 2008). If less than 80% are successful, the school needs to focus on reforming Tier 1 so that more students are able to reach benchmarks. There are at least two reasons for this recommendation: (a) there are not enough personnel and resources to provide interventions to large numbers of students, and most importantly, (b) issues surrounding

ineffective core instruction will never be addressed. Participants reported that RTI helped them focus on core instruction, including a common definition of what "good first teaching" was at their respective school sites. Changes to core instruction included increasing differentiation and small group instruction. The need to focus on Tier 1, or core instruction, is supported by several different sources (Bender, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Buffum et. al, 2009; Elliott, 2008; Hall, 2008; Sailor, 2009). Allain and Eberhardt (2011) refer to Tier 1 as "the forgotten tier" (p. 1) and outline the need for an effective, data-driven core program to serve as a foundation for all intervention efforts.

Greater practitioner understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems is needed. Another salient theme that surfaced for Cohort 1 schools in one section of a major urban district is the need for an understanding of an overall RTI vision, as well as an understanding of the structures and systems needed for implementation. Extensive literature surrounds the need for a vision and a clear plan for implementation efforts, as well as the need to communicate these ideas with all stakeholders (Batsche et al., 2005; Ehren et al., 2009; Elliott & Morrison, 2008). However, participants from six schools reported that they were unable to see the big picture of RTI. Largely, during the official 5 days of Cohort 1 training provided by the district in year one, participants felt that the trainings were lacking coherence and were unable to understand the overall vision for RTI implementation. These trainings focused on the three core components of RTI, but participants to whom this theme applies were unable to put the pieces together and to see where schools were heading. In addition to an inability to see the big picture in regards to implementation, a lack of clarity also extended to bridging theory and practice. In regards

to component 1, district trainings focused heavily on defining the tiers and exploring implementation considerations, such as maintaining fidelity of interventions, but schools were granted autonomy to implement tiered interventions based on the needs and resources at the school site. For some schools, this lack of structure was overwhelming and participants felt like they were reinventing the wheel.

Similarly, the theoretical nature of component 2, the problem-solving process, was also a challenge for some schools. The problem-solving process was a prominent focus of the district trainings and some participants were confused by the complex nature of the process, failed to see the relevance, and most importantly, did not see how component 2 fit into the big picture of RTI implementation. Instead, participants from four schools saw the problem-solving process as overly complicated and unrealistic given the time constraints found at school sites. For component 3, data-based decision-making, participants from two schools also regarded some of the progress monitoring skills, such as graphing student progress, drawing an aim and trend line, as unnecessary and impractical; these participants failed to see how these discrete skills connected to a larger implementation plan. For the six Cohort 1 schools for which this theme of a need for greater practitioner understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems applies, participants wanted a simple, easy to follow recipe for RTI implementation with a clear picture of the completed entree. During year two of implementation, participants reported greater clarity in regards to the big picture of RTI. In addition, the standard protocol approach to RTI was introduced during the second year of implementation, which participants from two schools noted as their preferred approach due to its straightforward nature.

Implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process. The theme that implementing and revising RTI is a recursive process surfaced for at least six Cohort 1 schools. These schools continually refined implementation efforts and made changes whenever they were needed. Participants reported that this recursive process was positive and empowering; they felt that it was okay to make mistakes and that learning was part of the journey. Schools reported varying levels of modifications to intervention efforts, from frequent tweaking to a complete overhaul. The majority of this revision and learning surrounded Tier 2 and 3 interventions, where SBLT members reported trying out new interventions and discontinuing ineffective interventions. One school reported that the data showed that their initial Tier 2 intervention efforts were not yielding the desired results despite their best efforts, which resulted in utilizing a completely different intervention program the following year. Another school completely changed the manner in which Tier 2 services were implemented and moved from the pullout model to a push-in model in order to ensure alignment with the core curriculum.

At the heart of RTI is a cyclical process of analyzing the effectiveness of particular efforts and making necessary adjustments in order to achieve the desired results. Implementing the RTI framework requires the same approach. Ehren et al. (2009) refer to the importance of refining implementation efforts. Elliott and Morrison (2008) advise using systemic methods to monitor and adjust efforts based on ongoing analysis of implementation integrity. Batsche (n.d.b) cites the need to assess the quality and integrity of the implementation through progress monitoring and offers that this can be achieved via self-assessment surveys, which are completed from three to four times per year.

Support and professional development from the district was helpful. Another theme that surfaced was that support and professional development from the district was crucial to successful implementation efforts. All SBLT members had the opportunity to attend 5 days of official Cohort training per year, and those who were members for both years had the opportunity to attend 10 days of training. In addition, there were several optional "technical assistance" days that offered training on particular topics such as data systems, literacy interventions, and Positive Behavior Support. Also, schools received ongoing support at the school site from district RTI experts who helped schools in ways such as facilitating SBLT meetings, assistance with planning implementation efforts, and delivering professional development for teachers at the school site. For these schools, outside support was essential to successfully implement RTI. The Florida Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project (2011) and Sailor (2009) cite the need for extensive professional development that occurs at both the district and school level. Hall (2008) cites the need for a comprehensive PD plan that includes a variety of formats.

Strong SBLT and administrative support is essential. Leadership is critical to the work of RTI. Schools assembled a SBLT that was responsible for implementation of RTI, including attending training, building consensus, creating an infrastructure, and leading implementation efforts at the school site. Broad-based representation from staff members on the SBLT is needed (Batsche et al., 2005; Hall, 2008; Sailor, 2009). It is critical that the principal plays an active role in the SBLT (Hall, 2008). For four schools, the principal did not play an active role in leading implementation efforts, which hindered levels and fidelity of implementation. At one school, the principal did not have a strong SBLT and felt like she did not have any support at the school site, which made it difficult

to focus on RTI and overcome obstacles to implementation. Lastly, despite extensive work towards implementation at the school site and active involvement from the SBLT, including the principal, internal tensions and politics impacted implementation efforts. The SBLT had conflicting views over different roles, who had decision-making power, and who should be involved in various decisions concerning reform efforts at the school.

Discussion of Salient Findings for Research Question Two

Research question 2 explored experiences related to the levels and fidelity of implementation of the three core components of RTI: multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making. The levels and fidelity of each component will be discussed using the following theme headings:

1. Component 1: Level and Fidelity of Implementation
2. Component 2: Level and Fidelity of Implementation
3. Component 3: Level and Fidelity of Implementation

This section will provide a discussion of each of these noted themes, which represent the most salient findings for research question 2.

Component 1: Level and fidelity of implementation. Component 1 encompasses the multi-tiered service delivery system. In order to achieve full implementation and fidelity, schools need to not only have services in place for all three tiers of instruction and intervention, but those services need to be delivered consistently and with integrity. Eight schools reported experiences regarding the difficulty of ensuring fidelity of Tier 1. In addition, the theme of *it's crucial to focus on Tier 1* surfaced for four schools. In order to achieve full implementation and fidelity of Tier 1, teachers had to not only maintain the integrity of the core instructional program, but also had to provide

differentiated Tier 1 interventions within the core classroom; for most schools Tier 1 intervention occurred during Individual Work Time (IWT), where teachers worked with small groups and or individual students. Buffum et. al (2009) advocate that differentiation and small group instruction are crucial steps in improving Tier 1 in an RTI framework.

Implementation of Tier 2 interventions varied greatly. Not all schools reported details surrounding the manner in which Tier 2 interventions were provided at their respective school sites. At nine schools, Tier 2 interventions were provided by an intervention teacher or intervention coordinator using either a pullout or push-in model. Tier 2 interventions that were delivered by an intervention teacher or coordinator by in large were implemented with high degrees of fidelity; these interventionists were often members of the SBLT and received training and support. At least three schools trained teacher assistants, also known as paraprofessionals in this district, to deliver interventions. Participants noted the need for training, observation and follow-up support in order to maintain fidelity of implementation for interventions delivered by paraprofessionals. Finally, the team-teaching approach (which involved swapping students based on need at certain times throughout the day) used by at least three schools to deliver Tier 2 interventions, was the most difficult approach to maintain fidelity due to the fact that all teachers at a particular grade level must be involved in some way. This approach also necessitates trust and a collective responsibility for all students, which four schools reported as a positive aspect of RTI implementation. While the team-teaching approach is the most complicated to implement successfully, it may be the most viable in tenuous budgetary times because it requires no additional personnel. Bender (2009) refers

to this approach to providing Tier 2 interventions as the class-sharing idea and contends that it is a feasible option for schools.

All schools that provided details in regards to Tier 3 interventions utilized the *Language!* reading program and reported high levels of fidelity due to the fact that teachers received training and follow-up support from the publisher. One school reported that its implementation of *Language!* was ineffective and that they were revising implementation efforts for the next academic year. It is important to note that the district's implementation of this Tier 3 program differs from the research and literature on intensive interventions. The district under study utilizes *Language!* as a replacement program, whereas some Tier 3 interventions occur in addition to core and Tier 2 instruction. In addition, much of the research surrounding Tier 3 interventions, show these services being delivered to small numbers of students. Buffum et al. (2009) report that Tier 3 interventions are often conducted individually or with up to three students. Bender (2009) also reports that Tier 3 interventions involve few students and adds that certain states have a maximum number of students for these services. However, due to the fact that the several schools in the district under study have large numbers of students requiring Tier 3 interventions, anywhere from 10 to 20 students may participate in particular Tier 3 interventions at one time.

Looking at overall levels and fidelity of implementation, component 1 was the most fully implemented of the three core components of RTI. However, only 6 of 22 schools achieved full implementation and fidelity, while eight additional schools achieved full implementation but inconsistent fidelity. The remaining eight schools reported inconsistent implementation and fidelity.

Component 2: Level and fidelity of implementation. Overall, component 2 was the least implemented of the three core components of RTI. Only four schools achieved full implementation, and at all of these schools the fidelity of implementation was lacking. However, these four schools regularly used the problem-solving process with the entire faculty, often in forums such as grade level meetings or department meetings. Participants from these schools reported that use of the problem-solving process was facilitator dependent and teachers did not successfully engage in the problem-solving process without a trained SBLT member or district RTI expert leading the work. Furthermore, participants from one school reported that attempts to engage in the process without a trained facilitator sometimes led to dwelling on the many causes of the problem and stymied moving forward with an action plan to address identified needs. Therefore, although there was systemic use of the process at these four schools, fidelity had not yet been achieved.

Eighteen schools reported that they used the problem solving process in some manner at various meetings at the school. The most commonly mentioned meetings and teams that utilized the problem-solving process were COST meetings and SST meetings, which focused on aligning services and formulating an action plan for struggling students. Nine schools also reported informal use of the problem-solving process during data analysis sessions, such as teacher-administrator data chats or during grade level data analysis. Informal use often involves steps 1 (identifying the problem), 3 (creating an action plan), and 4 (measuring the response of result of action plan). Step 2, the most involved and potentially beneficial step, was often skipped by schools that reported informal use of the problem-solving process. Step 2 encompasses analyzing the problem

through the development of hypotheses as to why the problem is occurring, validating or refuting hypotheses, and developing a prediction statement as to the result of the action plan if a determined intervention were implemented (Florida Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project, 2011).

Step 2 involves analyzing four domains: instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner (ICEL). The domains are in order from the domain which educators have the most control over (instruction) to the domain over which educators have the least control (learner). The importance of moving away from focusing on student deficits to those factors over which educators have control is critical for major urban districts that often serve large percentages of English learners and or socio-economically disadvantaged students. Educators in these districts must focus on analyzing the effectiveness of instructional strategies that meet the needs of these students as opposed to focusing on language proficiency levels or literacy levels as the sole reason why a problem is occurring. Schools must analyze all of the factors over which they have control in order to enable student learning for all. It is most critical that this type of analysis occurs in regards to Tier 1 instruction. Why are large percentages of students not successful in the core and what can we do about it? If this is not addressed at Tier 1, then students will continually be referred to intervention as a solution to ineffective core instruction.

Early research and work in the arena of special education cite the problem-solving process as an integral aspect and driving force of this approach to RTI (Tilly et al., 1999). However, looking at the problem-solving approach to RTI when implemented as a general education or school-wide initiative, maintaining consistent implementation was a challenge for 18 of 22 schools. Again, the training and expertise required as well as the

complexity of the process make systemic use difficult. In addition, schools reported that time and patience were required to continually engage in the process. In order to engage in the problem-solving process, teams must meet regularly and complete work between meetings such as validating or refuting hypotheses by reviewing, interviewing, observing, or testing (RIOT) students. Another critical consideration reported by participants was the need for trust. If teachers are going to analyze how their instruction contributes to a student's problem, there must be emotional safety. The need for trust and safety in order to engage in RTI practices surfaced throughout the study. Buffum et al. (2009) address the need to build collaborative cultures to support the implementation efforts and suggest that utilizing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) will a lay a foundation for RTI.

Component 3: Level and fidelity of implementation. Overall 12 schools reported full implementation of data-based decision-making, and half of these schools reported fidelity of implementation while the other half reported inconsistent fidelity. Ten schools reported inconsistent implementation of component 3. While increased accountability and data analysis are nation-wide trends connected to NCLB and Race to the Top, data-based decision-making as it pertains to RTI is in some ways unique (U.S. Department of Education, 2010; White House, 2009). The purpose and rationale behind implementing data-based decision-making is to ensure that a student receives appropriate instruction and intervention matched to their needs. This goes beyond initial placement into certain intervention programs and is, instead, a recursive process of monitoring progress and making adjustments to the type, level and intensity of interventions. In addition, this process of using data to make decisions about what to teach and how to teach it is utilized at all three tiers in the RTI model. Schools where all teachers

systemically used data to inform instruction and intervention earned full implementation. Schools in which there was consistent analysis of data by all teachers but a lack of fidelity in terms of consistency of follow-through with using the data to inform instruction and intervention, earned full implementation but inconsistent fidelity. At the remaining 10 schools, there was extensive data use within the SBLT and from certain groups of teachers at the school site, but not all teachers were engaging in this work.

Although this component was not fully implemented in all schools, it was clear that all schools had engaged in substantial work towards implementation of data-based decision-making. Participants reported varying experiences, advice, and considerations around successful data use. One piece of advice that surfaced from at least two schools is the need to create a culture for effective data use. While these schools reported that this takes time, they also reported that it was imperative in order to engage in systemic data-based decision-making. Largely, creating a culture to support data-based decision-making involves trusting that the data analysis is used to assist the teacher in teaching better—not to evaluate the teacher. The district under study is piloting linking student achievement to teacher evaluation, which makes this consideration critical and complicated. Another related topic is focusing on student growth. While one school reported that this was essential for teachers, growth in students' scaled scores on the state standardized test will also determine a teacher's effectiveness according to the new teacher evaluation pilot.

Two schools also reported that collaboration, including ways of talking and collaborative norms, contributed to effective data-based decision-making. Welman and Lipton (2004) outline ways of communicating that support collaboration and effective data analysis in their text *Data-Driven Dialogue*; in addition, Garmston and Welman

(2009) outline norms of collaborative work in their text *Adaptive Schools*. Both of these approaches and texts were explored in the district under study. Another tip that surfaced from one school is the need for specificity of language in regards to data, which involves moving away from generalities (such as good) to more concrete statistics (such as proficiency percentages and growth rates).

Conclusions

Four main conclusions were derived from the study findings, which are supported by existing literature.

Full implementation takes 3-5 years. Achieving full implementation of RTI takes 3-5 years. The schools and participants that took part in this study were the first to implement RTI in the district under study. The research was conducted at the end of the second year of implementation. At that time, no schools had achieved full implementation and fidelity of all core components of RTI. While all schools had done work around building consensus, creating an infrastructure, and moving forward with implementation efforts, there were still necessary additions and revisions that need to be made in order to achieve complete successful implementation. The time required for these schools to achieve full implementation with fidelity and to begin the final phase of institutionalization of the work may span anywhere from 3-5 years (Elliott & Morrison, 2008; Fullan, 2007). Research and literature support this conclusion and offer varying year ranges for full implementation of the multi-tiered framework. The shortest of these spans suggests that implementation could take from 2-5 years (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, & Wallace, 2007). However, the Florida Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project (2011) advises that implementation takes at least 3 years and could last up to 6

years. The challenge for these schools and the district under study is to maintain focus on RTI as the central reform effort, despite pressures for a quick fix to sagging academic achievement, as well as changing budgets and leadership. Hall (2008) asserts that it may take up to 5 years to see the "full impact" (p. 56) of RTI on students' standardized test scores. Finally, in regards to RTI implementation Batsche (n.d.a) offers, "It's a marathon, not a sprint" (para. 5).

Strong leadership is required. The need for strong leadership cannot be overemphasized in regards to implementing a multi-tiered framework for educational reform. This conclusion was derived from numerous findings in the study. The theme of a need for a strong SBLT and administrative support surfaced for six schools. However, the overarching concept of leadership and related practices that led to robust implementation efforts was present throughout all aspects of the study.

"The superintendent's support is helpful; the principal's commitment is essential" (Hall, 2008, p. 37). Since this study focused on experiences at the school level, leadership begins with the principal. First, the principal must be actively involved in all aspects of implementation, including off-campus training at the district. In order for a new principal to lead this work, he or she must have adequate support from stakeholders at the school site before engaging in implementation in order to successfully navigate faculty through the change process associated with RTI. The principal must also build a strong SBLT, ideally with broad-based representation from different departments, grade levels, and programs (Batsche et al., 2005; Hall, 2008; Sailor, 2009). Together, the SBLT, including the principal, must have a clear vision and rationale for RTI implementation. The team must also be able to successfully build consensus around the need for RTI, as well as the

ability to connect prior practices to new practices. The team must also be able to maintain or create a culture of collaboration and trust in order to support systemic use of the problem-solving process and data-based decision-making. Kukic (n.d.) asserts that trust and collaboration are intertwined and both are needed in order to empower staff to take risks associated with trying something new. In addition, the team must be able to understand, create, or tailor systems and schedules for tiered interventions that meet the needs of the students and faculty of their school; this may involve redefining roles at the school site in order to effectively deliver interventions with limited staff. Lastly, all staff will need substantial training, support, and monitoring in order to achieve implementation.

Ongoing, differentiated district support is beneficial. This conclusion is derived from several different aspects of this study. Six schools reported that support and professional development was helpful in their implementation of RTI. Six schools also reported the need for greater practitioner understanding of RTI vision, structures, and systems. Therefore, in addition to district training, ongoing differentiated support at the school site is needed. This includes school-based professional development that occurs at the school site and is based on the needs of the school, as well as capacity building at the school site (Sailor, 2009).

Schools need assistance in all aspects of implementation. In particular, schools need assistance in envisioning the big picture and a clear roadmap of implementation efforts, which involves bridging theory into practice. Related support is needed in regards to creating interventions systems and schedules, particularly for Tier 2 interventions. This support must be ongoing during the first few years of implementation in order to monitor

fidelity and make necessary revisions to intervention programs. Schools also need assistance with more technical aspects of implementation, including step 2 of the problem-solving process, utilizing data systems, and data analysis. Showers (1984) and Showers, Joyce, and Bennet (1987) indicate that effective professional development involves theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback. These four components must be in place in order for schools to gain the necessary skills associated with RTI. In addition, Batsche et al. (2005) advise that districts must also consider strategies to sustain implementation, including on-site coaching. Again, this support is most useful when it is targeted to meet the needs of the school, and when capacity is built at the school site with the goal of gradual release of district support (Sailor, 2009).

RTI is an effective way to organize instructional efforts for struggling students. RTI is a comprehensive framework that can assist schools in creating and tailoring intervention programs to meet diverse student need (Bender, 2009; Buffum et. al, 2009; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Ehren et. al, 2009; Elliot, 2008). Utilization of the RTI framework will help refine and clarify the purpose of existing intervention programs, as well as necessitate the development of new interventions to address students' needs. In addition to facilitating the creation of a multi-tiered support system with varying levels of intervention intensity, RTI assists schools in focusing on increasing the effectiveness of core instruction, including targeted strategies and intervention within the core classroom. When a school has achieved full implementation, a purposefully organized continuum of services should exist. Use of the problem-solving process and data-based decision-making will ensure that students are placed accurately

and have access to effective interventions for the amount of time needed in order to meet benchmarks.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice In the District Under Study

This study was designed to explore the RTI implementation experience of SBLTs in one section of a major urban district. The findings from this study can be used to inform both practice and policy within this district.

1. It is imperative at this stage of district implementation, that the district maintains its focus on RTI as the central reform effort. Although there is an incredible sense of urgency within the district, a comprehensive reform effort such as RTI takes 3-5 years to achieve full implementation with fidelity. Cohort 1 schools require on-going, differentiated support for a minimum of one more year and all cohorts will need a minimum of 3 years of district training and support. This will assist schools in achieving full implementation, monitoring and revising implementation efforts, as well as institutionalizing practices and building capacity at the school site (Elliott & Morrison, 2008; Fixsen et al., 2007; Fullan, 2007; Florida Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project, 2011).
2. Continue to invest time, training, and resources towards building collaborative cultures at the school site. Train SBLT members on approaches to facilitating collaboration, ways of talking, and norms. SBLT members must then be accountable for training staff at the school site. This will assist schools in broad-based skillful implementation of the three core components of RTI. The need for collaboration and trust is essential in order to engage in the problem-

solving process and data-based decision-making, as well as to achieve collective responsibility for all students, which is needed for implementation of a multi-tiered service delivery system (Buffum et al., 2009; Kukic, n.d.). Noted approaches to fostering collaboration and trust include: Professional Learning Communities, Adaptive Schools, and Data-Driven Dialogue (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Garmston & Welman, 2009; Welman & Lipton, 2004).

3. District policy and reference guides should provide an outline of structures, programs, and schedules that detail the logistical items related to the multi-tiered service delivery system, such as length of intervention and scheduling options for each of the three tiers. For Tier 1, the district should clarify that intervention needs to occur in the core classroom and provide clear expectations for what this looks like (e.g. small group differentiated instruction). The district will need to provide professional development for teachers who need support in delivering Tier 1 intervention. Since Tier 2 occurs in addition to the core instruction in English language arts and or math, schools need clear scheduling options including the duration and frequency of Tier 2 interventions, as well as guidance as to what subject or content may be missed during this time. Bender (2009) cites that Tier 2 scheduling considerations are a common concern and need. Shapiro (n.d.) offers sample schedules for schools that incorporate set times for daily interventions, referred to as "tier time." Using Shapiro's approach, students requiring intervention received targeted instruction, while students who are at

benchmark receive enrichment during these set times. While approaches to scheduling tiered interventions exist, schools need guidance, support, and permission from the district in order to make radical changes to their daily schedule.

4. The problem-solving process needs to be streamlined in order to increase use. While research indicates that the formal process is useful, it is not practical for teachers to engage in the formal process for several struggling students. Step 2 of the problem-solving process is critical, yet overly complex. Due to a lack of time and expertise, schools are skipping step 2 altogether in order to avoid engaging in hypothesis development and validation. It is critical for educators to examine instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner (ICEL), when analyzing problems in order to identify factors over which they have control and to move away from solely focusing on student deficits. Therefore, step 2 must be streamlined in order to increase use of the problem-solving process. This recommendation adds something new to research surrounding RTI and the problem-solving process. Existing literature examines two approaches to RTI: standard protocol and problem-solving (Bender & Shores, 2007; Buffum et al., 2009); use of the problem-solving process is intended for a small number of struggling students. However, as the problem-solving process is used to analyze problems for larger numbers and percentages of students, which is needed in the district under study, a scaffolded and abbreviated approach must be developed and implemented in order to increase use.

Broader Recommendations for Policy and Practice

RTI shows promise as a general education or school-wide initiative and, contingent upon further research, should be considered as a viable method of school reform for school districts, particularly for districts with large numbers of struggling students. However, implementation of RTI is a massive undertaking, which requires strong leadership, as well as substantial planning, training, and time in order to achieve full implementation. In addition, recommendations that apply to the district under study may also apply to other districts.

Recommendations for Further Study

There are several opportunities for further research and study in regards to RTI implementation, both in the district under study and beyond. First and foremost, are the opportunities to measure whether or not, and to what extent if at all, there is a correlation between RTI implementation and changes in student achievement. Under this broader topic of RTI's impact, or lack thereof, on student achievement are several different research topics. One example is to examine whether or not there is a correlation between levels of RTI implementation and student achievement as measured by state standardized tests, and therefore reflected in API and AYP data reports. Is RTI an effective strategy of meeting NCLB's goals?

In addition, there is the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of particular interventions and intervention programs. Many research studies look at single Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention programs and measure their effectiveness in raising student achievement in reading or math and compare these results to a control group. Having effective intervention programs is integral to RTI implementation and research on

individual intervention programs will assist district in selecting programs with the highest probability of raising student achievement. This research may also assist districts in maintaining fidelity of these set intervention programs.

Final Thoughts

The nationwide call for school improvement has spurred numerous reform efforts. NCLB's intense focus on accountability has highlighted the challenge that some districts face in trying to close achievement gaps among subgroups of students. Two years ago one major urban district with sizable strengths and challenges adopted a multi-tiered framework for education reform known as RTI in hopes of accelerating academic achievement for all students. This research study reported findings and experiences related to the first two years of this journey.

Sailor (2009) asserts that RTI is not a magic bullet that will fix broken schools. Instead, school-wide RTI is significant structural reform, so if it is implemented with fidelity in schools that are struggling the most, it can be put to the test. A just society should, at the very least, strive to create circumstances through education that hold out the possibility of a ticket out of poverty and a chance to participate in the American dream (Sailor, 2009). A participant in this study described RTI as follows:

> You know, I cannot think of … this is the way that I describe RTI, you know, in a social justice context. I cannot think of a more social just way to address the needs of children who are the neediest. That is a true revolution when you look at the student, … where as in the past, you had to, you almost blamed the student for everything. So we are looking for matches at all levels: environment, curriculum, and instruction. You know, that is so empowering for our children. And I don't think that anything like that, in my way of viewing the world, you cannot wait but to do it. You need to make sure that you have those tiers in place because the children cannot wait.

In the district under study, the needs of students and the dreams of their families are palpable. At 22 schools in one section of a major urban district in southern California, RTI has emerged as a promising, yet complex, framework for educational reform.

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APPENDIX A

Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

To: _____
From: David E. Baca, Doctoral Student
Date: Spring 2011
Subject: Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

Dear _____:

I have received permission to conduct research from the district's research unit, and I would also like your permission to conduct a research study at 22 schools that comprise RTI Cohort 1 in your section of the local district. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy program at Pepperdine University. I am working under the supervision of my professor and mentor, Dr. Linda Purrington. This research is in partial fulfillment for my dissertation.

The study will explore the lived experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams of 22 schools, which comprise Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI2) Cohort 1 in one section of a major urban school district, in regards to the implementation of the RtI2 framework, including: (a) lived experience during implementation; and (b) levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making).

This research topic is opportune in light of the nationwide implementation of RTI/RtI2 as the study proposes to add to the literature pertaining to implementation considerations, particularly for urban districts and the students that these districts serve. The results of this study may be used to further refine the implementation of RtI2 and hence increase its effectiveness, which will improve educational outcomes across all students, including English learners, Standard English learners, special education students, and gifted students. Available upon your request will be a summary of the study's findings.

If you allow me to conduct research, I will facilitate focus groups with up to three members of School-Based Leadership Teams from each of the 22 Cohort 1 schools. Participation will involve one focus group that will last approximately 45 minutes and will occur after school hours. Interview questions are attached for your perusal. In addition to your permission, I will seek permission from each school principal as well as recruit SBLT members to participate in the study.

This research is important to me, and I appreciate your consideration of this request to conduct research in this section of the district. If you have any questions about this study, I can be contacted at XXXXXXXXX or at XXXXXXXXX, and or you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Linda Purrington, at XXXXXX or at XXXXXXX.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you willingly agree for me to invite principals and staff at select schools to participate in this study, and that you have received a copy of this form.

Sincerely,

David E. Baca
Pepperdine University Doctoral Student

I hereby consent to my school district's participation in the research described above.

_____
School District

_____
Superintendent or Designee Signature

_____
Please Print Superintendent or Designee's Name

APPENDIX B

Principal or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

To: _____
From: David E. Baca, Doctoral Student
Date: Spring 2011
Subject: Principal or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

Dear _____:

I am conducting a research study about RTI at Cohort 1 schools in your section of the district. I have received permission to conduct research from the district's research unit and from the local district Superintendent. I would also like your permission to include up to three SBLT members from your school in this study.

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy program at Pepperdine University. I am working under the supervision of my professor and mentor, Dr. Linda Purrington, and this research is in partial fulfillment for my dissertation. The study will explore the lived experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams of 22 schools, which comprise Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI2) Cohort 1 in one section of a major urban school district, in regards to the implementation of the RtI2 framework, including: (a) lived experience during implementation; and (b) levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making).

This research topic is opportune in light of the nationwide implementation of RTI/RtI2 as the study proposes to add to the literature pertaining to implementation considerations, particularly for urban districts and the students that these districts serve. The results of this study may be used to further refine the implementation of RtI2 and hence increase its effectiveness, which will improve educational outcomes across all students, including English learners, Standard English learners, special education students, and gifted students. Available upon your request will be a summary of the study's findings.

If you allow me to conduct research, I will facilitate one focus group with up to three members of the School-Based Leadership Team from your school. Participation will involve one focus group that will last approximately 45 minutes and will occur after school hours. Interview questions are attached for your perusal. If you give permission, I will also ask if you would like to participate in the study or appoint a designee; in addition, I will ask you to identify two additional key SBLT members that were integral to RTI implementation at your school, and I will attempt to recruit them to participate in the study.

This research is important to me, and I appreciate your consideration of this request to conduct research at your school. If you have any questions about this study, I can be contacted at XXXXXXXXX or at XXXXXXXXX, and or you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Linda Purrington, at XXXXXXXXX or at XXXXXXXXX.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you willingly agree for me to invite SBLT members at your school to participate in this study, and that you have received a copy of this form.

Sincerely,

David E. Baca
Pepperdine University Doctoral Student

I hereby consent to my school's participation in the research described above.

_____
School Name

_____
Principal or Designee Signature

_____
Please Print Principal or Designee's Name

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Letter

To: RtI2 School-Based Leadership Team Member
From: David E. Baca, Doctoral Student
Date: Spring 2011
Subject: Focus Group on RtI2 Implementation - Doctoral Dissertation Research

Dear Educator:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy program at Pepperdine University. I am working under the supervision of my professor and mentor, Dr. Linda Purrington.

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a research study on the implementation of the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI2) framework. Although I am an employee of the District, I am conducting this research for partial fulfillment of my dissertation.

The study will explore the lived experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams of 22 schools, which comprise Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI2) Cohort 1 in one section of a major urban school district, in regards to the implementation of the RtI2 framework, including: (a) lived experience during implementation; and (b) levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making).

This research topic is opportune in light of the nationwide implementation of RTI/RtI2 as the study proposes to add to the literature pertaining to implementation considerations, particularly for urban districts and the students that these districts serve. The results of this study may be used to further refine the implementation of RtI2 and hence increase its effectiveness, which will improve educational outcomes across all students, including English learners, Standard English learners, special education students, and gifted students. Available upon your request will be a summary of the study's findings.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will facilitate focus groups with up to three members of School-Based Leadership Teams. Participants will participate in one focus group that will last approximately 45 minutes. Focus groups must occur after school hours. As a small thank you, I will provide a $25 dollar gift card of your choosing (Starbucks, Target, or Amazon.com); you may even discontinue participation and still keep the gift card. Please read over the informed consent document, which will be completed at the beginning of focus group. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign the tear-off below and return in the provided envelope. This research is important to me, and I appreciate your consideration of this invitation to participate in my study. If you have any questions about this study, I can be contacted at XXXXXXXXX or at XXXXXXXXX, and or you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Linda Purrington, at XXXXXXXXX or at XXXXXXXXX.

Sincerely,

David E. Baca

Pepperdine University Doctoral Student

Yes, I would like to participate in this study.

Participant Name: _____
School Name: _____

Note: The researcher will provide additional copies of informed consent documents at the beginning of the research interview.

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Participant: _____

Principal Investigator: David E. Baca

Title of Project: AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A MULTI-TIERED FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN A MAJOR URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. Participants will receive a $25 dollar gift card of their choosing (Starbucks, Target, or Amazon.com). The following is a description of what the study will entail, the terms for participating in the study, and a discussion of your rights as a participant. Please read this information carefully before deciding whether or not you wish to participate.

1. I, _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by David Baca under the direction of Dr. Linda Purrington. I understand that this research is being conducted for partial fulfillment of a dissertation.

2. The overall purpose of this research is to explore the lived experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams of 22 schools, which comprise Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI2) Cohort 1 in one section of a major urban school district, in regards to the implementation of the RTI/ RtI2 framework, including: (a) lived experience during implementation; and (b) levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making).

3. My participation will involve participation in a focus group with other members of my School-Based Leadership Team. Participants will participate in one focus group that will last approximately 45 minutes. During this time, the researcher will ask questions relating to my experience during the implementation of RtI2 at my school. At any time during the focus group, I may choose to discontinue participation. If I choose to discontinue participation, I still get to keep the $25 dollar gift card of my choosing (Starbucks, Target, or Amazon.com).

4. My participation in this study will last 45 minutes and will occur at my school site, at another designated location such as a public library, or online using a virtual communication tools such as Skype. This study cannot happen during the school day on campus.

5. I understand the possible benefits to schools or society from this research. This research topic is opportune in light of the nationwide implementation of RTI/RtI2 as the study proposes to add to the literature pertaining to implementation considerations, particularly for urban districts and the students that these districts serve. The results of this study may be used to further refine the implementation of RtI2 and hence increase its effectiveness, which may potentially improve educational outcomes across all student groups, including English Learners, Standard English Learners, special education students, and gifted and talented students. Available upon request will be a summary of the study's findings.

6. I understand that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated with this research. These risks are minimal, and include possible boredom, fatigue, and or slight discomfort reflecting on lived work experience.

7. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.

8. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. Again, if I choose to discontinue participation, I still get to keep the $25 dollar gift card of my choosing (Starbucks, Target, or Amazon.com).

9. I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others.

10. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Linda Purrington at XXXXXXXXX if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Dr. Yuying Tsong, Pepperdine University's IRB Chairperson, at XXXXXXXXX.

11. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form, which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

Subject's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness Signature: _____ Date: _____

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Welcome Script

Welcome. Thanks for being here. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study on the implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. I want to begin by reviewing a few items:

1. Participation is voluntary, and although I am an employee of the District, I am conducting this research for partial fulfillment of a dissertation. As a small thank you, I will provide a $25 dollar gift card of your choosing (Starbucks, Target, or Amazon.com). You may choose to discontinue participation at any time, and you still get to keep the gift card.

2. Please refer to the informed consent document. I am going to read over the informed consent document. Should you have any questions, please feel free to stop me and ask them.

3. After reading the informed consent document, what questions might you have? If you are still willing to participate in the study, please sign the informed consent document and have someone else sign the document as a witness.

4. The study will explore the lived experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams of 22 schools, which comprise Response to Intervention (RTI) Cohort 1 in one section of a major urban school district, in regards to the implementation of the RtI2 framework, including: (a) lived experience during implementation; and (b) levels and fidelity of implementation in regards to three core components (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making).

This research topic is opportune in light of the nationwide implementation of RTI as the study proposes to add to the literature pertaining to implementation considerations, particularly for urban districts and the students that these districts serve. The results of this study may be used to further refine the implementation of RtI2 and hence increase its effectiveness, which will improve educational outcomes across all students, including English learners, Standard English learners, special education students, and gifted students. Available upon your request will be a summary of the study's findings. You can obtain a copy by contacting me via email, telephone, or snail mail.

5. Before we begin, I want to outline that there are 13 questions about RTI implementation. I will utilize the focus group format and ask that folks answer in a rotating round-robin format and that everyone answers each question, even if it is to indicate agreement or a desire to not respond. All responses are confidential, and no individual or school names will be used; research numbers will be assigned, and responses will not be linked to individuals in order to protect subject identities. Please answer all questions honestly and candidly. The duration of the focus group will be about 45 minutes and it will be audio recorded.

6. Thanks for meeting outside of school hours due to the fact that the research cannot occur during school hours. Feel free to grab coffee, water, or a snack. Also, feel free to take a break when needed. Are there any other questions before we begin?

APPENDIX F

Actual Interview Questions

1A. How might you describe your experience in regards to RTI implementation?
1B. How might you describe the process of implementing RTI at the school site?

2A. What might be some positive aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI?
2B. What were some "moments to celebrate" in regards to RTI implementation?

3A. What might be some negative aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI?
3B. What were some obstacles to implementing RTI?

4A. What were some strategies that the team may have used to overcome these obstacles?
4B. What advice might you give an SBLT member who is about to begin RTI implementation?

5. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of Component 1, a multi-tiered system of service delivery?

6. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 1, a multi-tiered system of service delivery?

7. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 1, a multi-tiered system of service delivery?

8. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of Component 2, systemic use of the problem-solving process?

9. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 2, systemic use of the problem-solving process?

10. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 2, systemic use of the problem-solving process?

11. How might you describe the level and fidelity of implementation of Component 3, systemic use of data-based decision-making?

12. How might you describe your experience in regards to ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 3, systemic use of data-based decision-making?

13. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring fidelity of implementation of Component 3, systemic use of data-based decision-making?

APPENDIX G

Former Proposed Interview Questions (First Set)

Table 1G

Former Proposed Interview Questions (First Set)

Research Question	Proposed Interview Questions
1. What is the lived experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams during RTI implementation?	1. How might you describe your experience in regards to RTI implementation? 2. How might you describe the process of implementing RTI at the school site? 3. What might be some positive aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI? 4. What were some "moments to celebrate" in regards to RTI implementation? 5. What might be some negative aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI? 6. What were some obstacles to implementing RTI? 7. What were some strategies that the team may have used to overcome these obstacles? 8. What advice might you give an SBLT member who is about to begin RTI implementation?
2. What is the level of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools?	1. What is the level of implementation in regards to establishing a *three-tiered system of service delivery?* Follow-up Question(s): A. If you had to pick *not started, in progress,* or *achieved*, which would you pick? Say more about why you selected that descriptor. B. What are some ways that RTI may have impacted Tier 1 services? C. What are some ways that RTI may have impacted Tier 2 interventions and services? D. What are some ways that RTI may have impacted Tier 3 interventions and services?

(table continues)

Research Question	Proposed Interview Questions
	2. What is the level of implementation in regards to systemic use of the *problem-solving process?* Follow-up Question(s): A. If you had to pick *not started, in progress,* or *achieved*, which would you pick? Say more about why you selected that descriptor. B. What educators or teams utilize the problem-solving process? For what purposes is the problem-solving process used? C. How often is the problem-solving process used? 3. What is the level of implementation in regards to systemic *data-based decision making?* Follow-up Question(s): A. If you had to pick *not started, in progress,* or *achieved*, which would you pick? Say more about why you selected that descriptor. B. How often is data analyzed? For what purposes is data analyzed? C. What are some examples of how teachers make data-based decisions to inform instruction and intervention? D. In what ways might RTI have impacted the use of data?
3. What are some perceptions about the effectiveness of RTI?	1. Overall, how might you characterize the effectiveness of RTI in increasing student academic performance at your school? Follow-up Question: A. If you had to pick *ineffective, somewhat ineffective, neutral, somewhat effective, or effective*, which would you pick? Say more about why you selected that descriptor. B. What are some factors or reasons that contribute to this degree of effectiveness? 2. In what ways has (or hasn't) RTI impacted student academic performance at your school? 3. In your opinion, has RTI helped raise standardized test scores at your school? Please explain.

(table continues)

Research Question	Proposed Interview Questions
4. What are some overall attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in regards to RTI?	1. Thinking of the entire school staff, what are some overall attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in regards to RTI? Follow-up Question: A. In regards to overall attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about RTI, if you had to pick *negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, or positive*, which would you pick? Say more about why you selected that descriptor. B. What are some factors or reasons that contribute to these attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs?

APPENDIX H

Former Proposed Interview Questions (Second Set)

Table 1H

Former Proposed Interview Questions (Second Set)

Research Question	Proposed Interview Questions	Literature Source Grounding
1. What is the lived experience of the School-Based Leadership Teams during RTI implementation?	1. How might you describe your experience in regards to RTI implementation? 2. How might you describe the process of implementing RTI at the school site? 3. What might be some positive aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI? 4. What were some "moments to celebrate" in regards to RTI implementation? 5. What might be some negative aspects, experiences or items related to the implementation of RTI? 6. What were some obstacles to implementing RTI? 7. What were some strategies that the team may have used to overcome these obstacles? 8. What advice might you give an SBLT member who is about to begin RTI implementation?	Bender, 2009; Buffum, Mattos, &Weber, 2009; Ehren, Ehrren, & Proly, 2009; Elliott, 2008; Elliott & Morrison, 2008; Galvin, 2007; NASDSE, 2008; Sailor, 2009; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003

(table continues)

Research Question	Proposed Interview Questions	Literature Source Grounding
2. What is the level and fidelity of RTI implementation in Cohort 1 schools in regards to three core components (multi-tiered system of service delivery, problem-solving process, and data-based decision making)?	1. What is the level and fidelity of implementation in regards to establishing a *three-tiered system of service delivery?* Follow-up Question(s): A. If you had to pick *not started, in progress,* or *achieved*, which would you pick? Say more about why you selected that descriptor. B. What are some ways that RTI may have impacted Tier 1 services? C. What are some ways that RTI may have impacted Tier 2 interventions and services? D. In regards to Tier 2 interventions and services, how would you describe the fidelity of implementation? What evidence exists around the fidelity of Tier 2 interventions? E. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring the fidelity of Tier 2 interventions? F. What are some ways that RTI may have impacted Tier 3 interventions and services? G. In regards to Tier 3 interventions and services, how would you describe the fidelity of implementation? What evidence exists around the fidelity of Tier 3 interventions? H. What advice might you give an SBLT member around ensuring the fidelity of Tier 3 interventions?	Self-Assessment for Problem Solving Implementation (SAPSI), developed by the Florida PS/RTI Statewide Project and based on the IL-ASPIRE SAPSI – Loyola University Chicago. Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; NASDSE, 2008; Telzrow, McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000

(table continues)

Research Question	Proposed Interview Questions	Literature Source Grounding
	2. What is the level and fidelity of implementation in regards to systemic use of the *problem-solving process?* Follow-up Question(s): A. If you had to pick *not started, in progress,* or *achieved*, which would you pick? Say more about why you selected that descriptor. B. What educators or teams utilize the problem-solving process? For what purposes is the problem-solving process used? C. How often is the problem-solving process used? D. The most involved step of the problem solving process is step two (problem analysis), how would you describe the fidelity of step 2 (or in other words - the depth of problem analysis) at your school site? 3. What is the level and fidelity of implementation in regards to systemic *data-based decision making?* Follow-up Question(s): A. If you had to pick *not started, in progress,* or *achieved*, which would you pick? Say more about why you selected that descriptor. E. How often is data analyzed? For what purposes is data analyzed? F. What are some examples of how teachers make data-based decisions to inform instruction and intervention? G. In what ways might RTI have impacted the use of data?	