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Administrators as Change Agents in Implementing MTSS: Beliefs, Skills, and Challenges

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ADMINISTRATORS AS CHANGE AGENTS IN IMPLEMENTING MTSS: BELIEFS, SKILLS, AND CHALLENGES

by

Tasha Frigmanski

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
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Response to Intervention (RTI) is traditionally known as an alternative to the IQ-discrepancy model used for the identification of students suspected of having a specific learning disability. The focus of the study is to examine the challenges of RTI implementation, finding the perceptions and beliefs of administrators regarding RTI and determining if they are equipped with the skills necessary to serve as a change agent in implementing successful practices in RTI. This study uses survey research in a mixed-method design to collect information from administrators in the state of Michigan. Findings from this study indicate that (1) administrators believe RTI improves student outcomes and should be a necessary component in the evaluation of students for determining eligibility for special education; (2) administrators believe roles and responsibilities within the RTI process should be shared among several key titled positions, not specific to special education personnel; and (3) administrators are equipped with the skill set necessary to carry out successful RTI practices. Supports identified by surveyed administrators for successful implementation and suggestions these administrators have for other administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model are discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Tasha Frigmanski
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Overview

In response to almost three decades of criticism regarding the IQ-discrepancy model as a means of identifying students with a specific learning disability, changes in legislation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, IDEIA, 2004) has provided an alternative to the IQ-discrepancy model, which is the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), historically and most commonly referred to as Response to Intervention model (RTI). However, even with this sanction, and a growing support and literature base endorsing RTI, many schools are continuing to use the IQ-discrepancy achievement model. Although, legislation has authorized a change in practice, it does not lay out a framework or blueprint for how to implement the change. This leaves it up to school districts not only to adopt a change in practice, but also to fully implement the innovation. In order for this innovation to be successfully executed, it would require a paradigm shift and change in culture, which would result in blurring the lines between special education and general education that have been deeply rooted in many school societies for decades. The focus of this study is to examine the challenges of implementation, finding the perceptions and beliefs of administrators regarding RTI and
determining if they are equipped with the skills necessary to serve as a change agent in implementing successful practices in RTI.

**Background**

From initiation of the IQ-discrepancy model, many individuals working within the field of education began to express disapproval of the practice of using the IQ-discrepancy model unaccompanied with any other indicators for quality of instruction. The traditional IQ-achievement discrepancy model measures the discrepancy between intellectual/cognitive ability and academic achievement. Although a variety of methods are used to determine if a discrepancy exists, the most common method used is to compare standards scores on an intellectual ability assessment to the standard scores obtained on various measures of academic achievement. If the discrepancy between ability and achievement is equal to or greater than the pre-established criteria set forth by the state, the student has met the criterion for a SLD (Restori, Katz, & Lee, 2009). One of the major points of contention is that the IQ-discrepancy model has made early identification of children suspected of having a specific learning disability very difficult based on this method alone, as it is very common for young children experiencing academic problems in the early elementary grades to lack the IQ-achievement discrepancy necessary to meet the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) eligibility criteria. In fact, special education rates indicate that SLD identification peaks in third and fourth grade (Restori et al., 2009). As a result, when there are no other quality indicators for instruction embedded into the identification process for young children, many students go unidentified and miss out on years of prevention and intervention services.
Additionally, the very concept that the IQ-discrepancy model can contribute to under-identification of young children is the same concept that points the finger at over-identification rates in special education. The inability of schools to identify students suspected of having a disability at a young age limits the schools’ capacity to prevent or remediate students’ academic and/or behavioral difficulties, which ultimately contributes to the over-identification rates of students in special education. Furthermore, difficulty using the IQ-achievement discrepancy model arises when schools are faced with students that experience long-term academic delays (i.e., the slow learner). Many times these types of students do not have an IQ low enough to qualify them as having a cognitive impairment, nor is there a big enough discrepancy between IQ and achievement to qualify them for a specific learning disability. This results in many students never receiving special education services, while continuing to struggle and fall beneath benchmark (Restori et al., 2009). These types of circumstances are not only negligent related to lack of or inappropriate interventions that students receive, but additionally they lead to the inappropriate misplacement of students into special education programs, all of which indicate the lack of quality instruction and educational benefits that students are receiving.

Additionally, there continues to be a real or perceived division between general education and special education. Special education staff is often viewed as “gatekeepers” as they are often charged primarily with the responsibility of qualifying students for special education programs and services, which is difficult based solely on the IQ-discrepancy model, as previously discussed. Without a union among staff working on
behalf of students, further harm can come to students that struggle academically. With a lack of coordination between educators, interventions may be redundant, and a continued disconnect in responsibility for student learning remains.

The Response to Intervention model not only offers an alternative to the IQ-discrepancy model, but also provides a unified system of studying student difficulties and providing early intervention prior to referral for formal evaluation for special education (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009). Response to Intervention can substitute for the traditional special education evaluation process by eliminating the weight of the IQ-discrepancy and using the critical information and data that IQ and achievement testing produce in a different way. Restori, Katz, and Lee (2009) found support for this initiative in a unique place and state,

Developers of popular intelligence tests such as the CAS (Naglieri & Das, 1997), WISC-IV (Wechsler, 2003), KABC-II (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2004), and the W-J III COG (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, IDEIA, 2004) actually discourage the use of their overall scores (i.e., Full Scale IQ). Instead, they strongly urge the user to use their tests for the purposes of identifying processing strengths and weaknesses. (p.136)

Response to Intervention highlights this very notion and encourages the use of a team problem-solving model for the purpose of identifying instructional interventions that address educational deficits.
Problem Statement

It is easy to identify the many benefits of implementing RTI practices, which provides a collaborative, systematic approach to examining students’ difficulties as well as a culture of collective responsibility for all students. However, what is not identified is the operational framework for implementing RTI. What is identified throughout the literature is the notion that leadership is vital to the implementation process of RTI, and principals are specifically identified as direct change agents in school-wide reform. What is not known is whether principals view themselves in the same way and accept the responsibility of guiding and leading a reform which has been historically branded as a special education modus operandi. Additionally, it is unknown if administrators are equipped with the skill set necessary to carry out reform and what supports they feel are warranted to assist them with this responsibility.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review and investigate three broad areas relating to the practice of leadership and the implementation of RTI. The first objective is to investigate administrators’ beliefs and attitudes regarding the responsibilities, as well as outcomes, as they relate to the implementation process of RTI. This question seeks to determine if beliefs and attitudes regarding outcomes and responsibilities align with best practice identified in literature as well as legislative mandates identified at both the state and federal level. Second, this study seeks to determine if challenges identified throughout the research on organizational change management and leadership align with
actual challenges school administrators face when charged with implementing RTI. Additional investigation will seek to investigate what supports administrators are identifying to assist with burden relief and challenges associated with implementing RTI in the building and school districts in which they work. Lastly, the study seeks to investigate if school administrators are equipped with the skill set necessary to successfully employ an operational framework for the implementation of RTI in the building or school district in which they work. This study also seeks to consider what suggestions administrators would have for fellow colleagues in the field of school administration that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The review of related literature and research for this study includes the legislative mandates specified through both federal and state policies. Also included in the review are the historical perspective and rationale associated with these mandates, as they relate to the requirement for schools to consider Response to Intervention (RTI) as a means of identifying students for special education programs and services.

The literature review also describes key components required in the RTI model, as well as best practices in carrying out implementation practices. Quality indicators associated with educational reform, organizational change management, and leadership pertaining to implementation of successful RTI practices were also reviewed.

Legislation

Two main legislative policies serve as guiding principles in the identification, education, and rights of students with disabilities: The Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, No Child Left Behind, 2002). Although neither policy is new in nature, both continue to make significant progress toward increasing accountability for
developing and implementing effective programs and services for early intervention, special education, and related services.

The anti-poverty and civil rights laws of the 1960s and 1970s brought about a dramatic emergence of an equal access mission. Induction of laws such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which prohibited discrimination based on race, sex, and disability, respectively, made civil rights enforcement a fundamental and long-lasting focus of the Department of Education. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010)

It was during this epoch that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, most recently branded as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, was passed. This act served as a component of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and has continued to be one of the most influential federal policies affecting education ever passed by Congress. Section 1001 of Public Law No. 107-110 (No Child Left Behind, 2002) states that the purpose of this title 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. No Child Left Behind’s core focus is on academic, instructional, and environmental goals.

These goals are: ALL students will attain proficiency or better in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014, ALL limited English students will become proficient in English, ALL teachers will be highly qualified by 2005-2006, ALL students
will be educated in safe, drug-free environments, ALL students will graduate from high school. (MDE, No Child Left Behind Presentation, 2002)

The No Child Left Behind Act has vast implications for how localities invest in the education of students with disabilities. A major constituent in the NCLB Act is based on accountability measures for school districts. Within the sector of accountability, the legislation mandates that if schools are to receive federal funding, they must administer standardized tests aligned to Grade Level Content Standards to all students, including students with disabilities. Student outcomes on the standardized tests will quantify the capacity for schools to meet annual state objectives for progress. Furthermore, NCLB mandates that all students must reach and demonstrate 100% proficiency by the year of 2014. With this legislation encompassing students with disabilities, school districts are held responsible and answerable to achievement outcomes for ALL students, with consequences in place for schools that do not make adequate yearly progress.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was first enacted in 1975 as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) for the purpose of providing access and opportunity to education for students with disabilities. In 1970, U.S. schools educated only one in five children with disabilities, and many states had laws excluding certain students, including children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or intellectually disabled (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Public Law 94-142 guaranteed a free, appropriate public education to all children with a disability, in every state and locality across the nation. Additionally, Public Law 94-142 embedded efforts in the way students with disabilities were identified as well as educated,
assurances that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents were protected, and financial incentives to assist states and localities to comply (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In 1990, Public Law 94-142 was reauthorized and officially became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 2004, legislation reauthorized IDEA (P.L. 108-446), which was then termed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). With every reauthorization of this Act, amendments are made that continue to improve efforts and rigor toward the identification and education of children with disabilities.

One noteworthy amendment that was made in the most recent reauthorization is related to the methods with which schools identify children with a specific learning disability. With the passage of IDEIA 2004, Section 1414(b)(6)(B) of IDEIA states, “in determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as part of the evaluation process.” This process is referred to as the RTI model.

**Response to Intervention**

Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) describe Response to Intervention as the practice of providing high-level quality instruction and interventions that match students’ needs and of using students’ learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions. The RTI model uses a pyramid structure, described as “Tiers.” Each Tier becoming sequentially more intense with empirically based interventions. In Tier 1, all students are monitored and assessed on how they are
responding to the curriculum and classroom instruction. Students that do not respond to instruction/interventions at the Tier 1 level, move up to Tier 2, where small or large group supplemental instruction is given. Students that do not respond to Tier 2 supplemental instruction then move on to Tier 3, intense individual instruction. The internal structure of the pyramid is understood to be fluid by design, meaning that students can move up and down through the Tiers. Only students that enter Tier 3 and do not respond are referred for special education evaluation. For this reason, special education has often been thought of as a fourth Tier, or a separate entity from the pyramid, to fully illustrate that Tier 3 is still a product of general education instruction and intervention. Furthermore, only those students who have received intense individual instruction without progress are identified for special education eligibility, largely for evaluation of a specific learning disability. This method ensures accountability for students having had access to rigorous purposeful instruction prior to being referred for special education supports. With the induction of this evaluation process, local school districts are no longer required to use the IQ-discrepancy model, historically used in the identification of students with learning disabilities.

Response to Intervention is a school-wide initiative that has been receiving national attention since its founding, but it gained momentum when IDEIA (2004) gave way for local educational agencies to use RTI as a part of their evaluation process. It also provided an alternative to the long-time criticized method of the IQ-achievement discrepancy model conventionally used throughout the nation for the identification of students with specific learning disability. RTI should not merely be viewed as a new
process for identifying students for special education; instead RTI should be viewed as a school-wide, collaborative approach to using all school resources in a seamless fashion to ensure a high level of learning for all students (Buffum et al., 2009).

There have been decades of criticism regarding the IQ-achievement discrepancy model. Some of the major criticisms are focused in the subjects of variance, methodology, and “wait to fail” approach. This is in large part due to the inconsistency of SLD criteria across states which qualify students for special education. Some states require one standard deviation in the difference between IQ and achievement, while others require more. Additionally, many psychologists also criticize that the practice of taking two data points from two different assessments from a single moment in time is error prone and has problematic statistical properties (Bailey, 2003). However, one of the most common criticisms that inundates the literature is related to the “wait to fail” approach, which insinuates that children must struggle and perform poorly academically for years before their achievement is sufficiently low compared to their IQ and qualifies them for specialized instruction and intervention. In fact, special education identification rates indicate that the odds of being classified as SLD peaks in the third and fourth grades (Lyon, Fletcher, Fuchs, & Chhabra, 2006). Additionally, as stated by the U.S. Department of Education (2005),

There are many reasons why the use of the IQ-discrepancy criterion should be abandoned. The IQ-discrepancy criterion is potentially harmful to students as it results in delaying intervention until the student’s achievement is sufficiently low so that the discrepancy is achieved. (p. 35802)
Another criticism of the IQ-achievement discrepancy model is that there is little scientific basis for using this approach. In regard to reliability, the notion of making a decision based on one single test score, at one point in time, with an instrument that is known to have error, is argued by some as not being a sound practice. Additionally, in regard to validity, there are many bodies of research that conclude that the IQ-discrepancy model is not valid for the purpose of identifying students with specific learning disability, as it cannot accurately identify students who are “discrepant low achievers from non-discrepant low achievers” (Restori et al., 2009).

For this reason, it is easy to see that using only the IQ-discrepancy unaccompanied with any other indicators for quality of instruction or the schools’ capacity to prevent or remediate their academic and/or behavioral difficulties can contribute to the over-identification rates of students with specific learning disabilities. Garda (2006) suggests that variables influencing eligibility decisions must be restructured to provide instructional practices of varying degrees of intensity prior to referral within the general education setting. The implementation of RTI practices is one way to offer this opportunity to school districts. RTI has the potential to better and more accurately determine special education eligibility, as well as provide more students with early, targeted, and explicit interventions (Buffum et al., 2009).

Ardoin, Witt, Connell, and Koenig (2005) stated,

Identifying students in need of special services through an RTI model will require a paradigm shift. Rather than using standardized tests in an attempt to identify what is specifically wrong within a student, an RTI approach will require schools
to examine contextual issues (quality of instruction) and more importantly shift
focus from identifying students with a deficit to identifying students at risk.
(p. 74)

The underlying principle of RTI is that schools should not wait until students are so far
behind that they are in need of special education services; instead schools should provide
targeted interventions to all students as soon as they are in need (Buffum, Mattos, &
Weber, 2010). An article by Scanlon (2013) cites a research study conducted by the
International Reading Association (IRA) in which IRA members were surveyed in an
effort to seek information regarding how RTI is progressing as it relates to students with
reading difficulties. Forty-three percent of respondents reported fewer children being
classified as learning/reading disabled as a result of RTI implementation, and of those
that reported a decline in identification numbers, 75% indicated that they believed the
reduction was due to the fact that struggling learners were getting stronger and more
timely instruction. Additional analysis found that a substantial majority of respondents,
nearly 70%, indicated that RTI has resulted in more (or much more) collaboration.
Scanlon states that these finding are positive and encouraging, as it is “consistent with
IRA’s RTI guidance, and with the research that supports that children, particularly those
at risk, benefit when their teachers share a common vision and approach to instruction”
(p. 6).

Conversely, although legislation permits a shift in practice, it does not lay out the
blueprint for implementation. Therefore, it is left up to schools to adopt new practices and
endorse a change in culture and practice. Currently, RTI is implemented in various ways
across states and local school districts and there has yet to be a single paradigm accepted as being the right way to do RTI. As a result, according to Buffum et al. (2010), “Too many schools have failed to develop the correct thinking about Response to Intervention. This has led them to implement some of the right practices for the wrong reasons” (p. 11).

However, certain components have been agreed upon as representing the basic tenets of the approach: (1) implementing research-based instruction in classrooms, (2) conducting general screening of students to determine educational progress, (3) intervening with more intense instruction for students who are not making adequate progress, (4) maintaining the fidelity of instructional quality, and (5) making instructional decisions based on data (Werts, Lambert, & Carpenter, 2009)

A key constituent of Response to Intervention is measuring and determining a child’s responsiveness. Essentially this means investigating whether the interventions that were implemented were effective, and continuing to question, Did the student make progress? Fundamental components of investigation would include how frequent should data collection take place, by what means, when to collect, and who should be responsible for this collection? A study by Hauerwas, Brown, and Scott (2013) investigated how all U.S. State Departments of Education are defining the Response to Intervention assessment process. Although the results of this study showed no national consensus, best practices were identified.
Frequency

Federal regulations regarding the frequency of data collection recommends “data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formative assessment of student progress during instruction” (IDEA, 2004, § 300.309[b][2]). However, once again, this interpretation is left up to individual states, and when not defined, individual school districts are charged with the responsibility to establish criteria for measurement and frequency. Michigan is currently among five states that do not specify beyond federal language. The other four states include North Carolina, Kansas, Louisiana, and South Dakota (Hauerwas et al., 2013).

When to Collect Data

The federal regulations indicate that assessments of student progress should occur “during instruction” (IDEA, 2004,§ 300.309[b][2]). The analysis by Hauerwas et al., 2013 found that when states do specify in their regulations when data must be collected, they refer to different features of the RTI practice, such as specificity of number of weeks and instructional context (general education or during instruction) (p. 11). Additionally, Hauerwas et al. found that it was most common in state guidance documents that RTI data collection must occur based on the Tiers. “For example, some states indicate screening two or three times a year at Tier 1 and progress monitoring during Tiers 2 and 3 (AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, IA, MD, NY, RI, SD)” (p. 11). Michigan is not among the states to establish such criteria.
Who Is Responsible for Collecting Data

Federal regulations do not specifically address who collects RTI data, but do specify that highly qualified personnel must provide the instruction. No states provided requirements regarding who collects RTI data. However, three states (DE, IA, OH) emphasize that a team must review the RTI data. Several more states (AZ, CT, DE, FL, KS, MT, NM, NC, SD) further referenced in their guidance documents “regular team data review” as part of their RTI process (Hauerwas et al., 2013).

To date, Michigan has not produced regulations defining the Response to Intervention assessment process. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has produced Response to Intervention guidance materials for the main purpose of defining a vision and definition of RTI. The Michigan Department of Education (2011) defines RTI as “an integrated, multi-tiered system of instruction, assessment, and intervention designed to meet the achievement and behavioral needs of all learners” (p. 3). In addition to the definition, MDE included 11 essential elements to help clarify the definition, in which they preface that all 11 elements must be present in order to be considered an RTI system. According to MDE (2011), the essential components of Michigan’s RTI framework are as follows:

1. Implement effective instruction for all learners.
2. Intervene early.
4. Utilize a collaborative problem-solving model.
5. Assure a research-based Core Curriculum (aligned with Michigan’s state standards).


7. Monitor student progress to inform instruction.

8. Use data to make instructional decisions.

9. Use assessments for three purposes: universal screening, diagnostics, and progress monitoring.

10. Implement with fidelity.

11. Engage parents and community.

Buffum et al. (2009) suggested that in order to successfully implement RTI, staff members must dissolve the cultural and structural barriers between regular education and special education to create a collective response in which core instruction and supplemental instruction form a learning continuum to meet the individual needs of every student. Buffum et al. also suggested that the implementation of RTI will take both restructuring and re-culturing. In the movement toward RTI, leadership is very important because it not only requires an examination of current practices and procedures but additionally charges administrators with the responsibility of creating a school-wide focus on learning and raising the standards of all students, as well as creating a culture of collective responsibility, which is an essential characteristic of RTI implementation (Buffum et al., 2009)
Organizational Change Management

Research in the area of organizational change management has indicated that for any change to be successful, strong leadership must be at the forefront. Change would be a relatively simple process if organizations were dealing with only mechanics, computers, or otherwise physical amenities; however, in reality, organizational change directly impacts human capital of an organization and requires people to alter their behavior. Adding this human factor increases the complexity of the change process significantly, as many change efforts are viewed as unnecessary and are resisted by the people involved. Mecca (2004) states that regardless of whether the change is perceived positively or negatively, resistance is a natural reaction, and the major problem is not resistance itself, but the inability of leaders responsible for the change to anticipate resistance, understand its dynamics, and respond effectively. It is common for administrators to become overly involved in technical components of a change project (charts, dates, outcomes, goals, etc.) and neglect the human aspects (feelings, attitudes, communication gaps, relationships, etc.) (Mecca, 2004). Ignoring the gravity of influence that the organization’s culture plays in the organization’s ability and willingness to accomplish a specific change can be detrimental to the success of the change effort. It takes strong leadership to be able to navigate through the process of change and motivate the actions needed to alter the behavior of the culture to achieve success. Kotter (1996) defines leadership as the ability to define what the future should look like, align people with that vision, and inspire them to make it happen despite the obstacles. Kotter also describes an organization that is over-managed and under-led as an environment where there is a lot
more pushing than pulling, an environment where decisions are made at the top and demands that others accept it. The problem with this is that it is enormously difficult to enact by sheer force the big changes often needed to make the organizations better (Kotter, 1996). It is clear to see that there is a distinct difference between managing change and leading change, and leading change is a powerful influence over successful change.

Much of these findings can be applied in the educational sector as well. Similar viewpoints are shared by Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008); they state that schools must emphasize conditions that build capacity of both the system (school) and the individuals (educators) who work within the system. From this perspective, the fundamental ingredients necessary for educational change are improving relationships and increasing the skill set of all involved, rather than relying on top-down reform. It is important that school leaders include those directly involved with the desired educational reform in order to achieve the desired goal. Educators may resist using a new instructional model if it requires them to embrace a new philosophy or dramatically redefines their roles. Sophisticated leadership strategies are required for averting or overcoming resistance to such adaptive changes (Mellard, Prewett, & Deshler, 2012).

Datnow and Stringfield (2000) found a positive relationship between strong district-level support and degree of change implementation among 13 schools implementing educational change programs. Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) cited work by Sarason (1995), which found that teacher support and implementation may be lower when decisions are made at the top of the administrative hierarchy without regard for
reactions of individuals and groups as to how the decisions were made, announced, and implemented. It is important to involve staff members throughout all stages of implementation. Their involvement and input steers the direction of the change (Rogers, 2003). Sansosti and Noltemeyer also cited findings by Hall and Hord (2001) that indicated that the leadership style of principals could greatly influence the success of implementation. In the study of the implementation of a science curriculum over a two-year period, researchers discovered three groups of schools (high, middle, and low implementing schools) and that these groupings were accounted for by the principal leadership within the buildings. Specifically, high implementing schools had initiator principals that provided active support of teachers in learning and using new curriculum. Middle implementing schools had managing principals, those that did not push teachers beyond minimal requirements. Lastly, the lowest implementing schools had responder principals, those that did not support or follow through with helping teachers with new curriculum.

**Leadership and RTI**

Fuchs and Deschler (2007) stated that RTI models that are driven by districts in a top-down approach have less of a chance of survival. It is apparent that the type of leadership needed to implement RTI is one that includes involving others in the process. It is evident that a systematic change process, such as the implementation of an RTI model, takes the skill set of more than one person. Administrators are challenged with not only setting the vision, but additionally aligning others with that vision. Mellard et al. (2012) note that effective leaders set the context for successful implementation by
creating broad awareness. Further supporting this viewpoint, Feuerborn, Sarin, and Tyre (2011) found that establishing staff member “buy-in” involves building staff members’ awareness of, knowledge of, and interest in RTI. It is critical that teacher “buy in” or, in other words, commitment to the initiative is required for success of an educational reform. Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) referenced a study (Turnbull, 2002) in which teacher buy-in and the implications for school reform initiatives were examined. In the study, 671 teachers who were involved in educational change efforts completed surveys assessing buy-in. Researchers found seven variables that accounted for a significant percentage of teacher buy-in:

1. Training
2. Administrator buy-in
3. Developer support
4. Resources
5. Knowledge of budget
6. Influence in school-level implementation
7. Control over classroom implementation

Additionally, this study showed the importance of gaining teacher support initially, as teacher buy-in from year one is the biggest predictor of year two buy-in. This work further supports that leaders of educational reform, such as the implementation of RTI, must include teachers in the process of implementation and seek to gain their “buy-in” or commitment to the effort, which must be done up front and in the beginning. For this reason, it is the belief of many researchers in this field that the principal must be at the
vanguard and lead the initiative. Buffum et al. (2009) stated that the principal’s role in implementing RTI is critical to its success and further state that the school principal must assume the role of advocate for all students, so that all students achieve at high levels.

A qualitative research study conducted by Spiegel (2009) sought to identify and examine leadership characteristics of principals who have successfully implemented RTI. The study included 12 study participants, 3 secondary-level principals and 9 certified professional staff members, at three study sites, each of which can be described as a traditional, comprehensive high school. In the study, six major characteristics were identified as being leadership characteristics of principals who have successfully implemented the innovation of RTI in their schools.

1. Principals as participants in the RTI process
2. Effective communicators
3. Supportive of staff members
4. Effectively allocating resources to support RTI implementation
5. Identify high performers and rely on their expertise in the RTI efforts
6. Proficiency in using data to inform decision-making

A qualitative research study conducted by Harkins (2009) involving six educators who completed an open-ended survey questionnaire and that sought to investigate best practices for Response to Intervention, revealed that meeting the needs of all students is a result of effective leadership that establishes communication among the principal, teachers, parents, and other educational professionals. The core concept that leadership increases the successful implementation of RTI surfaces throughout the research.
To further support this concept, Mellard et al. (2012) conducted a study in an attempt to gain a more in-depth understanding of secondary school RTI implementation processes, specifically at the middle school level. Interviews were conducted with administrators and these results were compared to the four essential components of RTI set forth by the National Center on Response to Intervention. Essentially, 12 schools that had data to demonstrate positive student outcomes were visited and interviewed. Mellard et al. (2012) states that “one of our most important findings was that schools that demonstrated the highest levels of RTI implementation also demonstrated the highest levels of district and principal leadership” (p. 31). When staff members were interviewed, the most common response was that their principals were fully involved in the process and invested in the entire implementation process. When principals were interviewed, four common themes emerged:

1. Principals ensured that staff members had sufficient time built into their daily routines to incorporate RTI.
2. Principals promoted buy-in from staff members, and were personally involved in RTI planning and implementation.
3. Principals established RTI as an expectation and defined key characteristics for the school’s culture.
4. Principals protected the time and resources needed for implementation and sustainability.

The key take-away from this study, as noted by Mellard et al., is that school leaders must understand how to provide leadership support during technical change that involves
supporting staff members through the solution and problem-solving stage, as well as through the adaptive stage which involves changing culture and attitudes of staff.

**Summary**

This chapter cited various studies and literature reviews concerning historical and present legislative mandates, RTI operational frameworks, implementation, as well as leadership and how it plays a critical role in the development and implementation of a school-wide reform such as RTI.

Consistent throughout the literature review on legislation was the premise that, for many reasons, the traditional IQ-discrepancy model for determining eligibility for special education, unaccompanied with any other quality of instruction indicators, should be abandoned (Ardoin et al., 2005; Bailey, 2003; Lyon et al., 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

The idea of a systematic, school-wide practice that provides high-level intentional instruction through a diagnostic method of collaboration, that matches students’ needs and measures learning rate over time so that educational decisions are made with fidelity, sounds very uncomplicated and the appropriate thing to do for all students. However, what becomes complicated are the logistics and practical operations that carrying out a school-wide reform requires, such as in the case of RTI. There is an underlying agreement across the literature review as to the leadership qualities required for successful restructuring in schools to occur. First, the principal should be at the forefront and have an active role in the process, while providing vision, support for staff members, communication to all stakeholders, and resources allocated for the initiative (Buffum et
Taking this into consideration, one might ask, why are so many schools still struggling to implement RTI? For this reason, and for the intent of focusing on the practical operations of RTI, this study seeks to examine the challenges of implementation, perceptions, and beliefs of administrators regarding RTI and to determine if they are equipped with the skills necessary to serve as a change agent in implementing successful practices in RTI. The study seeks to find answers to following questions:

1. What beliefs do administrators have regarding the implementation, outcomes, and responsibilities of the RTI process?
2. Do administrators have the skill set necessary for carrying out successful RTI implementation practices?
3. What percentage of administrators anticipates staff resistance while implementing RTI in the building or district in which they work?
4. What ISD supports are needed by the local school districts in order to successfully implement an RTI model?
5. What suggestions would school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology used in the collection and the data analysis used within this study. Included are the descriptions of the design method, participants, instrumentation, content validity, data collection, and data analysis. The study used a mixed-method survey research design to gather information from administrators throughout the state of Michigan regarding their beliefs, perceptions, challenges, and perceived skill sets pertaining to the implementation of RTI. The purpose of the study is to review and investigate three broad areas relating to the practice of leadership and the implementation of RTI: (1) beliefs and attitudes regarding the responsibilities and outcomes as related to the implementation process of RTI, (2) administrators’ skill set in initiating and implementing an operational framework for RTI practices, and (3) challenges school administrators face when charged with implementing an operational framework for RTI practices.

The study proposed to answer the follow research questions:

1. What beliefs do administrators have regarding the implementation, outcomes, and responsibilities of the RTI process?
2. Do administrators have the skill set necessary for carrying out successful RTI implementation practices?
3. What percentage of administrators anticipates staff resistance while implementing RTI in the building or district in which they work?

4. What ISD supports are needed by the local school districts in order to successfully implement an RTI model?

5. What suggestions would school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model?

**Design**

A mixed-method design rooted in survey research was selected for this study. Close and open-ended questions were asked for the purpose of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in seeking information associated with administrators in the state of Michigan regarding their beliefs, perceptions, challenges, and skill sets pertaining to the implementation of RTI.

With the growing and constantly changing face of technology, online surveys have increasingly been on the rise among companies and organizations in the way that they conduct research and collect data. Although the vast majority of research identifies mail surveys as generally having a higher response rate than Web-based surveys, it is also important to note that Internet usage is continually increasing, and the necessity and accessibility of computers and Internet access continues to grow each year. Much of the literature regarding response rate comparisons of mail surveys versus Internet surveys conducted even just a couple of years ago can be considered out of date, due to the large increases of Internet access and usability each year. According to the Internet World Stats (2011), as of December 31, 2011, there were 273,067,546 Internet users in North
America, which is approximately 78% of the total population in North America. These statistics identify that 78% of the total population in North America have access to and use the Internet. Based on the historical trend, we can only assume that this number will continue to increase. However, even within the research of comparisons between mail and Internet surveys, there are clear advantages to Web-based surveys over traditional methods, such as mail surveys.

One clear advantage of electronic surveys is response speed, which is the rate or number of days associated with the respondent returning the survey. With electronic surveys, respondents are not delayed by minor, but necessary, steps in returning a survey, such as enveloping and mailing, which contribute to lower response speed. Web respondents have the simplicity of just clicking a “send” button and surveyors instantly have access to the research data. Additionally, ease of writing longer responses to open-ended questions by means of typing, as opposed to paper-pencil method, is another advantage to Web-based surveys. This is especially important as longer responses have been associated with more detailed responses, which contribute to the quality of a survey method (Kwak & Radler, 2002). Kwak and Radler conducted a study in an effort to examine whether there was a significant difference in response patterns between mail and Web surveys, and they found that Web-based surveys had an obvious advantage over mail surveys. Response speed for Internet surveys was about four times faster than mail surveys, with the average number of turnaround days being 2.2 days for the Web survey and 9 days for the mail survey. Additionally, in the same study, respondent responses to
open-ended questions were examined. This study found that Web surveyors’ open-ended responses were about two to four times greater than those of mail surveyors.

Other apparent advantages of using a Web-based survey are reduced time and effort of the researcher, as well as cost. With a Web-based survey there is no printing, stuffing, or mailing of surveys and, additionally, there is no cost in regard to postage, envelopes, printing of paper, and possible stipend to those participating in these activities. An invitation to participate can be sent to hundreds of potential participants with the click of a mouse. However, in a noteworthy account by Shannon and Bradshaw, as cited by Greenlaw (2006), there was a significant amount of extra time devoted to the design of the Web-based survey used in their study, and time spent on designing Web-based survey instruments, especially those with sophisticated code, can represent monetary expense. Conversely, Greenlaw (2006) points out that design of a survey, dissemination, data storage, and data analysis of Web-based surveys is efficient and becoming more user-friendly with the continued increase of multiple survey websites, and with the continual arrival of these survey websites, time and cost has been improved.

Another advantage of a Web-based survey is the abundant features and options available in the design. Survey design has been the focus of many research studies in the past few decades; many have sought to answer what size font to use, color of paper, spacing, length, format of questions, wording of items, etc., in an effort to improve survey success. Many studies have proven that the more attractive or professional-looking a survey is, the better the response rate. Web-based surveys can provide the option of drop-down menus, which allows for more potential answers without cluttering
the page. They also have many feature options for font, color, graphics, multi-media, pop-ups, logo representation, question formats, skip logic, page breaks, etc., that can contribute to the overall appearance of a survey, features that are limited with a traditional mail survey.

Participants

The target population in this study included Local Educational Agency (LEA) special education directors and supervisors, and building level administrators including principals, curriculum directors, dean of students, and assistant principals from school districts in Michigan. The sample was obtained through the use of the State of Michigan directory for Intermediate School Districts (ISD) Directors of Specialized Instruction. ISD directors were targeted because of their connections to the local district that they serve, as well as connections to local district administrative personnel. ISD directors were not included in the target population, as their anonymity could not be protected to the extent that the target population was.

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study, a survey questionnaire titled “Administrators as Change Agents in Implementing MTSS: Beliefs, Skills, and Challenges!” (Appendix E), was formatted in Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), an online survey program. The survey includes a cover letter with instructions on how to complete the survey, as well as an explanation on anonymity and how the information collected will be used.
The survey questionnaire is comprised of 27 total questions, and two sections with various formats: multiple choice, multiple choice with multiple answers, yes/no, short answer, and open-ended questions. There are 11 questions regarding demographics to seek descriptive data about the participants: gender, age, years as an administrator, current position, highest education degree attained, special education endorsement, locale of district, size of district, involvement in curriculum, and training in RTI. Additionally, there are 16 questions concerning participants’ viewpoints and attitude towards RTI, as well as the anticipated challenges they might face during the implementation of RTI practices.

In order to answer research question 1 (What beliefs do administrators have regarding the implementation, outcomes, and responsibilities of the RTI process?), respondents were given a variety of multiple-choice questions in order to examine their beliefs regarding who should be primarily responsible for the developmental structure, implementation procedures, and data collection related to RTI practices within their building. Additionally, respondents were asked questions concerning student outcomes in an attempt to examine how administrators believe RTI improves student outcomes, and if RTI is a critical component in the evaluation of students suspected of having a disability. Displayed in Table 1 are the survey items that relate to each category represented in research question 1.
Table 1

*Survey Items for Research Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>14, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>12, 13, 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to answer research question 2 (Do administrators have the skill set necessary for carrying out successful RTI implementation practices?), respondents were given a variety of multiple-choice questions related to perceived skill sets. Administrators were surveyed for quality indicators identified in the literature (Spiegel, 2009) for leadership characteristics of principals who have successfully implemented the innovation of RTI in their buildings. The six major characteristics identified include: principals as participants in the RTI process, effective communication, supportive of staff members, effectively allocating resources to support RTI implementation, identify high performers and rely on their expertise in the RTI efforts, and proficiency in using data to inform decision-making. Questions 19-24 focused on these six characteristics. Question 25 focused on administrators’ ability to change culture and attitude within their buildings, as this skill is identified in the literature as critical for the successful implementation of any new initiative (Mecca, 2004).

Since this section of the survey was so closely tied to the literature support regarding quality indicators for successful RTI implementation practices, a Cronbach’s
alpha was used to calculate the reliability of this section of the survey. Represented in Table 2, the Cronbach’s alpha value was .923, indicating a very high reliability measure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>N of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill set</td>
<td>.923</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to answer research question 3 (What percentages of administrators anticipate staff resistance while implementing RTI in the building or district in which they work?), respondents were given a question in which they were asked to rate the degree of acceptance/resistance that they anticipated if given the task of implementing RTI. This question was based on the literature support that suggests that teacher buy-in is critical for the successful implementation of RTI (Feuerborn et al., 2011; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008).

In order to answer research question 4 (What ISD supports are needed by the local school districts in order to successfully implement an RTI model?), respondents were given an open-ended question in an attempt to discover any individual challenges or supports needed to assist administrators with the implementation of RTI in their building or district.

In order to answer research question 5 (What suggestions would school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model?), respondents were given an open-ended question in an
attempt to discover any additional ideas or implications for implementation from a practical standpoint, which may not have otherwise been identified in the research.

**Content Validity**

The content of the questionnaire is comprised of broad areas involving viewpoints/attitudes of the administrators toward RTI, anticipated challenges faced by administrators seeking to forward the implementation of RTI, as well as the acquisition of skills necessary to carry out the implementation of RTI within their buildings/districts. The questions are specific and are rooted in existing literature on successful RTI practices, characteristics of leadership and skills necessary to carry out successful implementation of RTI, and organizational change management.

The draft of the survey was reviewed by a panel of experts, including professors from two large public universities, and a number of experts in the areas of special education leadership and educational leadership. Feedback on the instrument was considered and revisions were made in accordance with the feedback. After the survey instrument was finalized, protocol for obtaining permission from Western Michigan University’s Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) was completed. The research was conducted after HSIRB at Western Michigan University approved the research (see Appendix A).

**Data Collection**

Each ISD director of special education received an email (Appendix B) identifying myself as the researcher and the study, and asking them to assist me in the
dissemination of the survey to the target population that I sought for the purpose of this study. A copy of the Invitation to Participate letter intended for the potential participants (Appendix C) as well as the informed consent form (Appendix D) was included in the email. The email additionally contained key dates of when the survey window closed, as well as directions for forwarding the survey questionnaire to the appropriate potential participants within the local districts (LEAs) served by their ISD.

All surveys completed generated data into the survey program database. ( surveymonkey.com ). The database provided the author with respondent summary information regarding (a) the total number of persons accessing the survey, (b) number and percentages of each person responding to each option in the multiple choice questions, (c) number and percentage of each person responding to the yes/no choice questions, and (d) full text of written responses including individual responses and open-ended comments.

**Data Analysis**

Since this study used a mixed-method design, various methods for data analysis were employed to interpret and analyze both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the data. The quantitative data obtained from the survey instrument was statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), as well as the software package provided by Survey Monkey ( www.surveymonkey.com ). Predominantly descriptive statistics were used, including frequency, number, and percentages. These aspects were automatically calculated by the software package for each multiple-choice question. Additionally, all data received were keyed into SPSS software by the author, so
that supplementary analysis could be performed. Reliability statistics were calculated using a Cronbach’s alpha to measure the internal consistency or intercorrelation of survey items. Typically, a value of 0.7–0.8 is an acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficient; alpha values greater than 0.8 indicate good reliability, whereas alpha values less than 0.7 indicate an unreliable scale (Field, 2005).

The qualitative data obtained in the survey instrument are displayed as full-text responses as reported by the respondents to open-ended questions. The purpose of the open-ended questions is to provide an opportunity for respondents to elaborate or offer insights that have not been captured in the closed questions. Data analysis processes included the constant comparative method to reduce data and generate summary rationale quotes (Denzin, 1978). Glaser and Strauss, as cited more recently by Kolb (2012), stated that the benefit of using the constant comparative method is that the research begins with raw data; through constant comparisons, a substantive theory will emerge. This process begins with open coding to develop categories from the first round of data reduction, and further reducing and recoding allows possible core categories to emerge (Fram, 2013). O’Connor, Netting, and Thomas (2008) state that the constant comparison method “assures that all data are systematically compared to all other data in the data set. This assures that all data produced will be analyzed rather than potentially disregarded on thematic grounds.” The written responses were analyzed in order to discover common trends or themes embedded in the written responses. Coding categories were determined based on the trends identified in the qualitative data, and major patterns and themes were
summarized using frequency and percentages, by tallying up the number of times the category was stated by the respondents.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The focus of this study is to examine the challenges of implementation, finding the perceptions and beliefs of administrators regarding RTI, and determining if they are equipped with the skills necessary to serve as a change agent in implementing successful practices in RTI. This study surveyed local school district administrators across various school districts in Michigan.

Participant Demographics

The sample is comprised of 79 administrators in various school districts across the state of Michigan. Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 list the descriptive data about the participants regarding gender, age, years as an administrator, current position, highest education degree attained, special education endorsement, locale of district, size of district, involvement in curriculum, and training in RTI.

Table 3 displays the results of gender, age, and years as an administrator. Of this group of administrators, 69.7% reported as female, and 30.3% reported as male. The majority (68%) of the group reported to be between the ages of 36-55 years of age, with 38.7% between the ages of 46-55 years of age. Of this group, 51.3% reported as having 10+ years of experience.
Table 3

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as administrator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 displays the results of title of current administrative position, highest education degree, and whether the individual holds a special education degree or endorsement. Of the participants, 46.7% reported as holding a supervisor or director of special education position, and 38.6% reported as holding a general education administrative position (25.3% principal, 5.3% curriculum director, 8% assistant principal). Of the participants in this study, 98.7% reported as having a graduate degree,
and 58.7% reported as holding a master’s degree, with 69.7% reported as having a degree or endorsement in special education and 30.3% reported as not having a degree or endorsement in special education.

Table 4

Participant Professional Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/Supervisor of special education</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum director</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of students</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education degree or endorsement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 displays the results of school locale and size of the district or combined districts in which the participant serves. The majority (48.6%) of the participants reported as serving a district in a rural locale, with 19.4% serving in a city locale, 19.4% serving in a suburban locale, and 12.5% serving in a town locale. The majority of the participants, 52.1%, reported as working in a district or combined districts of mid-size stature (1,000-5,000 students), with 31% reported as working in a large district (5,000+ students) and 16.9% as working in a small district (less than 1,000 students).

Table 5

Participant School Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School locale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 displays the results of involvement in curriculum, formal training in RTI, and how recently the participant had attended a professional development opportunity, training or university course related to RTI. Of the participants, 84.6% reported as having an active involvement in curriculum, with 15.4% reported as not having an active involvement in curriculum; 79.5% reported as having formal training in RTI, and 67.7% reported as engaging in a professional development experience or university course in RTI within the last year.

Table 6

Participant Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal RTI training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent RTI attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the last year</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the last two years</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 + years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Questions

Research Question 1

What beliefs do administrators have regarding the implementation, outcomes, and responsibilities of the RTI process?

This question sought to examine administrators’ beliefs regarding who should be primarily responsible for the developmental structure, implementation procedures, and data collection, as it relates to RTI practices within their building. Questions 12, 13, and 15 were presented in a multiple-choice format, in which respondents were asked to indicate titled personnel whom they believe should have primary responsibility in specific functions of the RTI process. Tables 7, 8, and 9 represent responses to these questions. Additionally, question 16 is presented in a multiple-choice, multiple-answer format that asks administrators to identify key titled positions that they would include on a student advisory team. This question also includes the option for respondents to identify other titled personnel through open-ended means that may not have been identified in the multiple-choice selections provided by the author, in an effort to fully capture administrators’ beliefs regarding the implementation of RTI procedures. Table 10 represents the responses that administrators reported to this question. Additionally, respondents were asked questions related to their beliefs regarding student outcomes. Question 14 is designed to examine to what degree administrators believe that RTI improves student outcomes, and question 16 is designed to examine whether or not administrators believe RTI is a critical component in the evaluation of students suspected
of having a disability. Table 11 represents the beliefs that administrators reported to these questions.

Table 7

*Primary Responsibility for the Development of RTI Structure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director/Supervisor of special education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building level administrator (i.e., principal)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum director</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School psychologist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancillary staff (i.e., speech/occupational therapist)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

*Responsibility for RTI Implementation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director/Supervisor of special education</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building level administrator (i.e., principal)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum director</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School psychologist</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education teacher</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancillary staff (i.e., speech/occupational therapist)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Responsibility for Collecting Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General education teacher</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building administrator</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District director/ supervisor of special education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School psychologist</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

Positions Included in SAT (Student Advisory Team)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General education teacher</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building administrator (principal)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District director/ supervisor of special education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School psychologist</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior specialist/interventionist</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum coordinator</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancillary staff (speech, OT)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

**Student Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.) I believe that RTI improves student outcomes.</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.) I believe RTI is NOT a necessary component in the evaluation process for determining eligibility for special education.</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, 39.3% of administrators that participated in the study selected the building administrator (i.e., principal) as the person responsible for the development structure for RTI. In close second to this, 32.8% reported that the curriculum director should be primarily responsible for the developmental structure of RTI. In addition, a large percentage (37.7%) of respondents indicated the primary responsibility should be something “other” than the choices provided. The responses to “other” included district central office, and co-leadership between special education and general education administrators. When surveyed regarding responsibility for the implementation of RTI practices in the school system, most frequently, 83.6% of respondents identified building level administration (i.e., principal) as having primary responsibility. By and large, 78.3% of respondents identified general education teachers being responsible for collecting data on students that have been identified as “at risk” or non-responsive to Tier 1 instruction. When surveyed regarding building a team within a district, most frequently, respondents identified 5 key titled positions: principal (54.7%), general education teacher
(52.8%), school psychologist (39.6%), special education teacher (33.9%), and a school social worker (28.3%). In general, administrators indicated that they believe (72.9% strongly agree, 27.1% agree) that RTI improves student outcomes. Additionally, when surveyed regarding RTI being a necessary component in the evaluation process for determining eligibility for students suspected of having a disability, administrators indicated that they disagree with the statement of RTI not being a necessary component of the evaluation process (50.8% strongly disagree, 41.5% disagree), whereas only a small percentage (7.7% agree) that RTI is not a necessary component.

Research Question 2

*Do administrators have the skill set necessary for carrying out successful RTI implementation practice?*

This question sought to identify whether administrators are equipped with the skill set previously identified in literature (Spiegel, 2009) as key leadership characteristics of principals who have successfully implemented RTI. Respondents were given a variety of multiple-choice questions related to the six major characteristics identified by Spiegel’s study, which included: principals as participants in the RTI process, effective communication, supportive of staff members, effectively allocating resources to support RTI implementation, identifying high performers and relying on their expertise in the RTI efforts, and proficiency in using data to inform decision-making. Questions 19-24 focused on these six characteristics. Question 25 focused on administrators’ ability to change culture and attitude within their building, as this skill set is identified in the literature as critical for the successful implementation of any new
initiative to occur (Mecca, 2004). Table 12 represents the assessment of skill set that administrators reported.

Table 12

Assessment of Skill Set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.) I believe I am a key component in the RTI process.</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.) I believe the staff members in which I directly oversee would describe me as an effective communicator.</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.) I believe I am supportive to all staff members.</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.) I believe funds and resources should be allocated to support MTSS.</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.) I believe I have the ability to identify high performers and rely on their expertise in the RTI efforts.</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.) I believe I have proficiency in using data to inform my decision-making.</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.) I believe I have the ability to change the culture and attitudes of those working within my building or district.</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following generalizations can be made from the data as it relates to administrators' skill set in the RTI process:

- The majority of administrators that participated in this study believed that they are a key participant in the RTI process (87.7%),
• The majority of administrators that participated in this study believed that the staff members that they directly oversee would describe them as an effective communicator (98.4%).

• The majority of administrators that participated in this study believed that they are supportive to all staff members (98.5%).

• The majority of administrators that participated in this study believed that funds and resources should be allocated to support MTSS (100%).

• The majority of administrators that participated in this study believed that they have the ability to identify high performers and relay on their expertise in the RTI efforts (96.9%).

• The majority of administrators that participated in this study believed that they have the proficiency to use data to inform decision making (100%).

• The majority of administrators that participated in this study believed that they have the ability to change the culture and attitudes of those working within their building or district (96.9%).

Research Question 3

What percentages of administrators anticipate staff resistance while implementing RTI in the building or district in which they work?

The literature regarding RTI suggests that teacher buy-in is crucial and a quality indicator for the successful implementation of RTI (Feuerborn et al., 2011; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008). Question 17 sought to answer research question 3 by asking respondents to rate the degree of resistance that they would expect to encounter from staff
if they were implementing MTSS in their building/district. Table 13 displays the results of degree of staff resistance/acceptance that administrators anticipate they would encounter if they were given the task of implementing RTI in their building or district. The majority (70.7%) of administrators reported that they would anticipate staff being accepting (61.5% accepting, 9.2% very accepting), whereas 29.2% of respondents indicated that they would anticipate resistance amongst staff (9.2% very resistant, 20% resistant).

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Very Resistant</th>
<th>Resistant</th>
<th>Accepting</th>
<th>Very Accepting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17.) If you were given the task of implementing MTSS in the building/district in which you work, please rate the degree of resistance/acceptance that you would expect to encounter from your staff.</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 4

What ISD supports are needed by the local school districts in order to successfully implement an RTI model?

Respondents were given an open-ended question in an attempt to discover any individual challenges or supports needed to assist administrators with the implementation of RTI in their building or district. Question 26 was given in the survey instrument to identify barriers that administrators may be facing that would be prohibitive to the
initiation of RTI in the building/district in which they work, as well as supports that would assist administrators with this process.

Table 14 displays the top six themes that were identified from the responses that administrators reported in regard to ISD supports needed by the local school districts in order to carry out successful RTI practices. Largely, respondents (30.8%) identified training and professional development focused on general aspects of RTI as an ISD support needed. These general aspects included: process identification, best practice guidelines, structure, and basic understanding of expectations for the process. Secondly, local school district administrators (13.5%) identified needing their ISD to provide a vision for carrying an RTI initiative. Additional supports were identified as training focused on general education initiatives (11.5%), such as instructional delivery, differential instruction, classroom management, and curriculum. Funding (11.5%) and “none” (11.5%) were also identified. For respondents that reported none, most commonly they referred to either being already involved in successful RTI practices, or having the capacity at the local level to carry out the implementation of RTI without additional ISD supports. Lastly, there was a small percentage of respondents (9.6%) that indicated a need for an ISD consultant that was specific to RTI, such as an RTI coach or RTI teacher consultant. Other responses that were not captured in the six major themes included (a) professional development that focused specifically on data, data analysis, and strategies that assisted with making data-based decisions; (b) additional staff (such as social workers, speech pathologists, school psychologist and curriculum directors); and
(c) finding solutions to the perceived disconnect between ISD and local obligations in the process.

Table 14

**ISD Supports Needed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI consultants/coaches</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training – PD focused on RTI</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training – general education initiative</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 5**

*What suggestions would school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model?*

Respondents were given an open-ended question in an attempt to discover any additional ideas or implications for implementation from a practical standpoint, which may not have otherwise been identified in the research. Question 27 was included in the survey instrument for the intention of gleaning insight from practitioners working within the field that may have experience with implementing a school-wide reform such as RTI.

Table 15 displays the six major themes identified in the data regarding the suggestions school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are
preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model. The most frequently reported theme was communication. Respondents reported that communication was essential to the process and suggest the other school administrators communicate effectively, often, and work on getting buy-in from teachers, staff, and parents. The second most frequently reported suggestions were for administrators to develop and rely on that team for expertise and for carrying forth the vision. The third most frequently reported suggestion was creating a vision, to include setting high expectations, and sticking to the plan. One common quote that was identified in these data was “go slow to go fast.” This indicated that administrators felt it was important to take the time to set the vision first, rather than speeding through the process. The fourth most frequently identified theme was to use data for decision making. This theme emerged in two different capacities: (a) Use data and research to support the initiation of the RTI process, and (b) Collect data to find mismatches in instruction and intervention for struggling students in order to make accurate decisions on behalf of students. Reported at the same frequency were the fifth and sixth themes revealed in the data. The fifth theme included changing the culture of the building (i.e., preparing for resistance and getting teacher buy-in and support for the process. The sixth theme included administrators taking a leadership role in the process. Common quotes that came out of the data were “be committed,” “be consistent,” “be passionate,” and “be a strong leader.” Other suggestions identified in the data, but were not identified in the six major themes, included (a) Offer professional development opportunities for staff ($f = 4$), (b) Consider the use of MiBLSi ($f = 2$), and (c) Consider the use of professional learning communities ($f = 1$).
Table 15

**Major Themes Within Suggestions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Suggestion</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use data for decision making</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take leadership role in the process</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a team (rely on expertise of others)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a vision (stick to the plan, set high expectation)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate effectively (get teacher buy-in)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change the culture (prepare for resistance)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

The results section of this study provide a condensed summation of the (a) beliefs and attitudes that administrators have regarding the responsibilities and outcomes related to the implementation process of RTI, (b) administrators’ skill set in initiating and implementing an operational framework for RTI practices, (c) challenges school administrators face when charged with implementing RTI, (d) ISD supports needed by local school districts in order to successfully implement an RTI model, and (e) suggestions that school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model. Chapter V that follows discusses implications of the findings for school districts within the state of Michigan, the State of Michigan Department of Education, as well as universities and colleges that offer educational leadership programs within state.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This chapter contains the summary of the study, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, discussion, and suggestions for future research. The findings for the study have implications for school districts within the state of Michigan, Intermediate School Districts within the state of Michigan, the State of Michigan Department of Education, as well as universities and colleges that offer educational leadership programs within Michigan.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to review and investigate three broad areas relating to the practice of leadership and the implementation of RTI, to include: (a) beliefs and attitudes regarding the responsibilities and outcomes as they relate to the implementation process of RTI, (b) administrators’ skill set in initiating and implementing an operational framework for RTI practices, and (c) challenges school administrators face when charged with implementing RTI.

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What beliefs do administrators have regarding the implementation, outcomes, and responsibilities of the RTI process?
2. Do administrators have the skill set necessary for carrying out successful RTI implementation practices?

3. What percentages of administrators anticipate staff resistance while implementing RTI in the building or district in which they work?

4. What ISD supports are needed by the local school districts in order to successfully implement an RTI model?

5. What suggestions would school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model?

The first question investigated administrators’ beliefs and attitudes regarding the responsibilities, as well as outcomes, as they relate to the implementation process of RTI. This question sought to determine if beliefs and attitudes regarding outcomes and responsibilities align with best practice identified in literature as well as legislative mandates identified at both the state and federal level. The second question of this study sought to investigate if school administrators perceive they are equipped with the skill set necessary to successfully employ an operational framework for the implementation of RTI in the building or school district in which they work. The third question investigated the challenges identified throughout the research on organizational change management and leadership to determine if there was an alignment with actual challenges school administrators face when charged with implementing RTI. The fourth question sought to investigate what supports administrators are identifying that would assist them with burden relief associated with implementing RTI in the building and school districts in which they work. Lastly, the fifth question of the study sought to identify what
suggestions administrators would have for fellow colleagues in the field of school administration that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model.

The findings of this study presented implications of the perceived or real challenges that administrators face when implementing RTI practices in a school-wide reform. The findings also present the administrators’ perceptions and beliefs of regarding RTI and suggest whether or not current administrators are equipped with the skills necessary to serve as a change agent in implementing successful practices in RTI.

The sample was comprised of 79 school administrators from various school districts across the state of Michigan. The majority (69.7%) was female. The majority (68%) of the group reported to be between the ages of 36-55 years of age, with 51.3% reported as having 10+ years of experience. The majority of the participants (46.7%) reported as holding a supervisor or director of special education position, and 38.6% reported as holding a general education administrative position. The vast majority of participants (98.7%) reported having a graduate degree, with 69.7% reported having a degree or endorsement in special education. The majority (48.6%) of the participants reported serving a district in a rural locale, and 52.1% worked in a district or combined districts of mid-size stature. In terms of involvement in curriculum and formal training in RTI, the majority of participants (84.6%) reported having an active involvement in curriculum; 79.5% reported having formal training in RTI that occurred through a professional development experience or university course in RTI within the last year.
Interpretation of Findings

Question 1

What beliefs do administrations have toward the implementation, outcomes, and responsibility of the RTI process?

Several conclusions can be made in regard to the beliefs that administrations have toward the implementation, outcomes, and responsibilities of the RTI process. First, overwhelmingly, administrators surveyed agreed with the belief that RTI improves student outcomes. Additionally, the majority of the administrators surveyed agreed that an administrator should have the primary responsibility for the development structure for RTI. This belief is supported throughout the literature as a quality indicator for successful RTI implementation, as in the case of Buffum et al. (2009), who stated that the principal’s role in implementing RTI is critical to its success. Additionally, a study conducted by Spiegel (2009) found that a principal as participant in the RTI process was among the six major characteristics identified as being a key leadership characteristic of principals who have successfully implemented the innovation of RTI in their schools. Also supported in the work of Harkins (2009), where best practices of RTI were studied, the core concept identified in the study revealed that leadership increases the successful implementation of RTI.

Consistent throughout the literature review on legislation was the premise that, for many reasons, the traditional IQ discrepancy model for determining eligibility for special education, unaccompanied with any other quality of instruction indicators, should be abandoned (Ardoin et al., 2005; Bailey, 2003; Lyon et al., 2006; U.S. Department of
Education, 2005). Administrators in this study supported this premise by reporting that RTI should be a necessary component in the evaluation of students for special education. Another conclusion that can be made is that administrators view RTI as an education initiative and not just an alternative method for qualifying students for special education. This is supported in the data in which administrators identified the role for reviewing data to be a shared responsibility amongst several key titled positions, not specific to special education personnel, and identified the principal as being a member of the team. Lastly, administrators identified the general education teacher as not just being part of the team to review data, but additionally acknowledged them as having the primary responsibility for collecting data on students identified as being at risk or non-responsive to Tier 1 instruction.

In regard to data collection, most frequently administrators selected general education teachers as those that bear responsibility for collecting data on students that have been identified as “at risk” or non-responsive to Tier 1 instruction. Although there is no federal regulation pertaining to who should collect the data, it does specify that data collection should take place during instruction and that instruction should be provided by highly qualified personnel. Additionally, Michigan has yet to define beyond federal language regulations who should collect data. However, many states have stipulated through regulation documents that the process must include a team to review data as part of their RTI process. When surveyed regarding building a team within a district, most frequently, respondents identified 5 key titled positions; principal (54.7%), general education teacher (52.8%), school psychologist (39.6%), special education teacher
(33.9%), and a school social worker (28.3%), although there are no legislative mandates or literature support that stipulates what titled positions should be included in the review team. These data support the philosophy that RTI should be an education initiative, not specific to special education. Additionally, it supports the foundation embedded in the literature support that principals should be an integral component to the RTI process. There is an underlying agreement across the literature review as to the leadership qualities required for successful restructuring in schools to occur. First, the principal should be at the forefront and have an active role in the process, while providing vision, support for staff members, communication to all stakeholders, and resources allocated for the initiative. (Buffum et al., 2010; Feuerborn et al., 2011; Fuchs & Deschler, 2007; Harkins, 2009; Mellard et al., 2012; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008). Thus, this finding of this first question corroborated previous findings.

**Question 2**

> Do administrators have the skill set necessary for carrying out successful RTI implementation practices?

Several conclusions can be drawn from the data as related to administrators’ skill set in the RTI process. First, the administrators in this study believe that they are a key participant in the RTI process. Second, administrators in this study believe they are effective communicators. Third, administrators believe that they lend support to all staff members. Fourth, administrators believe that funds and resources should be allocated to support MTSS. Fifth, administrators believe that they have the ability to identify high performers and rely on their expertise in the RTI efforts. The sixth and last conclusion
that can be made from the data is that administrators believe they have the proficiency in using data to inform decision making. These conclusions fully support the quality indicators identified in a qualitative research study conducted by Spiegel (2009), in which six major leadership characteristics of principals who have successfully implemented the innovation of RTI in their schools were identified as:

1. Principals as participants in the RTI process
2. Effective communicators
3. Supportive of staff members
4. Effectively allocating resources to support RTI implementation
5. Identify high performers and rely on their expertise in the RTI efforts.
6. Proficiency in using data to inform decision-making

This study identified that, according to the literature support, administrators in this study believe they are equipped with the skill set necessary to carry out successful RTI practices.

**Question 3**

> What percentages of administrators anticipate staff resistance while implementing RTI in the building or district in which they work?

There is a significant amount of support throughout the literature as it relates to organizational change management and leadership that indicates that cultural barriers and resistance to change within an organization are the most frequently encountered obstacles to carrying out a change. Mecca (2004) stated that, regardless of whether the change is perceived positively or negatively, resistance is a natural reaction. Buffum et al. (2009)
suggested that in order to successfully implement RTI, staff members must dissolve the cultural and structural barriers between regular education and special education to create a collective response in which core instruction and supplemental instruction form a learning continuum to meet the individual needs of every student.

Results from the study indicated that administrators surveyed (96.9%) believe that they have the ability to change the culture and attitudes of those working in their building, which would be regarded as a positive quality indicator for being able to carry out a change in the buildings/districts in which they work. When asked to comment on the anticipated degree of resistance or acceptance that administrators would expect to encounter from their staff if given the task of implementing MTSS in the building/district in which they worked, the majority (70.7%) of administrators reported that they would anticipate staff being accepting (61.5% accepting, 9.2% very accepting), whereas 29.2% of respondents indicated that they would anticipate resistance amongst staff (9.2% very resistant, 20% resistant). The anticipated degree of resistance does not align with the premise embedded throughout the literature regarding organizational change. One supposition that can be gleaned from the data is that administrators may have underestimated the degree of resistance that they may face from staff. This could be attributed to the fact that the respondents indicated notable confidence about their ability to change the culture and attitudes of those working within their building or district. It could be very troublesome if the degree of resistance has been underrated or undervalued, as there is clear and abundant literature that supports the concept that resistance should be expected and planned for carefully (Buffum et al., 2010; Feuerborn et al., 2011; Fuchs &
In fact, change initiatives in organizations generally experience a high failure rate (70%). This is because significant change, even if perceived good or bad, creates a level of uncertainty, which leads to fear and resistance. The only way to overcome the uncertainty of this opposition is to understand the complex layers of resistance and to accurately plan for the change initiative (Umble & Umble, 2014).

**Question 4**

*What ISD supports are needed by the local school districts in order to successfully implement an RTI model?*

When surveyed regarding the supports needed from their Intermediate School District, administrators identified six major themes. First, 30.8% of administrators in this study identified training and professional development focused on general aspects of RTI; these general aspects included process identification, best practice guidelines, structure, and basic understanding of expectations for the process. Second, 13.5% of administrators identified needing a vision for carrying an RTI initiative. Third, 11.5% identified training focused on general education initiatives, such as instructional delivery, differential instruction, classroom management, and curriculum. The fourth identified support was funding. The fifth identified support was none. For respondents that reported none, most commonly they referred to either being already involved in successful RTI practices, or having the capacity at the local level to carry out the implementation of RTI without additional ISD supports. Lastly, identified was an RTI coach or RTI teacher consultant 9.6%.
Several conclusions can be drawn from this qualitative data. First, administrators identified the need for professional development in the form of training, specifically professional development with a focus on RTI. This is congruent with the data in this study in which administrators identified that RTI improves student outcomes, and they support the RTI initiative. However, process identification, best practice guidelines, structure, and basic understanding of expectations for the process were identified as specific areas of focus for ISDs to provide training in. This indicates that, although administrators may believe that RTI improves student outcomes, they are unclear of how to begin the process of implementation. This is especially interesting as research question 2 indicated that, based on the data, administrators believe they are armed with the skill set to carry forth implementation. What appears to be missing is the framework for implementation. Although administrators may believe they have the skill set and leadership characteristics to carry out the RTI initiative, there is no foundational structure within which to apply the skill set. This creates disconnect between knowledge and application for administrators, which could be a considerable obstacle with initiating and realizing successful RTI implementation. Tying into and supporting this notion is the second identified theme, which is vision. It is paramount that administrators have a vision for their school or district. Research embedded in leadership, organizational change management, and RTI, in general, all specify that administrators must not only have a vision for implementation, but additionally are responsible for aligning others with this vision. Based on these data, and supporting outcomes in this data set, one must deduct
that administrators are still looking for direction, regulation, or best practices to be specified.

Another area of support identified in the data is the need for training focused on general education initiatives, such as instructional delivery, differential instruction, classroom management, and curriculum. This supports previous findings in question 1, where conclusions were drawn from the data that support insight into administrators’ beliefs toward roles and responsibilities. It was identified in the data that administrators believe general education teachers should be responsible for data collection. It was also identified that administrators selected primarily general education staff for those to study and review academic interventions for struggling students. For these reasons, conclusions can be drawn that administrators view RTI as an educational initiative, not specific to just eligibility processes for the identification of special education programming and services. This additionally rationalizes why administrators would seek support in the form of general education initiatives, so that teachers and staff could have an opportunity for growth and refinement.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this research study is that funding remains a challenge for school districts, as many administrators identified that support is needed in the form of funding. Although administrators identified in the data that funding and resources should be allocated for RTI initiatives, the probability remains that funds and resources may not be available in districts to get new initiatives off the ground.

The fifth identified theme was “none.” For respondents that reported none, most commonly they referred to either being already involved in successful RTI practices, or
having the capacity at the local level to carry out the implementation of RTI without additional ISD supports.

Additionally, administrators identified the need for RTI support in the form of ISD consultants or coaches. This may be an indicator that administrators still rely on an “expert” model, which would indicate that they themselves may not have the expertise to carry out RTI implementation, or that perceived internal capacity may not exist among the staff or building. This further supports the previous supposition that administrators are looking for more direction in regard to practical application of the process and feel that a skilled practitioner or authority in RTI is needed in order to get efforts off the ground.

Question 5

What suggestions would school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model?

There were six major themes identified in the data regarding the suggestions school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model: communicate effectively, develop a team, create a vision, use data for decision making, change the culture in the building, and take a leadership role in the process. Several conclusions can be drawn from this particular data set. The first would be that the suggestions that administrators identified are tied very closely to skill sets and leadership qualities identified throughout the literature related specifically to educational leadership. This further supports the concept that administrators know or possess the skill sets that align to the quality indicators identified
as key leadership characteristics. Although foundational knowledge of leadership exists, what is missing from the data set is a deeper set of suggestions related to the framework of RTI. Even though administrators are encouraged by other administrators to set a vision, there is no mention of specifics or essentials that a vision should include, nor is there mention of any particulars regarding best practices or essentials related to the practical application of implementing RTI, such as guidance regarding assessment tools, criteria for defining non-responsiveness, or guidance and criteria around RTI data collection. However, a clear conclusion that can be drawn from the data set is that these administrators are armed with best practices aligned in the literature regarding organizational change management, as well as the quality indicators identified in the literature in concerning educational leadership and RTI.

**Limitations**

There are multiple limitations to this study. The findings of this study represent only local school district administrators within the state of Michigan and should not be generalized to other states or professions within the school system. Additionally, the sample size \((n = 79)\) is only a small representation of the total population of administrators working within the state of Michigan; therefore, caution should be taken when drawing conclusions from the study.

Secondly, the very nature of a survey questionnaire that seeks information through means of self-reporting can potentially have a number of validity problems associated with it. The field of social psychology has argued that people are often unaware of what influences their behavior; therefore, pervasive biases exist that limit
one’s ability to account for their own behavior and the behavior of others (“Self-report Methods,” n.d.). Additionally, researchers Brener, Billy, and Grady (2003) found that situational issues, such as the influence of the setting in which a survey is given and perceptions of who may be accessing the results, can lead to respondents reporting their perception of a socially desirable response. For this reason, the author made a strong effort to convey anonymity of the survey, as well as access to the survey, that would allow respondents the opportunity to participate in the survey during a time of convenience and in a setting that was comfortable for them.

A third limitation is an inability to calculate a response rate. The ISD directors, who sent the surveys links to the potential participants, were also requested to send an email back to the researcher stipulating the number of potential participants that they had forwarded the link to. This was going to serve as a basis for calculating the response rate. However, this information could not be obtained in spite of repeated requests. As such, although a total of 79 survey responses were received, a response rate, which is often viewed as an important indicator of quality in survey research, could not be determined.

Discussion

This study contributes knowledge to the field of education, as efforts are still being pursued in breaking down educational silos that exist for students and increasing a collective responsibility for all children, despite learning difficulties. The results of this study recognize a number of strides in this effort, particularly with respect to collective responsibility. Traditionally, there has been a perceived or real division between special education and general education staff, where struggling students were sent or referred for
specialized instruction, and where those working within specialized instruction were charged with determining which students qualified or warranted programs and services. With this in mind, many would hypothecate that data in this study would yield results wherein administrators would indicate responsibility falling to those working in special education. However, data in this study present evidence to the contrary. The reality that administrators indicated general education teachers as having primary responsibility for data collection within the RTI process, indicated general education administrators (i.e., building principals) as bearing responsibility for RTI process within a building or district, and identified 3 out of the 5 key titled positions in the student review process as general education staff, reveals that administrators buy into the philosophy that RTI is an education initiative, not specific to special education.

This study also greatly contributes to the field of educational leadership in realizing barriers that may exist in carrying out an educational reform, such as RTI. It became apparent through the data presented in this study that administrators are adequately armed with key foundational concepts rooted deep in educational leadership research and literature. Administrators not only reported possessing the skill set identified in the literature for leadership qualities of administrators who have successfully carried out the innovation of RTI, but, additionally, identified these key leadership characteristics when asked what suggestions they would have for other administrators that were going to be embarking on a change initiative. This affirms the collective gains made in providing groundwork for successful leadership to individuals who have participated in educational leadership programs, professional development and trainings focused on organizational
change. However, what appears to be missing is a vision or blueprint within which to apply these skill sets. Future efforts in the field of educational leadership related to RTI should focus on next steps in the process, such as identifying best practices or essentials related to the operational framework for the development of RTI initiatives, as there appears to be a disconnect between the knowledge/skill set that administrators have and their ability to apply it, as knowledge of a framework for implementation appears to be missing.

This study also has implications for the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). As cited in the study, MDE has produced Response to Intervention Guidance Materials for the main purpose of defining a vision and definition of RTI. In addition, MDE included 11 essential elements to help clarify the definition. However, MDE has yet to define guidance criteria around RTI for data collection, as many other states have. In fact, Michigan is among only five states that have yet to define criteria beyond federal language as it relates to frequency of collection, or when to collect data (Hauerwas et al., 2013). This presents a limitation for our skilled educators, as well as our colleges and universities offering education and educational leadership programs, as there are no guidance materials, frameworks, or prescriptive process for best practice procedures for RTI.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Various topics focused around RTI could be explored using this study as a foundation. Expanding this study to reach a larger population sample would allow opportunity for further analysis in an attempt to look for trends or insights among specific
regions of the state of Michigan. This could additionally be expanded to look for comparison data among school districts. For example, a study to include differences among responses from school locales, and/or size of districts, may provide additional opportunity for comparison analysis.

Further suggestions for future research would include using a review of U.S. State Departments of Education and their guidance materials defining Response to Intervention (RTI) assessment procedures as a framework, such as the research conducted by Hauerwas et al. (2013). Expanding this study to states that have completed work in defining assessment criteria and guidance materials could provide an opportunity to investigate differences among states (subgroups) of the same population covered in this study. This could provide further insight in determining if support from leaders at the U.S. State Departments have an impact on the challenges that administrators face or the supports needed by administrators that are implementing RTI practices.

Additional suggestions would include further analysis using qualitative means for examining administrators through direct observation and interviews with staff to determine the extent of accuracy between what administrators actually practice and what they believe they do. Additionally, qualitative means for investigating grounds for which administrators reported anticipating a very low degree of resistance from staff would be beneficial, as this finding does not align with the premise embedded throughout the literature regarding organizational change. Mecca (2004) states that regardless of whether the change is perceived positively or negatively, resistance is a natural reaction, and the major problem is not resistance itself, but the inability of leaders responsible for the
change to anticipate resistance, understand its dynamics, and respond effectively. For this reason, it may be very problematic for administrators to not accurately plan for resistance or underestimate the degree of anticipated resistance.

Lastly, best practice in regard to each specific step of RTI implementation requires exploration and scrutiny. There are many different ideas and viewpoints regarding fundamental components of the RTI process, and currently there is no consensus as to what means of practice yields the most successful results for students. Future investigation should begin with best practice guidelines to include a systematic plan for addressing detailed steps in the RTI process, such as how frequent data collection should take place, by what means, and when to collect data. This would significantly contribute to next steps for administrators that are assigned to implementing RTI within their buildings/districts.

Summary

This study assisted the effort of gaining a deeper and richer knowledge of the current state of perceived challenges, perspectives, beliefs, and skill sets that administrators hold that prevent or contribute to the successful implementation of RTI.

According to this survey, administrators believe RTI improves student outcomes and should be a necessary component in the evaluation of students for determining eligibility for special education. When surveyed regarding beliefs toward roles and responsibilities in the RTI process, administrators reported that building administrators should have the primary responsibility for the development structure for RTI. Additionally, administrators identified the role for reviewing data to be a shared
responsibility amongst several key titled positions, not specific to special education personnel, and to include the principal, general education teacher, school psychologist, special education teacher, and a school social worker. In regard to data collection, most frequently administrators selected general education teachers as those that bear responsibility for collecting data on students that have been identified as “at risk” or non-responsive to Tier 1 instruction.

This study also provides data that administrators perceive they are equipped with the skill set necessary to carry out successful RTI practices. Administrators also anticipate little resistance from staff if given the task of implementing RTI, and felt that staff would be accepting of this concept. Results from the study also indicate that administrators believe they have the ability to change the culture and attitudes of those working in their building. When surveyed regarding the supports needed from their Intermediate School District, administrators identified six major themes: (a) training and professional development focused on general aspects of RTI, (b) a vision for carrying an RTI initiative, (c) training focused on general education initiatives, (d) funding, (e) none, and (f) RTI coach or RTI teacher consultant. Additionally, there were six major themes identified in the data regarding the suggestions school administrators have for other school-based administrators that are preparing to implement a school-wide RTI model: (a) Use effective communication, (b) Develop a team, (c) Create a vision, (d) Use data for decision making, (e) Change the culture in the building, and (f) Take a leadership role in the process.
Lastly, and perhaps the most important finding that came out of the study suggests that there is disconnect between knowledge and application for administrators. Although administrators have a solid skill set of leadership characteristics for carrying out the implementation of RTI, there is no foundational structure, legislative guidance, or framework within which to apply the skill set. Administrators will need more direction or regulation specific to the RTI process, and best practice guidelines in order to fully implement a successful RTI initiative.

This study has implications for all school-based administrators in Michigan, as well as Michigan Intermediate School District administrators looking for ways to support the local school districts in which they serve. The study also has implications for the Michigan Department of Education, as well as Michigan-based colleges and universities that offer programs in education and educational leadership.
REFERENCES


Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), Pub. L. No. 108-446 (2004).


Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter
Date: July 23, 2013

To: Shaila Rao, Principal Investigator
    Tasha Frignanski, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-07-22

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Administrators as Change Agents in Implementing MTSS: Beliefs, Skills and Challenges” has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved.

You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: July 23, 2014
Appendix B

Email to Directors
Hello,

My name is Tasha Frigmanski, and I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University, within the Department of Special Education and Literacy Studies. I am currently conducting research that will provide valuable information and deeper knowledge related to the current state of perceived challenges, perspectives, beliefs, attitudes and skill sets that Administrators hold that prevents or contributes to the successful implementation of RTI. I am writing to you in hopes that you would be willing to assist me in seeking potential participants for this research study. ISD Directors such as yourself are being targeted because of your close connections to the local district and local district administrative personnel. Additionally, by utilizing a third party for dissemination of this survey, I can further protect the anonymity of the potential participants. I am asking for assistance in the following ways:

1.) Dissemination of the survey. Within the next week, you will receive an email from me that will contain a survey link, as well as an Invitation to Participate letter and as an informed consent form. If you would please forward that email to current any/all Local School District personnel that you may have contact for, i.e., Special Education Supervisors, Building level administrators including; principals, curriculum directors, dean of students, and assistant principals.

2.) Please forward the email containing the link to the survey right away. The survey window will only remain open for three weeks from the date the email is received.

3.) Please send me a returned email to tasha.m.frigmanski@wmich.edu stating only the number of potential participants that you forwarded the link to, so that a response rate can be calculated for the survey. Please do not include any identifying information such as; district, schools, buildings, titles, or names that the link was disseminate to. This is so that anonymity of the respondents can be protected to the fullest extent possible. Moreover, for this very reason, I am asking that you exclude yourself from the study, and not participate directly, as by having contact information for you, your anonymity cannot be protected to the extent that the potential participants being sought for this study can be.

Your participation is crucial in helping me identify potential participants for the study. However, if you choose not to participate, then simply ignore this email as well as the following email that will contain the link to the survey. There will be no prejudice, penalty or consequence for your decision to not participate. Either way, I thank you for your consideration to participate in the study, but even more so for your efforts and work that you do on behalf of all students.

Sincerely,

Tasha Frigmanski

Student Investigator, Western Michigan University
Appendix C

Invitation to Participate
Hello

You are being invited to participate in a research study that will provide valuable information and deeper knowledge related to the current state of perceived challenges, perspectives, beliefs, and skill set that Administrators hold that prevents or contributes to the successful implementation of RTI.

The questionnaire is a web-based questionnaire that can be accessed by clicking on the link contained in this email. The questionnaire will take approximately 30-45 minutes (29 questions) to complete. You can choose to participate in this survey at a time that is convenient for you, and you can complete the survey during one session or multiple sessions. The survey will not ask you for any identifiable information, and effort has been made to ensure anonymity. As such, please do not include your name or any personally identifiable information anywhere in your responses.

Please be sure to thoroughly read the Informed Consent Letter, prior to submitting your responses. The Informed Consent Letter contains details about your participation in the study, and crucial information related to ensuring confidentiality, and is attached to this email.

Please consider participating in the study, by completing the questionnaire, if you hold a current LEA Administrative position: Special Education Supervisor, Building level administrators including; principals, curriculum directors, dean of students, or assistant principal. The information you can provide as a Administrator is critical to the research being conducted.

Sincerely,

Tasha Frigmanski

Student Investigator, Western Michigan University

tasha.m.frigmanski@wmich.edu
Appendix D

Informed Consent
You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Administrators as change agents in implementing MTSS: Beliefs, skills, and challenges!” This project will serve as Tasha Frigmanski’s independent research project for the requirements of the Doctorate in Special Education degree. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used on the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please feel free to ask any questions, via email to Tasha Frigmanski (tasha.m.frigmanski@wmich.edu), if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**

In response to almost three decades of criticism regarding the IQ-discrepancy model a means of identifying students with a specific learning disability, changes in legislation (IDEIA, 2004) has provided an alternative to the IQ-discrepancy model, which is the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), historically and most commonly referred to as Response to Intervention model (RTI). However, even with this sanction, and a growing support and literature base endorsing RTI, many schools are continuing to use the IQ-discrepancy achievement model. Although, Legislation has authorized a change in practice, it didn’t lay out a framework or blueprint for how to implement the change. This leaves it up to school districts to not only adopt a change in practice, but also to fully implement the innovation. The focus of this study is to examine the challenges of implementation, finding the perceptions and beliefs of administrators regarding RTI and determining if they are equipped with the skills necessary to serve as a change agent in implementing successful practices in RTI.

**Who can participate in this study?**

Any current LEA Administrator, (Special Education Supervisor, Building level administrators including; principal, curriculum director, dean of students, assistant principal) in the state of Michigan, is invited to participate in this study.

**Where will the study take place?**

This study includes a questionnaire that will be completed online, through the use of SurveyMonkey, a secure web-based survey instrument. This is a one-time commitment to participate. There will be no follow up contact or commitments related to this study.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

The survey questionnaire will be comprised of 29 total questions, with various formats: Multiple Choice, Yes/No, short answer, rank order, and open ended questions.

The short answer and open-ended questions will require you to type a narrative answer, which increases the amount of time needed to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete.
If you choose not to participate in the study, simply disregard the invitation, consent letter and questionnaire link provided.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**

When you accept the invitation to participate in this study, after reading the informed consent letter, you will click on the questionnaire link provided in the invitation email. By clicking on the link, you will be directed to the questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire, you will click the submit button. Clicking the submit button of the questionnaire, indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply to be reported as a summary.

**What are the risks and cost to and protection for participants?**

There are no physical risks involved and no other known risks involved with participation in this study. Participation is strictly voluntary and you have the right to not answer any question, and can opt out of any question by simply leaving the answer blank. Additionally, there is no cost or further obligation to participate in the study. This is a onetime survey, and you will not be contacted in any further in regards to this study. The questionnaire will be completed anonymously using a web-based survey tool that will contain no questions related to place of employment (ie. district, schools, buildings, titles) or personally identifying (ie. Names, address, contact information). The SurveyMonkey site is secure and data will not be associated with respondents email addresses. I will not ask you for contact information of any kind, and ask that you please do not put your name, name of colleagues, school or district information or any other identifiable information anywhere in the text boxes provided on the questionnaire, this is to ensure that your identity would not be compromised in any way.

Dr. Shaila Rao, as faculty advisor, and Tasha Frigmanski, student investigator will be the only individuals with access to the raw data provided through the submission.

*You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either professionally or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.*

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the student investigator, Tasha Frigmanski at tasha.m.frigmanski@wmich.edu You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document was approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board on July 23, 2013. Do not participate in this study if the date listed is older than one year.

*Your consent is indicated when you submit the questionnaire electronically, by clicking the submit button at the end of the web-based questionnaire.*
Appendix E

Survey Instrument
Your participation in this survey will assist me with gaining a deeper and richer knowledge of the current state of perceived challenges, perspectives, beliefs, and skill set that Administrators hold that prevents or contributes to the successful implementation of RTI.

**Section One:**
**Demographics:**
*For questions 1-10 Please circle the applicable answer*

1.) Gender
   - Male
   - Female

2.) Age
   - 25-35
   - 36-45
   - 46-55
   - 55 +

3.) How many years have you served as an Administrator?
   - 1-3
   - 4-6
   - 7-9
   - 10-15
   - 15+
4.) What job title best describes your current position?

- Supervisor of Special Education
- Principals
- Curriculum Director
- Dean of students
- Assistant principals
- Other _____________________

5.) What is your highest earned degree level?

- Bachelors
- Masters
- Specialist
- Doctorate

6.) Do you hold a special education degree or endorsement?

- Yes
- No

7.) What type of school locale is the district(s) in which you serve?

- City
- Suburban
- Town
- Rural
8.) What is the size of your district or combined size of the districts in which you serve?
   - Small (less than 1,000 total students)
   - Mid size (1,000-5,000 total students)
   - Large (5,000 or more total students)

9.) Does your position require an active involvement in curriculum?
   - Yes
   - No

10.) Have you had formal training in RTI?
   - Yes
   - No

Please only answer question 11 if you have answered “yes” for Question 10. If you answered “no” to question 10, then please skip forward to Section Two.

11.) How recently have your attended a professional development, training, or University course related to RTI?
   - Within the last year
   - Within the last two years
   - Three- Four years
   - Five + years

Briefly describe your training. (short answer)
Section two:
For the following items please indicate your viewpoint by circling or briefly describing, your viewpoint.

12.) Who do you feel should be responsible for the developmental structure for RTI?

- Director of Special Education
- Building level administration
- School Psychologist
- General Education Teachers
- Special Education Teachers
- Ancillary Staff (ie. Speech therapist, Occupational therapist, etc.)

13.) Who do you feel should be responsible for the implementation of RTI practices within a school system? (Circle any/all that you feel should be responsible)

- Director of Special Education
- Building level administration
- School Psychologist
- General Education Teachers
- Special Education Teachers
- Ancillary Staff (ie. Speech therapist, Occupational therapist, etc.)
14.) I believe that RTI improves student outcomes?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15.) Who should be responsible for collecting data on student’s that have been identified as “at risk” or non-responsive to Tier 1 instruction? (Circle any/all that you feel should be responsible)

- General Education student
- Special Education Teacher
- Building Administrator
- Special Education Director
- Counselor
- School Psychologist
- Other

16.) If you could build a SAT (Student Advisory Team) in the building/district in which you work what key titled positions would it include? And why? (Please refrain from including names or personally identifying information about the individuals).
17.) Please rate the degree of resistance/acceptance that you feel you would encounter from your staff, if you were given the task of implementing RTI in the building/district in which you work.

- Very Resistant
- Resistant
- Accepting
- Very accepting

18.) I believe RTI is not a necessary component in the evaluation process for determining eligibility for special education.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

19.) I believe I am a key participant in the RTI process.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
20.) I believe the staff members in which I directly oversee would describe me as an effective communicator.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

21.) I believe I am supportive to all staff members.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

22.) I believe funds and resources should be allocated to support RTI implementation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
23.) I believe I have the ability to identify high performers and rely on their expertise in the RtI efforts.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

24.) I believe I have proficiency in using data to inform my decision-making.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

25.) I believe I have the ability to change the culture and attitudes of those working within my building or district.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
26.) What ISD supports if any would you need as a local administrator in order to successfully implement an RTI model in the building/district in which you work? (short answer)

27.) What suggestions do you have for any school based Administrator that is preparing to implement a school wide RTI model? (open ended)