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Special Education Leadership and the Implementation of Response to Intervention

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SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

by

Derek Ryan Cooley

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
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SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

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Western Michigan University, 2013

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a process by which schools identify students with disabilities using research-based interventions. As schools across the United States struggle to redefine district structures and processes required for RTI, special education administrators have become primarily responsible for implementation. Research describing special education administrators' perceptions about the implementation of RTI is limited, however.

Framing RTI as an educational change initiative, this study uses survey methods to determine special education administrators' 1) perceptions of leadership and change, 2) the extent to which they determine a structured plan to implement RTI as important, and 3) how frequently they encountered challenges during implementation. This study also seeks to determine if there is a relationship between these three variables.

Findings from this study develop in three themes. First, special education administrators acknowledge the importance of staff relationships, creating learning

communities to support personnel development among staff, the urgency for staff to implement RTI, and that success of such initiatives is measured in small increments. Second, special education administrators indicate that district evaluation plans, data collection systems, and reviewing the performance level of all students at all tiers within RTI are essential components for effective implementation. Third, special education administrators identify a number of challenges, which include staff implementing RTI practices with fidelity, co-teaching in general education settings, and staff using policies and/or procedures to implement RTI. While there was no relationship between special education administrators' perceptions of leadership, change, and the frequency in which they encountered challenges during implementation, special education administrators were more likely to indicate the importance of RTI implementation plans as they agreed with concepts related to leadership and change.

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Derek Ryan Cooley

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Many decades ago, Berry (1941) stated that the differences in philosophy and administration between general and special education were only in that the emphasis was placed on students with disabilities. Today, there are more than 20,000 special education administrators practicing in the United States who continue to emphasize the importance of programs and services for students with disabilities. Although the difference some 70 years ago was merely between those students with and those student without disabilities, special education administrators are now charged with providing equal educational opportunities for *all* students (Boscardin, 2007; Crockett, 2011; Crockett, Becker, & Quinn, 2009).

The practice of special education leadership is primarily responsible for the leadership and administration of programs and services for students with disabilities. Special education administrators provide leadership to guide the identification of learners with exceptionalities and ensure that staff working with special education students delivers instructional best practice. In order to execute these responsibilities, special education administrators must be effective problem-solvers who collaborate with a variety of stakeholders including parents, teachers, administrators, and the community.

Central to the practice of special education leadership is the “finely tuned recognition of and response to individual learning needs” (Crockett, 2011, p. 351). Effective special education administrators juxtapose the needs of all students with the

needs of each individual learner. These administrators must navigate policy, ensure the delivery of instructional best practice, and understand the context in which they administer programs and services. Crockett (2011) defines effective special education administration by:

(a) how clearly the purpose of special education policy is understood by those who implement it, (b) beliefs and knowledge about effective instruction and the academic and social capabilities of students with disabilities, and (c) the cultural contexts that influence the ways in which special education is organized and delivered. (p. 351)

Special education administrators ensure that students with disabilities benefit from educational programs in both the general and special education settings. As a result, special education administrators are being held responsible for educational access and accountability not only for students with disabilities but also for students without disabilities.

Crockett (2011) states that although once driven primarily by district-wide compliance, the administration of special education is now focused on delivering effective and responsive instructional models at all district levels. Crockett (2011) continues by explaining that the practice of special education administration includes:

(a) setting expectations for recognizing the individual capabilities of students with disabilities, (b) developing personnel who work collaboratively and effectively in responding to students' unique educational needs and (c) making the organization of schools work more flexibly on their behalf. (p. 359)

Of these three tasks, the process of identifying students with disabilities and the provision of corresponding special and general education programs is likely to be the most difficult challenge for special education administrators in public schools today (Boscardin, 2007; Crockett, 2011; Crockett et al., 2009; McHatton, Gordon, Glenn, & Sue, 2012; Passman, 2008).

Contrary to their general education counterparts, special education administrators must possess a *specific* body of procedural knowledge to identify low-performing groups of students (Crockett et al., 2009; Passman, 2008). Much of this specific knowledge is needed to provide early intervention services and to develop procedures for identifying students who are at-risk as being identified with a disability (Werts, Lambert, & Carpenter, 2009). These procedures are often referred to Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS).

Response to Intervention is a multi-tiered model of instruction designed to foster academic achievement for *all* students. It is based upon the use of evidence-based interventions and research-based curriculum, which is intended to address unique learning needs. If implemented successfully, RTI can serve as a model to prevent severe academic problems and provide a means to identify students with disabilities (Whitten, Esteves, & Woodrow, 2009).

Response to Intervention is often organized into a three-tiered model. Tier I is high-quality instruction in which approximately 85% of all students participate. Tier I instruction is often referred to as the general education curriculum. Tier II includes supplemental instruction for small groups of students, representing approximately 10% of the student population. Tier III includes specially designed instruction and interventions

for approximately 5% of the student population. If students fail to make progress in one tier, they move on to the next tier of more intensive interventions. If students fail to respond to instruction in all three tiers, a referral for special education can be made. As a result, RTI is both a diagnostic tool and an instructional model in which the needs of struggling learners can be met.

Among all administrators in education, special education administrators have primarily taken the lead to make certain that RTI is successfully implemented in schools at both the building and district levels. Given that there is no “right way” to implement RTI, special education administrators are faced with the complexity of designing procedures, policies, and protocols to effectively implement RTI (Werts et al., 2009).

Statement of the Problem

A number of recent federal, state, and local policies have included provisions for decreasing or eliminating the number of students who qualify for special education services. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was passed in 2001, mandates that schools provide high-quality instruction using evidence-based practices for all students. The reauthorization of Individuals and Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 allowed for the creation of Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) to address the needs of struggling learners and to identify students with disabilities. Coupled together, these two laws have created systematic reforms by merging general and special education to meet the needs of both general and special education students in one unified system (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008).

Given that special education administrators have historically been responsible for the provision of programs and services for students with disabilities, they are uniquely

positioned to take responsibility for implementing RTI for groups of students who similarly lack adequate academic achievement. Non-disabled, underachieving students are also likely to benefit from the mandates of IDEA (2004), which calls for the use of research-based interventions delivered in an RTI model. Under IDEA (2004), students with and without disabilities can benefit from the same system of interventions and supports. This intersection has necessitated coordination of RTI models by both general and special education administrators. Boscardin, McCarthy, and Delgado (2009) state that “as inclusive practices and accountability continue to shape American education, special education and general education leaders will be challenged to join together in solving the problems of practice inherent in a diverse, complex, high-stakes environment” (p. 68).

Special education administrators must determine which factors for implementing RTI are most effective. Although there is an abundance of literature that defines RTI and how it is practiced in schools, there is less research on how to successfully implement it (Baaken, O'Brian, & Shelden, 2007; Harlacher & Siler, 2011; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Sansosti, Goss, & Noltemeyer, 2011; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008; Werts et al., 2009; Wiener & Soodak, 2008). Thus, special education administrators are more likely to be challenged with determining the “how” of RTI as opposed to the “what” or the “why.” Special education administrators encounter a number of challenges related to the implementation of RTI. These challenges include 1) the implementation of RTI with fidelity, 2) that research-based instruction and evidence-based interventions are delivered, 3) the use of effective professional development that supporting RTI practices, 4) staff

collaboration and buy-in, and 5) that resources and/or materials are made readily available for staff.

The ability for special education administrators to effectively implement RTI is dependent upon the leadership skills they possess. Referring to the responsibility special education administrators' possess in addressing the challenges related to RTI, Boscardin (2007) states that:

the challenge for school administrators is to direct system-wide initiatives that redefine leadership in ways that support the use of proven practices and link administrative interventions to increased educational achievement for each student who has a disability and for all the students who are in their charge. (p. 189)

Thus, special education administrators are confronted with selecting administrative strategies that lead to the successful implementation of RTI. Such strategies for managing school reform often rely upon theoretical models for change (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008).

One such model of change is Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership. Frequently cited in the educational reform literature, Fullan (2001) describes his work as a set of dimensions that can improve the practice of leadership in education. Within his framework, Fullan (2001) emphasizes that effective leaders must understand the process of change, rely on productive relationships with and among staff, collaborate with stakeholders to create and share knowledge, and depend on a sense of moral purpose. Although there are a number of theoretical models for educational reform, Fullan's (2001) model is well suited to support special education administrators in that it directly

applies to the implementation of RTI (Datnow, 2006; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review and explore three interrelated topics relating to the practice of special education leadership and the implementation of RTI. The first purpose of this study is to determine the self-reported perceptions of leadership and change by special education administrators according to Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership. The author makes no assumption of the familiarity special education administrators have of Fullan's (2001) framework. Rather, this research question seeks to determine if the perceptions of special education administrators align with Fullan's (2001) framework. Second, this study seeks to determine the extent to which special education administrators perceive the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) steps to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) as important. Third, this study seeks to determine how frequently special education administrators encounter challenges during the implementation of RTI. Lastly, this study seeks to determine if there is a relationship between how special education administrators rate components of Fullan's (2001) framework and how they rate NASDSE's steps to implement RTI. This study also seeks to determine if there is a relationship between how special education administrators rate components of Fullan's (2001) framework and the frequency in which they encounter challenges related to RTI.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Betts (1992) states, "even a small child can use a hammer and a saw, but it takes a master carpenter who fully understands the tools and their limitations to build a house" (p. 38). A system, such as the tools needed to build a house, is defined as a set of

elements that work interdependently to fulfill a common purpose or goal. Each element within a system is not self-sufficient, but necessary for each system to achieve its purpose. Among the elements within each system, a synergy ensures that the results of the system as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Betts, 1992).

Special education administrators must possess a specific body of knowledge about the technicalities to implement RTI, and master the use of all “tools” needed to successfully lead and manage change during initiatives such as RTI. With the passage of IDEA (2004) and NCLB (2001), there is an apparent need to understand complex problems within the context of an educational *system*. Within this view, special education administrators must acknowledge that solutions must be contextualized among all of the parts, or elements, of the system of which they are connected. Thus, RTI cannot be implemented in discrete, separate steps within individual school buildings, for example; it must be implemented while considering all of the elements, or school buildings, within the entire school system. Further, special education administrators must acknowledge that solutions occur only when change within these systems occur (Fullan, 2001) and they must recognize the challenges that affect implementation by viewing each step as interconnected and interdependent.

The theoretical framework on which this study relies is Systems Theory. Sometimes called Systems Thinking, it is defined as the understanding of how humans interact with their environment in complex systems, such as education. Within this system, the designer’s purpose is to change a system to maximize its value to users (Fullan, 2006; Skyttner, 2005). Special education administrators are ultimately

responsible for maximizing the use of initiatives such as RTI for all users within the educational system.

Ellsworth (2000) purports that the application of Systems Thinking can be applied as a strategy to guide educational change. Systems Thinking is required to integrate each part within a model of change, select and coordinate types of change, involve stakeholders to meet their needs, and ensure that the end results of the process of change is a feasible system in and of itself within the larger set of systems. Thus, Systems Thinking can be applied to the process in which change is initiated, or implemented, and to the actual change as a unit in and of itself.

Research Questions

The following research questions will aid in the analysis of this study's results:

1. To what extent do special education administrators agree with practices of Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership?
2. To what extent do special education administrators rate the importance of the steps to implement Response to Intervention defined by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)?
3. To what extent do special education administrators encounter challenges related to RTI?
4. Is there a relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the frequency in which they encounter challenges related to implementation?

5. Is there a relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the extent to which they rate the importance of NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI?

Implications of the Study

Special education administrators face many challenges related to educational reform, such as the implementation of RTI. Effective leadership is essential for ensuring that the implementation of RTI is successful. In order to realize success, special education administrators need strategies to practice effective leadership during educational change and to identify the potential hurdles along the way.

In order to effectively understand and lead change, many special education administrators rely on models for educational change. These models describe *why* change occurs, *how* change occurs, and *what* will occur as a result of the change (Edgehouse, Edwards, Gore, Harrison, & Zimmerman, 2007). Used as a framework to seek the perceptions of special education administrators about leadership and change within this study, Fullan's (2001) model can provide special education administrators a framework in which they organize, understand, and manage the process of change during the implementation of RTI (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008).

When implementing RTI, many special education administrators rely on a prescriptive set of steps to work through the process from beginning to end (D. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Such frameworks for implementing RTI are intended to guide implementation at the district and building level within a school system. By addressing the critical components within each step of implementation, special education administrators are better equipped to effectively implement RTI.

Because of the complexity in implementing RTI, special education administrators need to identify and understand challenges and potential drawbacks (Harlacher & Siler, 2011; Wiener & Soodak, 2008). By identifying challenges, special education administrators can more effectively navigate implementation.

In sum, this study is important because it can provide a better understanding of how special education administrators perceive steps to implement RTI, the challenges associated with implementation, and the extent to which it impacts the process of change. That is, the perceptions of special education administrators guide their day-to-day practice of the leadership and administration of special education.

Definition of Terms

1. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 - Federal law that influences education regarding the determination of individuals with disabilities using response to intervention (Yell & Walker, 2010).
2. Response to Intervention - The practice of (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important education decisions (Batsche et al., 2005).
3. Fullan's Framework for Leadership – This framework defines the process in which leaders can address change themes that will result in effective leadership (Fullan, 2001).
4. Student with a Disability – A child having mental retardation, a hearing impairment, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment, an emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, a traumatic brain

injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities needing special education and related services ("Individuals With Disabilities Education Act," 2004)

5. Special Education – Instruction that is specifically designed, at no cost to parents, to address the unique needs of a child with a disability to ensure access to and progress toward the general education curriculum ("Individuals With Disabilities Education Act," 2004).
6. Special Education Administrator – A school administrator whose primary responsibility is leading, supervising, and managing the delivery of special education and related services (Crockett, 2007).
7. Implementation – “The process of achieving intended change.” (Duke, 2004, p. 158)
8. Implementation of Response to Intervention – The process of putting systematic supports and structures, often organized into successive components or steps, into place to establish a comprehensive model of Response to Intervention. This primarily takes place at the school district level, but may also include a focus on individual school buildings (Elliott & Morrison, 2008; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Providing a framework for this study, this literature review examines the roles and responsibilities of which special education administrators assume during the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI), also known as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and what leadership characteristics and challenges are exhibited during this process.

This literature review includes information on the background, components, delivery, and implementation of RTI. Also, a review on school leadership includes leadership characteristics of special education administrators, in general, and the characteristics they exhibit when implementing RTI. Lastly, this chapter provides an overview of educational reform and a selected model is reviewed.

Special Education Leadership

The practice of special education administration has been described as the “intersection” of special education, general education, and educational leadership (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). Conversely, Crockett (2007) describes special education administration as the “interface” between special education and educational leadership. That is, the practice of special education administration accounts for the “interactions” between these two disciplines where the primary responsibility is to address the programming needs of students with disabilities (Crockett, 2007). Collaborating with many school personnel to achieve the shared intentions and goals of schools, special

education administrators work on behalf of students with disabilities to provide equal access and high quality programming to ensure sufficient outcomes (Crockett, Billingsley, & Boscardin, 2012).

The skills special education administrators must possess in order to be successful are complex and multi-faceted. Special education administrators must possess a specific body of procedural knowledge, an in-depth knowledge of learner characteristics, and disability criteria, as well as accommodations, modifications, and intervention plans. Special education administrators must also possess the skills to successfully facilitate the problem-solving process, including mediation and negotiation skills. Working with a variety of school staff, parents, and the community, special education administrators must possess dispositions including compassion, flexibility, sensitivity to differences, and an ability to build relationships with others (Passman, 2008).

In a review of special education administration literature, Crockett, Becker, and Quinn (2009) found that a significant body of the literature is primarily focused on leadership roles and responsibilities. They define these roles and responsibilities as the “dimensions of the work of special education administrators and the programmatic issues they address in their positions” (p. 58). Central to this theme is a focus on providing support for improving instruction for both general and special education students. In order to provide this support, special education administrators must promote a collaborative partnership with teachers and administrators within general education. Effective special education administrators recognize that such partnerships are critical in meeting the needs of all students through high quality programming and equal educational access (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003).

Similar to other educational administrators, the roles and responsibilities of special education administrators are changing. The onset of higher standards and increased accountability necessitates the need for special education administrators to provide reliable and valid assessment data for student with disabilities (Baaken et al., 2007; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Voltz & Collins, 2010). Broadening this responsibility to all students, “special education and general education leaders will be challenged to join together to solve the problems inherent in a diverse, complex, high-stakes education environment” (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003, p. 73).

Boscardin (2007) provides a framework for the practice of special education administration based upon the premise that evidence-based leadership practices are needed to improve educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Within this framework, special education administrators employ leadership approaches and responsive leadership interventions that mimic the concepts applied to RTI. These concepts include:

1. The concept of multiple stages of administrative interventions to improve teaching in ways that lead to improved student achievement.
2. The implementation of differentiated administrative approaches.
3. Leadership provided by staff other than designated personnel.
4. Varied duration, frequency, and time of administrative interventions.
5. Traditional and non-traditional administrative decisions.
6. Situational conditions for decisions.
7. Urgency for administrative decisions.

8. The use of standard protocols for determining the use of specific administrative approaches or interventions. (p. 191)

This framework is not based upon a set of prescriptive actions, per se, but a set of conceptual processes that are guided by progress monitoring and problem solving at the building and district level. Within Boscardin's (2007) framework for leadership, *student-progress monitoring* is replaced with *system-progress monitoring* by using leadership interventions to respond rapidly to system needs.

Standards for Preparation and Practice

Several studies highlight the importance of articulated standards for the practice and preparation of special education administrations. Although there are a number of standards for educational administration in general, the standards authored by the Council for Exceptional Children are most frequently cited among special education administration and leadership.

Boscardin, McCarthy, and Delgado (2009) used an integrative approach to engage special education administrators to validate major knowledge and skill statements in special education leadership. Triangulating data from a literature review, Q-sort analysis, and surveys, the authors were able to prioritize and rate domains that are associated with special education leadership. Their work resulted in the 2009 edition of the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) Advanced Knowledge and Skills for Administrators of Special Education (2009). The standards are:

1. Leadership and Policy
2. Program Development and Organization
3. Research and Inquiry

4. Evaluation
5. Professional Development and Ethical Practice
6. Collaboration

These standards are intended to guide universities in developing standards for preservice programs as well as professional development opportunities for practitioners in the field.

In a similar study, Wigle & Wilcox (2002) investigated the competencies of special education directors by developing a survey based upon an earlier set of CEC standards.

The results of this survey suggest that special education directors perceived themselves as having high levels of competence in the following areas: program development, collaboration, communication and advocacy, technology, and behavior management.

The CEC standards provide a strong foundation to guide preparation and practice within this field. However, Voltz and Collins (2010) suggest that the CEC standards lack content in the areas of staff recruitment and retention, instructional leadership, and issues involving equity and assessment for students with disabilities.

Based upon historical themes in special education such as free appropriate public education (FAPE) and least restrictive environment (LRE), Crockett (2002) developed a framework for special education leadership. Crockett's (2002) five core principles are intended to guide institutions of higher education in the development and preparation of special education administrators. The core principles are:

1. Ethical practice: Ensuring universal educational access and accountability.
2. Individual consideration: Addressing individuality and exceptionality in learning.

3. Equity under law: Providing an appropriate education through equitable public policies.
4. Effective programming: Providing individualized programming designed to enhance student performance.
5. Establishing productive partnerships. (p. 163)

In sum, the literature on special education administration is quite limited. It is primarily based upon explanations, observations, and experiences of both practitioners and researchers in the field. Further explained, “the special education administrative knowledge base is informed primarily by theoretical or interpretive professional commentary rather than by data-based research studies that could guide effective leadership practice” (Crockett et al., 2009, p. 65). Some recommend a stronger empirical foundation to support this body of literature.

Response to Intervention

Since the first passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) more than 30 years ago, the number of students identified as having a Learning Disability (LD) has increased more than 200% (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). This dramatic increase has caused concern for the method in which students are identified as having learning disabilities (D. Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004; Kavale, Kauffman, Bachmeier, & LeFever, 2008).

Traditional methods for identifying students as having LD rely upon “wait-to-fail” models in which the discrepancy between academic achievement and intelligence determines eligibility (D. Fuchs et al., 2004; Kavale et al., 2008). This discrepancy model has been criticized for an over-reliance on a single testing point and a wide

variability in LD assessment procedures (Fletcher, Denton, & Francis, 2005; Mellard, Deshler, & Barth, 2004).

Resulting from mandates passed in IDEA (2004), one of the most commonly used methods for identifying students with LD is Response to Intervention (RTI). As a tiered model, RTI is designed to move poorly performing students through a series of increasingly intensive academic interventions. If students fail to respond to all tiers of intervention, schools should consider a referral for eligibility for special education services (Hollenbeck, 2007).

Background

The process for identifying students with LD dates to the original passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This law was renewed in 1991 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA (1991), the process for identifying students with LD was largely unchanged. This process relied heavily upon the use of a discrepancy formula, which is calculated on the difference between a student's actual performance and expected academic achievement (Mellard et al., 2004). Before the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, school districts were allowed to individually define the formulas they used within their districts. As a result, inconsistencies in formula definitions allowed for a variation in LD identification procedures and prevalence rates not only from state to state but from school district to school district (Kratochwill, Clements, & Kalymon, 2007). Because of these inconsistencies and the lack of student progress, the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 included major reform efforts that provided states and districts the option to replace the "wait-to-fail" method with a response to intervention model of support. Such models identify students who are

not working at grade level, whereby the use of evidence-based instruction is immediately implemented (D. Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012).

In 2002, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education concluded that the entitlement of special education services was based upon waiting for a student to experience academic failure. Subsequently, it was recommended that special education services should be provided only after a student had the opportunity to participate in instructional programs that were designed to prevent failure (Gresham, 2007). Along with the President's Commission, the National Summit on Learning Disabilities (2002) concluded that little evidence supported a continued reliance on the IQ-discrepancy model as a means for LD identification. Both groups determined that a preventative model, such as RTI, could provide an alternative for LD identification (Kavale et al., 2008). Based upon the recommendations from these national groups and others, congress included provisions for RTI as a method for the identification of students with LD in the reauthorization of IDEA (2004). Specifically, IDEA outlines that states, "may permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention" (IDEA, § 300.307(a)(2)). This language gave way to the term "Response to Intervention."

Definitions and Components of RTI

The literature outlines a number of components that define RTI. Among these definitions, the most common component is the use of outcome data for decision-making regarding the effectiveness of an academic intervention (L. S. Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Gresham, 2007; Knotek, 2007; Kratochwill et al., 2007). Such decisions can be made about the academic achievement of individual students and groups of students within

schools and districts. These decisions can also include eligibility determination of special education for students who fail to respond to interventions. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) defines RTI as “the practice of (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important education decisions” (Batsche et al., 2005, p. 5). Outlining similar components to the NASDSE definition, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC; 2008) states that RTI shall include universal screening, high quality research based instruction, and progress monitoring. CEC organizes these core components within a tiered system of instructional delivery, which rely on increasingly intensive interventions.

Using a practical application of RTI components, Fletcher and Vaughn (2009) recommend that school personnel implement universal screening and assessment of academic progress at regular intervals, progress monitoring using curriculum-based measurement and, the provision of increasingly intensive interventions for students who do not respond to instruction. Those students who do not adequately respond to instruction may be referred for evaluations for special education, which most often includes eligibility determinations of LD.

A Multi-Tiered System

RTI is most frequently structured around a three-tier system of interventions. Tier I is the core academic curriculum. Effective for 80% to 85% of all students, these core instructional interventions are preventative and proactive. Tier II consists of targeted group interventions for approximately 10% to 15% of students who are at-risk for academic failure. Comprising the most intensive interventions, tier III is tailored for 5%

to 10% of students on an individual or small group basis. Longer in duration than tier I and II, tier III interventions measure student achievement most frequently to monitor student achievement (Batsche et al., 2005; Whitten et al., 2009).

Within an RTI framework, school personnel must determine whether a student responds with academic success or failure. Thus, decisions for changing the intervention rely upon how well or poorly students respond to that intervention. Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHayden (2007) state that within a tiered system of interventions,

the focus typically is on universal, selected, and indicated (or primary, secondary, and tertiary, respectively) interventions that are structured so that a student can progress through *levels* of intervention with progress monitored throughout these tiers. It is the movement through the tiers that provides the decision-making framework of RTI approaches. (emphasis in original, p. 43)

Consequently, when a student fails to make academic progress in all three tiers, a referral for special education is made (D. Fuchs et al., 2004). Further, it is assumed that if a student does not respond with an increase in academic achievement as the result of an intervention, then that student is entitled to more intensive, and therefore more effective, interventions (Gresham, 2007).

When using RTI as a framework to establish LD identification, poor instruction is ruled out and student failure is more likely to be attributed to the result of a disability. Inadequate growth “suggests that disability is responsible and that specialized instruction is necessary to boost academic achievement” (D. Fuchs et al., 2004, p. 217). Although originally intended as a framework for early reading intervention, RTI is widely used to

ensure that high-quality instruction and interventions are matched to students needs (Mellard, Stern, & Woods, 2011).

RTI has been found to increase student achievement and decrease the number of students identified as having a disability (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). In a review of 13 published field studies, Hughes and Dexter (2011) report that schools implementing RTI report academic improvement. In a separate review of 21 studies, Burns, Appleton, and Stehouwer (2005) conclude that within existing RTI models, less than 2% of the student population was identified as LD, whereas national LD prevalence rates are higher than 5%

Response to Intervention Models

RTI is often constructed into two different, yet related, models – the problem-solving model and the standard treatment protocol (D. Fuchs et al., 2004; Hollenbeck, 2007; Marston, 2005; Mellard et al., 2011). Implementing an RTI framework requires choosing one of these models or establishing a hybrid between the two. Problem-solving models are associated with a shared decision-making team, which is charged with identifying the problem. These teams are responsible for choosing interventions to address the problem, evaluating the outcome of the intervention, and monitoring progress to ensure the effectiveness of the intervention that was chosen (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009).

Problems are defined as the difference between the actual and desired level of academic performance (Gresham, 2007). As the difference between the actual and desired levels of performance gets larger, so does the problem. Four questions often guide problem-solving teams in schools (Batsche et al., 2005; Tilly, 2002):

1. What is the problem?
2. Why is the problem taking place?
3. What can be done to correct the problem?
4. Did the intervention work?

The second type of model uses a standardized protocol to deliver instruction. Implemented with validated interventions, standard protocols are delivered in a fixed-duration trial (e.g. 10-15 weeks) to allow for more control. Typically scripted, these interventions guarantee the integrity of delivery (Gresham, 2007). The standard protocol method uses “tightly structured teaching using commercially available instructional packages” (Kovaleski, 2007, p. 83) These protocols have a high probability of producing outcomes for larger numbers of students (Batsche et al., 2005).

Some consider that the use of both models, combined into one hybrid approach, is preferable to the exclusive use of one model. Batsche et al. (2005) state, “in considering problem-solving teams and standard protocol interventions, it appears that a merger of the two approaches at tier 2 is most desirable” (p. 24). Within a hybrid model, problem solving teams utilizing standard protocols can increase treatment fidelity with specific interventions (e.g., reading fluency) to counteract less precise methods such as brainstorming (Batsche et al., 2005).

Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring

Fuchs and Vaughn (2012) state, “RTI’s greatest accomplishment to date may be the dramatic increase in schools’ routine reliance on screening to identify students at risk for reading and increasing math difficulties” (p. 196). As the principal means for

identifying struggling students, screening consists of brief assessments targeted at skills, such as reading and math, that are predictive of future academic achievement (Jenkins, Hudson, & Johnson, 2007). Universal screening tools, typically conducted three times per year, are administered to all students and intend to provide information to staff that allows for efficiently identifying academic problems (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Whitten et al., 2009).

After universal screening is completed and student are receiving tier I instruction, progress monitoring is needed to frequently assess student performance to gauge the effectiveness of the interventions (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Whitten et al., 2009). Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs (2008) define progress monitoring as “a system of brief assessments that are given frequently, at least monthly, to determine whether students are progressing through the curriculum in desired fashion and are likely to meet long-term goals” (p. 11).

Currently, the recommended time period for progress monitoring is 8-10 weeks (McMaster & Wagner, 2007). One of the most well known and widely used techniques for progress monitoring is curriculum-based measurement (CBM). Similar to techniques used for universal screening, CBM can determine whether a student is learning and at what rate the learning is occurring. CBM is highly standardized, requires a small amount of time to be administered, and can be repeated multiple times during a school year (McMaster & Wagner, 2007; Whitten et al., 2009).

Implementation of RTI

Since the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, school districts across the country have begun to implement RTI. Castillo and Batsche (2012) report, “district

implementation of the response to intervention (RTI) model has occurred at a surprising rate” (p. 14). Findings from a survey by Spectrum K12 Solutions (2011) show that RTI implementation continues to rise nationally with 94% of districts reporting some level of RTI implementation (up from 72% in 2009). Eighty-eight percent of districts use RTI to identify students for early intervention and 66% of districts use RTI to identify students for special education services.

The implementation of RTI across the United States is primarily intended to improve outcomes for general education students. Within some RTI models, there has been a shift from special education eligibility to deciphering which interventions will maximize student success. In assisting struggling students, the focus revolves around what the student needs to be successful, rather than solely ruling out special education eligibility (Hackett, 2010).

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) published one of the most widely cited models for district-wide implementation of RTI (Elliott & Morrison, 2008). Designed to provide concrete guidance to school districts, these “Blueprints” define three steps for implementing RTI. Districts engage in district level consensus and infrastructure building, which is followed by specific steps for implementation, district wide evaluation, and the development of professional development plans.

As of 2009, fifteen states had adopted an RTI model on both large and small scales, 22 states were developing models for RTI, and 10 states were providing guidance to schools. Of 15 states that developed models, the majority consisted of a hybrid model. Many states provided guidance but did not require districts implement RTI models.

Eighty-eight percent of state departments of education have some form of professional development to support RTI (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009).

The majority of states have adopted three-tier models of RTI. All states define the tier I as general education, with tiers II and III consisting of increasingly intensive interventions. In all states with a three tier model, special education is separate and used when interventions have been exhausted (Berkeley et al., 2009). Contrary to recommendations from the literature, many states are using problem solving models when the standard protocol method is preferred (Berkeley et al., 2009; L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

Michigan's statewide RTI model is called Michigan's Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSI). The goal of MiBLSI is to "facilitate development of school-wide approaches to improving reading and behavior that provide multiple levels of intervention" (Ervin, Schaughency, Goodman, McGlinchey, & Matthews, 2007, p. 359). This model is divided into layers of instruction to ensure successful implementation. Building teams, coaching supports, local content expertise, state trainer/technical assistance, and national technical assistance make up each level of support.

A number of states have implemented RTI in various ways. Despite recommendations from national organizations, no single model has been widely accepted. Some components of RTI include:

1. Implementing research-based instruction in classrooms.
2. Conducting general screening of students to determine educational progress.
3. Intervening with more intense instruction for student who are not making adequate progress.

4. Maintaining the fidelity of instructional quality.
5. Making instructional decisions based on data collected on individual progress.

(Werts et al., 2009, p. 246)

Professional Development

Professional development has been cited as the most frequent factor leading to the successful implementation of RTI. School personnel should have many opportunities to practice new skills with ongoing feedback (Harlacher & Siler, 2011). School personnel participating in district-level professional development should also understand the relationship between RTI and achievement, empirically validated instructional practices, and the use of the problem solving model. Further, they should also understand evaluation strategies for student performance difference, which include continuous progress monitoring methods (Batsche et al., 2005; Harlacher & Siler, 2011).

Many schools use professional development programs developed at the state level (Berkeley et al., 2009). For example, the Illinois State Department of Education has established a statewide professional development program for RTI. The Alliance for School-based Problems-solving and Intervention in Resources in Education (ASPIRE) is designed to increase capacity for schools to implement an RTI model. Participants receive training on universal screening, problem identification for at-risk students, scientifically-based reading instruction, and progress monitoring (Bergstrom, 2008).

State Guidelines

In a study of six states in the Midwest Region, Detgen, Yamashita, Davis, & Wraight (2011) describe state level policy development relating to RTI. Among the states reported, interest in RTI was initially spearheaded by special education. However,

general and special educators in most states are now collaborating to implement RTI. Although implemented largely by general education, RTI falls within federal and state special education law. The majority of state laws permit both RTI and discrepancy for the determination of LD (Zirkel & Thomas, 2010). Michigan guidelines recommend high quality instruction in general education, universal screening for academics and behavior, continuous progress monitoring, and a model of three tiers of progressively more intensive instruction with fidelity measures.

In 2011, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) published guidelines for RTI that were explicitly recommended to all schools and districts across the state. At tier I, MDE recommends that all students receive 90 minutes of instruction in reading per day. Approximately 60% of students receive 30 minutes of instruction per day, in addition to tier I instruction, at tier II and tier III. Although universal screening is recommended three times per year, no recommendations for frequency of progress monitoring were made (Detgen, Yamashita, Davis, & Wraight, 2011; Zirkel & Thomas, 2010). Michigan's purpose for implementing RTI was to improve student achievement. Both the Office of School Improvement and the Office of Special Education and Early Intervening Services within the Michigan Department of Education are accountable for RTI responsibilities. Among schools in Michigan, the use of RTI is permitted, but not required, to determine special education eligibility.

Special Education Leadership and RTI Implementation

Administrative support has been cited as one of the most critical components for the successful implementation of RTI (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Sansosti et al., 2011; Werts et al., 2009; Wiener & Soodak, 2008). Specifically, Sansosti, Goss, & Noltemeyer

(2011) state that the “role of the special education director as a leader and change agent is critical to successful implementation of RTI” (p. 16). When implementing RTI, special education administrators must assign staff roles and responsibilities, develop and implement district policies, and carefully consider the use of time and resources when overseeing programs (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Werts et al., 2009).

Having influence on decisions that impact student learning, special education administrators play key roles in data-based decision making processes that impact RTI. Special education administrators must be knowledgeable about concepts, principles, and communicate a rationale for a school-wide process for making data-based decisions. Further, special education administrators must establish and maintain structures for sustaining data-based decision making processes that align with school improvement goals and objectives. O'Connor and Freeman (2012) state that the “role of district-level administrators is to facilitate the development of clear outcome targets and to establish routines that support the efforts of each building” (p. 301).

Special education administrators consider a number of factors when implementing RTI. Wiener & Soodak (2008) found that special education administrators attributed RTI success to “access to professional development, resources and materials for training and implementation, and guidelines for implementation” (p. 43). Further, special education administrators are generally optimistic about the results of RTI in terms of impact on instruction and collaboration. Viewing the primary benefit of RTI as the improvement of instruction, rather than decreasing the number of student classified as LD, special education administrators concede that additional benefits will be realized through ongoing implementation and change (Wiener & Soodak, 2008). Creating a shared

knowledge and understanding of RTI, special education administrators must provide clear and specific support to staff during RTI implementation (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012).

Implementing Educational Change

Duke (2004) defines educational change as “any intentional change designed to improve teaching and learning” (p. 30). As an ambiguous term, change may refer to the process in which change is initiated or the change as an artifact itself. Thus, not only is the study of educational change concerned with the process of change, but also the product of change (Duke, 2004). For the purpose of this literature review, the *process* of change will be emphasized.

The volume of educational change research is immense. A recent search of the literature revealed an astounding 461,000 journal articles referring to the topic. In order to conceptualize, organize, and make meaning of this amount of information, a number of researchers associate change within a particular perspective, or schema. From these perspectives, models and/or frameworks for educational change are created. The terms educational reform, educational change, and school reform are used interchangeably.

House and McQuillan (2005) conceptualize the literature on school reform into three perspectives: technological, political, and cultural. Researchers who subscribe to the technological perspective of school reform focus on specific goals and tasks, efficiency, outcomes, and systemic rational processes. This perspective is based on how to complete a specific set of steps to efficiently complete a job. Emphasis is largely placed upon the economics of the market as a means to frame the need for change. The political perspective of education reform relies heavily on negotiation. Concepts such as

power, authority, group conflict and compromise, and competing interests make up this perspective. Lastly, theorists who rely on a cultural perspective focus on a school system as a community. Concepts include shared meaning, values, and the importance of relationships. Each of these perspectives points to a different set of factors that are responsible for change. Schools do not operate within one of these perspectives exclusively. The interaction among all three perspectives explains the complexity in which change occurs in schools. These models are typically prescriptive, in which a set of specific steps or actions are followed in order to implement, manage, and lead change.

Ellsworth (2000) makes three assumptions about the nature of educational change. First, educational change can be understood and managed. When approached as such, it is often referred to as *planned* change. Second, educational change can be understood and managed when practitioners apply a set of tools from a number of different models of change. Such models can be referred to as a “toolbox” that allows leaders to effectively match certain tools with certain innovations of change. Lastly, effective and lasting change must address the concerns and priorities of multiple stakeholder groups. The success of an initiative is a direct result of the willingness of staff, parents, and the school community to change themselves as individuals (Edgehouse et al., 2007).

One assumption about change is that it must be managed. Yet, Kotter (1996) outlines the problem with this assumption. Rather than to manage change, special education administrators must lead change. The management of tasks, which is intended to keep complex systems of schools running smoothly through order and consistency, is important. However, Kotter (1996) suggests that only the act of leadership has the

potential to produce useful change and movement within an organization. Effective leadership can define the future of an organization and inspire people to align toward the shared vision of the organization.

Educational change models are used by leaders to understand the process of change. These models describe *why* change occurs, *how* change occurs, and *what* will occur as a result of the change (Duke, 2004; Edgehouse et al., 2007). Certain models concentrate on a specific part of the process of change such as problem solving, innovation, the change agent, or the intended users of change. Ellsworth (2000) presents an overview of each of the major models of educational change. Instead of defining each model by the steps or components within them, questions that each model is most likely to answer are presented:

- What attributes can I build into the innovation or its implementation strategy to facilitate its acceptance by the intended adopter? – Roger's (1995) Diffusion of Innovations
- What are the conditions that should exist or be created in the environment where the innovation is being introduced to facilitate its adoption? – Ely's (1990) Conditions of Change
- What are the implications of change for people or organizations promoting or opposing it at particular levels? – Fullan and Stiegelbauer's (1991) Meaning of Educational Change
- What are the essential stages of the facilitation process and what activities should the change agent be engaged during the each stage? - Havelock's (1995) Change Agent's Guide

- What stages will stakeholders go through during implementation and what will be the major concerns at each stage? – Hall, Hord, and Newlove's (1973) Concerns-Based Adoption Model
- What are the cultural, social, organizational, and psychological *barriers* to change that can promote resistance to the innovation and what can I do to lower these barriers and encourage adoption? – Zaltman and Duncan's (1997) Strategies for Planned Change
- What are the factors *outside* the immediate environment in which the innovation is being introduced that can affect its adoption? Reigeluth and Garfinkle's (1994) Systemic Change in Education (p. 37)

Although each question is intended to guide a user to a specific model, many have suggested that school leaders draw on relevant components from all of the models to build one holistic strategy to approach change (Edgehouse et al., 2007; Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2001). When special education administrators choose a selected model, for example, they must begin by determining which of the answers they are seeking. Each innovation or initiative comes with a different set of challenges, and as a result, may present with a new set of questions. Educational change cannot be achieved in a linear systematic process. Schools work on many different goals and initiatives at the same time, which require levels of concurrent management and coordination that are integrated simultaneously (Hargreaves, 2005).

Even with an immense knowledge base for guidance in the field, efforts to lead change are often ineffective. Hargreaves (2005) mentions several factors that make leading change difficult. Some of these factors include:

- The reasons for the change is poorly conceptualized or not clearly demonstrated.
- The change is too broad and ambitious.
- The change is too fast or too slow for people to cope with.
- The change is poorly resourced.
- There is no long-term commitment to the change.
- Key staff are not committed to the change.
- Leaders are too controlling or ineffectual.
- The change is pursued in isolation and gets undermined by other unchanged structures (p. 2).

These factors highlight that educational change is not simply a technical process, nor is it based only upon an understanding of the culture and people of an organization. “People fear change not just because it presents them with something new, uncertain, or unclear – because it has no obvious or common meaning for them” (Hargreaves, 2005; p. 2). In sum, special education administrators must master the technical process of change, understand the culture in which they attempt to lead change, and ensure that stakeholders involved in change find meaning and purpose.

School Improvement and RTI

After the need for change has been identified and a design has been selected, the next phase involves developing an implementation plan. An implementation plan is a set of guidelines that ensures that the design itself is put into place. Such plans are often called school improvement plans or continuous school improvement. School

improvement plans “are not the designs themselves, but the provisions for moving the designs from the drawing board to the school” (Duke, 2004, p. 123).

School improvement is based upon strategies that focus on curriculum and instruction, organization development, and the decentralization of decision making (Hopkins, 2005). Such efforts have led to a focus on the process of how to effect change, which is based upon school-selected priorities for improvement. This process often emphasizes the roles and perspectives of teachers and other stakeholders. School improvement also stresses the importance of a school culture, teacher collegiality, and staff relationships (Fink & Stoll, 2005). Such relationships are productive when the interactions between leaders and the people they work with produce desirable results for all stakeholders within a school (Cardno, 2012).

School improvement is an effective model when used to implement RTI because both processes focus on student outcomes. Further, both school improvement and RTI use planning and frequent review of system-level effectiveness to determine progress toward goals. Both models utilize system-wide decision making and progress monitoring to improve schools (Bernhardt & Hebert, 2011; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012).

Not only does school improvement focus on enhancing educational outcomes for students, it also strengthens the capacity for schools to understand and manage change (Bernhardt & Hebert, 2011). School improvement allows schools to take control of change. Thus, schools that use school improvement are “no longer the ‘victims’ of change, but can take more control of the process.” (Hopkins, 2005, p. 3). Similarly, the implementation of RTI also allows for special education administrators to take control of

change. O'Connor and Freeman (2012) articulate the relationship between RTI and change:

We observe that RtI implementation requires a significant educational reform, including changes in the way we think and act at all levels of the system. Inherent in this view is the recognition that RtI is not a program or initiative, but rather a process that is incorporated throughout a district to drive all educational decisions. Therefore, it is our assertion that effective implementation of RtI has to consider the school district entirely, as well as school buildings, as units of change. (p. 299)

The literature on educational reform often highlights that leading change is a complex and difficult task. Special education administrators must consider that change takes place in a world of chaos, and that the process of change is a complex chaotic process in and of itself. In addition to an understanding of the process of change, and the application of selected models that assist in leading it, special education administrators should consider societal change forces, the political factors that influence or mandate change, and the emotional aspects of teaching, learning and leading change (Hargreaves, 2005).

RTI and the Process of Change

Response to Intervention is often viewed as an educational reform initiative. Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) state that, "RTI cannot be characterized by one educational program or curriculum, but rather a transformation in the way that systems, schools, and professionals operate" (p. 56). Key to the success of reform initiatives such as RTI is a need for school leaders to understand the process of change and how to

manage it. The literature fails to adequately identify factors that contribute to the successful implementation of RTI. As a result, it is important to review models and theories of educational change in order to improve future practice (Hargreaves, 2005; Ellsworth, 2000; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008).

In the non-stop pursuit to improve school systems and school personnel, understanding the process of change is important for special education administrators to successfully implement RTI. Fullan (2007) describes this structure as a hierarchy of successive levels. That is, students cannot be successful without successful teachers; teachers cannot be successful without successful leaders; and leaders must sustain the betterment of all stakeholders through sustaining meaningful educational change. When organizations change, leaders are required to link all stakeholders within the system together (Fullan, 2006).

Given the lack of research on what makes the implementation of RTI successful, theoretical models of change can serve to guide future educational practice. Specifically, Fullan's (2001) model for change has been pivotal in guiding practitioners and researchers through the process of educational change (Datnow, 2006; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008; Stoll, 2006). Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) purport that "Fullan's model appears to have direct applicability to the current practice of RTI" (p. 57).

Fullan's Model for Educational Change

Examining the process of change, Fullan (2001) provides a framework for leaders to define and implement change. One of the most cited researchers on change in schools, Fullan (2001) conceives a framework for leaders so they "can focus on certain key themes that will allow them to lead effectively under messy conditions" (p. x). Fullan

(2001) suggests that “*leading* in a culture of change means *creating* a culture of change” (emphasis added, p. 44). Leaders who create a culture of change produce “the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices” (Fullan, 2001, p. 44). Change is not addressed with step-by-step manuals or protocols. Rather, Fullan (2001) places emphasis on an understanding and an insight of change, rather than steps for taking action. His model, called A Framework for Leadership, is organized into five domains.

The first domain of Fullan’s (2001) framework is *moral purpose*. Moral purpose is simply defined as the drive to make a difference in the lives of others. Leaders exhibiting moral purpose possess characteristics such as integrity, conviction, responsibility, moral excellence, and trust. Fullan (2001) states, “leaders in all organizations, whether they know it or not, contribute for better or for worse to moral purpose in their own organizations and in society as a whole” (p. 15). If leaders use moral purpose to lead change effectively, Fullan (2001) states they must:

(1) have an explicit ‘making-a-difference’ sense of purpose, (2) use strategies that mobilize many people to tackle tough problems, (3) be held accountable by measured and debatable indicators of success, and (4) be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it awakens people’s intrinsic commitment, which is none other than the mobilizing of everyone’s sense of moral purpose. (pg. 20)

The second domain is *understanding change*. Fullan summarizes the concept of understanding change into six parts:

1. The goal is not to innovate the most.

2. It is not enough to have the best ideas.
3. Appreciate the implementation dip.
4. Redefine resistance.
5. Reculturing is the name of the game.
6. Never a checklist, always complexity. (p. 34)

Fullan (2001) explains that leaders who implement initiatives do not always make progress. Without buy-in from staff, good ideas are nothing more than ideas. Effective leaders must not only possess good ideas, but they must be able to implement them as well. After implementing a new initiative, leaders find themselves and their staff lacking skills to sustain innovation because they lack new skills to accompany it. Fullan (2001) describes this as the implementation dip. Building in differences and offsetting equilibrium creates capacity for change. Leaders should foster organizations that have creativity to get through this implementation dip. As leaders understand the process of change, they realize that if everyone thinks exactly alike, no one will be able to make suggestions as how to move forward.

The third domain to Fullan's (2001) model is *relationships*. Fullan (2001) states that to implement change effectively, "it is actually the relationships that make the difference" (p. 51). Fullan (2001) articulates that although the development of people is important, it is not enough to successfully lead change. The creation of relationships is crucial, but only if the result is greater coherence among staff, programs, and schools. Relationships should lead to the creation of additional resources, which can be accessed by staff, parents, and the school community. The role of leadership is to cause a greater capacity among the individuals in the organization. Professional relationships are

bolstered with the use of professional development to improve teaching and learning. Fullan (2001) recommends professional development that focuses on system-wide change to improve instruction.

The fourth domain of Fullan's (2001) model is *knowledge creation and sharing*. The process of knowledge creation and sharing is built upon the development of relationships among staff. Ultimately, the purpose of relationships is to create and share knowledge for the betterment of the organization. Fullan (2001) describes schools as being in the business of learning, yet he states that districts are inept at learning from one other. Using what Fullan (2001) calls intervisitation and peer advising, administrators and teachers can learn best practice from colleagues.

Through intervisitation, groups of teachers and administrators visit to observe instructional best practice in other schools. Districts participate in instructional consulting services in which both internal and external consultants work with staff to improve instruction. When staff shares information about best practices, they express a need for more knowledge, including the practical implications when implementing a new project or initiative. Administrators and teachers should also request time to reflect on newly implemented practices, policies, and protocols. During peer advising, administrators and teachers participate in a mentor-mentee program in which experienced administrators collaborate with new administrators.

The last domain of Fullan's (2001) framework for leadership is *coherence making*. Based upon the premise that complex systems such as schools are continually generating overload and fragmentation, the act of maintaining coherence is necessary to

lead change. Fullan (2001) describes this coherence making by using the work Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (2000, p. 6, emphasis in original):

1. *Equilibrium* is a precursor to *death*. When a living system is in a state of equilibrium, it is less responsive to changes occurring around it. This places it at maximum risk.
2. In the face of threat, or when galvanized by a compelling opportunity, living things move toward the *edge of chaos*. This condition evokes higher levels of mutation and experimentation, and fresh new solutions are more likely to be found.
3. When this excitation takes place, the components of living systems *self-organize* and new forms of *repertoires* emerge from the turmoil.
4. Living systems cannot be *directed* along a linear path. Unforeseen consequences are inevitable. The challenge is to *disturb* them in a manner that approximates the desired outcome.

In schools, “the main problem is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects (Fullan, 2001, p. 109). The result is that staff becomes frustrated, disenchanted, and complacent to change. Leaders must ensure organizational coherence to successfully implement new initiatives.

When applying each of Fullan’s (2001) five domains to lead change, leaders should be patient and deliberate by absorbing challenges and redefining new patterns along the path of change. Learning in context, leaders are able to attain specific knowledge because the learning takes place with the group of an organization. Thus,

commitment from staff cannot be activated from top-level leadership. Leadership at many levels within the organization is needed for sustainable success. Fullan (2001) concludes that “ultimately, leadership in a culture of change will be judged as effective or ineffective not by who you are as a leaders, but by *what leadership you produce in others*” (emphasis in original, p. 137).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology of this study. The type of research methods and purpose of this study is first explained, followed by a description of the participants, data collection, and instrumentation. This chapter concludes with procedures for data analysis

Purpose

This study used survey research to gather information from special education administrators in the State of Michigan regarding the perceptions of leadership, change, and the implementation and challenges related to Response to Intervention (RTI). Developed by the author, the survey was designed around three themes found in the literature: 1) leadership and change, 2) the implementation of RTI, and 3) challenges administrators face when implementing RTI.

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which special education administrators agree with practices of Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership, how they perceive the importance of steps to implement RTI, and how frequently they encounter challenges related to the implementation of RTI. Further, this study seeks to determine if there is a relationship between the extent to which participants agree with Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership and frequency in which they encounter challenges during the implementation of RTI. This study also seeks to determine if there is a relationship between the extent to which participants agree with Fullan's (2001)

Framework for Leadership and the extent to which they rate the importance of the steps to implement RTI according to NASDSE. Approval from the Western Michigan University's Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to beginning this study (see Appendix A).

Design

Given that the intent of this study was to collect information to describe aspects and characteristics of the beliefs and perceptions of special education administrators in the State of Michigan, survey research was selected. As a non-experimental design, survey research is an efficient tool to examine the characteristics of a sample population (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Survey research seeks the opinions of a large group of people about particular topics, beliefs, or issues and is intended to describe some aspect or characteristic of a sample population through participants answering questions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Research Questions

Below are the research questions for this study:

1. To what extent do special education administrators agree with practices of Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership.
2. To what extent do special education administrators rate the importance of the steps to implement Response to Intervention defined by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)?
3. To what extent do special education administrators encounter challenges related to RTI?

4. Is there a relationship between the extent to which special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the frequency in which they encounter challenges related to implementation?
5. Is there a relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the extent to which they rate the importance of NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI?

Participants

The target population included special education administrators in the State of Michigan working in public school districts for the 2013/2014 school year. Special education administrators include special education supervisors, assistant directors of special education, directors of special education, coordinators of special education, planner/monitors of special education, and principals of center-based schools. The sample was obtained from the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) annual statewide conference. All potential participants ($n=553$) were active members of MAASE at the time of this study. Affiliated with the National Council of Administrators of Special Education, MAASE is a statewide organization representing special education administrators from private, public, charter, and intermediate school districts within the State of Michigan. MAASE provides leadership for special education administrators in the development and implementation of programs and services for students with disabilities.

The sample included special education administrators who were working in public local or intermediate school districts. Charter and private school administrators were not included in this sample, given that the author believed that the roles and responsibilities

of special education administrators in charter or private schools would not align with the roles and responsibilities of their counterparts in public schools.

Data Collection

The survey was conducted via a group administration at the MAASE Summer Institute Conference in August, 2013. An announcement was made to all participants including a brief description of the research, an assurance of confidentiality, and a description of informed consent. After receiving paper copies of the survey instrument and the informed consent document, participants were given approximately four hours to complete the survey. Participants were instructed to leave completed surveys on the tables at which they were sitting or at boxes placed throughout the room.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument, titled *Leadership, Challenges, and the Implementation of RTI*, was created by the author (See Appendix C). As a paper-based survey, the development and organization of the content was based partly on the works of Fanning (2005) and Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009). The survey instrument is organized into three subscales 1) leadership and change, 2) steps to implement RTI, and 3) challenges related to RTI. A demographic section of the survey was intended to seek information about gender, age, highest level of educational attainment, total years practicing as a special education administrator, job title for current position, and type of district.

In order to answer research question 1 (to what extent do special education administrators agree with practices of Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership), participants were asked to rate their level of agreement using a Likert scale. Choices

were assigned numerical values of 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree. This section of the survey was organized into three items for each of the five domains of Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership: Moral Purpose, Understanding Change, Relationship Building, Knowledge Creation and Sharing, and Coherence Making (see Table 1).

Table 1

Survey Items for Research Question 1

Category	Item
Understanding Change	7, 8, 9
Relationship Building	10, 11, 12
Knowledge Creation and Sharing	13, 14, 15
Coherence Making	16, 17, 18
Moral Purpose	19, 20, 21

Questions were generated by the author based upon a modified system of coding frequently found in qualitative research literature (Creswell, 2007). The data source for the questions in this section is Fullan's (2001) text titled *Leading in A Culture of Change*, in which he describes his model. Although the themes among the data were already identified by Fullan (2001; referred here as domains), this study's author analyzed the text to create meaningful categories within each theme, or domain. From each category, three survey items were written to represent each of the original domains.

In order to answer research question 2 (to what extent do special education administrators rate the importance of the steps to implement Response to Intervention defined by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), participants were asked to rate the level of importance of each step using a Likert scale. Responses were assigned numerical values of 4=not important, 3=somewhat important, 2=very important, and 1=essential. The items for this research question were adapted with permission (See Appendix B) to align with a publication titled Response to Intervention: Blueprints for Implementation (District Level) by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE; see table 2).

The purpose of the NASDSE Blueprint is to provide a framework for districts to follow when implementing RTI. The framework builds on the definition of RTI by Batsche, et al. (2005). There are three Blueprints in this series: one at the state, district, and building level, which are all intended to guide RTI implementation. Given that special education administrators are most likely responsible for special education programs and services at the district level, the district level Blueprints in this series was selected for the instrument.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education acknowledges that system level change must be guided by practices and principles that address the following points during implementation:

- There are critical components of RTI implementation that if not attended to can render otherwise acceptable implementations ineffective.

- The school building is the unit of change in RTI. Multiple building within a district can implement RTI, but these implementations will be likely be somewhat different.
- District-level supports must be systematically built in to support building-level implementation.
- State-level supports must be systematically built to support district and building level implementation.
- Building change should be guided by the answers to key questions. By answering a specific set of interrelated question, using the scientific research and site-based data, buildings can be assured that they are implementation the major component of RTI. Specific mandated answers to these question should not be imposed uniformly across all buildings (Elliott & Morrison, 2008, p. 1).

NASDSE organizes each of the Blueprints in these stages:

1. Consensus building – where RTI concepts are communicated broadly to implementers and the foundational “whys” are taught, discussed, and embraced.
 2. Infrastructure building – where districts and sites examine their implementation against the critical components of RTI, find aspects that are being implemented well and gaps that need to be addressed. Infrastructure building centers around closing these practice gaps.
 3. Implementation – where the structures and support are put in place to support, stabilize, and institutionalize RTI practice into a new “business as usual.”
- (Elliott & Morrison, 2008, p. 2)

Table 2

Survey Items for Research Question 2

Category	Item
Consensus Building	22, 23, 24, 25
District Infrastructure Building	26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32
District Level Implementation	33, 34, 35, 36

For research question 3 (to what extent do special education administrators encounter challenges related to RTI?), participants were asked to rate the level of frequency using a Likert scale. Choices were assigned numerical values of 5=never a challenge, 4=rarely a challenge, 3=sometimes a challenge, 2=often a challenge, and 1=always a challenge. The items for this research question were generated from a review of the literature base.

Instrument Content Validity

The instrument underwent a review by a number of content experts in the areas of special education leadership, Response to Intervention, and educational leadership. Additionally, this instrument was reviewed by practicing special education administrators in the field. Feedback on the instrument was considered and revisions were made in accordance with suggestions.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated to answer research questions 1, 2, and 3. Linear correlation was calculated to answer research questions 4 and 5. A coefficient of internal consistency was used to determine

reliability for the survey as a whole and for each of the subscales within the instrument. All raw data was coded and entered into a spreadsheet. All statistical calculations were completed using SPSS. The level of significance for all data analysis was set at $p < .05$.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter describes the results of this study. Descriptions of the participant demographics are followed by the results for each research question. A number of tables are provided to display and clarify results. This chapter concludes with a description of the reliability of the instrument used for this study.

The purpose of this study is to 1) determine the leadership characteristics of special education administrators according to Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership, 2) determine the extent to which special education administrators perceive the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) steps to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) as important, and 3) determine how frequently special education administrators encounter challenges during the implementation of Response to Intervention. This study also seeks to determine if there is a relationship among these three variables.

A total of 233 surveys were completed for this study. Of the 233 surveys, 35 included missing data in the form of unanswered questions. Of these 35 surveys, 16 had four or fewer missing data points and were included in the analysis. Missing data from these 16 surveys was imputed based upon the subscale mean in which the data was missing. Twenty-seven participants completed surveys that did not meet the sample population criteria. These surveys were not used for analysis. A total of 187 surveys were used for analysis with a response rate of 34%

Participant Demographics

Personal characteristics of all participants were examined. Tables 3, 4, and 5 list the variables of gender, age, educational attainment, years as an administrators, job title, and district type.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=187)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	47	25
Female	140	75
Age		
21 to 30	1	< 1
31 to 40	50	27
41 to 50	61	33
51 to 60	60	32
61 or older	14	7

Survey results indicate that the majority of participants were female (75%) and fell within the 41 to 50 year-old category (33%; see table 3). Table 4 displays the results for educational attainment and years as a special education administrator. The most frequent level of educational attainment among participants is a Master's Degree, representing

52% of the sample. The most frequent category of years as a special education administrator is 0 to 5 years (38%).

Table 4

Professional Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=187)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Educational Attainment		
Bachelors Degree	0	-
Masters Degree	97	52
Specialists Degree	68	36
Doctoral Degree	22	12
Years as an Administrator		
0 to 5	72	39
6 to 10	44	24
11 to 15	39	21
16 to 20	11	6
21 or more	21	11

The largest number of participants was in the supervisor of special education category, representing 40% of the sample (See Table 5). Table 5 indicates that the majority of participants (63%) were employed by intermediate school districts/educational services agencies, whereas the remaining participants (37%) were employed by local public school districts.

Table 5

District Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Job Title		
Supervisor of special education	75	40
Center-based principal	18	10
Director of special education	67	52
Planner/Monitor	15	8
Other	12	6
District Type		
Local public district	69	37
ISD/ESA	118	63

Research Questions*Research Question 1*

To what extent do special education administrators agree with practices of Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership.

Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership is organized into five domains: Understanding Change, Relationship Building, Knowledge Creating and Sharing, Coherence Making, and Moral Purpose. The results for this research question are

organized into five separate tables with each table corresponding to each of the five domains. Each question within this subscale used a Likert scale of 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. Mean and standard deviations were calculated for all survey questions. Combining all of the responses for this subscale of the instrument, descriptive statistics reveal that participants scored a mean of 3.25 (SD = 1.01) on all questions.

Domain 1 of this subscale included three questions pertaining to Understanding Change (see table 6). For this all items in this domain, participants indicated a mean score of 3.35 (SD = 1.06). This mean score indicates that participants average level of agreement fell between the “agree” and “strongly agree” scales.

Table 6

Survey Items Based Upon Understanding Change

Item	M	SD
7) Staff should act urgently to implement district-wide initiatives.	3.79	.852
8) Success is measured by winning small and winning often.	3.52	.975
9) District-wide change can be understood and led, but not controlled or managed.	2.74	1.07

Note. 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

Domain 2 of this subscale included three questions related to Relationship Building (see table 7). Combining each of the three survey questions within this domain,

participants scored a mean of 3.44 (SD = .99). Participants, on average, self-reported scores between “agree” and “strongly agree.”

Table 7

Survey Items Based Upon Relationship Building

Item	M	SD
10) The quality of staff-to-staff relationships is the most critical factor to create effective district-wide change.	3.72	.883
11) The quality of staff-to-staff relationships is more important than the effectiveness of district structures and strategies.	2.84	.896
12) Leaders must have strong relationships with staff before they can effectively lead them.	3.78	.922

Note. 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

Domain 3 of this subscale sought to determine the level of agreement about Knowledge Creation and Sharing. Table 8 displays the descriptive statistics for participant responses. For this domain, the average score was 2.54 (SD = .79)

Table 8

Survey Items Based Upon Knowledge Creation and Sharing

Item	M	SD
13) Knowledge should be created by peers, not by experts.	2.88	.844
14) Staff should be judged on the number of experiences they share with others.	2.42	.717
15) Decisions should be based on experience more than information.	2.35	.727

Note. 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

Table 9 displays the results for domain 4, which included questions about Coherence Making. The average score for all participants was 3.16 (SD = .88).

Responses fell within the “agree” to “strongly agree” category.

Table 9

Survey Items Based Upon Coherence Making

Item	M	SD
16) When in a state of equilibrium, the system is less responsive to change.	3.08	.915
17) Opportunities lead to uncertainty, which results in new solutions.	3.54	.757
18) When solutions aren't clear, change becomes the only solution.	2.88	.859

Note. 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

There were three questions in domain 5, Moral Purpose. The total mean score fell between “agree” and “strongly agree,” which was calculated at 3.77 (SD = .86). Table 10 displays the results for the questions in this domain.

Table 10

Survey Items Based Upon Moral Purpose

Survey Item	M	SD
19) Improving the quality of how staff work together is equally as important to improving the lives of students.	3.73	.878
20) The level of staff commitment is a reflection of the effectiveness of school/ district leadership.	3.96	.802
21) The goals of the district should allow staff to achieve their own goals.	3.64	.899

Note. 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

Research Question 2

To what extent do special education administrators rate the importance of the steps to implement Response to Intervention according to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)?

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) divides their steps for implementing RTI at the district level into three categories: 1) Consensus Building, 2) District Infrastructure Building, and 3) District Level Implementation. The results of this research question are organized into tables that align with each of the categories for RTI implementation. Mean and standard deviations were calculated for this subscale and for each of the categories.

A Likert scale of 4 = essential, 3 = very important, 2 = somewhat important, 1 = not important, was used for all questions in this subscale. For all questions in this subscale, participants self-reported a mean score of 3.45 (SD = .64). This indicates that participants scored all items between ratings of “very important” and “essential.”

The average score for the first category of Consensus Building is 3.44 (SD = .63). Participants in this category scored on average between the “very important” and “essential” ratings (see Table 11).

Table 11

Survey Items for Consensus Building

Item	M	SD
22) Develop an action plan to facilitate the sharing of information and the building of district wide consensus to support RTI.	3.47	.649
23) Provide information to internal and external stakeholders about RTI.	3.45	.632
24) Examine and define district structures to support your RTI initiative.	3.52	.590
25) Build consensus and support from internal and external stakeholders.	3.32	.659

Note. 4 = essential, 3 = very important, 2 = somewhat important, 1 = not important

The second category of this subscale is District Infrastructure Building. The mean score for all items within this category is 3.44 (SD = .65). Participants rated these questions between “very important” and “essential.” Table 12 displays the results for the questions in this category.

Table 12

Survey Items for District Infrastructure Building

Item	M	SD
26) Form an RTI district leadership team.	3.41	.708
27) Identify the roles that district/central administration will play in implementing RTI.	3.35	.689
28) Develop and complete a district-level needs assessment.	3.33	.701
29) Discuss and make decisions about the necessary components across universal, strategic, and intensive instruction.	3.41	.619
30) Review and discuss the current performance of all students in relation to universal, strategic, and intensive instruction.	3.48	.642
31) Identify an evaluation plan and data collection systems.	3.60	.533
32) Develop an action plan to guide the implementation of RTI.	3.55	.657

Note. 4 = essential, 3 = very important, 2 = somewhat important, 1 = not important

The last category of this subscale is District Level Implementation (see table 13)

On average, participants rated all questions between “very important” and “essential” with a score of 3.46 (SD = .62).

Table 13

Survey Items for District Level Implementation

Item	M	SD
33) Develop a multi-year (at least 3-5 years) action plan to address implementation.	3.44	.656
34) Implement an RTI professional development plan.	3.47	.642
35) Implement an evaluation and data analysis plan for RTI implementation.	3.48	.616
36) Maintaining the implementation of RTI.	3.57	.595

Note. 4 = essential, 3 = very important, 2 = somewhat important, 1 = not important

Research Question 3

To what extent do special education administrators encounter challenges related to RTI?

This subscale included nine questions regarding the challenges special education administrators face when implementing RTI. The Likert scale for this subscale is 5 = always a challenge, 4 = often a challenge, 3 = sometimes a challenge, 2 = rarely a challenge, 1 = never a challenge. For all of the questions combined within this subscale, participants self-reported a score of 3.38 (SD = .92). This indicates that average ranking fell within “often a challenge” and “sometimes a challenge.” Table 14 includes the scores for each question within this subscale.

Table 14

Survey Items for Challenges when Implementing RTI

Item	M	SD
37) Staff implementing RTI practices with fidelity.	3.93	.755
38) Staff using adopted policies and/or procedures to implement RTI.	3.53	.812
39) Staff using data to make decisions.	3.39	.917
40) Staff using evidence-based interventions.	3.29	.912
41) Staff using researched-based curriculum.	3.05	.974
42) Staff accessing professional development for RTI.	3.09	.844
43) Staff collaborating to implement RTI.	3.29	.851
44) Staff having access to adequate resources and/or materials.	3.27	.952
45) Co-teaching in general education settings.	3.65	.993

Note. 5 = always a challenge, 4 = often a challenge, 3 = sometimes a challenge, 2 = rarely a challenge, 1 = never a challenge

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the frequency in which they encounter challenges related to implementation?

A Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the frequency in which they encounter challenges related to implementation. There was no correlation between these two variables, $r(185) = .000$, $p = .999$.

Research Question 5

Is there a relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the extent to which they rate the importance of NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI?

A Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the extent to which they rate the importance of NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI. There was a positive correlation between these two variables, $r(185) = .146$, $p = .046$. As the participants' scores increased in the first subscale, so too did their scores in the second subscale. That is, participants who rated a high level of agreement with Fullan's (2001) practices were also more likely to rate highly the importance of NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI.

Instrument Reliability

To calculate reliability for the survey instrument, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the survey as a whole. Reliability of each of the three subscales were also measured using Cronbach's alpha. Represented in Table 15, all scores indicated reliability of the instrument.

Table 15

Instrument Reliability

Section	Cronbach's alpha
Entire instrument	.84
Subsection	
Leadership practices	.70
RTI implementation	.95
RTI challenges	.85

Summary

The results of this study provide a synopsis of perceptions special education administrators possess regarding leadership, the process of change, and the implementation of RTI. The majority of participants were female between the ages of 41 to 50 years old. Participants were most likely to hold a Master's degree, while practicing between 0 and 5 years as a special education supervisor within an intermediate school district/educational service agency.

This study reported results according to each of the three subscales within the survey instrument. Mean and standard deviation data indicated a small variance in responses from all participants for the subscales on the steps to implement RTI and challenges during implementation. That is, the majority of participants rated both subscales highly. There was more variation in the subscale measuring the perceptions of leadership and change. Correlations revealed a statically significant relationship between

how special education administrators rated Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership and NASDSE's steps to implement RTI. Correlations revealed there was not a statistically significant difference in how special education administrators rate Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership and the extent to which they encountered challenges related to RTI. Implications for these findings are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings and interpretations of this study. A summary of the study and findings are followed by the interpretation of findings, which provides more detail of conclusions from this study. Lastly, study limitations are reviewed and suggestions for future research are given.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of leadership and change special education administrators possess. This study also seeks to determine the extent to which special education administrators perceive a set of steps to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) as important and how frequently they encounter challenges when implementing RTI. Lastly, this study seeks to determine if a relationship exists between perceptions of leadership, change, and the steps and challenges related to implementing RTI.

This study used survey research to gather information from special education administrators in the State of Michigan regarding their perceptions of leadership, change and the process for implementing, and challenges associated with, RTI. Developed by this study's author, the survey was designed around three themes found in the literature: 1) leadership and the process of change, 2) a specific set of steps intended to guide the implementation of RTI, and 3) challenges special education administrators encounter when implementing RTI. Specifically, survey items relating to leadership and change

were based upon Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership. Survey items relating to the implementation of RTI were authored by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (Elliott & Morrison, 2008) and used with permission. Challenges associated with the implementation of RTI were gathered from the literature in general.

Summary of Findings

Several conclusions can be drawn from the perceptions of special education administrators regarding leadership, change, and the implementation of RTI. First, special education administrators acknowledge the importance of staff relationships, creating learning communities to support personnel development among staff, the urgency for staff to implement RTI, and that success of such initiatives is measured in small increments. Within the process of implementing RTI, special education administrators did not agree that decisions should be based upon the experiences of staff, nor do they agree that peers should create knowledge, as opposed to experts creating knowledge. Special education administrators assert that the process of change can be controlled or managed, but not led. Second, special education administrators rate all of NASDSE's district-level steps to implement RTI as important. Among these steps, special education administrators rate the creation of district evaluations plans, data collection systems, and reviewing the performance level of all students at all tiers as essential components for effective implementation. Third, special education administrators identified a number of challenges including staff implementing RTI practices with fidelity, co-teaching in general education settings, and staff using policies and/or procedures to implement RTI. Fourth, the findings of this study indicate there is no relationship between the perceptions of special education administrators of Fullan's

(2001) Framework for Leadership and the frequency in which they encounter challenges related to implementation. Lastly, special education administrators who indicated agreement with Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership were more likely to rate NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI with a high level of importance. This correlation may suggest that as special education administrators' understanding of change increases so does their reliance on specific and systematic steps to implement RTI.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1

To what extent do special education administrators agree with practices of Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership.

Special education administrators acknowledge the importance of making a difference in the lives of others by fostering relationships among staff. On average, special education administrators rated items within the domains of Fullan's (2001) Moral Purpose and Relationship Building with the highest level of agreement. Fullan (2001) defines Moral Purpose as the drive leaders possess to make a difference in the lives of others. Based upon care and respect, this "making-a-difference" is largely dependent upon the quality of relationships among staff, and between staff and their leaders. These findings are consistent with research from Sansosti, Goss, and Noltemeyer (2011).

Special education administrators acknowledge that the process of change requires staff to act urgently to implement RTI. Further, special education administrators acknowledge that successful implementation is measured in small steps. These results are consistent with previous research and suggest that successful leaders are able to excite their staff with drive and commitment to undertake new initiatives (Bernhardt & Hebert,

2011; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Having a vision for change, leaders must manage their vision for change in small steps. Initiatives such as RTI can be multifaceted and time consuming to implement and the complexities of such innovation can be met with resistance. Successful leaders understand that winning small and winning often is a key component to understanding and managing change (Fullan, 2001; Hamel, 2000; Kotter, 1996).

Special education administrators did not acknowledge the importance of staff sharing experiences as a means to build knowledge within an organization. Fullan (2001) defines knowledge creation as the process in which staff shares experiences to build knowledge within the context of their working environment. Not only is it important for staff to build new knowledge through their experiences, it is also important that staff share their knowledge with others. Through this process, members within an organization begin to rely on each other to apply that knowledge to understand change. Further, special education administrators did not agree that decisions should be based upon experiences of others; Special education administrators self-report that experts, not peers, should create knowledge. Fullan (2001), however, states that staff should rely upon systemic methods for sharing experiences and ideas to create knowledge during times of change. Special education administrators lack an understanding of the process of knowledge creation and sharing.

Special education administrators perceive that district-wide change can be controlled or managed. However, Fullan (2001) purports that district-wide change *cannot* be controlled or managed. That is, change should be allowed to happen. Fullan (2001) continues that there is no magic answer to managing change. Based upon these

findings, it can be concluded that special education administrators are uncomfortable with the notion of allowing change to take place without intervention. To understand and lead change, special education administrators need not rely on a set of actionable steps found in a “how-to” guide, but rather they must mobilize commitment among staff by establishing a vision, setting goals, and allowing staff to build and use their own knowledge to move the process of change forward (Fullan, 2001).

Based upon the results from this research question, special education administrators should consider the importance of building relationships with staff during the process of change (Bernhardt & Hebert, 2011; Cardno, 2012; Fink & Stoll, 2005; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Wiener & Soodak, 2008). It is through staff relationships that change can be led to allow for the achievement of organizational goals. Special education administrators should involve stakeholders in the planning and implementation of RTI to instill a sense of urgency to accomplish such initiatives.

During the implementation of RTI, special education administrators should consider the success of models that support educational change to increase staff capacity. The results of this research question are supported by Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008), who highlight the use of Fullan’s (2001) Framework for Leadership to ensure supportive leadership, collegiality, affirming teacher beliefs and attitudes with relationships, and to build capacity of individuals and systems to successfully implement RTI.

Research Question 2

To what extent do special education administrators rate the importance of the steps to implement Response to Intervention according to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)?

The results of this study indicate that special education administrators acknowledge the importance of a prescriptive set of steps to implement RTI. These steps are intended “to provide a framework around which implementation of RTI can be built” (Elliott & Morrison, 2008, p. 1). NASDSE describes this process of implementing RTI in three stages: Consensus Building, District Infrastructure Building, and District Level Implementation. Special education administrators rated the steps within the stages of District Infrastructure and District Level Implementation with the highest scores. Items relating to Consensus Building, although also rated as important, were not rated as highly.

Among the steps outlined by NASDSE, the following items were rated with the highest mean scores: identify an evaluation plan and data collection systems needed to implement RTI, maintain the implementation of RTI, developing an action plan to guide the implementation of RTI, and examine and define district structures to support an RTI initiative. These findings correspond with research by Sansosti, Goss, & Noltemeyer (2011) who found that special education administrators perceive district level leadership teams as an effective means to facilitate the implementation of RTI.

Although also highly related, the following items were rated with lower mean scores compared to all items for this research question: build consensus and support from stakeholders, develop and complete a district-level needs assessment, and identify roles and that district/central administrators will play in implementing RTI. The results of this study align with previous research indicating that special education administrators, while leading to implement RTI, play a critical role to improve student outcomes and foster a

shared commitment among stakeholders, including parents and community members (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Sansosti et al., 2011).

The results of this research question suggest that special education administrators value district level structures that include the routines, processes, and strategies to implement RTI. In particular, special education administrators perceive the use of data as an important process to evaluate and guide decision making at student, school, and district levels. O'Connor and Freeman (2012) support the findings of this research question by stating that special education administrators “must establish and sustain routines for decision making that incorporate data from building-level efforts and follow a systematic process that includes routine evaluation of progress on district objectives” (p. 301). The results of this study indicate that special education administrators perceive NASDSE’s steps to implement RTI as important, however, there continues to be little consensus among special education administrators regarding specific and effective processes, procedures, and routines to implement RTI. Wert et al. (2009) suggests further exploration on this topic: “Little consensus on procedures may signal a need for more discussion, sharing of results of RTI process on multiple measures, and a honing of ‘best practice’ recommendations” (p. 252).

Research Question 3

To what extent do special education administrators encounter challenges related to RTI?

Special education administrators report a number of challenges when implementing RTI. The most encountered challenges include staff implementation of RTI practices with fidelity, co-teaching in general education settings, and staff using

policies and/or procedures to implement RTI. Participants reported the following items as least likely to be encountered: staff using research-based curriculum, staff accessing professional development for RTI, and staff having adequate resources and/or materials for RTI.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that reported challenges perceived by special education administrators. These included the lack of district-level leadership teams, decreased options for co-teaching, and the need for better collaboration among staff. Additionally, lack of teacher preparation and professional development, lack of specific guidelines to implement RTI, and a lack of scientific-based interventions were also cited as challenges (Harlacher & Siler, 2011; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Wiener & Soodak, 2008). The identification of such challenges during implementation is not intended to discourage future initiatives to implement RTI, however. "It is anticipated that knowledge of such barriers can serve as a starting point for positive systems change." (Sansosti et al., 2011, p. 17)

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the frequency in which they encounter challenges related to implementation?

This study seeks to determine if a relationship exists between perceptions of leadership, change, and the steps and challenges related to implementing RTI. The findings of this study indicate there is no relationship between the perceptions of special education administrators of Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership and the frequency in which they encounter challenges related to implementation.

Although speculative in nature, this could suggest that, when using Fullan's (2001) model in the planning stages before an implementation takes place, special education administrators are unaware of the challenges that RTI exhibits. As a result, there would be no relationship between a chosen model for change and the challenges encountered during implementation.

Research Question 5

Is there a relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the extent to which they rate the importance of NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI?

There is a relationship between how special education administrators agree with Fullan's (2001) practices and the extent to which they rate the importance of NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI. Special education administrators who indicated agreement with Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership were more likely to rate highly the importance of NASDSE's steps for implementing RTI. These findings suggest that special education administrators who have an understanding of the process of change are more likely to rely on a prescriptive set of steps to implement and manage initiatives. Further, leaders who understand change rely on adequate planning to ensure success of initiatives such as RTI. Sufficient time, resources, and stakeholder commitment is needed to effectively apply a specific set of steps to an RTI initiative. It is hoped that a reliance on Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership, combined with NASDSE's steps to implement RTI, will lead to effective district-wide implementation.

Limitations

There are several possible limitations to this study. First, the findings of this study should only be generalized to special education administrators working in public schools within the State of Michigan. Participants may not be representative of all special education administrators within the State of Michigan as the survey was only distributed to members of MAASE. The results of this study may not be representative of other states or regions. Further, the results of this study may not be representative of the sample population in that the response rate was 34%. Second, the self-reporting nature of survey research brings validity into question. Although the intent of this study is to report on the perceptions of special education administrators, caution should be taken when making cause-effect conclusions from these findings. That is, the perceptions of special education administrators do not necessarily represent their practice accurately. Lastly, although reliability measures for the survey instrument range between .70 and .95, the extent to which the instrument accurately measures Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership should be further examined and refined.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of topics can be further explored using this study as a basis. Expanding this study to include a larger population could provide insight and comparisons among states, and possibly larger geographic regions. For example, replicating this study to include all of the states in the Great Lakes region could provide a means to determine differences among subgroups of the sample population. Analysis could also include a review of policies and laws that are specific to each state within the region. Additional

analysis could explore differences between rural, suburban, and urban settings as well as district socioeconomic status.

Understanding the perceptions of staff working under the authority of special education administrators during the implementation of RTI could be explored. Future research could address the interactions among special education administrators and their staff to determine the effectiveness of NASDE's steps to implement RTI in greater detail.

Although the scope of this study did not include an analysis of actual practices during implementation, qualitative methods such as direct observation, interviews, and focus groups could allow for a comparison between self-reported perceptions and actual practice in the field. These methods could also provide analysis to determine where challenges arise during each step of implementation.

Given that some of the self-reported responses by special education administrators were contrary to the assertions by Fullan (2001), additional research could explore these outcomes further. For example, why is it that special education administrators reject the notion that change cannot be managed or controlled? Special education administrators also rejected Fullan's (2001) notion that decisions should be based upon the experiences of others. A subsequent study to examine these differences may give insight into these differences.

Summary

According to this study, special education administrators overwhelmingly acknowledge the importance of the steps to implement RTI according to NASDSE. Although special education administrators did not agree with all of the statements regarding Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leadership, the majority of participants agree

with concepts related to Moral Purpose, Understanding Change, and Relationship Building. Special education administrators were most likely to encounter challenges with implementing RTI practices with fidelity, co-teaching in general education settings, and staff using adopted policies and procedures.

This study provides information for special education administrators and others who are responsible for leading the implementation of RTI in schools and districts. Special education administrators will need a set of skills to successfully implement RTI, to understand the process of change, and to identify challenges during implementation. Perhaps one of the most important findings of this study suggest that special education administrators should have an in depth knowledge of the process of change, implement a strategic and prescriptive process for RTI based upon a systematic plan to address all district structures, and recognize the challenges that may impede the process along the way.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: July 17, 2013

To: Elizabeth Whitten, Principal Investigator
Derek Cooley, Student Investigator for dissertation
Luchara Wallace, Co- Principal Investigator
Scott Koenigsknecht, Co- Principal Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-06-04

This letter will serve as confirmation that the change to your research project titled "Special Education Leadership and Response to Intervention" requested in your memo received July 16, 2013 [to add statistical consultants Haolai (Lincoln) Jiang and Marianne Di Piero] has been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. 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.

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

Approval Termination: June 24, 2014

251 W. Walwood Hall, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456
PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276

Appendix B

Permission to Use NASDSE's Blueprints for Implementation

derek.r.cooley@wmich.edu
 To: Bill.East@nasdse.org
 Cc: derek.r.cooley@wmich.edu
 Reply-To: derek.r.cooley@wmich.edu
 NASDSE Website - Contact Us Form

April 21, 2013 9:25 PM

Your Name	Derek Cooley
Your Email	derek.r.cooley@wmich.edu
Subject	RTI Survey
Message	<p>Dr. East,</p> <p>My name is Derek Cooley and I am currently working on a dissertation in special education at Western Michigan University. I am studying district level RTI implementation and the leadership characteristics and responsibilities of special education directors. In my own work, I intend to survey all special education administrators in the State of Michigan.</p> <p>I am seeking your permission to adapt the actions published in Response to Intervention: Blueprints for Implementation at the District Level into survey questions for my dissertation.</p> <p>For example, the action "Develop an action plan to facilitate the sharing of information and the building of districtwide consensus to support RTI" would be adapted in survey question form as:</p> <p>Please rate the level of importance of the following actions for RTI implementation:</p> <p>Facilitate the sharing of information and build districtwide consensus to support RTI.</p> <p>Not Important Somewhat Important Very Important Essential</p> <p>If you grant permission, I will fully credit NASDSE in the survey instrument and in my dissertation. I would be glad to share the results with you as well.</p> <p>I contacted Dr. Elliott and she gave me permission as the author and suggested I also contact you regarding copyright permission.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration.</p> <p>Derek Cooley Doctoral Candidate Special Education and Literacy Studies Western Michigan University</p>

Nancy Reder <nancy.reder@nasdse.org>
To: derek.r.cooley@wmich.edu
your email to Bill East

April 23, 2013 5:03 PM

Mr. Cooley: I am responding to your email to Bill East at NASDSE. This email will serve as permission for your request to adapt material from our Response to Intervention District Level Blueprint so long as you credit NASDSE for the material. Thank you for your request. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

N
Nancy Reder
Deputy Executive Director
NASDSE
(703) 519-1506 -- direct dial
www.nasdse.org

Appendix C

Survey Instrument

Please indicate whether the following statements are a leadership challenge when implementing RTI in your school and/or district.					
Statement	Always a Challenge	Often a Challenge	Sometimes a Challenge	Rarely a Challenge	Never a Challenge
37. Staff implementing RTI practices with fidelity.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
38. Staff using adopted policies and/or procedures to implement RTI.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
39. Staff using data to make decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
40. Staff using evidence-based interventions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
41. Staff using research-based curriculum.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
42. Staff accessing professional development for RTI.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
43. Staff collaborating to implement RTI.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
44. Staff having access to adequate resources and/or materials.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
45. Co-teaching in general education settings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Thank you for completing this survey!

*Based upon Fullan's *Framework for Leadership* (2001)
 **Used with permission from NASDSE's *Response to Intervention: Blueprints for Implementation* (2008)

Leadership, Challenges, and the Implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)

Your responses will help to determine what leadership characteristics and responsibilities are exhibited during the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) in your school and/or district. This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential.

Demographics—These questions are for classification purposes only.			
1. What is your gender?	☐ Male	☐ Female	
2. What is your age?	☐ 21 to 30 ☐ 31 to 40	☐ 41 to 50 ☐ 51 to 60	☐ 61 or older
3. What is your highest level of educational attainment?	☐ Bachelors Degree ☐ Masters Degree	☐ Specialists Degree ☐ Doctoral Degree	
4. Total years as a special education administrator.	☐ 0-5 ☐ 6-10	☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20	☐ 21+
5. What is the job title for your current position?	☐ Supervisor of special education ☐ Center-based principal	☐ Director of special education ☐ Planner/monitor	☐ Other
6. What is your district type?	☐ Local public district ☐ ISD/ISSA	☐ Charter	☐ Other

Please continue to next page

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding leadership in your school and/or district. *					
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. Staff should act urgently to implement district-wide initiatives.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Success is measured by winning small and winning often.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. District-wide change can be understood and led, but not controlled or managed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. The quality of staff-to-staff relationships is the most critical factor to create effective district-wide change.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. The quality of staff-to-staff relationships is more important than the effectiveness of district structures and strategies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Leaders must have strong relationships with staff before they can effectively lead them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Knowledge should be created by peers, not by experts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Staff should be judged on the number of experiences they share with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. Decisions should be based on experience more than information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. When in a state of equilibrium, the system is less responsive to change.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Opportunities lead to uncertainty, which results in new solutions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. When solutions aren't clear, change becomes the only solution.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. Improving the quality of how staff work together is equally as important to improving the lives of students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. The level of staff commitment is a reflection of the effectiveness of school/district leadership.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21. The goals of the district should allow staff to achieve their own goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the implementation of RTI in your school and/or district. **				
Statement	Essential	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
22. Develop an action plan to facilitate the sharing of information and the building of district-wide consensus to support RTI.	☐	☐	☐	☐
23. Provide information to internal and external stakeholders about RTI.	☐	☐	☐	☐
24. Examine and define district structures to support your RTI initiative.	☐	☐	☐	☐
25. Build consensus and support from internal and external stakeholders.	☐	☐	☐	☐
26. Form an RTI district leadership team.	☐	☐	☐	☐
27. Identify the roles that district/central administration will play in implementing RTI.	☐	☐	☐	☐
28. Develop and complete a district-level needs assessment.	☐	☐	☐	☐
29. Discuss and make decisions about the necessary components across universal, strategic, and intensive instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐
30. Review and discuss the current performance of all students in relation to universal, strategic, and intensive instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐
31. Identify an evaluation plan and data collection systems.	☐	☐	☐	☐
32. Develop an action plan to guide the implementation of RTI.	☐	☐	☐	☐
33. Develop a multi-year (at least 3-5 years) action plan to address implementation.	☐	☐	☐	☐
34. Implement an RTI professional development plan.	☐	☐	☐	☐
35. Implement an evaluation and data analysis plan for RTI implementation.	☐	☐	☐	☐
36. Maintaining the implementation of RTI.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please continue to next page