THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

By

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ABSTRACT

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The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 spurred sweeping changes in how special education students are identified in the United States. IDEA encourages instructional models that are research-based, and emphasizes the analysis of student progress data prior to special education identification. Response to Intervention (RTI) is at the forefront of these models, and it is currently being implemented across the nation. As schools begin to implement these models, the principal becomes a key figure in determining the success of RTI. Elementary education has a long history of remediating skills as a function of core instruction. Middle schools and high schools, however, tend to be lagging in providing opportunities to remediate student skills such as reading, because teachers are more subject area–oriented and focused on the instructional core (Ratekin, et al.1985). This study examines how middle school principals view the merits of RTI and how external, internal, and environmental pressures affect their perceptions and the implementation of RTI programming in their schools. A clearer understanding of the principal's role in implementing programs such as RTI may help policy-makers develop considerations within policy that support the needs of principals, therefore increasing the likelihood of full policy implementation.

Keywords: Response to Intervention, multi-tiered supports, leadership, school improvement

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: IMPLEMENTING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

In the spring of 2009, the Ingham Intermediate School District (IISD) began an initiative to curb persistent skill deficits among students in all schools within the county. Many students within Ingham County were identified by the IISD to have deficient basic academic skills. The lack of basic academic skills is a common issue among K-12 students across the US, and it is visible on state and national test scores (Batsche, 2006). In Michigan, reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests continually declined from 2002 to 2009 (US Dept. of Education, 2011). In addition, the 2011 Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) showed a decline in seventh grade reading scores, from 82% to 79% (Michigan Dept. of Education, 2011). To address these academic deficits, over the past three years the IISD has committed resources, time, and training to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) programming in all schools. The IISD's goal is to train school principals and teachers how to use RTI strategies to improve the academic skills of all students.

RTI is a program designed to improve reading, writing, and mathematics instruction. Successful implementation of RTI at the secondary level commonly requires schools to reconfigure their master schedules and provide intensive training to instructional staff (Hall, 2007). Using research-based strategies and frequent student performance measures, RTI programming adjusts classroom instruction to the needs of the students (Shapiro, Zigmond, et al., 2011, O'Connor et al., 2012). The adoption of effective RTI programing requires that staff within a school buy into the strategy and work collaboratively to implement it (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012). Faithful adoption also necessitates commitment from district leaders to support the program logistically and fiscally. Principals, however, make decisions that are critical to whether or not RTI is implemented substantively and coherently within a school. Understanding

the reasons why principals might support the implementation of a new policy like RTI, rather than capitalizing on current academic programs, may help future policy makers understand the factors that principals consider when choosing a comprehensive academic program like RTI.

There are some parallels that can be drawn from Cohen and Hill's (2001) study of the implementation of a new mathematics curriculum in California, and the implementation of RTI in Ingham County. Cohen and Hill found that principals and teachers embraced the implementation of the new math curriculum in schools where the state was more intentional in providing trainings and resources. Cohen and Hill's findings suggest that when implementing policy, providing targeted trainings and resources increases the odds that a policy will be implemented as designed. The results of Cohen and Hill suggest that by employing Elmore's (1979) "backwards mapping" strategy in policy design, policy makers may be able to have more control over the outcomes of policy implementation. Using backwards mapping, the policymakers target the point where administrative actions intersect private choices. It is at this intersection that policy design encourages implementation by influencing the actions of administrators through addressing their needs (Elmore, 1979, p. 604). In both California's new math curriculum and the IISD's implementation of RTI, efforts were made to educate administrators by articulating the need for change, and by providing resources and training that would hopefully influence support for implementation.

In the summer of 2009, using funds associated with the Federal the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)[1], the IISD, in collaboration with all 12 superintendents of Ingham County, agreed to use these newly appropriated federal funds to implement RTI in all schools throughout the county (S. Williams, IISD Superintendent Interview, April 19, 2013).

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[1] Economic stimulus funds that were made available to invest in infrastructure, education, health and renewable energy (ARRA, 2009)

The initiative that emanated from the ISD was an effort to combat the number of students who were lacking basic skills across the county. In an interview, the IISD Superintendent said,

> When the AERA dollars became available, we had a Saturday session with superintendents. On Saturday morning we met here, and we pitched it [RTI] ,to the superintendents. With a superintendent like Barry Barnes [Superintendent of a Medium Sized School District in the ISD] who could walk away with $300,000 or $400,000, and Lansing would get a 1 and half to 2 million. But we can take all this money to put together and make it a system-wide approach. So luckily, we have a lot of collaboration in the county, and we had some trust that we could pull this off, and everyone consented.

With this agreement among superintendents, the IISD developed a model for delivering the content to schools through a series of workshops for school leadership teams throughout the school year. The IISD sought to develop the capacity of each school by supporting them with technical assistance through IISD RTI coordinators, who assisted schools in implementing progress-monitoring tools such as AimsWeb[2]. All the county K-12 schools participated in this training and, at the same time, began their involvement with the county RTI initiative. During the school year, sessions were held monthly with two cohorts, an elementary cohort and a secondary cohort, which met exclusively in order to provide grade level appropriate content for participants.

During the second year of implementation, the IISD reported that program implementation within member schools varied significantly. The IISD's RTI program coordinators reported full support for leadership, training, and program coordination throughout the county, yet not all schools had fully implemented RTI programming (ISD Meeting, 2010). Additionally, the IISD RTI coordinator illustrated how the county's student achievement data exposed varying achievement gaps in both fluency and comprehension skills across all schools. With varying

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[2] AimsWeb is a commercial Curriculum Based Measure (CBM) designed as a universal screening and data management platform that supports RTI skill identification and ability grouping. (NCS Pearson, 2014)

results, IISD leaders theorized that some schools implemented RTI as a program fully, adhering to the directed schedule of implementations, while other schools implemented only a few RTI strategies. Given that training and resources were equal among schools, this study theorized that variation of implementation might be due to the principal's actions in carrying out the directives of the IISD.

This study sought to examined how principals' beliefs and attitudes towards RTI policy affect the implementation of RTI programming. Understanding why principals chose to implement RTI as program in ways that led to varying degrees of fidelity provides insight into their understanding of RTI and their perceptions regarding the utility of RTI. I used a theoretical framework rooted in Hawley's (1950) *Social Ecological Theory*, which applied ecological principles to the organization to uncover the rationale and influence behind the actions of organizational leaders. From Hannan and Freeman (1977) to Hannan, Pólos, et al. (2007), the study of organizational ecology has been used to explain how organizations emerge, prosper, and decline. In organizational ecology, external and internal pressures affect the decisions and behaviors of actors in organizations, which subsequently determine whether and how organizations change or improve. Stemming from the rich research history utilizing organizational ecology to examine leadership, this study introduces an ecological framework derived from Hannan and Freeman's (1993) ecological theory of organizational change to describe the relationship among variable conditions that principals must interpret when facing new policy initiatives.

Principals have established relationships among staff within the school, which facilitates a level of cooperation. Principals are sensitive to maintaining this established level of cooperation in order to preserve a positive building climate, and therefore perpetuate the momentum of the

school. To support RTI positively and incorporate its associated programs, the principal has to believe that RTI will have pay-off or benefit for students within their school (Spillane, 1997, Leithwood et al., 2002). This study attempts to clarify how school principals rationalize RTI in their social-ecological context.

This belief that RTI will pay off is influenced by how principals weigh their own beliefs, values, and judgments and the potential benefits that may result from a policy like RTI (Heck 1992). These personal attributes influence the context, from which principals' view potential change in their environment; therefore the principal's context impacts the overall support for new policies and/or initiatives (Lipsky, 1980). Stein and Nelson (2003) suggested that successful policy implementation in an organization depends on sufficient knowledge capacity, appropriate learning opportunities, and ongoing support for implementation. It remains unclear how a policy like RTI can uniformly generate a capacity of knowledge that will convince school principals to redirect the course of educational programming within their schools. The IISD RTI committee believed they provided leadership in a manner that provided clear school and administrative support (IISD Meeting, 2010). They felt they had demonstrated the need for RTI and had provided the resources and professional development needed for successful implementation. And yet, variation in implementation resulted across the county schools. Further research is needed to understand if and why principals made decisions that varied the intensity and fidelity of RTI implementation, despite extensive and uniform professional development experiences. This study has the potential to illuminate ways in which principals can amplify or dampen the magnitude of RTI's effects.

Heck has indicated that "the principal's instructional leadership is assumed to depend on the principal's own beliefs and value preferences, and organizational and political variables

associated with the school and community context" (Heck, 1992, p. 22). Contextual factors such as pressures from the district, community, and staff can play a significant role in shaping the decisions principals make, particularly with a program such as RTI, which demands substantive changes in the operational routines of the school.

To understand better how these influences and beliefs impact how principals implement RTI, this study sought to answer the research questions below.

Research Question

How do different pressures on the organization influence middle school principals' implementation of RTI?

- How do external conditions and principals' beliefs, values, and judgments affect their decisions about RTI implementation?

- How do principals' perceptions of organizational stability and momentum influence their decisions about RTI implementation?

- How do principals' perceptions of organizational capacity influence their decisions about RTI implementation?

The over-arching question of this study was designed to uncover the organizational influences or pressures that affect how principals implement RTI. These influences included but were not limited to influences emanating from the district, the staff, the community, and principals' own perceptions and beliefs about RTI and the goals of education. This study sought to identify these influences and to explain their significance in relation to how RTI programing was ultimately implemented in schools.

The sub-questions were designed to dig deeper into specific influences or considerations that contextualized RTI in the principals' school setting. The external conditions or pressures to

improve the school, combined with the principals' own beliefs, values, and judgments, affected administrative decisions that may have influenced the level of support principals have for RTI as an educational strategy. Also, the climate and academic environment of the school could impact whether principals perceives RTI as a worthwhile effort in lieu of programs that already exist. In addition, the capacity of the staff, as in their cumulative talents and abilities, also impacts the school's ability to support RTI and the associated programming. Lastly, within the capacity of staff, the principal's ability to organize staff through existing relationships with both staff and the school community may impact how principals move RTI implementation forward.

All of these nuances that surround this studies' guiding questions somehow play a role in the ultimate implementation of RTI. These questions were the focus of every step and procedure that encompassed this study. Through these questions, this study was able to focus on specific factors and conditions that influenced how principals implemented RTI.

Through the Social Ecological Theory Lens: The Principal and RTI Implementation

Principals have to deal with various organizational tensions when faced with new policies (Hope, 2002). The principal understands that new policies create anxiety among teachers and staff. Some of these anxieties come from the notion of "change," but the idea of "shifting priorities" and redirecting resources can also create anxiety (Spillane, 1997; Hope, 2002). Understanding that teachers are less effective when they feel stress or anxiety, principals will seek to minimize teacher anxiety in order to preserve productivity (Smit, 2005). By applying social ecological principles, school principals can weigh whether the policy's potential for improving the organization outweighs the organizational disruption that may occur during its implementation.

Principals experience internal and external pressures that influence their decisions, which subsequently impact the direction of the organization. Figure 1, derived from the work of Hannan and Freeman (1993), illustrates how principals interact with these external and internal

FIGURE 1. Social Ecological Theory Model

Social Ecological Theory
The Principal's Need to Protect the Organization
and
The Principal's Desire to Improve the School

The Principal's Considerations
The School's capacity for change/improvement
and School's institutional momentum

Principal

Federal, State, and ISD Compliance

External Pressures

Enviroment

Legitimacy of RTI v. Existing Programs

Internal Pressures

Information from Teachers & Specialist

pressures. External, internal, and environmental pressures influence the considerations that principals have towards a new policy like RTI. Referring to Figure 1, the *external pressures* to adopt RTI come from both the federal and the state levels. As a regulatory act, RTI adoption is not a decision made solely by the principal. The principal experiences a considerable amount of pressure associated with government regulations, culminating with the eventual need to provide evidence of compliance. In addition, the principal must contend with the *internal pressures* from teachers and specialists who hold their own views and motivations regarding RTI. These pressures can be opposing forces, so that the principal has to decide which opinions to consider, against the potential positive or negative results for supporting or rejecting these opinions.

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Lastly, the pressures from the environment ultimately hinge on the merits of RTI versus the existing programs, and the perceived potential affects on the existing inertia or resistance to change within the school. This study sought to identify and describe how these pressures played into the principal's considerations of implementing RTI. These pressures have the potential to influence not only the principal, but also the whole school organization, through the direction-setting of the principal (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Jantzi, 2002). The pressures can also be reciprocal influences of strategic interactions among principals and teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 2010, p.228).

Though considering the principal as the key actor in policy implementation, district leadership is also needed, both to support and to encourage principals in implementing RTI. Districts must demonstrate their support of RTI by providing guidance, structures, and frameworks that support RTI initiatives in their school. This effort by the district reinforces the value and priority of RTI in the eyes of the principal and teachers as well (O'Connor et al., 2012). Hannan and Freeman (1993) argued that in order for new programs to become implemented in an organization, such as a school, elements of the program must make it through the leaders or the principal's protective filter of influences that leaders utilize to protect the organization. The district or other outside source has to convince the principal that a program like RTI will improve and not stall the school's current progress. Hannan and Freeman (1993) suggest that organizations rarely change their fundamental structural features; rather, the organization adapts to incorporate new demands.

A caveat to considering a school as an organization is that ultimately the school reports to the school district. District-level support is a necessity in successful RTI implementation (O'Connor et al., 2012). The district has to be able to acknowledge the degree of change the

school will have to undertake to implement RTI, but then it also must demonstrate to the principal how it can support these changes so that no harm comes to the school as an organization. In this study, the district can be seen acting as both an external and internal pressure in the case of RTI. The external pressures are obvious when you consider the typical organizational levels, in that the district holds a school accountable. However, in this study, it was found that some principals expressed a desire for more district support with RTI, specifically with technical issues such as data management.

For RTI, adaptation does not result in sufficient organizational change. Fundamental procedures and organizational structures need to change to effectively implement necessary interventions (Hall, 2007). Hall describes the implementation of RTI as a process that requires a large degree of change (Hall, p.18, 2007). The changes include moving away from random scheduling of students, to scheduling groups of students into skill-specific courses, creating common instructional methods for all subjects when addressing vocabulary and textual content, and creating mechanisms for monitoring individual students' progress in specific skill areas as they proceed through the school year. In essence, the remaining tasks those schools do throughout the year are created to work around RTI as a program, rather than adapt RTI to fit into existing practices. Thus, implementing RTI with faithfulness requires fundamental shifts in how schools organize to educate students. Essentially, using RTI refocuses schools from the traditional needs of cohorts or grade levels of students, to a focus on the individual needs of all students.

For principals and teachers, this is a dramatic shift in looking at curriculum and instruction. Instead of looking at the grade level appropriateness of curriculum and mapping the scope and sequence of curriculum accordingly, RTI suggests that while a broad curricular

approach is a necessary guide or target, the unit of analysis is individual students. RTI requires teachers to analyze frequent assessments of each student, and then adjust practices in order to revisit content and remediate if necessary. Ideally, teachers use differentiated strategies in core instruction; but for students that need more support than can be accommodated by tier I, teachers must coordinate tier II and possibly III interventions with other staff. This more focused approach to assessing student learning, offering re-teaching, and interaction with building-wide remediation programs is a shift from traditional teacher responsibilities.

For successful implementation, the structure of the school must evolve to facilitate this change. This evolution must incorporate the various stakeholders in the planning stages to develop support for change that fully embraces RTI. Hall is very clear in her opinion that principals must be advocates for RTI programming to be successful (Hall, 2007), articulating four key elements of RTI implementation: prevent rather than wait-to-fail; intervene early rather than remediate later; identify all at risk students through universal screening; and meet the needs of all students through tiered instruction. Smith, Johnson, and Harris (2009) criticized policies that lack impact due to "piecemeal change." Piecemeal change occurs when implementers pick and choose which components of a policy they want to put in place, with an eye to buffering efforts already underway. This cherry-picking of policy components and piecing them into existing efforts can never be as effective as systematic reform (Smith, Johnson, et al., 2009).

Extensive staff involvement is required for faithful and effective implementation, due to the continuous involvement in instructional training, progress monitoring, and student grouping. According to The National Center on Response to Intervention (2011), "Implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) involves significant shifts for many people and elements within schools" (p. 1). Often schools must reconfigure their master schedule and staffing assignments to

facilitate RTI programming (Hall, 2007). Commonly, secondary schools choose either to implement Tiers II and III as courses within the school schedule. The state of Michigan's guidance document for MTSS-RTI directs schools to federally funded websites, such as rti4success.org and centerforinstruction.org, which details research regarding how schools have implemented the Tiered supports of RTI. The National Center on Response to Intervention (2011) found that overwhelmingly middle schools implementing RTI utilize an elective format for providing tiered instruction, though a subset of schools shorten classes to create a new class period devoted to RTI (p.4). High schools often act to minimize disruption to existing school programs, and in so doing, they focus mainly on Tier II and Tier III students, because this strategy can be managed in elective hours with specialized teachers, (National High School Center, 2010). To be clear, RTI interventions scheduled as electives do not interrupt the regular instructional practices in all classrooms as is the case when interventions are managed within Tier I instruction.

Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2012), however, cautioned that no amount of Tier II and III can make up for weak Tier I programming. Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2012) stated that an increasing number of schools continue to add Tier II and II interventions instead of focusing on improved Tier I in core instruction. Mattos referred to a quote from Joanne Talbot (Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan 2010); "Administrators and leaders at all systems levels will need to revisit tendencies toward bureaucratic habits of mind and strategies and invent new ones, adapted to their particular system context, that are grounded in approaches to system change," to illustrate how schools too often choose to add intervention courses instead of addressing the issues associated with an ineffective core (p. 570).

With the breadth and depth of materials, professional development, master schedule

changes, and restructuring that is needed fully to implement the program; RTI should prove to be

more effective in impacting student achievement than less-systematic reforms. In fact, extensive

prior planning of professional development, delivery systems, and resource procurement has to

be performed thoroughly and carefully. These needs then have to be articulated by the principals

through out the organization prior to any implementation (NASDS, 2006). It should be

understood that if principals use piecemeal elements of RTI in an attempt to adapt the program to

current practices, the overall effectiveness of RTI would be reduced. The principal's

commitment to RTI and the level of detail he or she puts into the fidelity of implementation are

determining factors of the overall success of RTI implementation. The more that principals

support RTI, and understand the need to make the program foundational for all other programs,

the more productive RTI implementation will be. However, if principals take a passive approach

and do not fully support RTI as the school's foundational program, implementation is likely to be

much weaker (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. Examining Principals Interaction Within an Ecological Framework
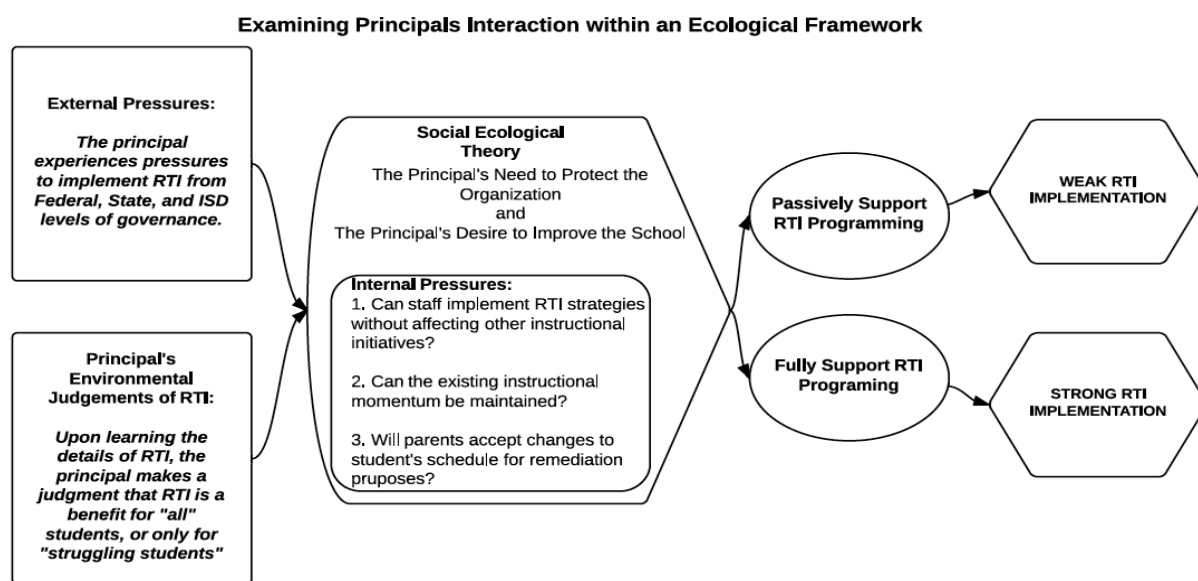
Figure 2 details the struggle that principals face when considering how RTI fits into their

school as a new program. Under the ecological theory, leaders inherently want what is best for their organization (Hannan & Freeman, 1993). The task for the principal then becomes to weigh the benefits from RTI against the potential that it could disrupt the momentum and success of current interventions that are already taking place. The outcome of this decision will affect whether the principal will fully support making RTI a foundational program within their school, or if he or she will passively support the program by implementing a few components as long as they don't interfere with existing programming.

Shapiro and Zigmond (2011) studied three models of RTI implementation to examine if the intentions of the models were realized after the program was implemented. They looked at programs implemented in Pittsburgh, Minnesota, and Oregon. In these studies, they found that the level of commitment by all involved must be exceedingly high, and there must be a sizable effort to monitor student progress data to help ensure success (Shapiro, Zigmond, et al., 2011). The studies also illuminated the potential for power struggles between different groups within the organization, and the effect leadership can have in creating cohesiveness between the groups (Shapiro, Zigmond, et al., 2011, p.391). In essence, the principal plays the roles of both implementer and mediator, and must balance the influences of new programs in a way that does not disrupt the overall function of the school. These studies help foreshadow the need to understand the perspectives and perceptions held by building principals in order to give context to their efforts in implementing RTI programming.

Strengths and Limitations of Research

One crucial limitation of RTI research rests with the fact that the most intensive strategies are given to the most skill-deficient students, making it difficult to discern a clear relationship between the intensity and effectiveness of RTI (Wanzek &Vaughn, 2007). In other words,

continually testing only at-risk or potential special education students, as opposed to a normative

group of general education students, skews the research data for how effective RTI would be for

all students. Another factor that is not included in the research is how the quality of instruction

affects the general education students outside of the scope of RTI. Much has been done for

students who need intensive support, but research is nonexistent on instruction for gifted and

talented students. Another limitation is in regard to teacher effectiveness. There is currently no

research that examines teacher quality and RTI instruction. The variation of instructional abilities

between teachers may also produce variations in program implementation. All of these are

outside the scope of this research. The focus for this study is on the decisions principals make in

implementation and the reasons for making them.

Theoretical Framework

To describe the process in which leaders considers decisions that affect their organization,

many scholars have utilized social ecological theory to describe the factors that leaders consider

before taking action (Hawley, 1950; Hannan & Freeman, 1993; Aldrich & Ruef, 2006; Hannan,

Pólos, et al., 2007; Petrides & Guiney, 2002). As school principals consider how RTI may affect

their school, the application of social ecology can help shed light on the tensions that exist in

principals' decision for whether to support RTI and the changes necessary to ensure the

program's success.

With the relationship between policy and the principal's actions in mind, the ecology of

theories developed by Hannan and Freeman (1993) help explain the ways in which a leader or

principal incorporates ideas and implements change while preserving the integrity of the

organization. A principal can be protective of his or her school, which means they also

subsequently filters information and outside directives in what is perceived to be the best interest

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of the organization. These filters conversely can also create barriers for change by withholding

information and motivations necessary to enact improvements (Lussier & Achua, 2009).

Principals have two overarching competing interests within the ecology of the school

environment: the principal's need to protect the organization, and the principal's desire to

improve the school, govern the actions a principal may take when considering a new school-wide

program. These two factors sometimes can be at odds with each other. As a principal wishes to

improve the school, he/she will be very selective in deciding what methods will promote

improvement without doing harm to the organization in an unintended manner. Conversely, in an

effort to protect the organization, the principal will be careful not to stunt the progress of the

school.

Within Figure 3, the school's capacity for change and the school's instructional

momentum, are principals' primary considerations of new policies when balancing the benefits

of a new program like RTI, and the potential disruption to the school the program may have.

FIGURE 3. Social Ecological Theory

External Pressures:

The principal experiences pressures to implement RTI from Federal, State, and ISD levels of governance.

Principal's Environmental Judgements of RTI:

Upon learning the details of RTI, the principal makes a judgment that RTI is a benefit for "all" students, or only for "struggling students"

Social Ecological Theory
The Principal's Need to Protect the Organization
and
The Principal's Desire to Improve the School

Internal Pressures:
1. Can staff implement RTI strategies without affecting other instructional initiatives?

2. Can the existing instructional momentum be maintained?

3. Will parents accept changes to student's schedule for remediation pruposes?

When the principal makes decisions that create changes with in a school, the school's organizational capacity for change and the possible effects the change will have on the school's existing programming become a part of the criteria for choosing whether or not to support RTI. When outside policy forces exert pressures, such as external pressures from government requirements or district directives, principals may choose not to support the policy if they believe the policy could impact the school negatively. However, the level of the principal's support will likely be considerably more if the program is understood to improve the effectiveness of the school. This example demonstrates that these pressures or influences can be positive pressures if help the principal embraces the new policy, or negative pressures that could generate resistance.

As Hannan and Freeman (1993) suggest, leaders protect their organization from outside forces that threaten the school's direction, momentum, or inertia. Schools are at different levels of achievement, but they are also grounded in communities with their own interests. When applying ecological theory, the principal will consider all of the effects that implementing a new program will cause within the school, while also considering how it may impact the community. Within ecological theory, the leader is only interested in the impact on the community if they

FIGURE 4. A Visual Representation of the Hannan and Freeman's (1993) Inertia Theory

A Visual Representation of the Hannan and Freeman's (1993) Inertia Theory
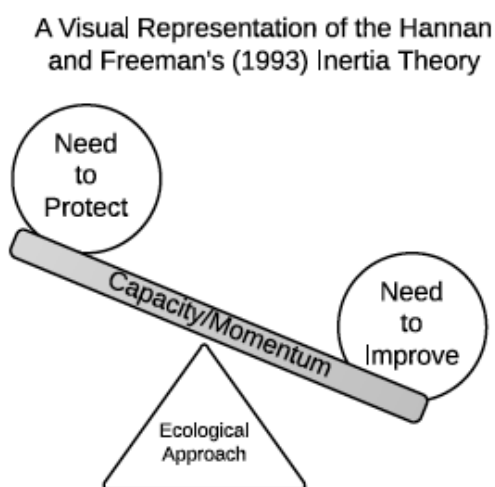
perceive a response that will affect the organization. For example, with RTI, restructuring how instruction is delivered will affect teachers and students by the required modification of the daily routine. Conversely, parents will have an opinion regarding how the changes affect their child. The principal will react to the positive and negative pressures to change by weighing the necessary changes and the possible disruptions to the organizational structure that the changes might create, in order to decide if the benefit outweighs the overall potential negative impact to the school. It is the influence of the principal implementing policies in schools that led this study to develop a theoretical framework based on Hannan and Freeman's (1993) ecological theory of organizational change. Petrides and Guiney (2002) have further explained the ecological process of knowledge management. They explained the process in the context of actions and/or tasks that must be performed in service of the organization. They describe the three actions as the examination of the "plethora" of data they collect. Then, these managers transform the data into meaningful information, and they then decide how or if the data becomes knowledge to sustain thoughtful educational decision-making (Petrides & Guiney, 2002, p.1703). Ultimately, by examining this ecological process, this study uncovers how principals' understanding of RTI influences their support of RTI programming implementation in their school. The principal must weigh the benefits to the school against the potential for disruption to the current progress of the school (Figure 4). As schools continue to improve, the principal is continually challenged to maintain balance between the need to protect and the need to improve.

Contributions to Educational Research and Policy

Researching RTI implementation is also important in further understanding how principals reach decisions to support and implement policy. With new policies like RTI, the level of implementation fidelity can influence shifts in schools' organizational and instructional

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foundations. Learning the ways in which principals understand and relate to RTI implementation may shed some light on how principals react in general to new policy demands.

The principal's rationale for supporting policy should be examined in conjunction with the influences of the political climate. Community pressures on the principal should also be explored, along with how the institutional history of the school affects the principal's decision-making. By designing a study that examines the principal's perceptions of these various influences, the relationship between influences and decision-making can become more clearly understood. By developing a well-defined understanding of the influences on a principal's decision-making process, their motivations and the decisions they make may be better understood.

As stated earlier, Elmore (1979) said that backwards mapping is a much better method for designing policy because the design can account for more issues that arise at the site of implementation. Since Elmore's assertion, there still is little evidence that policy makers pay enough attention to site implementation issues. By gaining more insight into the thoughts and feelings middle school principals have regarding RTI, policy makers may gain a better perspective or how principals, as key role players, affect RTI implementation.

In addition to learning more about how principals process policy, it may be possible to design policy in order to improve implementation by developing stronger principal support and knowledge of RTI, with the probable outcome of more effective implementation. With a clear understanding of RTI, principals may become more supportive of RTI as program if the necessary knowledge and training is more targeted and specific to building principals. With well-designed and -supported RTI programming, students may increasingly attain the benefits of targeted interventions.

Researcher's Role

      I conducted this study in my capacity as a partial member in this administrative community. As a former middle school principal in Ingham County, I have participated in many of the RTI trainings sessions offered by the IISD. Although I was a principal of a school in Ingham County, this school as been excluded for this study.   I no longer am employed or have regular contact with the schools included in this study; however I do know some of the participants. Rather than think of my former role only as a constraint of this study, I believe my prior role as a principal in Ingham County helped me gain access to both sites and participants. My goal as I conducted this research was to limit my own experience and background from influencing my interpretations and assumptions presented in this study.

CHAPTER 2: RTI BACKGROUND AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

To appreciate fully how principals influence the implementation of RTI, two understandings were particularly helpful. First, it should be understood that RTI is a policy that is intended to improve the way students are taught basic reading and math skills (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). Through the use of progress-monitoring techniques, students are continually exposed to targeted instructional interventions aimed at closing skill deficits among all students (Batsche, 2006). Second, to implement RTI effectively, principals must be willing to reevaluate current curricular offerings (Hall, 2007). Implementing RTI as a program requires a different approach to how students are instructed, scheduled into courses, and tested throughout the school year (Hall, 2007). Investigating the role principals' play in RTI policy implementation and how they respond to internal and external pressures, this study sought to understand principals' perceptions, values, and beliefs regarding RTI.

A wealth of literature exists that examines how policy-makers formulate policy to encourage implementation within school districts. Unfortunately, there is less research that focuses on the importance of the principal in policy implementation. There is, however, a great deal of research about the principal as a leader and reformer in the context of school improvement. This research can be generalized to the principal as a policy implementer when set in the context of the principal as an agent seeking continuous improvement for his or her school. It is in this context that research can inform and explain how principals implement reform policies like RTI.

Hope (2002) described principals as policy initiators, innovators, motivators, calculators, and communicators who are "indispensable" when it comes to policy implementation (Hope, 2002, p. 40). Principals are a major influencing factor in the implementation of policy, and their

willingness to embrace and support elements of a new policy is critical to bringing the policy into reality (Hope, 2002; Kurns & Tilly, 2008). Many researchers like Coburn (2006b) have examined the role of the principal in policy implementation, but have stopped short of really examining how the principal thinks about policy implementation.

This study utilized research regarding the role of principals as organizational leaders and their roles in policy implementation. This research, in turn, was applied to the ecological theory to help explain the considerations and decisions principals experience as they face new policies. In this chapter, I discuss the background of RTI in order to provide the context and intentions of RTI. With the RTI context in mind, the connections to policy are explained in addition to the framework of this study, which is based on social ecological theory. Finally, the framework is explained through the research that guides the thinking about principals as policy implementers.

RTI Background

RTI was developed over the past two decades by special education researchers and others to assist with reading and mathematics instructional, though reading is commonly its primary focus. RTI is a systematic method of instruction that requires the use of research-based strategies and frequent progress monitoring of student performance data, in order to assist students with specific skill improvements (Shapiro, Zigmond, et al., 2011).

Although RTI contains very few new teaching techniques, it does emphasize comprehensive data collection methods and student progress monitoring to inform the ability grouping of students. With an emphasis on remediation of skills, RTI requires teachers to adopt new instructional practices that are more child-specific, as well as to receive targeted training specific to skill-remediation (Batsche, 2006). These new instructional practices are often perceived by teachers to be at odds with the core curriculum that they are required to teach

(King, et al., 2012; O'Brien, et al.; 1990, Ratekin, et al.; 1985). When subject area teachers are asked to teach outside of their areas of expertise, such as teaching basic skills like reading, they tend to resist (Bintz, 1997). This resistance is often attributed to a lack of confidence in teaching outside of their subject area, or to a belief that teaching reading is not their responsibility (Ratekin et al., 1985; & O'Brien, et al., 1990). The combination of teachers feeling that they have limited time to teach their core content and in some cases a resistance to teaching remedial skills such as reading, further complicates the implementation of RTI interventions.

Some of the resistance to teaching these much-needed remedial skills may, in fact, be related to the perception of RTI as a special education program. RTI has roots in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which aimed at reducing the number of special education students (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). To understand the role of special education in RTI, we first need to look at the history of special education.

Special education was established in 1975 with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (US Congress, 1986). Since then, special education participation has tripled, from two percent to six percent nationally (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), with some schools registering far higher levels. For example, in 2009 none of the schools in this study had a special education enrollment of less than 9% of the total student population (Michigan Department of Education, 2014). In 2008, the federal government spent $19.23 billion on special education in the US and 11.9 billion in 2013 (US Dept. of Education, 2014). The extremely high and rising cost of special education across the nation spurred efforts to find alternative ways to assist students and perhaps prevent them from requiring special education services. With this in mind, RTI programming is currently being used as a tool to help reduce the number of special

education students across the US.

IDEA and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

The recent policy push for RTI stems in great part from the passage of IDEA in 2004. In IDEA of 2004, federal legislators specified language that expressly permits but does not require RTI for identified students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). This legislation changed the status of the discrepancy model, which was the existing process of identifying students who demonstrated a gap between their IQ and their academic performance, as measured by testing and academic achievement. Under this new legislation, the state could decide if they wanted to use or prohibit the discrepancy model and use RTI instead (Zirkel, 2009).

The discrepancy model had been the standard for identifying and certifying special education students. Over time, however, research has indicated that implementation of the discrepancy model lacks uniformity and often identifies students too late in their educational careers. Over the past decade, the discrepancy model began to be associated with the "wait to fail" model of special education identification (Moore-Brown, 2005). In the "wait to fail" model, students have to demonstrate repeatedly the inability to perform at grade level. Moore-Brown (2005) stated that the repetition of failure tends to leads to an administrative decision to pursue special education services.

RTI has become more attractive than the "wait to fail" or discrepancy model for two reasons. First, the large amount of data gathered from formative and summative assessments, which are a part of the RTI process, illuminate in greater detail the specific skill deficits that students have. Additionally, if targeted interventions are given to a student early on, it is possible that the student may never need special education services (Haar, J. et al., 2008).

RTI: How the Program Works

The IDEA of 2004 gave states the flexibility to either use the discrepancy model or a

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports model (MTSS) as the basis for identifying students who

require special education services. IDEA was then revised in 2006 to include modifications

requiring states to allow public schools to utilize multi-tiered supports, e.g., RTI, as a tool in the

process of evaluation and certification of special educations students (U.S. Dept. of Education,

2006). Specifically, section 614(b)(6)(B) states, "In determining whether a child has a specific

learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child

responds to scientific, research-based intervention as part of the evaluation procedures" (U.S.

FIGURE 5. Response to Intervention/Multi-Tier System of Supports

Response-to-Intervention   Multi-Tier System of Supports
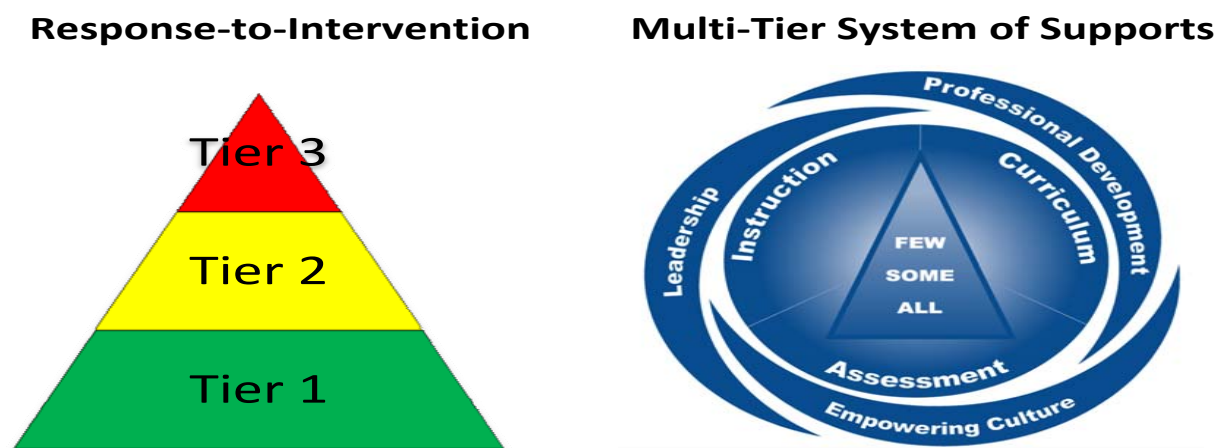
Dept. of Education, 2006). This simple sentence is the root of the modern intervention movement

that has changes the ways schools should provide special and general education services in the

future.

As schools sought multi-tiered support models to comply with these new federal special

education requirements, RTI became the leading multi-tiered program across the country

(Kame'enui, 2007). To encourage schools to implement RTI or MTSS over the discrepancy

model, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Intervention Act (IDEIA) 2006 also made an

allowance for schools to use up to 15% of their federal special education funding for early childhood interventions (Moore-Brown, 2005). As mentioned earlier, early interventions tend to assist students in skill development that may thwart the need for special education services later in life. Incredibly, MTSS programs such as RTI are beginning to help close student achievement gaps found throughout schools across the United States (Bowling, T., & Cummings, F., 2009). Using RTI as a form of identification marks a shift from an early identification process to a more general instructional process across all school levels. Currently, RTI is often used interchangeably with MTSS, which features many of the academic supports found in RTI, but goes beyond RTI by focusing on additional student supports, such as behavioral interventions. MTSS was developed by the state of Kansas's Department of Education (Kansas Department of Education, 2009). Both RTI and No Child Left Behind (2001) influenced the design of the MTSS model (Figure 5). MTSS seeks to incorporate all learners and is not specific to special education, the student population with which RTI is commonly associated. The MTSS model aims to support all students at all levels of learning through the development of a systematic process of support that encompasses both academic and behavioral concerns (Kansas Department of Education, 2009). In a sense, the development and notoriety of the MTSS process has increased the popularity of RTI with the model association, since both share the goal of improving student achievement by focusing on data and skill development. Often when education professionals refer to MTSS, they use the term *RTI*. Traditionally RTI only focuses on the academic side of student achievement, whereas MTSS also incorporates behavioral interventions.[3] This distinction between academics and behavior establishes the boundaries of the

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[3] Traditionally RTI only focuses on student achievement, however emerging are some new models that also include behavior (Buffum, A.G., Mattos, M., & Weber, C. 2012).

proposed research, since I did not inquire about how principals think about behavior-related implementation.

As of 2011, 43 states allow RTI or other methods of determining special education eligibility including the discrepancy model, and seven states require RTI exclusively (NCRI, 2012). With support from three major education associations, Spectrum K–12 School Solutions conducted a national survey of 1,306 district administrators, with the intent to assess the implementation of RTI throughout the United States A national survey performed by Spectrum K–12 School Solutions found that of 1,306 district administrators, 94% indicated that their schools were at some stage of implementation of RTI. Of these district administrators, 24% said that they have reached full implementation, and 88% of these administrators said that they use RTI for early intervention services and supports. This report demonstrates that RTI implementation is underway nationally, and that implementation is uneven, but it does not necessarily illuminate how RTI as a program vary from school to school (Spectrum, 2011).

Commonly, secondary schools choose to implement RTI Tiers II and III as intervention courses within the school schedule. The state of Michigan's guidance document for MTSS-RTI directs schools to federally funded websites which detail research regarding how schools have implemented the Tiered supports of RTI. (See, for instance, rti4success.org and centerforinstruction.org). Middle schools generally utilize an elective format for providing tiered instruction, while other schools shorten classes to create a new class period devoted to RTI (NCRI, 2011, p.4). Evidence has shown that high schools often act to minimize disruption to existing school programs, and so doing, focus mainly on Tier II and Tier III students because this strategy can be managed in elective hours with specialized teachers (National High School Center, 2010).

RTI and General Education Students

RTI is essentially an early detection model for identifying students who are lagging in skill development in comparison to expected development benchmarks (Brown, 2008; Gersten, & Dimino, 2006). Emphasis thus far has been on literacy interventions; however, mathematics is slowly becoming a focus of RTI programming as well. To identify deficiencies, schools categorize student achievement data into three levels, using a series of tests (known as *universal screeners*) that evaluate basic skills such as fluency and comprehension. Using this data, students are then are then divided into three groups based on ability levels. This process of testing and grouping students requires a huge amount of cooperation among school personnel such as administrators, specialists, and teachers. Because many of these tests are given in a one-on-one method, volunteers are usually trained to assist with the testing, and students have to be slotted in for testing appointments. This process requires much planning and staff development. Schools typically devote professional development time to developing an RTI process within the organization.

The first level of RTI's tiered intervention is identified as tier I. In tier I, students need some or no academic interventions to maintain grade-level work. This work is often done in core classrooms, and it requires teachers to deliver core curriculum with specific research-based strategies. In many cases, teachers are not asked to teach more content; instead, they are asked to teach their standard content with targeted instructional strategies or methods of delivery.

Tier II identifies students who need more specific and intense instruction. This instruction is often delivered to students in small groups, in addition to the instruction they receive in general core classes. Tier II students are sorted through testing data, such as fluency and universal comprehension screeners (tests). Tier III, the final level, consists of students who need

the most support. These students typically have a learning disability and require small group or one-on-one instruction, using a research-based program designed for their specific deficiencies. For students to move down from one tier to another tier, they must demonstrate proficiency on a variety of targeted assessments (Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2006). Student achievement is also continually monitored throughout the year to assure the intervention strategies are appropriate and effective by frequently monitoring the progress of each individual student. By using RTI instructional strategies, classroom teachers become more accustomed to viewing instruction as an individualistic process rather than as a group process. Teachers are more aware of students' academic deficiencies and can adjust their lesson planning throughout the year to help improve academic achievement.

RTI can be thought of in a step-by-step paradigm. Step one involves testing all students with "screeners," or formative assessments, which flag specific skill deficiencies. Step two involves a process in which data teams synthesize the data by looking at trends for groups and individual students. Step three involves identifying which intervention levels students and groups fall in. Step four requires the identification of research-based strategies that align with the specific needs of the students and/or groups. Step five is the delivery of instruction with staff that has had appropriate training. Finally, data is collected from frequent testing and is generated as teachers monitor progress during the instructional process. The data team decides on necessary changes in instruction and level of services, and it subsequently adjusts student instructional placements.

It is important to remember as the process takes place that much coordination is needed between multiple teachers who are providing general instruction and those who are providing different targeted interventions. Such coordination puts pressure on the administration and

planning of the master schedule. For example, in order for all students to have flexibility in their

schedule to participate in intervention-oriented classes, a time of the day needs to be blocked out

that allows students to be easily scheduled in and out, based on their progress. To do this, teacher

schedules have to be planned around this time to ensure that there is sufficient teaching staff

available to instruct the intervention classes. Additionally, supplies and materials needed for

instruction need to be made available.

Recent policy initiatives in Michigan have brought pressure on schools to improve the

overall levels of student test proficiency and to reduce achievement gaps between identified

subgroups.[4] When looking at the achievement gap between students, there is also hope that RTI

can prevent students from being placed in special education when they could better be served

with the targeted interventions that are included in RTI programming. Particularly in urban

settings, students are often placed into special education through misidentification (Garcia, &

Ortiz, 2006). Additionally, students of low-income families are also disproportionately placed

into special education due to their lack of demonstrated skills (Donovan & Cross 2002). Special

education programming is intended for students with disabilities; however, the increased

inclusion of minority and low-income students in this programming is a disservice to all

students. Minority students may feel inferior when improper placements are made, leading to a

more negative attitude towards school. Ladson-Billings (1995) also believes that instruction

tends to ignore cultural assets that minority students possess in the absence of culturally relevant

curriculum. This absence of cultural relevance to students can attribute to perceptions of

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[4] The State of Michigan, through a federal waiver for NCLB 2001, has placed sanctions on school identified as Priority schools. Priority schools are those identified in the bottom 5% of schools based on statewide testing data. The second group of schools are Focus schools which are schools, with a significant gap between high and low achieving students based on statistical testing data (MI Dept. of Education Waiver, 2012).

education deficits among these students. Additionally, special education services have become diluted for the students they are actually intended for, and minority and low-income students receive services that are not designed for their particular deficiencies (Patton, 1998). In essence, special education services are designed for students who have difficulty learning, not necessarily for students who have the ability to learn but have skill deficits influenced by socioeconomic factors.

When students are placed in special education, they can become reliant on the additional help. Teachers also often assume that these students will always need additional help. The assumption of a student's inability to do work creates an atmosphere of inhibited academic success that surrounds the students (Patton, 1998). RTI and early interventions could possibly prevent a student from being placed in special education altogether.

RTI in Michigan: Not required but implied with guidance from the department of education

In Michigan, RTI is not required for special education certification of students. However, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) lists RTI as an allowable special education certification tool. In 2011, Michigan's Department of Education issued a framework document aiming to define what RTI is in Michigan and how it is tied to special education and school improvement requirements. In this document, the Michigan Continuous School Improvement Process (MCSIP) detailed the process of organizing schools in order to analyze data and develop a comprehensive and continuous improvement plan (Michigan Department of Education MCIPS, 2011). To assist schools in making these changes, MCSIP details a comprehensive framework for the use of RTI and/or MTSS programs in public schools (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. What is the Relationship Between Continuous School Improvement and
Response to Intervention: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports
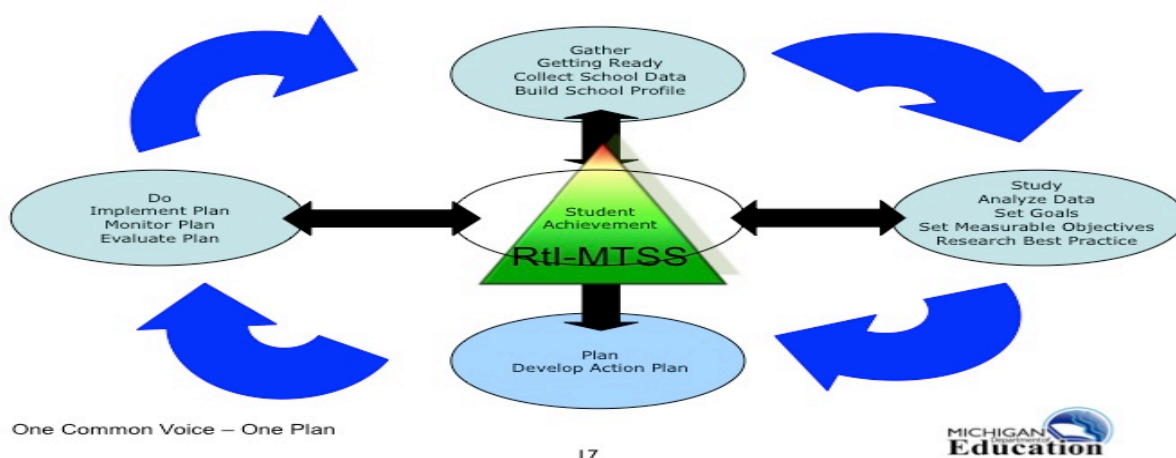
The RTI-MTSS framework also aligns with the School Improvement Process (SIP) Indicators

framework (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. Michigan's School Improvement Framework

All schools must complete the SIP Indicators framework in order to be eligible to achieve

Adequate Yearly Progress, or *AYP* (Michigan Department of Education Framework, 2006). In

essence, this tie between the Michigan RTI-MTSS framework and the School Improvement Plan

(SIP) framework indirectly implies that RTI—or a process using RTI principles—is required for all schools in the state of Michigan.

Michigan is also pushing schools to use RTI through a new accountability program founded on a waiver granted by the federal government, which allows some modifications to NCLB requirements (MI Dept. of Education Waiver, 2012). The waiver includes a state top-to-

FIGURE 8. Michigan Federal ESEA Waiver
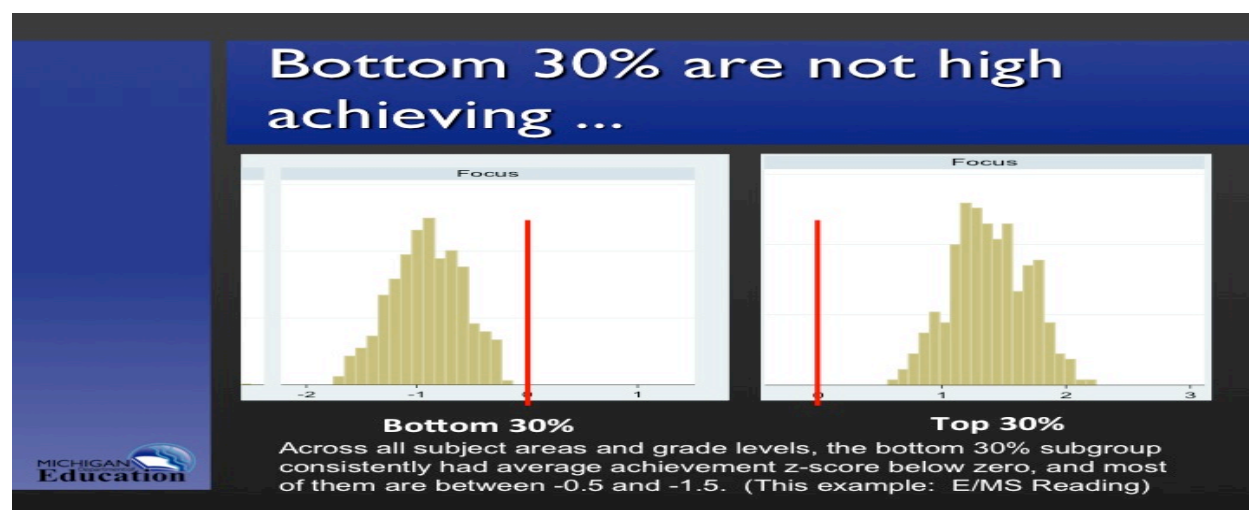
bottom ranking of schools, based on achievement, improvement, and achievement gaps. Priority schools are defined as schools that find themselves in the bottom 5% of the top-to-bottom ranking. Priority schools are required to implement a reform plan that includes targeted research-based interventions for students. These interventions must be correlated to performance data, and the planned teacher professional development must be aligned to support the prescribed interventions.

Additionally, schools identified as Focus schools must also use similar strategies to narrow the achievement gaps found in their schools. Focus schools (Figure 8) are the 10% of Michigan schools that have the most significant achievement gap between the average of the top 30% and bottom 30% of their students' performances on statewide standardized tests (Michigan

Department of Education Focus, 2012). Like Priority schools, these schools must use research-based interventions. Thus, although RTI is not specifically required to fulfill several state requirements and guidelines, schools must have some RTI or RTI-related programming within their building. With the understanding that schools have limited time and resources, it is highly likely that schools would adopt a uniform system like RTI or MTSS to meet the requirements of these multiple accountability programs.

RTI and Supportive Research

Mark Shinn at National Louis University of Chicago is one of the leading researchers studying the impact of RTI. Shinn found that prescribed interventions modified reading instruction, based upon diagnostic testing of student skills, and subsequently diminished the number of students who needed special education services (Shinn, 2007). Universal screening is a key practice needed to identify and align individualized interventions for all students. Shinn's examination of K–5 studies discovered that students make dramatic increases in reading in as little as five weeks with the use of targeted instruction.

Further research involving a meta-analytic study of RTI models included a study by Vellutino (1996) which found that first-grade students who participate in RTI not only improve their reading but actually approach normative levels of reading. This research reinforces the idea that RTI can help to limit the number of students requiring special education services (Burns et al., 2005). O'Connor, et. al (2005) also studied approximately 800 students, who were participating in reading activities provided through tiered interventions, and found that students showed improvement in all reading measures. This study also saw a reduction from 15% to 8% in students being referred to special education for the four years following the study.

Another meta-analysis of RTI found that the earlier student interventions are given, the

better students perform on skill assessments. This research was conducted by examining 18 studies of early reading interventions that took place between 1995 and 2005. Researchers found that these interventions became more effective when they were implemented as early as first grade (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007). This finding also reinforced evidence that suggests how crucial early interventions can be for children. The younger students are when they receive targeted interventions, the better off they will be as they progress through their education (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

A study of RTI implementation in six elementary schools found that students who were included in reading activities, such as word identification, word attack, and passage comprehension activities, out-performed on pre- and post-tests students who only had traditional classroom instruction (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). Looking at literacy specifically, a national study following the progress of 13,609 kindergarten students found that integrating phonics instruction and language arts instruction led to larger gains than those resulting from any one instructional strategy (Xue & Meisels, 2004). Both of these studies demonstrate that early, focused instruction is not only effective but also essential in building strong basic skills that may lead to increased confidence for future learning. This emphasis on early interventions is a key support for RTI. The success of these studies strongly supports the need for interventions for students as early in life as possible.

The Role of the Principal in RTI Implementation

In many ways, the principal is the key figure when a program or policy is introduced to a school. His or her assumptions, attitudes, and opinions influence decisions that will be made regarding how effectively a program will be implemented (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). In essence, the principal can be the catalyst of the program, building the enthusiasm and urgency

needed properly to launch new instructional strategies. For RTI, the principal needs to educate staff and detail why RTI is a valuable instructional technique that will benefit students. By outlining RTI's importance, the principal can build the capacity of knowledge and develop a consensus of support with staff to help ensure the success of implementation. In many ways, the principal can make or break the success of a program, which is well beyond the control of policymakers. However, if policymakers have a comprehensive understanding of the issues principals face and the dynamics of their position, policymakers might be able to incorporate contingencies within the policy that could promote successful implementation. For example, many policies ask principals and teachers to change their behavior to utilize a new set of tasks designed around an implementation design. Very few policy designs request principals and teachers to abandon existing practices and/or programs. For a program like RTI, it might be beneficial for the design to bolster the argument of why RTI is needed and how it may be more effective than existing programs. By being more explicit about what adopting RTI will require, in addition to its rationale, the implementation may gain an increase in acceptance.

District Influence

As principals develop an understanding of a policy like RTI, the school district represents a major influential factor on the school principal's contextual understanding of RTI and their school. Ronald Heck, of the University of Hawaii of Manoa, outlined a conceptual framework that explains how "the principalship" is assumed to depend on the principal's own beliefs and value preferences, and the organizational and political variables associated with the school and community context" (Heck, 1992, p.22). These beliefs and understandings lead to choices that a principal will make in relation to new policies that will affect the school as an organization. The contextual factors, such as pressures from the district, community, and staff, can shape the

decisions the principal makes. Understanding that principals, like other policy implementers, have strong discretionary powers over policy implementation, it is important to remember that their own interpretation of policy is crucial in policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980).

The district has to ensure that the materials and information needed to fulfill the intent of policy are available and accessible (Cohen & Hill, 2001). However, the principal has to act as a "policy broker" in order to bring teachers, administration, and support staff together to build understanding and support (Sabatier, 1997). Cynthia Coburn's concept of "sensemaking" illustrates how entities such as school buildings within the same school district can develop contrasting understandings of policies and directives (Coburn, 2001; Corcoran et al., 2001; Spillane, 1998). For example, a district could be aware of a new federal policy and its requirements. However, simply being aware and understanding the components needed for implementation are two very different levels of understanding. This difference in understanding or alternate perceptions can lead to a breakdown in how school leaders comply with directives (Coburn, 2001). When Coburn conducted a study aimed specifically at school districts implementing evidence-based instructional practices, she found that throughout the school organization opinions differed regarding what quality research is, and in some cases, there was very little understanding of the importance of research (Coburn, 2006b).

To further the "district" context of policy implementation, as described by Coburn and Copland, Meredith Honig (2008) has done a considerable amount of work looking at how districts can support policy implementation to bring about school improvements and reforms. Honig emphasized the need for central office administrators to become more engaged with individual schools, using ongoing evidence such as data to inform policies and practices (Honig, 2008). Honig believes that the district office should have individuals working more intimately

with individual schools to increase the district's knowledge of the inner-workings and issues in each individual school building.

One study by Honig showed that particular bridging and buffering activities conducted by central office administrators spurred the successful implementation of policy and programming in individual schools (Honig, 2009). The activities include assisting with communicating the goals of the policy as well as targeting precise information to those who need it. The study also found that central office employees in boundary-spanning positions function as change-agents in the context of policy initiatives. These central office employees assist principals in implementing policy by ensuring that new programs have the district-level support needed for implementation, such as funding and managerial backing. In addition, one study by Honig showed that particular bridging and buffering activities conducted by central office administrators spurred the successful implementation of policy and programming in individual schools (Honig, 2009). Honig claimed that districts support individual schools in several ways. Districts can assist with the flow of information to staff, as discussed earlier in the context of Coburn's "sense-making," to help unify the understanding of the important issues surrounding the policy, as well as the policy itself. By assisting with the communication of information, the district can help the principal educate staff and reduce skepticism in order to increase faith in the new policy. The district can also help formalize the expectations within the school for using data to inform decisions. The district can set the expectations for the use of data by providing the training necessary to utilize various sources of data (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012).

Honig has also found that the district can go outside of the organization by organizing and eliciting intermediary support from local intermediate school districts (ISDs) and other external organizations. Honig viewed intermediaries as valuable partners for schools and districts. By

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tapping into the knowledge base and resources held by the intermediaries, schools can access professional development and training, which are vital in implementing new programs. In addition to professional development supports, intermediaries can also help implementers interpret and enact policy. Honig did caution that this process of support is only beneficial as long as local considerations are observed for each site (Honig 2004). For example, through the county-wide training, the IISD guided training using literature written by Batsche, Shinn, and others that were designed to promote successful RTI as a program to all member schools. Using this literature, if the IISD develops a model of support for schools that ignores demographics, size, and other unique characteristics that schools may have, the support they offer may work well in some schools, while creating incoherence in others.

For principals to consider seriously implementing RTI programming in their school, they first want the assurance that funding will be ensured for multiple years. Principals understand how detrimental it is to start a new program then abandon it because of a funding reduction. Second, principals need support from the district for professional development. The district can support professional development either by providing funds for external professional development opportunities, or they can logistically help coordinate internal professional development opportunities. In the case of professional development, elements of funding and effort for coordination assistance can play a crucial role in the success of RTI. Finally, assistance with the management of data can greatly influence the principal's feasibility of managing RTI programming. Because of the wealth of the data that RTI creates, principals and teachers can become overwhelmed when a lot of data is collected but is not evaluated nor used. Managing data is an opportunity for district personnel to work in tandem with school staff and to demonstrate cooperation and support.

Having central office staff work with school staff can help build competency and confidence in RTI, particularly by creating opportunities for data conversation. Coburn (2006a) argued that the level of faith in data that staff generally have ranges from "skepticism" to "great faith" in the validity of data. Leaders need to consider how they introduce data to staff with consideration of the "natural roles" people hold in the organization and of their responsibilities for implementation. Principals often create a sense of urgency with data. Coburn cautioned, however, that this process of using data to elicit support requires a great deal of planning and careful design to build faith in the data, in order to increase staff engagement and support for the use of data. Understanding the need to build faith in the data can help promote a new program and can increase support for its implementation.

How Principals Manage Influence

As indicated earlier, RTI aligns with the cycle of inquiry that is central to school improvement plans. Copland stated, "The power of inquiry is the engine of distributive leadership and the glue that binds a school community together in common work." This quote illuminates how principals' knowledge and understanding of policy influences implementation, first through setting direction, and second through enrolling others in the collaborative work required for RTI (Copland, 2003, p. 394). However, as Coburn suggested, individual perceptions about RTI may cause elemental differences as programs continue to evolve and individuals gain or lose faith in the program. Balance must be achieved among autonomy, roles, and goals when considering the implementation of policy, to ensure that expected outcomes are achieved.

Many of the decisions made by principals and staff are shaped by a common set of professional norms and values (Hannan, 2000). These norms and values are influenced not only by individuals' backgrounds, but also by developed working relationships. When individuals are

able to operate as a group with autonomy, organizations can develop a strong resistance to change (Lipsky, 1980). In some respects, a principal's individual autonomy can seem like a negative influence on policy implementation when considering the possibility of variation. However, Fink found that a principal's autonomy from outside pressure is needed because principals tend use their autonomy to empower other individuals in the organization with regard to program implementation. Subsequently, this empowerment leads to more sustainable and accountable programs (Fink, 2006). In fact, the variation in the implementation can also be viewed as a positive aspect, by allowing adaptation to policy implementation to occur, which is more suitable for individual school settings (Cohen & Hill, 2001). The variation actually represents the customization of the policy to fit the school more effectively. Of course, adaption can also lead to varying outcomes, but over-standardization among schools has also led to the implementation of programs that are seldom sustainable (Fink, 2006).

With this understanding, policy implementers need to ensure in the planning stages that the policy allows for accommodations for professional development opportunities and follow-up visits in order to transmit consistent directives that encourage policy coherence (Cohen & Hill, 2001). A recent study in Chicago's public schools that looked at how principal leadership influences instruction and student learning found that the degree to which principals can create a strong learning climate in the school is the most important way they can influence the quality of instruction (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012, p. 642).

The idea that program implementation is more likely successful when a principal is highly involved and visible in implementing change is not a new concept. A statewide study by the Bureau of Education Research of the Ohio State University in the late 1960s identified the 20 most and least innovative school districts in the state. This study defined a successful district as

being more of an "open" organizational climate with a principal who "thrusts" building efforts

through hard work because of the support and trust given to him or her (Hughes, 1968). Given

these indicators, principals must cultivate the climate and motivation needed for positive change.

CHAPTER 3: RESEACH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Strategy for Inquiry

After developing the research questions for this study, the research design phase moved forward. The heart of this study was to find out why administrators made the decisions that they did as RTI was implemented in their buildings. To expand the understanding of what a subject may be thinking, semi-structured interviews have proven to be the best method of inquiry (Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Through the interview process, details that influence perceptions and thinking help explain the actions that subject make (Bickman and Rog, 2009). Understanding the influences that motivated principals' actions was critical in this study in order to understand their impact on RTI implementation.

An example would be the impact that Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) had on the development of capacity and relational trust. Although principals were not able to make the connections in most cases, the participant schools that already had PLC initiatives in the past reported to having more rapid implementation of RTI as a program. Without interviewing, which allowed deeper questioning, this study may have not have uncovered the significance of PLC's, which turned out to be a major influence in this study, as it will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Research Design: Comparative Case Study

This was a comparative case study designed to compare six demographically similar middle schools in Ingham County. A comparative case study investigates a number of cases in order to understand a phenomenon, population, or general situation (Yin, 2003). Using a critical case selection process, six schools were chosen due to their strategic importance for understanding how principals implemented RTI programing in similar school settings (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Schools were selected by performing a demographic analysis that prioritized

the size of the student population, the percent of students of low socio-economic status, and the percent of students who were identified as minority. A preliminary demographic analysis of Ingham County revealed that there were no more than six similar schools with similar demographic categories, due to the small size of Ingham County.

The essence of this study was how principals affected the implementation of the RTI program within their school, but as stated in Chapter 1, it was the variation of implementation throughout the county that created phenomena that suggested the need for further investigation. With all schools, through the countywide RTI initiative, despite the same training, resources, and funding, implementation occurred differently in each school. Understanding how each school processed these common resources yet arrived at different rates and degrees of implementation needed to be examined in depth. With principals as the major focus of this study, the sense-making functions and boundary-spanning behaviors demonstrated would align with previous research indicating that understanding the individual rationale of a principal reveals the pressures and contexts used when making decisions (Simon, 1997; Spillane, 1997; & Coburn, 2001). By conducting a multi-site case study, I hoped to answer the following questions:

- How do external conditions and principals' beliefs, values, and judgments affect their decisions about RTI implementation?

- How do principals' perceptions of organizational stability and momentum influence their decisions about RTI implementation?

- How do principals' perceptions of organizational capacity influence their decisions about RTI implementation?

The framework of this inquiry focused on the "empirical study of the differing ways in which principals experience, perceive, apprehend, understand or conceptualize various

phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around them" (Marton, 1970). Through cross-case examination of the data collected in each of these unique cases, patterns of commonalties were sought (Munhall, 1989).

After identifying the six schools, I sought permission for access to both the physical school buildings and opportunities to conduct interviews. Case studies have multiple methods of data selections. In this study, I sought a broad selection of data that would assist in understanding how principals thought about RTI implementation. Using the observations and interview data, I conducted an analysis of the decisions and opinions principals gave in regards to their feelings and their actions taken while implementing RTI programming in their schools. In order to interpret principals' decisions and opinions from a social ecological framework, this study conducted two building observations in each school to gain a better understanding of the building environment and contexts in which the principal administered. The two observations were conducted during the same visit as the interviews.

During the interviews, questions aimed at revealing the recent history of the mobility and stability of the teachers were asked in an effort to help illuminate possible staffing challenges the principal had to cope with. Understanding the history of the make-up of the staff helped describe the teacher-climate factors that influenced principals who were considering program adoption.

In addition to the principal interviews, this study included interviews of the IISD superintendent and RTI coordinator, in order to help establish contexts for both the intent and expectations of the RTI training provided to all districts. The inclusion of these interviews illuminated a broader view of the RTI initiative in Ingham County at a more bureaucratic level.

By examining, interview data and the observation data, this study found administrative thought processes that indicate what makes certain aspects of RTI more appealing than others.

With the understanding that principals are crucial to the organization and implementation of policies and programs, identifying RTI program traits that encourage principal support could help policy makers design an implementation schema that will be more likely to succeed.

Selection of Participants and Sites

Phase I of this the study was conducting a demographic analysis to identify six demographically similar schools. This study identified six schools with the same relative student racial and socio-economic make-up, to minimize the dissimilarities among the six schools.

Phase II of this study included both building observations and principal interviews for each of the six schools. Phase II also included the interviews of the IISD RTI coordinator and IISD superintendent. At each site, the school observations and interviews were conducted during one school day. Interviews were both recorded using a digital device and transcribed. The IISD interviews were conducted during one visit. During the observations and interviews, field notes were maintained along with transcripts and digital copies of each of the interviews.

The six interviews with principals were *semi-structured* and were conducted in person. Additionally, photographs and notes were taken during the building observations. The observations consisted of two parts. One observation was of the physical space, and the second was a thick description of the space and how people interact within it (Wolcott, 1975).

An advantage to the study was that all county schools were exposed to the same training, resources, and funding, creating a condition where these input variables were very similar between all schools. However, due to the uniqueness of locations and settings, variation between student populations, environmental variables such as poverty, and school size (Figure 9) could still have a large affect on RTI program implication (Bowling, T. & Cummings, F., 2009). The county where this study was conducted has incredible diversity between districts, from large

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urban middle schools to very small rural middle schools; the differences in demographics, SES, and race are enormous. Understanding the complexities of demographics, SES, and race, this study sought to reduce as much variability as possible by choosing similar sites.   The technique of "Purposeful Sampling" was used to identify sites that would have minimal variability (Charmaz, 2006). Using SPSS's 3-D scatter plot function, demographic data was loaded into SPSS from mischooldata.org for each school district in the county and was analyzed (mischooldata, 2013). Through the triangulation of schools' size, racial make-up, and SES percentages, the largest number of similar sites possible was six of twelve (Figure 9). The six

FIGURE 9. School Selection Model
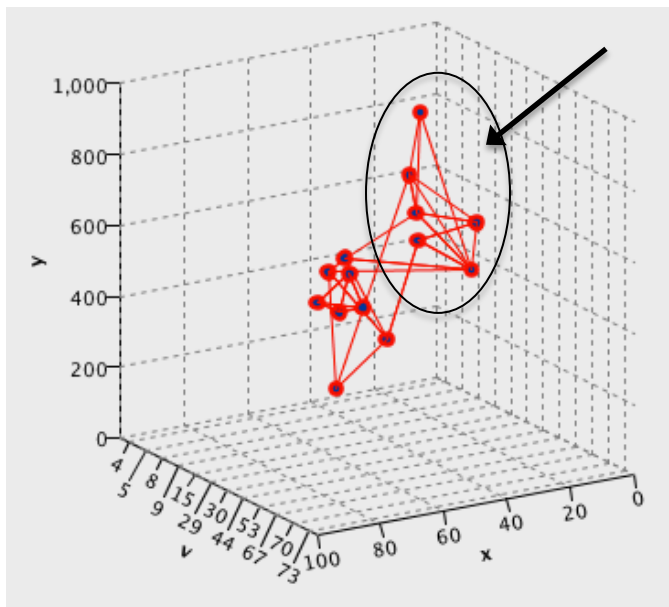
sites selected (located within the circle in figure 9) consisted of student populations between 435 and 965 students (Y-axis on Figure 10). The SES of students receiving free and reduced lunch ranged between 16 and 39 percent (V-axis), and the racial make up of minorities was from 5 to 44 percent (X-axis).

 After the schools were identified, the principals were contacted via email with a request for

participation in this study. Of the six schools, one did decline. To add another school, the selection was expanded by one deviation, which included two additional schools. One school was the former school that I had been a principal over, while the second school was the only middle school in the county to include fifth grade. The first school was eliminated immediately due to the conflict of interests and my being the investigator of this study. After careful deliberation, the second school, which contained the fifth grade, was selected. The caveat of having a traditional upper-elementary grade in the study was deemed potentially to present an interesting case that could expand the understanding of RTI implementation in middle schools.

For example, the principal with the fifth grade, reported that having elementary certified teachers made Tier 1 interventions easier to implement, because these teachers had more training in teaching students to read than secondary teachers. This was also reported by other principals; also by having a whole grade of elementary teachers in the middle school, this principal reported that teacher-to-teacher training of various reading programs was more productive than if all of her teachers were secondary teachers.

Affirmation of whether the selection of sites was effective depends on the interviews and observational data. While in each school, similar cultures, climates, and resources were described. In addition, issues and contexts given by the principals were also similar. All of these schools appeared to have similar resource capacity and building functionality.

I conducted the interview using a digital recording device as well as by taking notes. Hand written notes were utilized to highlight ideas and body language that occurred during the interview process. On the same day of the interview, I transcribed the interviews to text immediately in order to preserve the responses while they were still fresh in my memory. In most cases, interviews were interrupted with other school business due to the nature of the

principal's position; so to protect the non-participants, those conversations were not transcribed. Throughout the transcriptions the letter P was used to mask the identity of the principal. I further describe how the data was processed in the study later, in the Data Analysis section.

Access and Permission

The administration of RTI in Ingham County falls under the supervision of Ingham Intermediate School District (Ingham ISD), from which permission and cooperation was obtained. Historically, school principals and staff have opened their school to collegial study and assistance. Under this spirit of scholarly respect, this study gained consent from all school-level participants, including the IISD superintendent, RTI coordinator, and the building principals interviewed from each school. All participants were guaranteed anonymity, and school buildings were not revealed. Signed access and permission agreements were collected from all parties before the study was conducted.

During the process of conducting interviews and recording observations, this study used prepared protocols. Detailed field notes were recorded while on site, and analytic memos and contact summaries following each interview and observation were created to capture impressions while they were still most familiar (Maxwell 2005, Miles & Huberman 1984). Adults were the only subjects engaged in conversation in the school setting. These conversations, comments and visual cues were hand-recorded within the field notes.

Forms of Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-Structured Interviews

Using a phenomenological method, data was analyzed in an attempt to discover how principals think about RTI. A qualitative design was chosen because the review of the literature in this area indicated that interview data has been effective in providing reliable information in

similar studies.   The principal interviews served as the primary data for this study. IISD personnel interviews and building observations served as secondary data, to help with the interpretation and analysis of the principal interviews.

This study conducted a total of six middle level principal interviews with the respective school districts in Ingham County, and two interviews of IISD personnel. Six building principals were chosen under the assumption that their thoughts and opinions of RTI were most important to uncovering how principals think about RTI. By connecting the interview responses of the principals to the observations, this study revealed a more accurate picture of how the principal managed RTI programming in their school. Interviews were conducted with the RTI coordinator and superintendent in order to gain a better understanding of the intentions discussed in the development of the program and their perspectives in how the program was received by principals.

Within Phase II of the study, I used the semi-structured interview protocol found in the appendix (item A). The purpose of these questions was to examine the perceptions and attitudes building principals had towards the implementation of RTI. The study also sought to learn the pressures felt by principals to either support or discount RTI, and the actors or entities they emanated from. The dialogue was not be restricted to these specific questions; in fact, a more free-flowing *semi-structured* conversation was preferred as a means of engaging in unfiltered dialogue that revealed a more accurate representation of the participant's feelings.

Using coding and document analysis, the data examined trends in the principal interviews. A matrix was created to categorize each principal's responses according to the degree of faithfulness to RTI implementation. Triangulation between the principals' responses, the observation data, and analytical memos assisted in the disclosure of identifiable characteristics of

faithfulness in implementation (Maxwell, 2005, Denzin, 1989).

TABLE 1. Research Question In Relation to Interview Question

Research Questions	Interview Questions
How do external conditions and principals' beliefs, values, and judgments affect their decisions about RTI implementation?	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D9, D11, D12, D13
How do principals' perceptions of organizational stability and momentum influence their decisions about RTI implementation?	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, D2, D6, D7, D8, D9, D11, D12
How do principals' perceptions of organizational capacity influence their decisions about RTI implementation?	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P11, P12, P15, P16, D2, D4, D6, D7, D8, D9, D11, D12

P = Principal Interview Questions, D = ISD Interview Personnel Question

Careful attention was made to ensure that the interview questions matched this study's research questions, using a matrix shown in Table 1 (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Table 1 presents the three guiding sub-question of this study. This matrix serves as a guiding graphical representation for the foundation for how all interview questions (appendix A & B) were developed. Using this method, the balance of topics for questioning was maintained.

After conducting the interviews, this study coded the responses of the interviews into distinctive categories in order to identify trends and areas that needed further investigation. Using the method of *Grounded Theory–based* open-coding analysis, this study surveyed the data and identified specific units that spoke to perceptional trends that were held by the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). I then identified general categorical codes to sift out positive comments and negative comments. Lastly, this study further deconstructed these identifiers to more specific pedagogical realms in order to identify core attitudes and beliefs.

As mentioned earlier, I analyzed the interview data using grounded theory analysis methods developed by Glaser and Strauss (Charmaz, 2006). Once the interviews were all transcribed, I used Microsoft Word to highlight key words and phrases that revealed thoughts and perceptions held by the principal. Once these words and phases were highlighted, I then began to identify potential categories, using axial coding techniques. The techniques were used to identify overarching categories that described the big ideas included within the responses (Charmaz, 2006). The categories that emerged were District Support, RTI Support, Organizational Capacity, Organizational Trust, and Parent/Community Pressures. The second step after categorizing each response was to qualify the response by being positive, negative, or neutral, which simply meant that the comment was informative but did not contain a positive or negative implication. Table 2 provides details on the coding process mentioned above, to illustrate that the procedures used for ensuring interview response data was carefully and systematically examined to insure accuracy of coding (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). By systematically coding interviews, this study identified pressures that influenced the decisions that principals made in regard to RTI and its implementation. All of the interview comments were categorized, they were axial coded and rescanned for inconsistencies; I used a theoretical model of coding. Charmaz describes that a theoretical model for coding is when the researcher looks at "how substantive codes may relate to each other" (Charmaz, 2006 p. 63). In initial coding, general broad categories were identified that made the data more manageable for further analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

In the second iteration, categories were narrowed to themes that captured the essence of the data. For example, patterns between codes that tied into each other, such as RTI "implementation was easy for us because we already were a Failures Not an Option School,"

TABLE 2. Four Iterations of Responses Analysis

CATEGORY MAPPING FOR RTI IMPLEMENTATION (To be read from bottom up)

SubQ#1 How do external conditions and principals' beliefs, values, and judgments affect their decisions about RTI implementation?	SubQ#2 How do principals' perceptions of organizational stability and momentum influence their decisions about RTI implementation?	SubQ#3 How do principals' perceptions of organizational capacity influence their decisions about RTI implementation?

(FOURTH ITERATION: APPLICATION TO DATA SET)

How different pressures on the organization influence
middle school principals' implementation of RTI

(THIRD ITERATION: PATTERN VARIABLES BY PRESSURES)

1.District Support	2. RTI Support	3. Organizational Capacity
Positive	Positive	Positive
Negative	Negative	Negative
Observational/Neutral	Observational/Neutral	Observational/Neutral
4.Parental/Community Support		5. Organizational Trust
Positive		Positive
Negative		Negative
Observational/Neutral		Observational/Neutral

(SECOND ITERATION: PATTERN VARIABLES)

1.District Support	2. RTI Support	3. Organizational Capacity
4.Parental/Community Support		5. Organizational Trust

(FIRST ITERATION: INITIAL CODES/SURFACE CONTENT ANALYSIS)

1. District Logistical Involvement	2. Connection to Student Learning	3. Organizational Structure
1. District Provided Resources	2. Remediation	3. Training
1. District Meetings	2. Resources	3. Materials
1. District Coordination	2. Personnel Decisions	3. Ownership
1. Central Office Personnel	2. Support v. Dissatisfaction	3. Teacher Leaders
1. Superintendent Involvement	2. Student Interest	3. Qualifications
	2. Confusion	3. Current Initiatives
5. Parent Knowledge	2. Scheduling Resources	
5. Parent Involvement	2. Competing Programs	4. Trust/Respect
5. Parental Resources	2. Instructional Goals	4. Relationships
5. Parental Goals		4. Past Success/Failures
5. Community Knowledge		
5. Community Involvement		
5. Community Resources		
DATA	DATA	DATA

connected the categories of Support for RTI, Organizational Capacity, and Organizational Trust. A single statement was connected to categories in a meaningful and powerful way that vividly described influential relationships.

In the third iteration, the pressures (positive/negative) were determined as they relate to the actions of the principals. Positive pressure were pressures that contributed to favorable perceptions or actions towards RTI. For example, if principals expressed superintendents as supportive of RTI, the responses were coded as positive, and vice versa, if they were negative. By coding the pressures, connections between the influences and the beliefs, perceptions, and values of the principals became clearer.

District Support indicates the actions or involvement that was experienced by the principal, and the comments, perceptions, or actions that were expressed regarding district support. For example, when a principal shared that he also had continually requested district level discussions about student data and how other principals were using RTI in order to help improve student achievement, but had no assistance from the district to coordinate these discussions, this response was placed in the "District Support" category and was coded "negative."

Support for RTI describes the attitudes and comments conveyed during the interviews that spoke specifically about RTI and their opinions about RTI. When a principal said, "Since we have implemented RTI our special education numbers are growing rather than shrinking," this was categorized as "Support for RTI: negative," because the association between RTI and rising special education numbers was perceived as an unwanted causal relationship.

Organizational Capacity describes the ability the school has to carry out initiatives or directives based on the personnel, resources, and training that currently existed (Copland, 2003). For example, when a principal shared that one of the reasons that implementation of RTI was

lagging was due to the lack of a secondary RTI coach, this response was coded "Organizational Capacity" and "negative" because the lack of a coach was perceived to be holding up RTI implementation.

Organizational Trust describes the relationship between the principal and staff. Organizational trust essentially is "a series of negotiations between the individual and the collective over the degree which individuals are willing to adjust their interest or expectations of others" (Fuhrman & Lazerson, 2005). It could be described that trust accumulates as positive interactions over time lead to the development of goodwill between principals and staff. For example, one principal indicated that due to the relationships he developed with staff during a previous PLC initiative, he felt like his teachers would support the RTI initiative when he presented it to staff in his own words: "The staff knows that if I think it is important, that it must be, otherwise I wouldn't support it." This statement was coded "Organizational Trust," and "positive," because in his opinion his teachers trusted and valued his opinion due to previous collaborative work.

This data also revealed which policy characteristics are more likely to yield successful support for RTI program implementations. The stratification of this data described identifiable policy elements that positively influenced school principal support for policies like RTI. The findings from this study identified a narrative that may help inform other programs and situations in policy creation and implementation.

In order to understand how the RTI program in this county was meant to occur, and the expectations were of the IISD's RTI training sessions, I interviewed the IISD superintendent and the IISD RTI program coordinator. These interviews were designed to shed light on understanding the program design and the expectations were from the onset. I also learned from

these two interviews details and perceptions that helped inform my understanding of the program. For example, the county superintendent described the conversations with the individual district superintendents and the agreements for supporting schools in the implementation of RTI. From these conversations I could more clearly understand the expectations of the district superintendents and how the school principals experienced support form superintendents.

Additionally, the RTI director was able to explain the difficulties in implementing the county program and the nuances of the participating schools. For example, the IISD superintendents recounted a comment made to him by the Scotts superintendent, asking his principals to become completely immersed in RTI and follow the IISD directives. This comment by the IISD superintendent was affirmed in the interview with the Scott's principal. Although the district superintendent was not directly involved in Scotts' RTI program, because of this guidance, the school principal reported to me that his superintendent was requiring participation and it was a priority for his school. This method of district support is not ideal because it lacks direct support from the central office, but that will be discussed further in chapter 4.

Observations and Place Analysis

To assist with coding triangulation, observations were conducted to provide context for the interview responses. Two types of observations were conducted in each school. The first observation was of the physical setting, including the signage, layout, and other signifiers that indicated how people were expected to behave in these environments. The physical observation helped inform the researcher about the non-verbal messages that were being communicated by the physical structure and layout (Glesne, 2010). Each school in this study had a unique setting; however, there were commonalities, such as types of verbiage uses on posters, and the structure

of advertisements and directional signage. For example, one school was very clean and orderly, with masculine colors and very direct signage that instructed students how to behave and where to go. Understanding the aesthetic make-up of the building contextualized the interview responses, adding detail to the opinions expressed and shedding light on the over-arching beliefs that guided decision-making.

The second observation examined how the students and adults in the school interacted in the environment. Seeing how individuals act in an environment, or in this case a school, helps indicate the climate or mood of the building. For example, the masculine and orderly building mentioned above contained calm and orderly behaviors by individuals. It is probable that the building was purposefully designed to cultivate these expected behaviors. Like the physical observation, observing these behaviors helped contextualize interview responses as well. However, it should not be lost that watching how individuals act is also important in understanding if the expectations and testimony of how the principals described the school were actually present. Later, in the Enhancing the Quality of Inquiry section, I expand on how the observations assist in the triangulation of data.

Document Collection and Analysis

Because the ultimate goal of this study was to gain a clear understanding for how principals' though about RTI implementation, there we not many documents collected in this study. However the documents that were collected provided indications of principals' actions that either aligned or did not align with their interview comments. For example if principals reported to change their master schedule to accommodate RTI, a copy of the school's master schedule corroborate this action. In additions to documents being used to verify elements within the study, documents also provided reference to key opinions provided by participants. For

example, when the Benny principals refers to the ISD's RTI training sessions as "one size fits all," the agendas and materials the ISD used for the training session listed very little in customized experiences for individual schools. Lastly, the ISD RTI training documents also revealed the themes and concentrations of events. For example, most of the content was focused on Tier II strategies including ability grouping and remediation techniques. From this concentration on Tier II, these training provide a possible explanation why principals focused primarily on implementing Tier II programs.

Enhancing the Quality of Inquiry

After coding the responses was completed and categories were analyzed, the data was then transferred to a series of charts and graphs to examine trends visually. Using visual depictions of the data, the triangulation of the data began. Triangulation is utilized in qualitative research to add validity to the findings (Patton, 2002). For this study, triangulation occurred between the principal interview data, the observation data, the interviews of the county administrators, and the analysis of documents (Table 3).

TABLE 3: Data Triangulation: Matrix of Findings

	Source of Data			
Major Findings	I	O	D	M
Category I: RTI Support				
1. Principals are supportive of RTI for student remediation.	X	X		X
2. Principals view RTI either strictly for remediation for particular students, or as a benefit for all students.	X			X
3. Having students with higher social-economic status may restrict RTI to only remediation programming.	X			X
Category 2: External Pressure (ISD)				
4. With district superintendent support, the ISD led RTI effort led to all member schools to fully implement RTI.	X		X	X

	I	O	D	M
5. Principals, although critical of the ISD's training, still embrace RTI.	X	X	X	X

Category 3: District Pressure

	I	O	D	M
6. Principals feel pressure from the district to implement RTI, but this didn't seem to be a key motivator.	X			X

Table 3: Data Triangulation: Matrix of Findings (continued)

	I	O	D	M
7. Principals would prefer more district support for implementing and supporting RTI.	X			X

Category 4: Parent and Community Pressure

	I	O	D	M
8. Principals have minimally involved parents or community in RTI.	X			X

Table 3: Data Triangulation: Matrix of Findings (continued)

	I	O	D	M
9. In some cases, parents resist RTI if it interferes with preferred elective courses.	X			X
10. Principals feel pressure to preserve elective courses to make parents happy.	X			X

Category 5: Teacher Pressure

	I	O	D	M
11. Principals believe that a previous PLC helped teachers embraced the goals of RTI.	X			X
12. Teachers hesitant to change, may support RTI's potential, but resist embracing RTI instructional practices for themselves.	X			X
13. Principals believe having strong special education teachers helps support RTI.	X			X

Category 6: RTI Program Details

	I	O	D	M
14. RTI requires a change in the master schedule.	X	X	X	X
15. Having all teachers teach tier II interventions may support better tier I interventions.	X			X
16. The ISD's focus on ability grouping may have led schools to focus too much on tiers II and III, and to neglect tier I.	X			

I= Interviews, O= Observations, D= Documents, M= Member Checks

For example, a principal stated that their school had fully embraced RTI from the beginning of

the county initiative, and had organized all of their work around RTI programming. The

principal made the statement in the interview. The observational data indicated a formidable

presence of RTI throughout the school in the form of signage, the ways student acted, and the instruction in the classroom. Finally, when interviewing the county superintendent, he referred to the school by name and how impressed he was with the level of commitment to RTI. All three data points converged, or in this case confirmed a statement made by the principal.

Finally, Member checks were utilized when meanings from particular phrases were either extremely significant to the study or were not clear. Member checks are a method of validation to ensure that responses are as accurately portrayed as possible (Charmaz, 2006). These member checks were performed near the end of the study, after patterns became apparent in the data analysis. These member checks were performed via electronic mail, and participants were assured their responses would remain anonymous.

Ethical Concerns

The interview and coding was performed solely myself. I attempted to minimize opportunities where my own interests, background, and opinions could affect the research, but according to Glesne (2010), that is nearly impossible to do. Additionally, the candidness that the interviews displayed would not be the same for another researcher due to my prior position as a middle school principal in the county. Although I did not personally know all of the subjects, I had established a reputation in the county and had the credibility of someone who could be seen as qualified for holding a parallel position. However, by having a connection with the subjects, they could answer questions based on what they thought I would want the response to be (Yin, 2003).

Yin (2003) also would say that the construction of the questions themselves could lead to bias. To try to lessen question structure bias, questions were used in a mini-study prior to this study, and questions were shared with many scholars to tune the question to be as efficient and

unbiased as possible.

This study took approximately one year to perform. Three months were devoted to gathering data, with the remainder of the year devoted to the synthesis of the data, analysis, and interpreting the results. Writing a summary of this study and gathering any additional information fell within the twelve-month timeline.

The limitation of this study is the inferential nature of the data. Factors such as administrative turnover and funding inadequacies could provide alternative explanations of the data, and all may or may not have been revealed through data collection. Additionally, as a former colleague and member of this administrative community, responses from the principals could have varied in candor by either underplaying or exaggerating experiences in order to impress the interviewer. Functioning under the assumption that RTI training and professional development experiences were uniform in Ingham County, this study accounts for principals who may not have these uniform experiences.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter I illustrate the patterns and trends that were identified during this study. These "findings" are described as an overview, using the tabulated data from the interviews to display the relationships between the interviews and that data. In chapter 5, more finite and detailed accounts are provided to further explain further the connections between the data and the explanations provided. For the sake of clarity, an "RTI program" is defined as having all three tiers of student interventions. Within the RTI program, the individual instructional efforts, courses, and activities are considered RTI "programing or programs". Lastly, when all three tiers of interventions were present in a school, the qualification given was "fully-implemented", anything less was considered partially-implemented.

The Middle Schools

The countywide RTI initiative presented a unique opportunity to study how principals implement RTI as a program, because seldom are training and resources equally available when schools adopt new programs. The following section describes each site used in this study. Pseudonyms are used in place of actual school names, and gender-neutral pronouns are used for the principals to protect the anonymity of the schools. Names were carefully developed that would have no reflection on the actual name of the school. School size is also meant to be vague, in order to make an association between school size and the actual school difficult. Similarly, I do not make detailed reports of a school's socio-economic status so as not to allow deductive disclosure of the school.

Benny Middle School

Benny is one of the three or more affluent schools used in this study. Benny has a talented principal who has many programs to maintain throughout the year. Each of the schools in this

study utilized a degree of shared leadership. It is fair to characterize Benny's principal as in the top half of the principals within this study in terms of the degree of shared leadership operating in the school.

Benny's facilities reflect those of a more affluent community. The building had been remodeled and updated within the past ten years. Technology was current, each room appeared to have a smart board, and many had document cameras as well. The building was very clean and orderly, to the extent that a corporate feeling permeated as I walked the halls.

The students within the building were well mannered, and the relationships between teacher and students seemed to be very professional, reflecting the physical appearance of the building. Students frequently approached adults within the building and adults appeared to take genuine interest in assisting them.

During the interview, it was very apparent that the principal wanted to be candid and to express frustration with RTI. I would not characterize the principal as anti-RTI; rather the principal expressed support for RTI. The program, however, had created some difficulties with staff and parents, and as a result, the principal had some reservations about RTI in Benny Middle School. The first came in the form of a criticism of the roll-out of RTI in the county. The Benny principal did not like the "one-size-fits-all" approach because their district was "a cut above" the rest and had "the right students." The principals said "*I guess the one-size-fits-all approach is not my, if I have my druthers, it* [ISD approach] *would not be a way to do it,*" in describing the ISD's countywide training. From this comment, it is clear that the principal did not think favorably of this universal approach to RTI. In fact, the Benny principal saw the school and community as unique, saying that *"Every school district has its own culture and some personality and [Benny] really is a cut above in terms of having the right clientele."*

The comments made by the principal seem to also reflect the attitudes of the parents as well when discussing parent group whom support Gifted and Talented (GT) students. The principal explained how the district had a very active parent-led GT group that advocated for equity for these high-achieving students. According to the principal, this group placed so much pressure on the district administration that the central office had instructed them to "always mention GT programs whenever you speak publically about RTI so parents see that the district is spending money equally on their kids and struggling students," said the Benny principal. This directive was representative of a district wide attitude favoring educational goals for high SES students. The Benny principal explained that both the external pressures of the testing movement and the utilization of RTI to improve results were impediments to their goals for students. The Benny principal captured this attitude in this statement:

> When you look at [our] high school and the people we graduate and where they go, you know they go to the MITs, they go to Northwestern, and they go to the Ivy League schools. You know we produced good science students, but the way the testing has happened, I think has caused and will cause an effect that will slow us down now for years.

Benny Middle School, in the view of the principal, was geared to and equipped to assist high achieving students prepare for prestigious post-secondary educational opportunities.

The Benny principal characterized the staff as a very collegial group who "works hard" to educate students. Benny may have had the most resources available of any school, but the principal also dealt with the strongest environmental pressures of any other participant in this study. According to the principal, in order to minimize the disruption to electives the principal scheduled Tier II support to be taught by only a few teachers who had the talent for teaching reading in lieu of teaching a traditional elective. The principal echoed this feeling from parents by saying "parents refused to give up orchestra" to illustrate the need to keep electives. The principal believed that the staff who were allocated for teaching RTI Tier II was sufficient for the

number of students they who needed Tier II support; this belief was re-iterated when member checks were conducted. There had been cuts at Benny which forced the Benny principal to use one teacher for two different grade levels. The Benny principal said, "I need a Language Arts teacher to teach this class…by offering this class during different periods, both grade levels can have access to it." Table 4 shows how the principal perceived the levels of RTI programing implemented in the school.

TABLE 4: RTI Check: Benny Middle School

Tier	Present	Who Does It?	Principal's Opinion of Effectiveness
Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Low
Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	Moderate
Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	Low

By selecting only a few teachers to teach Tier II interventions, the disruption to current school programing is less than if all teachers were to teach an intervention course (National High School Center, 2010). The principal characterized that having a few selected teachers teaching Tier II interventions as an effective method for teaching Tier II interventions, but the scope seemed small, and special education numbers were increasing. The principal voiced frustration regarding the difficulties of certifying special education students with RTI, by saying "The new LD guidelines prevent us from getting kids into special education, which is a Tier III intervention." This statement also suggests that reducing the number of special education students was not necessarily a goal or focus.

The principal also reported that having all teachers teaching Tier I had been moderately effective. When the principal discussed Tier 1 interventions, the principal inferred that the English and Social Studies teachers had embraced Tier I the most, in contrast to the Science and Math teachers. Overall though, Benny seemed to be building momentum with RTI instruction;

the principal said "I think they [teachers] understand [that] tier II interventions, all the things that are in place now, can really remediate how kids learn."

As the principal vented frustration, it became clear that when it came to academically struggling students, there were some blind spots getting in the way of addressing the need for these students. As noted, the principal claimed that since the implementation of RTI, their special education numbers had gone up instead of down, which was in opposition to the research that indicates special education numbers go down with an increase in RTI interventions (Haar, et al., 2008). The Benny principal explained a bit more, "Our problem is our special education staff doesn't understand remediation, they don't understand how to help kids learn." It is possible that students with special education needs were not going up; rather, students who always needed support were now being identified. However, another possibility could be that the special education numbers were growing due to shortcomings in the current RTI program. To compound the problem, the principal reported that the special education department was very weak, and that the school had to rely on other teachers to provide training and leadership in academic interventions that were typically and traditionally the expertise of special education teachers. This attitude was captured by this response from the Benny principal: "There is not a lot of respect for my resource teachers." This statement seems to describe one of the impediment to RTI at Benny Middle School is staffing issue.

Considering the comments of Benny's principal, I gauged the school's RTI implementation was moderate due to a couple of factors (Table 5). First, the district support was described as moderate, although the principal's initial comments described the district as "very supportive." However, when asked for clarification, it became apparent that support was limited to coordinating monthly meetings among RTI building coaches. The district RTI building coaches

and coordinators did meet, but it was unclear what the district's role was other than facilitating these meetings. Each building was given the flexibility to customize RTI for the building's needs, to the extent that the Benny principal reported that the High School does not utilize RTI at all. These behaviors indicate that the district support's was low. Implementation was uneven district-wide, and logistical support was minimal.

The Benny principal's contextual understanding and consideration for RTI actually demonstrated clear connections (Table 5). From the comments given, the principal saw programing as a strategy for low-achieving students, of which they had very few. This perception of the principal, that RTI is designed for of low achieving students, intersected with his consideration that RTI was in competition with courses and programs that served the affluent high achieving students, which were the majority of students at Benny. Given the combination of the lack of pressure or support from the district, the view that RTI was for a student population that is relatively small at Benny, and the view that the program was in opposition to traditional programing at Benny, the overall implementation of RTI at Benny was moderate.

TABLE 5: Benny Middle School Summary

District Support	Principal's Contextual Understanding of RTI	Principal's Considerations	Level of RTI Support	Level of Implementation
Low	For students identified for support	RTI detracts from current programing	Moderate	Moderate

Davidson Middle School

Davidson Middle School is in a very diverse district with both very high-achieving students and those who are very low achieving. Like Benny, Davidson is one of three more affluent schools used in this study. Davidson too had a talented principal who had many

programs to maintain throughout the year. The Davidson principal had fewer than five years of experience, but had the reputation of being a "detailed-oriented" leader who logged long days, trying to provide a high quality education.   The principal was a former teacher in the district and was promoted to principal. Having been a teacher-leader in the school, the principal supported shared leadership strongly, placing the school in the top half of the study schools based on the extent to which the principal relied on shared leadership to operate the school.

Davidson's facilities reflected those of a more affluent community; in fact, it was the nicest middle school, structure-wise, of the study.   Like Benny, the building had been remodeled and updated within the past ten years. The maintenance of the building was impeccable. Technology was current; each room appeared to have a smart board and document cameras. The building was very clean and orderly, but still felt like a school as I walked the halls. Unlike Benny, there was extensive student artwork and numerous posters geared towards middle school students on the walls.

The students within the building were cheerful and the teachers were more causal with students than at Benny. In fact, the Davidson students appeared to be very comfortable around adults. The student-teacher relationships were less formal than those observed at Benny.

During the interview, the principal was a little guarded at first. I could tell that the principal was proud of Davidson's accomplishments and wanted to be sure I understood the efforts behind the school's accomplishments. The principal from the beginning expressed support for RTI. As a former teacher, the principal saw a growing number of students who were struggling with reading.   Although the principal was a self-described supporter of RTI, the staff had been "challenged" in the implementation process and were not yet all on board. The principal shared that some staff felt that "this shall too pass," in describing RTI as a movement.

Faced with this attitude from teachers, the principal believed that one of the most important

things a principal should do in regards to RTI is explain the reality that they are facing:

> The staff tends to think that this thing shall pass. They feel like I'm not going to get behind a consistent change. We [the teachers] lose ground by not understand the commitment that we need, understand that this is a world this is our life right now. We need to blend special education and general education, don't think that's taken yet.

An inference from the quote above from the Davidson principal is that not only staff had

not embraced RTI, but it is possible that staff is not sure the principal had as well, as noted by the

statement "They don't feel like I'm going to get behind a consistent change." This statement

raised my concerns because while the principal told me that the teachers said they were behind

RTI, the comment that teachers have also said "this shall pass" demonstrated that not all teachers

are supportive of RTI.

One of the negative effects of RTI was the time spent on testing that took away time from

instruction. In addition, scheduling students into RTI had been difficult because "parents expect

four core courses and two electives," which could not happen if students required RTI focused

courses. At this point, the principal did not think Davidson had done a good job involving and

educating parents about RTI; however the principal was hopeful that communication and

programming would improve now that the district had allocated funds for a building coach.

While this was a good step forward, that the school was just receiving a coach raised red flags to

me, because all of the other schools in the study had building RTI coaches for a few years.

Building level RTI coaches, in fact, were part of the initial county implementation plan. Because

the school did not have an RTI coach, and the district had not provided the funding for an RTI

coach, district support appeared to be low.

Further indication of the support from the district came after a direct question to the

principal about district support. While the principal expressed positive comments about the level

of investment by the district, the comment "I still get the sense it we're somewhere, working not as a collaborative group, were still working separately" reduced my confidence in district support. In addition, as an administrative group, principals had never met together to discuss specific student data. From these comments it could be assumed that there was still more work to be done in developing a more cohesive strategy for RTI between the district and the school.

Like the Benny principal, the Davidson principal characterized the staff as a very collegial and hardworking group. Davidson also adopted a similar structure to Benny in that a few "well-trained" teachers taught the Tier II interventions. This format would limit the number of students who could have access to Tier II support. The principal indicated that with the new building coach, they would be revamping the current structure.

TABLE 6: RTI Check: Davidson Middle School

Tier	Present	Who Does It?	Principals Opinions of Effectiveness
Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Low
Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	Moderate
Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High

The principal indicated that the special education teachers had been an excellent building resource for RTI. The special education staff had led staff development for incorporating new instructional strategies needed to further implement RTI programing, unfortunately it still was a challenge to get all teachers to utilize Tier I supports in core subject areas. The principal insisted that the transformation of instruction for teachers had been slow, by saying, " Our general teachers still haven't quite got their hands around it" when describing Tier I supports.
The Davidson principal did not seem happy with the current level of RTI implementation, however the principal did seem determined to improve programing and was excited to have a RTI building coach starting next school year:

We had just gotten to the point issue were we have put in place coaches, for math and literacy. Originally these coaches were only for the elementary. We just faced the fact that we need these coaches at the secondary level.

Looking at the Davidson's principal's comments placed within the summary table (Table 7) implementation was moderate due to a couple of factors. First, the district's support was described as low. The principal's comments described the district as not engaged in any substantive way. In addition, the district was only now funding the building coaching position, four years into the initiative. Also, that the district did not facilitate meetings of the administrative team to discuss student data demonstrated a lack of district -level engagement

The Davidson principal's contextual understanding and consideration for RTI showed very positive support. From the comments given, the principal saw programing as a strategy for "all" students. Also, the context held by the principal was that RTI should become the overarching initiative, within which all other programs should work. The combination of the principal's support and the advantage of having highly skilled special education teachers to lead new instruction strategies factored into a moderate level of implementation. Davidson is a school to watch for improvement, given changes the principal was making for the next years.

TABLE 7: Davidson Middle School Summary

District Support	Principal's Contextual Understanding of RTI	Principal's Considerations	Level of RTI Support	Level of Implementation
Low	For all students	RTI should be the Primary focus of all programing	High	Moderate

Green Middle School

Green Middle School is a smaller district, with limited diversity and a high number of educated parents. Characterized as a somewhat rural and somewhat suburban district, Green had

high variation in student achievement. Like Davidson, the Green principal had fewer than five years of experience, but had the reputation of being an instructional leader.   This was the third principal position in the principal's career. The Green principal described this position as a "dream" position because the superintendent was fully engaged in instruction. The principal utilized a building leadership team made up of the school's strongest teachers. The principal did not believe one could implement RTI without strong building leaders.

Green Middle School had quality facilities for a smaller district. The facilities reflected those of a modest community, with very few of the frills of the larger school previously described.   The building was built within the last 15 years. The maintenance of the building was not very good, and the building could not be described as clean.   Technology was current, and each room and most rooms appeared to have a smart board. The environment was relaxed, with walls adorned with student artwork and posters displayed in the hallways and geared towards middle school students.

The students in the building were relaxed and comfortable in their surroundings. The Green students seemed to have good relations with adults. As I waited in the office for the principal, I noticed that students came to use a phone designated for students. No one in the office asked to see a pass or even acknowledged they were in the office. This indicated to me that there was a fair amount of trust within the building.

The principal of Green Middle School seemed to very candid. The principal was very proud of the work the school had accomplished with RTI. Unlike Benny and Davidson, every teacher taught a Tier II support class. Because all teachers were teaching an RTI class, the principal was more confident that Tier I supports were also being implemented well. However, the principal said that the Tier I strategies still needed improvement (Table 8).

TABLE 8: RTI Check: Green Middle School

Tier	Present	Who Does It?	Principals Opinions of Effectiveness
Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Moderate
Tier II Support	Yes	All Teachers	High
Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High

The Green principal listed both special education teachers and general education teachers working in tandem to provide staff development and to support RTI instruction. The principal said that because these teachers worked so closely together, the line between special education and RTI was blurred, which in the principal's opinion was what the district had been working toward. The principal emphasized this by saying "The nice thing is these interventions are not based on whether or not you're on Special Ed., they are for everyone."

The principal spoke of much of the success being due to the four principals and the superintendent all being on the same page regarding RTI. The principal reported that the administrative team spoke highly of the superintendent's leadership with RTI and the positive effects experienced due the district's efforts. In referring to the superintendent's philosophy of RTI, the principal said, "my belief system and understanding is in lockstep with the superintendent, in terms of RTI". Although the high school principal had not fully implemented RTI, there were some RTI programs being used. In fact, this was the only high school in the study that was referred to as having a RTI program.

The principal attributed the level of implementation to the administrative team meeting weekly to look at student data and curriculum. The principal was clear that the superintendent was the leader of RTI, and she only hired administrators who were on board. The Green principal said that much of the district's work revolved around the superintendent's vision; "She's a big believer in individualized plans for children and generalizing for students." This

"individualized" perception of education appeared to propel RTI throughout the district.

The only weakness mentioned by the principal for Green's RTI program was related to parents. When asked what parents thought about RTI, he replied, "Ninety-eight percent of our parents would not know what I was talking about." The principal said that increasing parent involvement was tricky, and that the administrative team was still trying to develop a course of action to improve parent involvement. A possible explanation for not addressing parent involvement is that the principal was able to utilize the RTI program with little resistance from parents because parents were simply unaware. Regardless of the intent, in the case of Green Middle School, the principal reported that parents were both not-resistant and mostly unaware of RTI.

When I asked the principal where RTI fit in as a priority in Green Middle School, the response was:

> I think all the programs that we do operate within that (RTI) framework, 100% [of] the time. Everything does align with what we're doing at that time, whether it's academically, socially, or behaviorally.

The statement above, sums up the vigor that the principal emphasized in implementing RTI at Green. These strong beliefs also resonate in the summary:

TABLE 9: Green Middle School Summary

District Support	Principal's Contextual Understanding of RTI	Principal's Considerations	Level of RTI Support	Level of Implementation
High	For all students	RTI should be the Primary focus of all programing	High	High

Looking at the Green Middle School's principal comments placed within the summary table (Table 9), implementation was high due to many factors. First the district support was

described as high, with a superintendent who made it a personal responsibility to push administrators to do more with RTI and to meet frequently to discuss data.

The Green principal's contextual understandings and considerations for RTI were very high. The principal saw RTI as an umbrella initiative for all school programing. The combination of the principal's support and having a highly effective leadership team with skilled special education and general education teachers created a highly functional staff.

Lions Middle School

Lions Middle School is located in a predominantly rural district. Lions is the furthest district from the only major city in the county. Lions' principal had been a principal for fewer than five years, but as the district's former RTI coordinator, the principal was well suited to lead RTI. The principal was hired by the superintendent to improve student achievement at Lions Middle School. The principal described the relationship with the staff as excellent; working with teachers through RTI prior to becoming a principal provided creditability to move programing forward.

Lions Middle School is an old school, but well maintained and very clean. Students were well behaved in the hallway, and they seemed to get along well with the staff. The staff seemed to have more of an authoritative role in the building, and signage was more directed at what one could not do. Lions Middle School's tone and behavior was similar to Davidson's more professional, corporate environment.

During the interview the principal was extremely guarded. At first I thought that the guardedness was a defense against criticisms, but as the interview went forward it seemed more like the principal had a very formal personality and wanted to choose words carefully so as to be as accurate as possible. The principal commented that the building had a lot of momentum with

RTI, and the principal wanted to do everything possible to keep moving forward.   The school atmosphere seemed to mirror the principal's personality: formal, focused, and all business.

The principal described how relationships with staff were developed when the principal was the RTI coordinator, and how the staff knew of the coordinator's passion about RTI. The principal described RTI as especially a benefit for reading instruction. The principal firmly believed that all students would benefit from RTI, and that teachers had embraced RTI to support students. The principal said, "Yes... their progress monitoring data, from their inventions... yes. And they see these interventions help in their classroom too." Like Green Middle School, most teachers were involved in the RTI program. Lions utilized what used to be an advisory period, during which all students received RTI interventions. Also like Green's principal, the Lions principal felt that by having most teachers teach an RTI course, Tier I instruction in core classes would improve. The principal mentioned that the staff still had a way to go on Tier I instruction. In the member check, the Lions principal agreed with the following summary statement; "Tier I was moderately effective.   Not all core teachers were using RTI interventions daily in core instruction." Although the principal placed a high value on having most teachers involved in RTI, the principal felt that the school had not yet realized the goal of a highly effective Tier I program.

One of the benefits that the principal had seen was that teachers appeared to use data to inform their instruction:

> I think in the past we knew in our gut that kids were not doing well, but we didn't have data to support it. Now we're drowning in data. We can identify kids and we can focus on those kids… get them interventions and progress monitoring. Before, we knew it but did not know what to do with it.

When I asked what had been a negative consequence of RTI, the following comment reflects the passion for students that the principal believed the teachers had:

> What happens with my staff a lot is that they see [what might be needed] and they don't have time [to do it.] Especially when you get the seventh and eighth graders that are reading at a third and fourth grade reading level. They can't save them, and that's really frustrating.

From the principal's view, the staff was committed to RTI and was doing a great job. The principal also had positive comments about the superintendent. As said before, the superintendent hired the principal because of demonstrated expertise in RTI, but the superintendent was also involved in monitoring RTI and met frequently with all principals. Recently the high school added some RTI programing as well. It appears that the superintendent was a driving force behind RTI throughout the district. Because of budget cuts, the superintendent appeared to have become the sole instructional leader from the district office. The principal said, "Our superintendent is our curriculum director, he is superintendent, and currently the special Ed director, so he is the district level."

To inform parents, the principal personally conducted an informational session during curriculum night. The principal also informed parents about changes to student schedules when students were grouped based on testing data. Table 10 describes the levels of implementation:

TABLE 10: RTI Check: Lions Middle School

Tier	Present	Who Does It?	Principals Opinions of Effectiveness
Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Moderate
Tier II Support	Yes	All Teachers	Highs
Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High

Looking at the Lions principal's comments placed within the summary table (Table 11), implementation was high due to many factors. First, the district's support was very high due to direct superintendent involvement and the fact that the district hired the principal because of the principal's RTI skills. Second, by having all teachers teach RTI, the likelihood that teachers had a better understanding of RTI when they taught core courses increased. Many times throughout

the interview the principal expressed a belief in RTI for improving student achievement, and that having all teachers involved was critical to the success of the program.

The Lions principal's contextual understanding and consideration for RTI was very positive. Like the Green Middle School principal, the Lions principal saw RTI programing as a strategy for "all" students. Throughout the interview it was also apparent that the context of RTI was the overarching initiative that all other programs encompassed.

TABLE 11: Lions Middle School Summary

District Support	Principal's Contextual Understanding of RTI	Principal's Considerations	Level of RTI Support	Level of Implementation
High	For all students	RTI should be the Primary focus of all programing	High	High

Partridge Middle School

Partridge is a medium-size (relative to other study schools) suburban district. The school had an even mix of high, medium, and low achieving students. The school had a friendly environment, with many student artifacts posted throughout the building. The principal had been with the school for over five years and was highly involved in instruction. The principal worked in tandem with an RTI coach and a building leadership team. The principal was adamant that principals should work collaboratively to implement RTI:

> I've seen other schools where principals try to do it on their own, the coach does it without any administrative support, and in those cases it just doesn't move as quickly or smoothly as it does here. Here we have the perfect mix, we moved forward nicely.

Unlike Green and Lions Middle Schools, all teachers at Partridge did not teach RTI courses. The principal selected teachers who had specific skills to teach the Tier II classes during elective hours. Students could switch in and out of these classes throughout the year,

based on screening tests given every nine weeks. The principal was happy with the performance

of the Tier II interventions, but admitted a desire to see the Tier I core course instruction

improve. The Partridge principal contributed the need for improvement with RTI in middle

school to the program being relatively new by saying, "For middle schools this is all new

territory, we had to go do all the research yourself and plan it, there is no guidebook…we are

blazing the trail."

Partridge's principal characterized the staff as very collegial and hardworking. When

speaking of the staff at Partridge, the comment was "We [staff] talk about sustainability for a

long, long time. It is necessary for the sustainability of RTI…this program it's here and it is

viable." Additionally, the principal was very happy with the collegiality among the central office

and the building principals within the district. The principal felt "very impressed…the way we

chose to implement RTI, and the collaboration that's occurred between our coaches in the

districts." When characterizing the superintendent, the principal said, "Our Superintendent

laments that the only thing that matters is student achievement, so she's [the Partridge

Superintendent] real supportive RTI." The superintendent attended monthly meetings with the

principal to discuss student data and the progress of RTI. Each school in the district had a coach,

and they also collaborated to ensure that communication about students transferring between

buildings was occurring.

Table 12 describes the levels of implementation for Partridge Middle School.

TABLE 12: RTI Check: Partridge Middle School

Tier	Present	Who Does It?	Principals Opinions of Effectiveness
Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Low
Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	High
Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High

The principal was confident that Partridge was a school that benefitted from the shared leadership of special education, at-risk, and general education teachers.

> [Utilizing the strengths of those] with a special background, we look at the pyramid, considering all kids, not just Special Ed. kids. They are [learning] reading strategies, [it] doesn't matter if they are special or general [education students]. We had our SE teachers, at risk teachers, and general teachers [in] all of these classes, training to learn how to teach RTI strategies.

The principal believed that the building contained experts, so they did not have to rely on outside help. The principal believed that having "experts" on staff increased their effectiveness as a team, and that the level of collaboration allowed them to meet any new challenges that may lay ahead.

Looking at the Partridge Middle School principal's comments placed within the summary table (Table 13), implementation is high due to many of factors. First, the district support was described as high, with frequent meetings and strong central office involvement. In addition, the school had a strong leadership team that supported all staff. A concern would be that Tier II interventions were taught in an elective format by a small group of teachers. It is possible that Tier I supports were not strong because most of the staff was not as invested in RTI when they were not responsible for teaching RTI focused courses.

The Partridge principal's contextual understandings and considerations for RTI were very positive. From the comments given, the principal saw programing as a strategy for "all" students. Also, the contextual understanding held by the principal was that RTI should become the overarching initiative that all other programs should work within. The focus and the energy the principal had invested in the RTI leadership team demonstrated a strong passion for RTI.

TABLE 13: Partridge Middle School Summary

District Support	Principal's Contextual Understanding of RTI	Principal's Considerations	Level of RTI Support	Level of Implementation
High	For all students	RTI should be the primary focus of all programing	High	High

Scotts Middle School

Scotts Middle School is in a larger district with a significant white-collar population, but at the same time, with many lower SES students. Of all the schools within this study, Scotts had the largest diversity in terms of academic outcomes, as measured by standardized tests. The school had been remodeled within the past 10 years, but was fairly worn already. The building was not kept as clean as many of the other buildings. Scotts displayed more student work than the other schools; however the quality was fairly low, by my estimation, and the display was cluttered, interspersed with academically-oriented posters. The building was casual and the staff appeared to have good relationships with students, but I did not see many students speaking with adults.

The principal had more than five years of experience and had an instructional team that coordinated RTI programing. Throughout the interview, the principal seemed to be more of a delegator who trusted others to coordinate much of the RTI work. The principal seemed hesitant to respond to detailed questions; instead the principal preferred to talk about organizational capacity and trust.

The principal felt that Scotts had a lot of work to do to increase parent involvement in RTI. The principal believed that very few parents understood what RTI was and that parents were only contacted when student testing placed them into a Tier II intervention that required a

schedule change. For example, the Scott principal said, "We had to make a lot of changes to our schedule and organization so we would have flexibility to provide a lot of these interventions." For the middle schools in this study, recall that Tier II interventions were all performed in new elective support courses that were built into the master schedule. These elective support classes were a common characteristic of schools within this study, supporting Hall's (2007) findings that schools modify their master schedules to implement RTI programing.

Selected teachers taught the Tier II courses with support from special education teachers. Like Partridge Middle School, the teachers within the building provided much of the training and support for the RTI program. The principal was not satisfied with Tier I supports and described them needing a lot of work. The principal explained the weakness of RTI by saying "the training seems to focus on just identifying kids at first, not looking at what else are we to do with this information." My interpretation is that the principal believed the training failed in taking the next step - how to respond to the data - as at least a partial explanation for a lag in effectiveness. The level of implementation is reflected in table 14.

TABLE 14: RTI Check: Scotts Middle School

Tier	Present	Who Does It?	Principals Opinions of Effectiveness
Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Low
Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	High
Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High

Looking at the Scotts' principal's comments placed within the summary table (Table 15) implementation was moderate, due to a couple of factors. First, the district's support was described as low. The principal's comments described the district as not engaged:

> There's a lack of accountability from the district, we have five instructional coaches but are they held accountable? We talk about RTI, in using data. Nobody's coming down and sitting down with us and asking how we are doing. No one ever asked me about my school improvement plan, and that's odd, because it's like "core" of what we do in our school.

The lack of district leadership seemed especially to be a sore topic with Scotts' principal. It is unclear what the effect the lack of district support had on RTI implementation, due to the building's strong leadership teamwork in producing many RTI initiatives without district support.

The Scotts principal's contextual understanding and consideration for RTI showed very positive support. From the comments given, the principal saw programing for students who appeared to need support based in screening tests. Also, the principal saw RTI as the context all other programs should work within (Table 15).

TABLE 15: Scotts Middle School Summary

District Support	Principal's Contextual Understanding of RTI	Principal's Considerations	Level of RTI Support	Level of Implementation
Low	For students identified for Support	RTI should be the primary focus of all programing	High	Moderate

Implementation Trends Among Middle Schools

Looking at the implementation across all schools in this study, the county initiative led to program implementation for all three Tiers in all six middle schools. Although the schools customized the way they implemented RTI as a program, each principal felt that the allowance by the county to be flexible led to programming that was appropriate site-by-site. Research supports the customization of RTI policy, as long as the goals remain the same (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). However, I do question the practice of selecting only a few teachers to teach Tier II RTI supports. Looking at Table 16, half of the principals in this study reported low levels of effectiveness for Tier I supports while the other principals reported moderate levels. All of the

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principals that reported a lower effectiveness of Tier I support, also only used selected teachers to offer these supports. Whereas the other schools, which utilized all teachers to support Tier II, reported moderate levels of Tier I support. It may be possible that by having "all" teachers trained and engaged in Tier II support, the "acquired" skills may also transfer into improved instructional techniques for supporting Tier I supports.

Obviously due to size of this study, three instances out of six raises validity issues in drawing conclusions; however, previous research identified that the mind-set which explain how teachers who resist reading instruction because "they are not reading teachers" influences Tier I supports (Ratekin, et. Al.1985). Exposure to teaching Tier II supports could arguably assist in diminishing this mind-set. Scotts Middle School in particular reported that the reason that Tier I supports were low was due to the resistance of core teachers to use RTI to support instruction.

It is also important to note that all schools reported that Tier III supports were highly effective, except for one school, where the principal stated that the special education teachers in the building were low performing in general. The success in Tier III support is not surprising, considering that Tier III support is historically the function of special education programming in general.

Using Table 16, when looking at all of the principals' interview data within an ecological framework, three principals had moderate levels of implementation, while the other three had high levels of implementation. Of the three schools with low support, the level of implementation was moderate. Only one of the six principals' contextual understanding saw RTI as a framework for "only students identified for support", where the other five principals viewed RTI as a framework for all students. What is interesting is that when the principals weighed RTI

TABLE 16: Principals' Perceptions of the RTI Process and Effectiveness

School	Tier	Present	Who Does It?	Principals Opinions of Effectiveness
Benny Middle School	Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Low
	Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	Moderate
	Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	Low
Davidson Middle School	Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Low
	Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	Moderate
	Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High
Green Middle School	Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Moderate
	Tier II Support	Yes	All Teachers	High
	Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High
Lions Middle School	Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Moderate
	Tier II Support	Yes	All Teachers	High
	Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High
Partridge Middle School	Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Low
	Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	High
	Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High
Scotts Middle School	Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Low
	Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	High
	Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	High
Totals	Tier I Support	Yes	All Teachers	Four Low/Two Moderate
	Tier II Support	Yes	All Teachers	Two High
	Tier II Support	Yes	Selected General Ed. Teachers	Three High/One Moderate
	Tier III Support	Yes	Special Ed. Teachers	One Low/Five High

against current programs in their building, all but one felt that RTI should be the primary focus

of all programing. During the interviews, there was only one principal who was resistant to RTI,

but it was also obvious that there was considerable district and parental pressure to protect other

programs over RTI in that school.

In the context of an ecological framework, principals who believed RTI is a framework for

all students demonstrated a high level of support, except for one. However, only the schools with

high levels of district support had high levels of implementation. The importance of district

support is consistent with research conducted by Coburn and Honig. The next section report on how district support, RTI support, organizational capacity, organizational trust, and parent/community specifically influence implementation.

TABLE 17: Principal's Considerations Within an Ecological Framework

Column	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	District Support	**Views RTI as a program for:**	**RTI Beliefs:**	**Perceived Pressures** (*Beyond Federal, State, and the ISD*)		**Reported Level of Support**	**Level of Implem-entation**
Benny Middle School	Low	Students Identified for Support	RTI detracts from current programing	Superintendent Parents Staff	Negative Negative Negative	Moderate	Moderate
Davidson Middle School	Low	All Students	RTI should be the primary focus of all programing	Strong k-5 Program Hesitant Staff	Positive Negative	High	Moderate
Green Middle School	High	All Students	RTI should be the primary focus of all programing	Superintendent Strong k-5 Program Motivated Staff	Positive Positive Positive	High	High
Lions Middle School	High	All Students	RTI should be the primary focus of all programing	Superintendent Motivated Staff	Positive Positive	High	High
Partridge Middle School	Low	All Students	RTI should be the primary focus of all programing	Strong k-5 Program Motivated Staff	Positive Positive	High	High
Scotts Middle School	Low	All Students	RTI should be the primary focus of all programing	Strong k-5 Program Motivated Staff	Positive Positive	High	Moderate

Principal's Perceptions of Implementation

To this point in this study I have described the levels of RTI implementation in each school. Table 17 illustrates the principals' perceptions of the level of implementation they felt they have achieved within their schools. The study found that all six schools had implemented RTI programing for all three levels, however Tiers I and II for many of the schools were not implemented at a high level; meaning that not all teachers were using RTI strategies to support instruction (Table 17, Column 7). Only the Partridge principal reported low levels of district support but high levels of RTI implementation (Table 17 Columns 1 & 7). The remaining principals only reported moderate implementation with low district support. This is a notable trend, but to gain a clearer understanding of the relationships between factors such as district support and RTI implementation, we need dissect the principals' responses carefully and uncover patterns that may help explain these relationships.

District Support

During the interviews, the principals made positive and negative comments about RTI and their level of support from the district. In this section I will begin draw out the trends in regards to district support and zero in on key "take-a-ways" in Chapter 5. With the principals in this study, logically, the positive comments came mostly from the schools that reported moderate to high levels of RTI implementation, whereas the negative comments were from the principals who reported low levels of RTI implementation. Positive comments included "very impressed with the approach and the collaboration of central office" and "my belief system and understand his lockstep with hers [superintendent], and terms of RTI. Through our teacher evaluation system everything is coordinated to the RTI in a way, our walked through consider these strategies, the goal on evaluating them on his engagement of instruction, everyone in the building is evaluated

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on that with evidence and walk-throughs." These comments indicate engagement by the central office with schools in a meaningful way. This engagement was present when principals described actual examples of collaboration between the central office and the school. Stated examples of district support were considered to be a stronger indicator than principals' comments due to instances where some principals initially reported that "our central office is on board 100%," but then later in the interview said "there's a lack of accountability from the district" or "the district is not involved," when asked about specifics. The Benny Principal said "the whole RTI impetus… you can be a part of it but I don't think it needs to be a driving force," indicating that the principal may not have seen RTI as the most important initiative in the school. For this principal, it is possible that the district not leading RTI physically and leaving much of the initiative up to the principal, may have influenced the principal to believe that RTI is not important. This instance was also very similar to Scotts Middle School, where the principal said they were supportive of RTI, but at the same time felt like the school needed more district support to improve.

Specifically highlighting the Benny Principal, with low support from the district, the chances that the Benny principal would embrace RTI were relatively low, whereas it is possible that if the district was more engaged in RTI, the interest level of the principal may have increased. Honig (2009) found that when central office administrators develop relationships with school administrators, a collaborative relationship develops where administrators become more engaged with central office directives.

It is interesting that four out of six of the principals in this study reported moderate and high implementation, said they would like to have more district involvement. Specifically, the principal of Davidson, when asked about the support from the central office, replied, "I don't

think it's part of our culture." The district of Davidson Middle School appeared to be a progressive and professional district with sufficient funding, while also seeming not engaged in building academic program cohesion among its schools. The Davidson principal went further to point out examples of strongly desired supports the district did not provide.

When I asked about the county superintendent and the RTI coordinator and what they thought about district support for RTI, they reported that it really varied. Support ranged from "very engaged" to "not necessarily disengaged". The ISD personnel suggested that some districts preferred the county to take a leadership role with their schools. Honig (2004) said that intermediaries can be strong partners, but I have concerns about the sustainability of such a partnership if schools can recuse themselves from the work in absence of the support from the district's central office. According to the county superintendent, they realized how important it was for the intermediate school district to push districts hard for improvement. The superintendent said, "So guess what it comes down to. The negative effects are some strains on relationships because we are pushing so hard. They're not used to being focused on this for so long. They're looking for the next new thing to come along." I took this to mean that districts were used to initiatives coming and going, and they preferred to wait RTI out. However, the county superintendent and RTI coordinator appeared to view RTI as an effective tool to improve student achievement, a tool that they were going to continue to push districts to embrace.

RTI Support

The passion witnessed in both the county superintendent and the RTI coordinator was a strong indicator of their beliefs in the positive impacts that RTI can have on instruction. One of the assumptions of this study from the outset was that perhaps implementation was uneven in the county due to the principals' understanding of RTI. However, five out of six of the principals in

this study seemed very supportive of RTI and had a sizable working knowledge of RTI programing.

The interviews also revealed that all principals in this study saw value in RTI, especially in terms of collecting student achievement data. All schools were very data rich, using several types of test including Aims Web, NWEA, and DIBLES. The county superintendent explained that initially the county paid for a lot of the testing in order to unify the data between districts and to help the IISD program model data review strategies during the countywide professional development sessions. All principals reported that the wealth of data helped reveal the specific academic issues that students were struggling with.

> We know our kids so well now So now we know he is struggling math and we can [identify] exactly where. There's great power and really being able to really know those unique understandings of individual kids. It's a little scary because Davidson is a high-performing district. We have great expectations. Our parents know kids receive a great education. And when you know this much detail about [where] their child's skill sets are, there's a lot of pressure that we are remediating and continually improving the skill sets.

This quote from Partridge Middle School was echoed by all of the principals in this study. The principals seemingly valued the data that RTI produced above most aspects of the program. Specific student skill levels had been fairly unknown or ambiguous to most principals and teachers within these schools. Davidson Middle School's principal commented, "Instead of anecdotally making comments about students, we have real data but gives us hard facts about students," in referring to discussing specific students with staff and teachers. The principals seemed to believe that a lot of the discussions, and decision-making conducted in schools was based mostly on "gut" decisions rather than on informed decisions made with the assistance of data. The principals believed this move to use data will lead to more accurate diagnosis of problems, and eventually lead to more productive interventions.

Unfortunately, principals also reported that although a wealth of data had been collected,

much of this data was not put into practice. According to the Green principal,

> The hard part is not that I don't want to, is the collecting of data. We have meetings to try to problem solve. We develop plans and plans are not always followed by those that are supposed to be [following them]. And the data… it's not that I don't want to use that. We're asking teachers to do so much. How can I do even one more thing?

The quote above made by the Green principal illustrates the frustration with having so much data but too little time to actually analyze it and use it. This frustration of data and time was expressed by many of the principals, regarding the lack of administrative time and teacher time to review and use the data. Some of this frustration was blamed on the county and the way the leadership teams were trained. One principal said, "Because all the training seem to focus on just identifying kids at first not looking at what else are we to do with this information," and that this had led to the lack of RTI implementation in the classroom. The county RTI coordinator was very forth coming in stating that the impact of actual instruction in the classroom was a weakness in most schools, and that they were working on strategies and training that would improve teachers' use of data to inform instruction.

The issues with the lack of instructional modifications -- based on data-- are not unique to this study. In fact the improvement of Tier I instruction in in an RTI program is an issue seen nationally (Buffum, Mattos, and Weber 2012). As stated earlier by Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2012) in describing the flaw in focusing on Tiers II and III, "If your Tier I program underserves all kids, then no amount of Tier II and III will make up for that." In this study, the schools had fully implemented Tier II and III programs. Within these Tier II and III programs, teachers were using strategies curtailed to specific skill deficiencies. However, Tier I as discussed earlier, was not fully implemented in most schools. Tier II and III interventions seemed to receive the most focus due to the smaller numbers of teachers needed to teach the associated curriculum, versus Tier I, which requires that all teachers make curricular modifications. In fact, all schools in this

study implemented Tiers II and III first, then proceeded to work on Tier I. The Scotts' principal

explicitly said this, "we started working on tier 2 and tier 3 interest because your target is the

toughest kids."   The focus on the toughest kids instead of all kids strategically seemed sound if

one were trying to help the "toughest" kids. However, by initially focusing on the toughest kids,

teachers may identify RTI as a program for the "toughest" kids and not for "all" kids. This

attitude can be seen in the Partridge principal's response to the question regarding the

implementation of Tier I: "Still working on the research-based tools, finding different research

strategies that will work in our environment." This response indicated a translation issue of

moving from Tier II intentionality to Tier I. By developing Tier II and III specific curriculum, it

is possible that principals and teachers believe that RTI has an associated curriculum with Tier I.

They could be thinking Tier I instruction has to be based on a specific program or tool rather

than a variety of methods and techniques that amount to quality instruction.

Batsche et. al, (2006) described Tier I instruction as being more explicit and targeted

when teaching students based on data. He was not indicating that teachers adopt programs in

instruction, rather that they plan accordingly for specific skill deficits and provide support when

needed. This is the essence of Tier I instruction. The expectation of Tier I is that all teachers

consider data for daily instruction that supports specific skills and needs (Hall, 2007). Until the

principals in this study approach RTI as a strategy that informs instruction for "all students,"

instead of just the most needy, they will continue to struggle with Tier I instruction

implementation.

RTI is intended to be a program for "all" students. This implies that RTI practices should

be incorporated in core Tier I instruction. However, across the study's schools, the expectation of

improved Tier I instruction appears to have been lost in the implementation of the more technical

Tiers II and III. In each school, principals developed many creative systems for delivering Tier II and III, with almost no focus on Tier I. I submit three possible reasons which are embedded below in Figure 10. First, environmental pressure on the principals led them to believe that RTI does not offer a direct benefit to all students. Given that RTI's origins were in special education, principals may hold stronger beliefs for the merits of RTI as a program for struggling students than for all students, and thus they buffer the general education program and teachers, along with other initiatives, from RTI.

Second, principals may inadvertently be buffering components of Tier I through an over

FIGURE 10. Social Ecological Theory for Tier I Interventions
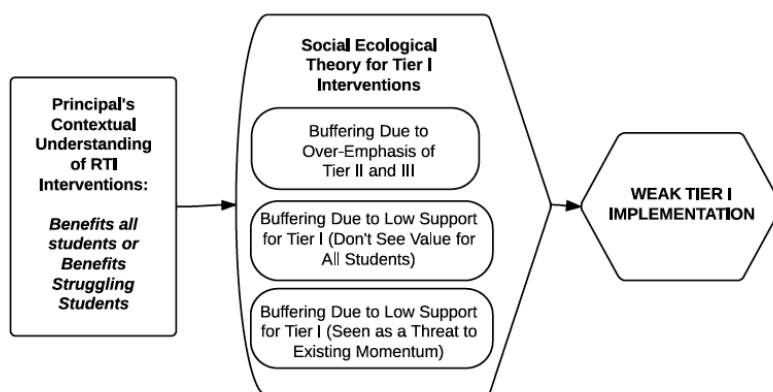
emphasis on Tiers II and III. Principals may simply be neglecting Tier I because they understand RTI as primarily about Tiers II and III, which serve the most pressing needs of their students. Principals may experience internal pressures to help their struggling students, and subsequently buffer out efforts for Tier I.

Third, principals might engage in administrative avoidance when it comes to challenging all staff to change their daily practices by incorporating Tier I strategies. Principals could buffer their schools from many RTI components, in order to preserve the current classroom instructional momentum and avoid potential fallout from staff and parents.

Organizational Capacity

Earlier when discussing the individual description of each principal and school, this study presented a series of tables that utilized the ecological theory model to illustrate the factors that lead to levels of RTI implementation. This section details how the principals discussed the capacity of RTI for implementation.

Principals in this study were very proud of the capabilities of their staffs. Most principals described their staffs as being well-skilled and passionate about student learning. Most also described their education professionals as highly collaborative and capable of implementing RTI. It was interesting to learn that all schools in this study had participated in a county-led Professional Learning Community (PLC) initiative, which took place only a year before the RTI initiative. The PLC used Alan Blankstein's "Failure Is Not and Option" commonly know as FINO, to rally school leadership teams to focus on improving classroom instruction for all students. The Green principal stated in response to how he or she felt about RTI, "It's not anything new, I see it as just a continuation of FINO." The Scotts principal referred to FINO as their "working model for RTI." During the interviews with the principals, it became apparent that FINO had in a way better prepared the staff for a program like RTI because the focus on student achievement for all students had already been solicited and conveyed by the county and the school leadership teams.

The Partridge principal explained that FINO created time and space for discussions surrounding low-achieving students. Using FINO as a vehicle for change, staff revamped their school's mission statement and norms. Much like the other schools in this study, the FINO PLC created an organizational capacity that the complemented RTI programing. In many ways, FINO helped formulate mind-sets among teachers that all students can learn.

While FINO was a common denominator among schools, staffing capacity differed by school. Many schools in this study relied on the expertise of special education staff for RTI support. The Benny principal, as one exception, was not satisfied with Benny Middle School's special education teachers. Without skillful special education teachers, according to the principal, Benny had issues with Tier 3 programs. With inadequate special education teachers, the Benny principal had to tap other expertise with in the school to devise and carry out interventions. According to the Benny principal, their school was very fortunate to have a reading specialist who was able to fill the void of quality special education teachers.

The results reported in this study demonstrate how RTI is so reliant on staffing and specific skill sets and abilities that influence the overall teaching capacity of the building. Of the six schools, school leadership varied according the expertise on staff. The list below describes the leader for RTI in each building (Table 18).

TABLE 18: RTI Leadership

	RTI Leader	Principal's Rationale for Choosing the Leader
Benny Middle School	Reading Specialist	Most Knowledgeable
Davidson Middle School	Special Education Teacher	Most Knowledgeable
Green Middle School	Principal	Passionate
Lions Middle School	Principal	Former RTI Coach/ Passionate
Partridge Middle School	RTI Coach	Most Knowledgeable
Scotts Middle School	At-Risk Coordinator	Passionate

In addition to the skill sets of the teachers, the principals in the study also described that teachers were driven to do more for students. The Scotts principal said, "Teachers feel like they are really tiered of doing poorly and they really are starting to rally together and figure out what can we do to turn this around." This mind-set arguably created a sense of urgency that the principal could capitalize on to draw support for RTI. The Lion's principal gave an example, "Social studies and science teachers, their kids can't read at third and fourth grade level, so they've been really supportive and actually teaching interventions." With this comment the Lions principal was expressing how teachers are embracing RTI.

So far I have described the leadership and teachers, needed to embrace RTI, and additionally I described how each building determined a talented passionate point person to lead RTI. Unfortunately, these factors were not enough to assure sufficient capacity to have strong RTI implementation. The overall skill sets of teachers are a very important capacity factor for RTI implementation. The Davidson principal described teaching reading as "a little out of their comfort zone" in referring to general education teachers. The discomfort in teaching reading was reported by other principals as well. Specifically, the science teachers were reported as struggling to teach reading at Scotts and Benny. Additionally, the Benny principal reported that they did not have the time to do all that is needed for a successful program. In this context, the capacity is not just knowledge, it is also time and support, which we have already discussed in the district support section earlier.

Organizational Trust

"School systems are built around a one-room school house model. We need to have a system that makes sure every child gets what they need to reach grade level" (Mattos, 2013).

The Mattos quote above is a call for change in the way that school systems operate. Most

individuals might not dispute that schools need to change; however, changing a school system is a very difficult process. As described earlier, the capacity to change is a difficult hurdle that relies on relationships among school personnel and the principal. The key to moving teachers beyond the "one-room" schoolhouse mind-set is building a great deal of relational trust among the adults within the school.

The Partridge principal stated that when asked about building capacity, "First of all we had to build trust, a common understanding of the priorities for that to work. To be real to the conversation, I have tell you, when building something like this, if this things smells like it's administered top-down, [it will get] blowback." The Partridge principal went on to explain how he involved many staff members from the beginning to build support and ownership among staff. The principal went further to describe how resources are important, but for teachers to fully utilize resources and support, there needs to be a "high level of trust to begin with."

While Partridge's principal reported a high level of trust, the Davidson principal reported low levels of trust. As a newer principal, the teachers were not buying-in to RTI as the principal had hoped. The principal reported to be battling the mind-set that "this shall pass." In other words, teachers were feeling like RTI was a fad, and despite the principal's effort to make RTI a priority, the staff was not buying-in. The Scotts principal reported combatting this attitude by working closely with staff in developing programing and in training staff. Through his own effort, he tried to generate buy-in. The Scotts' principals said, "it's not about doing it your way, it's about figuring out how we can work together, to do it together." With the Scotts principal, it appears to be the principal's relentless effort in working with staff that helped convince staff that RTI was important, because the principal appeared to believe it was important.

As with capacity, it appears that the collaborative work the of principals and their staff

during the FINO PLC seems to have help created much of the trust needed to implement RTI. Davidson, the only school that reported a low level of trust in regards to RTI, still had moderate levels of RTI implementation, possibly due to the high levels of trust the principal had built with the Tier II and III teachers. While trust with Tier II and III teachers is important, to improve Tier I interventions it is plausible that the principal would have to enhance trust among those teachers in the future.

Parent/Community Pressure

Up to this point, district supports, support for RTI, organizational capacity, and organizational trust have all appeared to influence RTI implementation. Surprisingly, the impact of parent and community support only appeared to be a major sphere of influence in Benny Middle School. Benny was unique among the rest of the schools in this study in that Benny had a pre-existing parent group that had organized to advocate for gifted and talented students. This group, according to the principal, was very suspicious of any programs that may divert funds from gifted and talented programs to programs intended to support other students. This parent group appeared to have successfully impeded RTI in Benny Middle School.

Benny's gifted and talented situation was not found to be an issue in any of other schools in this study. Only by chance, Benny was the first school interview. Because of this complication at Benny, the gifted and talented issue was subsequently raised with the other principals. In contrast, four out of six principals in this study reported that most parents really did not even know what RTI was after the four years of implementation. The principals in this study reported giving very little effort in informing parent about RTI. Most principals reported only having RTI conversations with individual parents who had students identified for specific RTI courses, or identified through RTI testing. Scotts' principal characterized parent discussions

more as an informative discussion that was individualized based on the needed of the individual student. The principals went further to say that these discussions only took place if the parents initiated contact as a reaction to receiving a letter from the school informing them that the students' schedule would be changed. In fact, all principals in this study reported similar processes and conversations. These responses to changing a students schedule may indicate possible negative pressures associated with changing students schedules.

All principals also said that their school or district did not do much in creating opportunities for parent involvement. The most effort seems to have come from the Lions' principal, who hosted an information session during the school's curriculum night in the beginning of the year. The principal characterized the session as available for parents who were interested in learning more about RTI. However, it was not clear how many parents attended the sessions, or how parents were notified. From the interviews it appears that little effort was made to include parents, and the principals reported very little push back from parents in regards to RTI as a program. In the case of resistant parents, all six principals reported that once they spoke with these parents, showing them the test scores and other data gathered on their student, parents usually agreed and allowed their student to participate in interventions.

What is an interesting caveat from the interviews regarding parents is that all principals reported feeling that they needed to do more in communicating and involving parents. In fact, both the ISD superintendent and the RTI director felt this way as well, from the county perspective. However, despite everyone seemingly believing that there should be more parent and community involvement, no one offered any plans that would improve involvement in the future or that would indicate that they were seriously moving toward a model of parent involvement. It is possible that principals only responded with a desire to engage the community

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because it was a question asked of them, however the principals were able to give fairly specific

plans which led me to believe that there was actual movement to involve parents. With the

exception of Benny's negative gifted and talented parent group, parent and community

involvement across schools was virtually nonexistent.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Revisiting the Research Questions

Like King (2012), when I began this study, I believed that a major reason that the RTI

implementation investigation in this study varied between schools due the principals' lack of

understanding of RTI and how the program supports student achievement. After conducting the

study, I do not believe the explanation is as one-dimensional as I might have expected. During

the interviews, I found principals to be mostly supportive to RTI. In fact, for all but one

principal, RTI was described as the driving force behind all curriculum and programs. The

Benny principal explained the testing movement and the utilization of RTI to improve testing as

more of an impediment to the goals of their district, through the statement below during our

interview:

> When you look at [our] high school and the people we graduate and where they go, you
> know they go to the MITs, they go to Northwestern, and they go to the Ivy League schools.
> You know we produced good science students, but the way the testing has happened, I
> think has caused and will cause an effect that will slow us down now for years.

With this quote, the Benny principal saw both testing and RTI as a distraction from

providing the curriculum and believes serves Benny's community. In contrast, the other

principals in this study roundly supported RTI. For example, the Green principal explained how

entwined RTI strategies were within Green Middle School:

> I think all the programs that we do operate within that [RTI] framework, 100% the time.
> Everything does align with what we're doing at that time, whether it's academically,
> socially, or behaviorally.

The Green principals' comment describes RTI as a framework or lens that focuses instruction

and programming within the school. While the Green principal provided the clearest statements

in regards to RTI's role in the focus of a school, the principals from Davidson, Partridge, Lions,

and Scotts Middle Schools made similar comments in regards to RTI. However, it should be

noted that difference in attitude towards RTI may be partially explained by the fact that none of the other schools are located in such an affluent community as Benny Middle School. This difference in attitudes may suggest that a particular level of affluence impacts the degree of utility a school principal might associate with RTI. In this chapter, further observations will be discussed in relation to this study's over-arching research questions.

Research Question: How do different pressures on the organization influence middle school principals' implementation of RTI?

ISD Pressures

Schools in this study were primarily pressured to implement RTI by the ISD, working under the auspices of the superintendents of each district. This pressure came through the form of the district superintendents' support of the ISD's implementation plan, which required participation of building leadership teams in regular professional development and which included progress reporting to a large group. School principals could opt not to participate in certain activities; however, they would face the embarrassment among other principals in the county by publicly admitting that they choose not to implement a program or to include an RTI related activity within their school. This potential embarrassment came as a result of updates that the ISD would give at ISD led RTI PD sessions that listed where individual schools were in the implementation process.

The ISD superintendent described the perceptions of the pressure the ISD placed on schools as intense for some, but not enough for others, through this comment. Below is how the ISD superintendent believes how school districts perceive the ISD:

> Some don't like that the [ISD] pushes, some say our people are too focused, and tell you [schools] what you need to do. Sometimes they [schools] see us pushing too hard. Forcing them to send teachers to many meetings, getting them out of their buildings, the net effect is there are some relationships that we had challenges with. Then some districts, they say we're not moving fast enough.

The principals' reaction to ISD pressure came more in the criticism of the training not being sensitive to the varying levels of progress among schools. For example, the Scotts principal expressed frustration with the countywide training by saying "The challenge of attending the ISD trainings is that there's a lot of downtime and my time is better spent here at the school." With this comment, the principal was not being critical of the content as much as the organization of the training. The Benny principal was more critical about the content, by saying they "felt that the ISD, they can put out a program that is for all, the same, and we are really not." The Partridge principal elaborated further by saying, "It's really hard to plan a PD now with all schools in the county because four years later we're all at different implementation levels." The Green principal concurred with this sentiment, "At first I felt like, frustrated because we are in a different place than the ISD. So a lot of information we got is the stuff we already knew, it just wasn't helpful."

District Pressures

These principal's quotes regarding the countywide organization and pressure for RTI implementation express frustration and displeasure over some aspects of the ISD's management of the effort. In light of this displeasure, principals still participated, which suggests that the principals felt a level of accountability towards their district superintendent. The Partridge principal said, "Our Superintendent is adamant that only thing that matters to her is student achievement, so she's the real supportive RTI," when asked about the district's support for RTI. This quote indicates that there was pressure from the superintendent to implement RTI. In another more implicit quote, the Green principal said,

> My belief system and understanding is lockstep with hers [superintendent], in terms of RTI. Through our teacher evaluation system everything is coordinated to the RTI in a way. My [classroom] walk-through considers these strategies, the goal on evaluating [teachers] on

engagement of instruction. Everyone in the building is evaluated on that with evidence and walk-throughs.

The Green principal's quote describes the belief of the superintendent and how that belief has influenced building-wide policies in the school. The Lions' principal reported the superintendent's pressure to implement RTI through an accountability process, by simply saying the superintendent gives "financial support of it (RTI), there's pretty regular reports (due to the superintendent)".

For the Lions principal, it seems that the pressure for implementing RTI was more constant by virtue of frequent required reports; however, many principals who said RTI was an expectation by the district also described little accountability to the superintendent or district. For example, the Scotts principal said, "We talk about RTI in using data, [but] nobody's coming down [from the district] and sitting down with us and asking us what we are doing." There was a tinge of frustration in the principal's voice, indicating that the school was doing what was asked, but the district was not following up and checking in on the progress the school was making. This became very clear when the principal said, "You [the district] can't just keep putting things [RTI directives] out there [and] not progress monitor. You do it, you want to hear [how] you're doing." By the Scotts principal's frustration stems from not knowing if the school is meeting the expectations of the district. In the case with Scotts, there was district pressure to implement RTI, but also frustration in not knowing if the current implementation met the district's expectations. The other principals made similar comments as well, including the Partridge's principal's very candid quote: "Quite honestly, formally, we have not had district-wide data meetings or RTI implementation process meeting." Statements like these indicate a seemingly *laissez-fair* management approach to implementing RTI.

DuFour and Marzano, (2011) state that effective superintendents communicate priorities to

define the focus for principals and those that support the district's priorities. The lack of clarity about monitoring of expectations provided principals an opportunity to vary or customize implementation within their respective school. The result of this ambiguity in implementing RTI is best described as Coburn's (2001) practice of "buffering." Through buffering, the principal is able to manipulate RTI's impact on their building's program and initiatives because of the limited district involvement. Because the districts are not fully engaged in most of the schools within this study, principals had the ability to control what facets of RTI were used and how to limit staff and student exposure to those facets. For example, the principals of Benny, Davidson, Partridge, and Scotts, all used only selected teachers to provide Tier II support, thus limiting the roles and responsibilities of Tier II supports to just a few teachers. By doing so, Tier II staffing assignments either allowed the remaining staff to continue programs that already existed, or limited Tier II instruction to teachers who demonstrated some expertise in this level of instruction. For either reason, existing programs were able to continue using the staff not involved in Tier II RTI instruction.

By the lack of district pressure, or more specifically lack of involvement, principals reported not performing data discussions and other tasks necessary for coherent RTI program implementation. The Davidson principal pointed to their inefficiencies resulting from the district not working collaboratively, by saying, "I still get the sense we're working not as a collaborative group; we're still working separately. Additionally the Davidson principal questioned the timeliness of getting district support through an allocation of an RTI coach:

> We had just gotten [after four years] to the point where we have put in place coaches, for math and literacy. Originally these coaches were only for the elementary. We just faced the fact that we need these coaches at the secondary level.

Some principals went further to say that because of this lack of district leadership their RTI

program varied from other schools in the same district. The Scotts principal outlined the issue in his district by saying, "We have schools that feed into us that don't have the same philosophies and so the kids are set up for failure because they come to our building and the buildings that feed into us have run their programs differently." Essentially, in the district of Scotts Middle School, the RTI program differed from building to building, so if a student changed a building the programing was different, which created program continuity issues for students. Given the Scotts account, it's likely this situation is also present in other school districts. For instance, student experience of RTI is probably distinct in the elementary school (with RTI coaches) that feeds into Davidson Middle School where coaches have just been assigned after four years of implementation.

It did not appear that the principals were making excuses for the schools' level of implementation; rather, it was apparent that because the principals did not feel district pressure or support to collaborate, the principals seemed to be both frustrated and less motivated to work collaboratively. As Honig (2012) found, district support is critical for improving instruction in schools, and this need for support translates to RTI implementation as well.

Parent and Community Pressures

Parent and community pressures were subtle in this study, with the exception of Benny Middle School. Most principals felt there was very little pressure from the community to implement or not implement RTI. With the exception of Benny, only a little push back came from parents in the form a desire not to change the student schedule to incorporate Tier II supports at the expense of other electives. However, with Benny there was significant push back from the parents of gifted and talented students:

> We were very careful whenever we talk about the school. I hold group meetings upon I talk about, spent some time at PLC's talking about reading strategies. I always throw in

something about and we have differentiated for our students for the gifted… and it's true… but I must always remember to mention it because we have a population [parent] that wouldn't be too happy if they didn't think that they were getting fair shake.

This parent push back from parents regarding programs for more needy students potentially over the more gifted students was unique to Benny, but demonstrates the pressures parents can place on principals. Besides Benny, there was not a lot of parent pressure reported. I believe this lack of pressure resulted mainly from the fact that all of the schools did very little to inform parents at all about RTI.   In most cases, schools only communicated RTI programing details to parents who had children who needed a specific intervention that would require a schedule change. In fact all schools reported to only notify parents of their RTI program if a schedule change was required. The most disclosure regarding RTI as a program came from the Lions' principal who held an RTI informational session for interested parents at curriculum night. For example communications to parents came in response to being contacted about a students' schedule change or possibly not at all. The following are comments made by principals regarding parent communications:

Benny Principal: "We frequently get some pretty detailed emails asking them (teachers) about information."

Scotts Principal: "When identified we send a letter letting them (parents) know what their (students) scores and how they were identified. If they have further questions to call me for further information."

Partridge Principal: "We send home letters to our parents that their child has been identified, though we don't use word at risk, that they are be assigning to support (intervention) classes."

Davidson Principal: "This is the second year we've been on, and we still haven't been informing parents. It is on our agenda for next year."

Green Principal: "We honestly don't do great job to parents communicating about RTI."

The lack of significant pressure from parents on school principals can be explained from

these statements above. In most cases, only a specific group of parents were notified, while in some cases they may not ever have been notified. This is not to say there is not pressure from parents. Principals did indicate that they contacted parents if a student did need an RTI oriented class in lieu of an elective class. Principals reported that parents tended to push back a little depending the values of the parent. For example, at Green, parents disagreed with having their student in an RTI class, according to the Green principal; "If they say no, its because of the stigma that we think they are special," meaning, that the RTI class is seen as a class for special education students. Parents at Davidson and Benny, were concerned about preserving the student schedule and electives. The Davidson principal said a popular reaction from parents was "Parents expect four cores and two electives, and now we're telling parents that your son or daughter is not meeting this criteria, and so we have to have them take a supplemental course." According to the Davidson principal, this break from a traditional schedule was difficult for some parents to accept. Further the Benny principal said that parental concerns can be much more specific, by stating that in the past "parents refused to give up orchestra" for RTI interventions. However it must be noted that this pressure communicated by the principals to maintain the "status quo" with the schedule was described to happen only on rare occasions and that, for the most part, parents were very amenable for the support of RTI classes once they understood what the courses were for. I discuss later in this chapter how this lack of parent pressure was also a symptom of lack of parental and community involvement, which could be used to help improve the effectiveness of RTI.

Teacher Pressures

Another pressure affecting the principal's support for RTI emanates from teachers. Unlike the pressures mentioned above that came from outside of the school through the ISD, districts,

and parents, teacher pressures came from within the organization. In the case of this study, many teachers were reported to be resistant to RTI due to both the lack of initial understanding and the fact that RTI would require many instructional changes. The principals reported that on a basic level of support for students, most teachers saw merit in RTI, especially for more severe struggling students. Teachers became more resistant when they were expected to change their own daily instructional routines. This resistance seemed to influence how much the principal would push teachers to change. In Benny, the principal said, "Our problem is our special education staff doesn't understand remediation, they don't understand how to help kids learn, because the system is broken," in referring to the issue that teacher resistance is not the sole issue; some teachers do not have the skills to implement RTI strategies. The Green principal said the problem with teachers implementing RTI stemmed from beliefs:

> I don't believe everyone on the staff understands the concept and were working on the [bottom-line] belief systems. You know, some of the adults in here may think that we're doing too much for these kids… too many resources towards helping them out.

The sentiment that adults [teachers] think RTI is doing too much was expressed by the Green principal, who then turned the focus back to the teacher and school organization by stating "we have to do a better job differentiating resources, so all students are included."

As mentioned earlier, two schedules are generally used for RTI. Schools schedule elective RTI classes throughout the day, or schedule one common class period each day for RTI intervention. The elective models requires a few teachers to teach RTI intervention courses to multiple sections, where as a common hour schedule requires that most teachers teach only one intervention class. The schedule choices are implicated in how staffing is done for each of the three instructional tiers. In the RTI model, core classroom instruction (Tier I) is taught by all general classroom teachers, and intensive support (Tier III) is provided by special education

teachers. How principals choose to organize and staff Tier II intervention, however, is variable. Within the study schools, some principals elected to keep the traditional master schedule and add Tier II RTI intervention sections throughout the day (Benny, Davidson, Partridge, and Scotts). Staffing these sections were a select set of general education teachers who began to specialize in intervention strategies in lieu of teaching only traditional core classes.

Other principals (Green and Lions) scheduled RTI Tier II intervention at one time of the day, when almost all teachers participated. In fact, the principals of Green and Lions were adamant that they wanted all staff to be involved in RTI Tier II because they felt the associated practices were simply good teaching practices. In fact, a review of the ISD professional development materials showed that the training emphasized the powerful overall improvement in core teaching for teachers engaged in RTI intervention.   Among the principals in this study, only the Green and Lions school leaders took this to heart. By scheduling a common period for all Tier II supports in a way that requires participation of nearly every teacher, the principal sent a powerful message that RTI is for all students and all teachers. Teachers needed to also be involved in administering program assessments and progress monitoring, and in the case of these two schools, they received adequate development support to do so. It is important to note that both Green and Lions also had positive pressure from their district superintendents and from highly motivated staff. Together, these factors possibly increased the principals' comfort in expecting that all teachers instruct RTI interventions. We place this idea of comfort within the ecology of the principals and the school environment; these two principals had high amounts of positive external pressure from their superintendents, a positive view toward RTI, and positive internal pressures from staff that were both willing and capable to implement RTI. These

positive social interactions among various stakeholders created conditions for embracing a deep level of support for RTI.

The remaining principals who selected specific teachers for Tier II (Benny, Davidson, Partridge, and Scotts) shared a common rationale that by using selected teachers, they both minimized the affect that RTI would have on the existing momentum of the school, and developed more talented Tier II intervention, teachers. It is likely that negative internal pressures from lack of capacity for all staff to provide RTI instruction influenced these decisions. By using only selected teachers for Tier II interventions, principals can schedule the intervention time in the same way as they would an elective class, which then helps maintain many of the structures within the existing master schedule, and which also reduces the number of teachers needed to teach RTI-related courses. Comments from these principals about resistance due to scheduling and elective classes follow:

> Scotts: "Part of the pushback has been because they [students] lose out on electives when they're in these [RTI] classes."
>
> Davidson: "Parents expect four cores and two electives, and now we're telling parents that your son or daughter is not meeting this criteria, and so we have to have the supplemental course."
>
> Benny: "Parents refused to give up orchestra [for intervention classes]."
>
> Partridge: "Students end up with their core classes, then a whole day of interventions.... It gets tricky to keep the motivation level."

This study found evidence that some principals chose not to involve all staff due to lingering issues of trust between the principal and teachers for whether RTI is a worthwhile effort. The Davison principal experienced negative internal pressure from staff when the principal said that teachers were still feeling like "this thing (RTI) shall pass," when speaking of RTI programing. In contrast, the Partridge principal said that they worked hard in the beginning

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to build trust and understanding toward RTI: "First of all we had to build trust, a common

understanding of the priorities for that to work," to illustrate how teacher buy-in and the

development of common goals had to be constructed in order to move forward. It is efforts like

PLC's and the efforts of principals like the Partridge principal that seem to lay a strong

foundation of trust and eventual organizational capacity with teachers.

Research Sub-Question: How do external conditions and principals' beliefs, values, and judgments affect their decisions about RTI implementation?

As mentioned earlier, relational trust seemed to play a large role in affecting how

principals implemented RTI. When outlining this study, I was more focused on how the

principal's beliefs, values, and judgments affected their decision to implement RTI. I found that

by and large the principals believed RTI to be currently the most effective way to help teachers

improve student achievement. Even the Benny principal, who did not seem to believe helping all

students was their school's mission, admitted to the effectiveness of helping teachers understand

how to adapt instruction for low achieving students. According to Benny's principal, "I think

there been many positive things come out of it I think, helping teachers understand that what

they do in the classroom affects all the kids growth now… focusing a lot on best practice"

In addition to the Benny principal's insights for how RTI helps focus instruction on helping

low achieving students, it was also apparent that most principals believed in RTI as a model to

help promote student achievement generally. Below are some of the comments of support for

RTI:

> Davison: "The etiquette for feedback, to the point where teachers want to open up their doors and work and learn with one another."

> Partridge: "There's great power in being able to really know those unique understandings of individual kids"

Lions: I think in the past we knew in our gut that kids were doing well, but we didn't have the data to support it. Now we're drowning in data, we can identify kids and we can focus on those kids… Get them interventions and progress monitoring. Before we knew it, but did not know what to do with it."

Scotts: "It's been going well. We've reduced the number of students that we have in Special Ed. ... Teachers embrace it."

These comments and others suggest positive pressures toward RTI exuding from a highly motivated staff that appeared to embrace RTI. When teachers reinforced RTI's effectiveness, principals appeared to be more willing to advance the program. RTI's process of monitoring learning in order to direct instruction contributed to the teachers' sense of their own capabilities. It was interesting to hear the perceived impact that RTI was having in the respective buildings. From these comments, principals provided insights on how they perceived RTI as a useful method for supporting struggling students.

In addition to how the principals perceived RTI, as this study progressed it became apparent that their perceptions of RTI, in conjunction with these associated values, beliefs, and judgment, was also an influence of prior professional development initiatives through solid professional relationships. The principals reported that relational trust was a key ingredient in their RTI success. During the FINO PLC, principals were able to establish this trust through shared leadership and collaboration. This level of trust then translated into support for RTI when the principals brought forth the initiative. Principals from Scotts and Partridge explicitly credited the FINO PLC as laying the foundation for the implementation of RTI. The Partridge principal described the introduction of RTI as a case where the staff believed that the principal would not ask to implement this program unless the principal believed it was in the best interest in students. Below is the Partridge principal's rationale for RTI:

We worked hard to tie the two together, FNO and RTI. [To be] very concrete about that, RTI is not a program, is not a program that we buy in a kit, and then we impacted for a

few years and then it was back on the shelf. It's so embedded in what we do and what we think.

The relationship the principal built with teachers was that they believed he was student-focused and would not pursue a program unless it was good for kids. In turn, the trust that the principals had of his teachers was that the principal knew teachers would support a program that was intended to help student improve.

Research Sub-Question: How do principals' perceptions of organizational stability and momentum influence their decisions about RTI implementation?

Because strong relational, positive trust existed between most of the principals and teachers, the principals were able to take comfort in knowing that the organization was stable enough to incorporate changes to its existing programing. The relationships built with staff were such that the principals believed they could implement RTI without affecting the trajectory of success they were already experiencing. The comments below describe how the principals viewed incorporating RTI into their schools:

Partridge principal: "They already had respect and rapport with their colleagues, so when we started this new stuff, it was much more readily received. All that work that occurred to build the foundation was really huge before we even embarked on RTI."

Scotts principal: "Teachers really feel like they're tired of doing poorly and they really are starting to rally together and figure out what can we do to turn this around. Especially now that they care about evaluations, it is becoming more meaningful to them to make sure that they can change the direction of the test scores sooner than later. I will be evaluated and I'm concerned about it as well, if we can get the outcomes. [If] we don't get the results, why are we doing all this?"

Green principal: "Not anything new at all; I see it as a continuation of FNO."

Lions principal: "We had an advisory program, and now it is enrichment for RTI."

These quotes suggest that RTI was implemented with relative ease due to positive pressures resulting from having pre-existing capacity that had been built through previous initiatives.

Since these schools had similar initiatives already underway, the transition to implementing RTI was more of an evolution of support systems already in place.

As principals adapted RTI to their school's settings, they adapted the form of the program to fit within their current structures and initiatives. The principals expressed how they were purposeful to implement RTI in a method that would not affect the school's momentum. Rather, principals implemented RTI more surgically and customized it to each particular school's needs. These adaptations can be seen by examining what personnel are involved in programing, and by looking at the existing structures that are utilized to implement RTI. For example, while RTI is rooted in special education practices, and many schools involve special education teachers in the administration of the program, the Benny principal did not involve their special education teacher because the principal expressed concerns with their capabilities. From Benny's principal: "Our problem is our special education staff doesn't understand remediation, they don't understand how to help kids learn, because the system [Benny's special education program] is broken" this is an example of a negative pressure towards staffing and RTI.

To implement RTI, each principal had to devise a strategy that brought teachers on board in a way that built support for the new changes. The Scotts principal described the school's approach as, "We try to backwards plan where we want to get and how we get there. We plant the seeds in the staff of things that we need to do and then we try to provide training that moves towards these goals." The Scotts principal's methodical actions of figuring out what the buildings needs to implement RTI, then map the path backwards in a way that is productive for his staff, indicates a purposeful logic of acknowledging the existing positive capacity and climate of the school to promote change.

For Partridge, the principal had to build the capacity with one strategy so that teachers

would have the ability to add another Partridge principal: "I had to build the capacity…. of [using] data ...with the teachers so they can focus on the core." Partridge administrators knew teachers needed to focus more on core instruction, so effort was made to improve the efficiency of teachers using data so more time would be spent on instruction.

In this study, each school had differences in how they implemented RTI programing, from teaching assignments to testing programs. Originally when RTI was introduced, variation for how to implement RTI was frowned upon by program developers; however, research conducted by Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) found that variation is really adaptability that may improve the effectiveness of RTI, setting by setting. Principals seemed to implement RTI in collaboration with staff in a way that was customized for their setting. Principals reported that some of the tweaks to the program were due to staffing and resources, while other adjustments were made to maintain other programs, as discussed earlier. What is an important take-away is that the principals appeared to push-in as many programs and activities as they could, without disrupting school momentum, which also reflects the high level of positive support that principals had for RTI.

Research Sub-Question: How do principals' perceptions of organizational stability and momentum influence their decisions about RTI implementation?

Like relational trust, the principals attribute much of the organizational capacity built to support RTI to the FINO PLC. This PLC activity helped build foundational programing and defined roles that allowed smooth transitions to RTI. Principals seemed very careful to take on elements of RTI that played into their existing strengths. These actions can be seen best in staffing assignments. Principals who had strong special education teachers choose these teachers to lead PD sessions and to take on leadership roles in RTI. These special education teachers seem to have had strong backgrounds in teaching basic skills that were not common among

secondary certified teachers. In contrast, some principals experienced negative pressures by not

believing their special education teachers had the ability to lead RTI, and so they sought out

other teachers. From whomever the principals chose, it is apparent that the capacity found

among staff was a consideration in strategies of how to implement programing. For example, the

Partridge principal acknowledges that teacher-leaders were critical for the success of their

schools' RTI program. The Partridge principal said *"We spend so much more time now building

leadership capacity with our teachers, because there is so much on their shoulders, and that's a

huge shift."* which describes the effort to increase the involvement of teachers as leaders in RTI

programming.

As discussed earlier regarding district pressures, district support was an important element

in organization capacity. From the interviews it became apparent that principals were critical in

regards to district support.

Scotts principal: "There's a lack of accountability from the district, we have five instructional
coaches but are they held accountable?"

Partridge principal: "Quite honestly, formally, we have not had district-wide data meetings or
RTI implementation process meetings."

Davidson principal: "It's (central office collaboration) not a part of the culture of what we are as
a district."

These principals reported negative pressures when either the district was reluctant to provide

support, or the district did not fully understand how they could support schools with RTI. These

pressures can be mixed, for example, while both the Davidson and Partridge principals reported

that their district was not doing enough to support their work with RTI, they also felt that the

district was supportive of RTI as a program and wanted their schools to be successful in

implementing RTI. In these cases, the pressures, positive or negative, may not be enough to

influence change. This disconnect between the concept of support and actual support may

indicate that districts simply do not know how to support schools with the implementation of RTI.

Throughout the study, principals reported that districts relied heavily on RTI coaches to administer RTI as a program throughout the district, with an omnibus relationship between the

FIGURE 11. District Relies on RTI Coaches to Administer RTI Programs
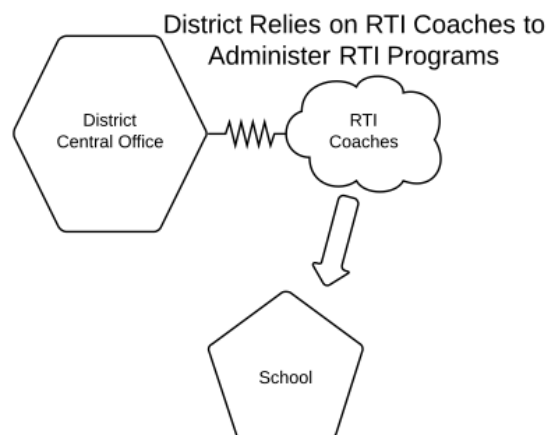
district and coaches. Technically these coaches tended to be labeled as central office staff, but their association was not as direct as assistant superintendents and more traditional central office administrators. Principals throughout this study mentioned having coaching support for RTI, but when asked how the district supported their schools, they did not describe the coaches as their preferred method of district support. It seems that these principals were looking for a more direct relationship with superintendents. Figure 11 illustrates the reported district-coach-school relationship that most principals described. It was described as though the coaches are an entity of their own and are tasked by the district to support school RTI implementation. These coaches met and supported school-level implementation of RTI as a program. However, each school's programing of RTI varied depending on the individual school's implementation plan and progress.

There does not appear to be any district where a firm system of implementation is in place,

as evidenced by how the principal in one school describes RTI. Without having collected data

from all schools in one district, this comment is tenuous as best. Certainly, implementation does

not have to be uniform to be effective; however, from the principal's comments, the variation

happens by chance because there is not strong district leadership in developing RTI through out

the district (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This could indicate that the variation between schools is by

chance and not by design. If variation is by chance, then it could be assumed that much of the

development of RTI by schools is also by chance, and that districts truly are not leading

implementation.

Lessons Learned

As I said earlier, a large premise of this study was that a leading factor that may impair the

implementation of RTI is the principal's understanding of RTI as a strategy to improve student

achievement. Although RTI understanding was a factor, I would not now place it among the top

factors that influenced RTI implementation in this study. Instead, I argue that the following four

factors held the most significance.

First, by having built organizational capacity in a previous school-wide PLC, principals

were able to transition to RTI more smoothly due to preexisting organizational trust and

capacity.

> If you intend to introduce a change that is incompatible with the organization's culture, you
> have only three choices: modify the change to be more in line with the existing culture,
> alter the culture to be in line with the proposed change, or prepare to fail.
>
> Salisbury & Conner (1994, p.17)

The quote above illustrates the importance of organizational culture as it relates to school

policy implementation. Throughout this study, it became apparent that the existing school

environment, including both the capacity and level of relational trust, was an important factor in

the success in RTI implementation. Deal and Kennedy (2000) stated that organizational culture

is "the way we do things around here," as a way to describe bluntly that this culture is how people act and treat each other within the organization. In education, there is an accepted culture that exists for how educators treat each other, which tends to be polite and incremental (Hess, 2013). As principals consider RTI implementation, they contextualize the changes to the system that RTI will require in relation to the skills and attitudes that staff possess. The principals in this study had laid the foundation with the FINO PLC, and they were able to build RTI on top of this past effort.

Secondly, the principals in this study seemed originally to approach RTI using deficit thinking, in contrast to an attitude that views RTI as a method to improve instruction for all students. By starting with Tier II and III interventions, which can be less difficult to implement, the principals neglected Tier I interventions. By focusing RTI totally on more severely struggling students, it became more difficult to elicit broad changes from teachers in instruction for all students. Now the principals are currently engaged in try to change the "mind-sets" of teachers in understanding that RTI is something you "do" only for struggling students; rather, the instructional techniques that encompass RTI should be incorporated into daily instruction for all students.

Teachers historically have been resistant to teaching skills seen as outside their content areas, such as reading (Ratekin, 1985). RTI's focus on skill development progress-monitoring places more demands on teachers (Batsche et. al., 2006). To ensure that these new instructional practices are adopted in daily instruction, principals will have to become increasingly involved in classroom walk-throughs and in targeting professional development that reinforces new techniques of instruction. The preverbal "cat is out of the bag," and principals cannot go back and reintroduce RTI, but they can take an active role in building upon their current efforts.

The third factor that was discovered in this study was that the principals were overwhelmed with the responsibilities associated with RTI. The principals believed that their district did not do enough to provide support for data processing, program curriculum, and progress monitoring. In essence, the districts did not assume a leadership role in RTI district wide, and in many cases offered little effort in a supporting role. These administrative functions were reported to be a strain on the school as an organization.

Many principals reported that the expertise and time needed to administer these RTI functions were not present in their current staffing and skills. Honig (2006) found that district support is crucial in transforming instructional practices, and this lack of district engagement appears to be not only impeding implementation, but also is devoid of accountability, which influences the level of effort that principals and teachers will put forth.

The final factor that was discovered in this study was the almost complete void of parent and community engagement. This lack of parent and community engagement is in direct opposition to the research for what works with struggling students with low socio-economic conditions. Although all principals made it a point to say that they "need to work on" increasing parent and community involvement, none of the principals referred to any definite plans to improve involvement in the future. I found this lack of engaging parents and the community a serious deficit in the RTI implementation efforts in this study and worthy of further discussion in the next section.

Community Engagement

An interesting caveat in regards to how the principals implemented RTI programing in this study is the perceptions of engagement between the principal, the school, and the parent-community. From the perspective of the principals, details surrounding RTI as a program and

the process being used to identify and assist students are often shared on a need-to-know basis.

The principals seemed reluctant to share information with parents, as detailed in the interviews

conducted in this study.

Partridge principal: "We like to include parents more, have more support, but reality did not involve parents"

Davidson principal: "Even at the middle school we're not sharing that data. This is the second year we've been on it. We still have to inform parents."

Green principal: "We honestly don't do great job to parents communicating about RTI."

Scotts principal: "When identified we send a letter letting them know what their scores were ….they were identified. If they have further questions to call me for further information."

The quotes by the principals at Partridge, Davidson, and Green demonstrate recognition of the

lack of parent communication. Even the communication from the Scotts principal seems to have

been an impersonal and weak attempt to inform parents.

The rationale given by principals for not communicating with parents had little variation

and appeared unrelated to the school's context. The opinions expressed by the principals

centered on the idea that coordination and/or collaboration with parents was not viewed as

critical for the success of the RTI program. Specifically, principals from both affluent and non-

affluent districts gave concurring responses that expressed their lack of effort to communicate

with parents. This is not to say these principals did not believe on some level that they should be

communicating with parents. In fact, five out of the six principals in the study responded that

they did not feel like they were doing enough to communicate with parents.

These responses demonstrate that the principals seemed to be aware of their lack of

communication, but from their perspectives, they also seemed to believe that the lack of

engagement was justifiable due to the complexity of RTI as a program. Whether it was

reluctance to involve parents or simply an issue of time, the principals within this study did not feel that parental involvement within RTI programing was a priority.

A wealth of research would suggest that these principals are underestimating the importance of parent involvement (Baum, 2003; Adams et. al. 2009; Blasé, 1987; Fan & Chen, 2001). In fact, when looking at a larger grain-size like the community, research also suggests that when schools reach out to the community through collaboration, schools can yield both positive experiences for students and improved programing (Warren & Mapp, 2011). Mapp (2011) described how community engagement facilitates collaboration between the school and families, creating more support for students. When principals fail to involve parents, they essentially are tackling student achievement from one direction, the teacher-student relationship, and ignoring the benefits of parent-student relationships or parent-school relationships.

In Chicago, Sebastian and Allensworth (2011) studied a fully integrated school-community relationship where parents led many of the programs aimed at improving school achievement. In this case, parents created educational opportunities for students by enlisting community leaders and local support groups that could provide experiences that were both relevant to promoting student growth and also "matched-up" with the interests and needs of the students. It is important to note that it was principals in the Chicago study that sought collaboration and engagement with the community. In fact, the Sebastian and Allensworth study, is among others that emphasized that it is the actions of the principal that best sets the stage for quality community engagement (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2011; Fan & Chen, 2001).

Warren (2009) found that parents could also initiate collaboration with schools by tapping into the shared-common interest of helping students (Warren et. al., 2009). For parent to initiate and take the lead in support of a program or initiative, they need to understand the reason

for and purpose of the initiative. For the schools in this study, for the most part there had been so little communication about RTI that parents may not have even heard about RTI. Due to the lack of communication, parents essentially had no information to work within any coordinated effort of support.

Principals in this study, in regards to RTI, did not use parent involvement to assist students in the program. In fact, the highest level of parent communication in this study came from a rural school, where the second-year principal, who was the former RTI coach, held a seminar for interested parents on curriculum night. In this brief session, the principal explained how the RTI program would be conducted in the upcoming year. The principal said that parents listened quietly but did not ask many questions indicating that they may not have totally understood the presentation. The principal further described the seminar as being limited to providing an overview of and rationale for RTI, but stopped short of giving parents tools, or guidance, in how to assist their children with RTI. The lack of follow-up questions could indicate that the principals' feeling that RTI is too complex to involve parents could have merit when only considered in this single presentation. Conversely, parents could have also been underwhelmed with the presentation. Parents may have felt that the program either did not seem worthwhile, or did not seem too different from how they assumed teachers were already teaching their students.

According to the RTI research, parent involvement can play a major role in RTI programing (VanDerHeyden &Burns, 2010). For example, parents can play a role as a partner with teachers in meeting frequently about the progress of their child and how they can support the process. This collaborative relationship mirrors the relationship of a parent who assists students with their homework and projects in the general sense. This relationship is slightly

different in that the parents are helping students build skills rather than focusing on content. With a more skill-based process, parents who are fearful or feel unskilled in working with their children when the tasks are content focus may feel more comfortable, and perhaps empowered, when assistance is in the form of basic skill reinforcement.

Parents can also assist RTI programing during the school day. For example, a major component of RTI is the frequent screening of student skills (Batsche et. al., 2006). These screenings are usually done using a cumbersome and time consuming one-on-one interaction with an adult and one student at a time. To be more efficient, many schools at the secondary levels block out part of the school day and screen all students in mass sessions. In this mass-testing setting, schools can utilize parent-volunteers who can help move groups of students because these screenings are usually done in libraries, gymnasiums, or specified classrooms. Parents can actually testing students when teachers trust them; they can easily be instructed on how to test students using several brief formative assessments that can help identify what skills student need the most support. Of course, all of these models of parent involvement are subject to district policies regarding parent volunteers within the school day.

By involving the parents in this more collaborative way, schools can accomplish two things. First, schools can improve their efficiency in administering components of the program, providing more time to focus on instruction. Second, by involving parents the school is creating clarity of the program and transparency that can permeate throughout parent networks within the community. This knowledge can help build even more support for RTI and reinforce the sincerity of the school and the confidence that parents have in the school (Mahdavi & Beebe-Freankenberger, 2009).

Baum (2013) discussed the difficulty that schools can have in engaging parent groups,

due to the variance in their interests. Parent group interests vary due to the goals that each group has in relation to the function of the school system (Baum, 2013). For example, the PTO may have more of a focus on teaching and learning than the athletic boosters, who are more focused on sports teams. Although these interests vary, principals can create several appealing arguments for these groups to support RTI. The connection to academics is obvious for the PTO; however, details that illuminate the benefits for "all" student would be important to articulate so that PTO members do not see RTI as a program that is meant for only specific students. In case the case of the athletic booster, the focus can be on how interventions will allow time for student-athletes to access support that they need that can help with issues of eligibility. There are many more arguments that can be made for supporting RTI by these groups; however, more importantly, the act of the principal in reaching out to these organizations could provide an improved environment of support for students.

It would be shortsighted to assume that parent involvement is the only engagement tool that schools can use to support students with RTI. Principals can also engage other members of the community to support students. In many communities, knowledge and resources are available, if approached, to assist schools in ways that benefit students. Since RTI materials can be very expensive, developing partnerships with community businesses to help fund the purchase of materials can be a major benefit. In addition, community partners may be willing to provide adults to assist in the screening/testing steps of RTI. This assistance could be more needed in communities where parent involvement is harder to elicit. As mentioned in this section, principals can engage the community for support of RTI, but principals should also be cautious when pursuing engagement opportunities.

Effective principals tend to be politically aware of the dynamics in their community.

In reference to the principals of this study, its not that they did not see the benefit of creating a stronger level of engagement for RTI as a program; it was a fear that bringing attention to RTI would do more harm than good. Baum (2013) referred to the "politics of education" and the issues that can promote or hinder community engagement. The politics of education describe the political dynamics found in a school community, as well as the pressures and forces that affect relationships among various actors (Baum, 2013). In this study, the principals in two districts discussed the perceived political pressure they experienced in reference to RTI, from motivated parent-groups who were more concerned about the needs of their high-achieving students being met than the needs of other students in the district. The Benny principal described the situation as "so hot" that in their district they had been directed by the superintendent not to mention RTI programs without highlighting gifted and talented programs, so that parents of gifted and talented children believed funds were being spent on RTI and gifted and talented programs equally.

The politics of education regarding RTI and other programs targeted at specific students really raises the issues of equality in education. Young adult author Rick Riordan, through the character Julius Kane, said, "Fairness does not mean everyone gets the same. Fairness means everyone gets what they need" (Riordan, 2010). In his assertion, fairness means that some students would get more and some would get less. It could be argued that this perspective is counter to equality, but Shinn supports targeting students with specific interventions based on their needs as good teaching (Shinn 2008).

When put in the context of "A Nation at Risk" (1983), equality in education can mean that it is a charge of public education to allocate more attention and resources to student with higher needs. With schools as a vehicle to promote social change, creating opportunities for students can ultimately promote social change in the lives of students and society (Dewey, 1913).

This can be a controversial use of education to those who believe it is not the schools' responsibility to create social change.

In the context of this study, acts of creating opportunities for community engagement with RTI could "democratize" RTI programing by increasing the influences of multiple stakeholders. Support and parental enthusiasm could improve the program, and perhaps even encourage higher levels of encouragement for students participating in the interventions.

Limitations of This Study

As I conducted this study, there were areas that were limited by the constraints of time, access, and resources. First, the majority of the data used in this study came from interviews. These interviews were self-reported data sources where individuals could either hide details or exaggerate claims in order to make themselves or their organization to appear different from reality. As a researcher, through observational data, I attempted to verify as many of the claims as possible, but there were always areas of interpretation.

Through probing questions I attempted to clarify the meaning of several terms and concepts. For example, from the first interview conducted I noticed that a challenge to examining district support was that the principals did not know what a quality model of district support looked like, therefore influencing their understanding of district supports. In the preceding interview I gave examples of what research considers district support, and I asked the participants to respond accordingly. Because the principals were expected to place their responses in a new context with little processing time, the respondents' responses were not as accurate as they would have been if they had prior knowledge of the quality of district supports.

Another limitation is the size of this study. Although these principals and settings were chosen due to the fact of their exposure to a countywide effort, the population is still very small.

While most principals reported very similar experiences, there was one outlier or dissenting opinion, at Benny Middle School. Benny Middle School was also located in the most unique community in the study, so an increase in participants in further studies of population similar to Benny would be more ideal to examine trends more effectively.

It is also hard to gauge if participants were more or less frank in their comments and information provided during the interviews. While it felt like participants were being extremely candid, it is unknown if participants actually held back information, due in large part to my relationships with administrators throughout the county.

Questions for Further Study

In reference to implementation variation, the most variation was described in Tier II instruction, specifically which teachers provided the instruction. A study that examines the effectiveness of Tier II instruction provided by all staff versus targeted staff would help indicate best practice. A second level of such a study could also look at how each practice influences the productivity of Tier I interventions.

This study was conducted in a county where a countywide PLC had taken place in the preceding years. This PLC was found to have a profound effect on RTI implementation. Another study could be conducted in a county where schools had not participated in a PLC, and this lack of the pre-existing capacity that a PLC builds. This data may expose more challenges to implementing RTI.

Lastly, a study that includes districts with more idyllic district support of schools would be interesting in finding when program implementation occurs within those setting compared to other settings. I believe that district-related research is a promising area of research that could lead to more effective policy designs.

CHAPTER 6: RTI POLICY DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Implications of RTI Policy Design Literature

Education policy expert Richard Elmore once said, "Better policies would result, we are told, if policy makers would think about whether their decisions could be implemented before they settle on a course of action," to describe the lack of systematic thinking towards policy design and implementation (Elmore, 1979, p.601). While he did go further to explain that this statement might be a little in jest in describing a highly technical and complicated process, there is a thread of reality in this statement because some polices appear as though actual implementation was not completely thought through. In the concluding month of this study, I surveyed all of the data I had gathered over the past year, and I thoroughly examined RTI as a policy.

It is important to note that the intentions of this policy was ultimately to reduce the number of students certified into special education programs. After analyzing the findings, I examined the percentage of students identified as special education by each school in this study. When looking at the number of special education students reported in the initial year (Table 19) of the ISD RTI initiative during the 2009-2010 school year, to the 2012-2013 school year, the number of special education students declined among all schools (Michigan Department of Education, 2014). This decrease was also true with Benny even though the principal reported that special education numbers had risen. So considering the intentionality of the policy, there are signs that the policy may, in the case of the schools in this study, be contributing to a reduction in the number of special education students.

RTI policy is a federal regulation passed by Congress to promote a change in practice at the school level for how students are identified for special education. As mentioned earlier, this

TABLE 19: Percent of Students Receiving Special Education Services

School	Scotts	Davidson	Partridge
2009-2010	12.83	10.44	13.38
2010-2011	13.62	9.45	13.02
2011-2012	12.71	8.99	12.2
2012-2013	11.11	8.27	11.12
Change 2009-2013	**-1.71**	**-2.17**	**-2.26**

School	Lions	Benny	Green
2009-2010	11.14	11.73	10.77
2010-2011	11.98	11.28	10.11
2011-2012	11.62	11.08	9.8
2012-2013	10.17	9.72	10.06
Change 2009-2013	**-0.97**	**-2.01**	**-0.71**

change in practice was expected to reduce the number of student identified for special education

service, and therefore reduce the overall federal expenditures for special education services. To

map out conceptually the relationships between the various stakeholders, I made a broad-view

map (Figure 12) in an attempt to explain how each stakeholder group interacted regarding RTI.

According to Elmore (1970), there are essentially two ways to perform an implementation

analysis, either *Forward Mapping* or *Backward Mapping.* According to Elmore, *Forward*

Mapping begins at the top of the policy process with the policymaker's intent and then proceeds

to examine the sequential steps and to define what the implementer's expectations

are at each step (Elmore, 1979). Essentially, the examination focus is on how the policy

directives influence behaviors towards the policy goals. In contrast, *Backward Mapping* begins

where "administrative action intersects private choices," by examining the policy directive and

the responsibilities of the administration to the policy outcomes (Elmore, 1979, p.604). With

Backward Mapping there is an assumption that there are other factors and forces at work that

influence administrative choice at each level.   Elmore described this relationship between the

administrator and policy implementation to be "conditional" (Elmore, 1979, p.604). These

FIGURE 12. RTI Policy Map
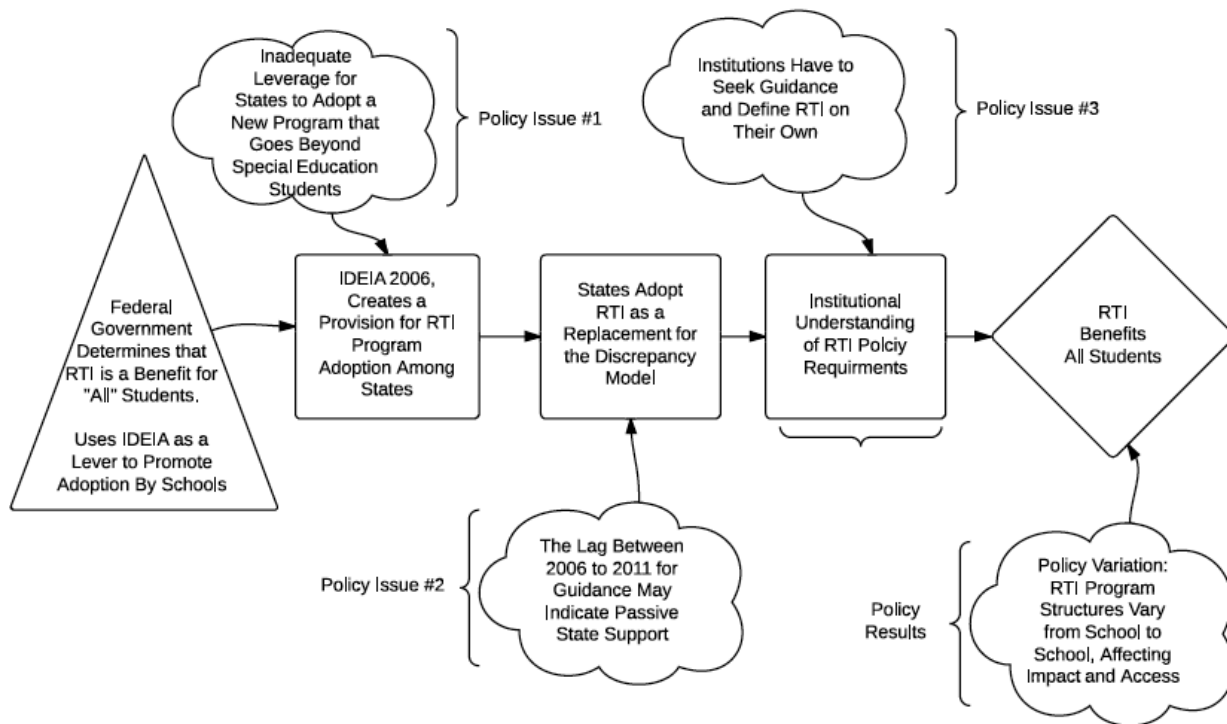
conditional choices that administrators make can help propel a policy or thwart its efforts. This relationship between policy and administrative decision-making parallels the premises established in this paper in regard to the ecological factors that weigh or act as pressures on principals as they make decisions toward policy implementation.

Starting with the outcome "RTI Benefits All Students," while policymakers are driven by potential ulterior motives such as cost reductions in special education, the outcome relies heavily on the building principal and the educational institution. This study demonstrated that the principal had substantial influence on the shape and magnitude of RTI implementation at the school level. The principals in this study had seemingly total discretion for how RTI was implemented in personnel, resources, and structure. How the principals purposed these elements ultimately shaped the level of changes the organization would endure and the impact on how students were involved in RTI.

To assist in the implementation, this study suggested that more district involvement could improve the implementation by assisting the principals in developing the capacity and administrative efforts for the logistics needed for both implementing and maintaining RTI programming. The district can serve as a conduit for critical RTI policy components and guidance, in order to help reduce the *boundary spanning* of principals as they seek to rationalize policy pressures in their school context (Simon, 1997). These potential district oriented policy levers were not apart of the RTI policy and should be a consideration in future designs.

In this study the IISD, appointed by the member school superintendents, became the primary provider of content and training, whereas in neighboring counties, each school district had to search for their own definitions and approaches to RTI. From a coherence perspective for the IISD and the member schools, this choice reduced the variation of information channels and definitions for RTI, versus other counties. RTI is a national policy, and as we backward map from the institutional understanding for the requirements for RTI programming, the policy leaves the guidance in defining RTI and best practices to be sought out by the schools themselves. So schools are being asked to implement RTI, while policymakers have not defined exactly what the best practices for RTI are. This ambiguity for a true definition of RTI beyond the few sentences offered in IDEIA 2006, creates variability of understanding between schools as inevitable.

In the case of RTI, the schools or institutions obtain their guidance from the state; however, the state did not offer clear guidance until 2011, five years after the federal clarifications in IDEIA 2006. The guidance document was sent to school superintendents and building principals with a memorandum that included the excerpt in Table 20.

This paragraph from the guidance document verifies that this document is the first communication of the official definition RTI from the state of Michigan. Within it there is no

TABLE 20. Michigan Department of Education Excerpt One

> The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has completed Michigan's definition and vision for the Response to Intervention (RtI). The materials attached will provide guidance for continuity and alignment in the implementation of a research-based system of RtI. In addition, the collaborative planning or braiding of initiatives, is recognized as an essential component for improvement of academic achievement in all learners.

recognition of the five-year time-lapse from the inception of the federal regulation to the official guidance emanating from Michigan's Department of Education (MDE).

A caveat to this document and IDEA 2006, which we will discuss, next as we backward map this policy, is a specific mentioning of using RTI for all students (Table 21).

TABLE 21. Michigan Department of Education Excerpt Two

> To streamline a school's efforts and resources to maximize improvement for all learners, the MDE has outlined how a school district can break down barriers and plan collaboratively to develop one common plan for improvement. The Michigan

In this statement (Table 21), MDE is reemphasizing that RTI is a program for "all" students. Although this is a very clear statement, it did not resonate with the same meaning with all of the principals in this study. It is possible that either the training provided to the principals did not verbally emphasize the intent of RTI for all students effectively, or more likely the IISD's efforts to implementing programs in schools, which were generally Tiers II and III interventions, focused attention away from Tier I interventions for all students. From examining the training documents, most of the effort of the training was directed at implementing and maintaining a viable progress monitoring system that supported ability grouping in Tiers II and III. In fact, this specific issue was pointed out by the Scotts' principal by who stated, "Training seem to focus on just identifying kids at first not looking at what else are we to do with this information." This statement indicates that the IISD's training directly influenced how schools implemented RTI.

While having the training directly influence program implementation is a desired outcome, if the training is off target then implementation may also be off target as mentioned by the Scotts principal. However, in defense of the IISD, there was no implementation guidance given to them either by the state or federal levels.

In this study I have not been able to identify a reasonable explanation for the lag from federal regulation to state guidance, but the situation inevitably was partly responsible for a pause in implementation in the case of Michigan. It is very possible that the state needed more time to develop policies that would ensure that RTI implementation statewide would meet the federal guidelines in IDEIA 2006.

Moving to the last step backward along this policy continuum, there are the initial inputs of the RTI as a policy, both IDEA 2004 and IDEIA 2006. Initially RTI was ambiguous in 2004 and was clarified in IDEIA 2006. This need for immediate clarity indicates there were policy communication issues from the beginning of this sequential journey. It is possible that policy makers had difficulty in conveying policy directives because their available levers were very limited and technical. For example, in the United States the federal government has limited jurisdiction over general education students in public schools. To avoid potential legal entanglements from disseminating a policy that had general education implications, policy makers sought to keep RTI policy narrowly defined in special education regulations that the federal government did have jurisdiction over, because schools used federal dollars for their students. It is unclear if this example was an actual factor in the initial policy implementation phase, but it does outline the difficulties in designing policies with narrow jurisdiction and limited leverage.

If in actuality jurisdictional issues impeded RTI policy at the federal level, this would

explain why more direct guidance was not offered at other sequential policy levels. It is possible that in order not to usurp jurisdiction and existing regulations, remaining vague and discreet may have been the only path policymakers had in developing their implementation design.

Understandably, there are many assumptions laden in this analysis, and further research of the actual federal RTI policy design would be needed to examine the true nature of this policy accurately. However, the fact remains that the design from the onset created ambiguity, and the ambiguity filtered its way to the actual implementation level, where much discretion was ultimately given to building principals.

Cohen and Hill (2001) found that a key to successful instructional policy implementation at the school level is "substantial professional learning." Further, professional learning is a "necessary" condition for any improvements in practice (p. 185). While the ISD did provide these learning opportunities, there is no evidence that they had any substantive guidance in what these learning opportunities looked like. Due to this lack of clarity from policy makers, the interpretation and development of RTI professional learning opportunities were entirely left to the ISD. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) stated that variation among schools can lead to a better-customized program, but this is with the assumption that the over-arching understanding of the program is well designed. With this study, there is no way of knowing if the training matched the vision of the policy makers, because they did not communicate any details for what a successful RTI program looked like to them.

Essentially there are three policy design factors that become illuminated when using *Backward Mapping* to examine RTI policy. First, the schools received direction from the ISD for developing and implementing a viable RTI model within the school. Much of the modeling depended on the information and resources directed by the ISD to the school. Because of the

directives from the federal and state levels, the ISD had a great deal of flexibility in shaping the school models, which of course were still open to interpretation at the school level.

Second, the ISD began work on developing training prior to the state's guidance, which was not given until 2011. Acting off of the federal regulations for RTI in IDEIA 2006, the ISD gathered best practice research and developed a model, which they felt was most appropriate for the county. As they developed and implemented training, the focus was mostly on identification of abilities, which subsequently became a large focus in school implementation.

The third and final factor attributed to the shape of implementation at the school level moving backwards is the federal regulations from IDEIA 2004 and 2006. These regulations were vague and communicated poorly to stakeholders, which led to impeded implementation. It is possible that the vagueness of the regulations prompted the state to take longer to react with a guidance document, and subsequent uneven implementation at the school level through the ISD. Of course this analysis is only a theory and would require further study, but the factors identified demonstrate potentially vague and omnibus communications that led to the interpretation of RTI policies that ultimately affected the manner in which the principals implemented programing.

Implication for Special Education Literature

As mentioned in Chapter 2, general education teachers are resistant to teaching outside of this core subject area (Ratekin et al., 1985; & O'Brien, et al., 1990). However, within this study I found this resistance not to be true in the case of special education teachers. In fact, five of the six principals within this study stated that their special education teachers were vital in the success of RTI within their schools. In fact the Green principal describe the value for having a special education background when facing the new challenges of RTI when speaking to the

district-wide success of RTI by stating, "One of our principles is also the special education director, and they really understand and they get it [RTI]."

In this study, the special education teachers were described as the resident experts whom possessed the background and training in supporting both the remediation and ability grouping of students. Even with the Benny principal who had a low opinion of the special education teachers at Benny Middle School stated "Our problem is our special education staff doesn't understand remediation, they don't understand how to help kids learn," also expressed a desire to have competent special education teachers who could lead RTI initiatives.
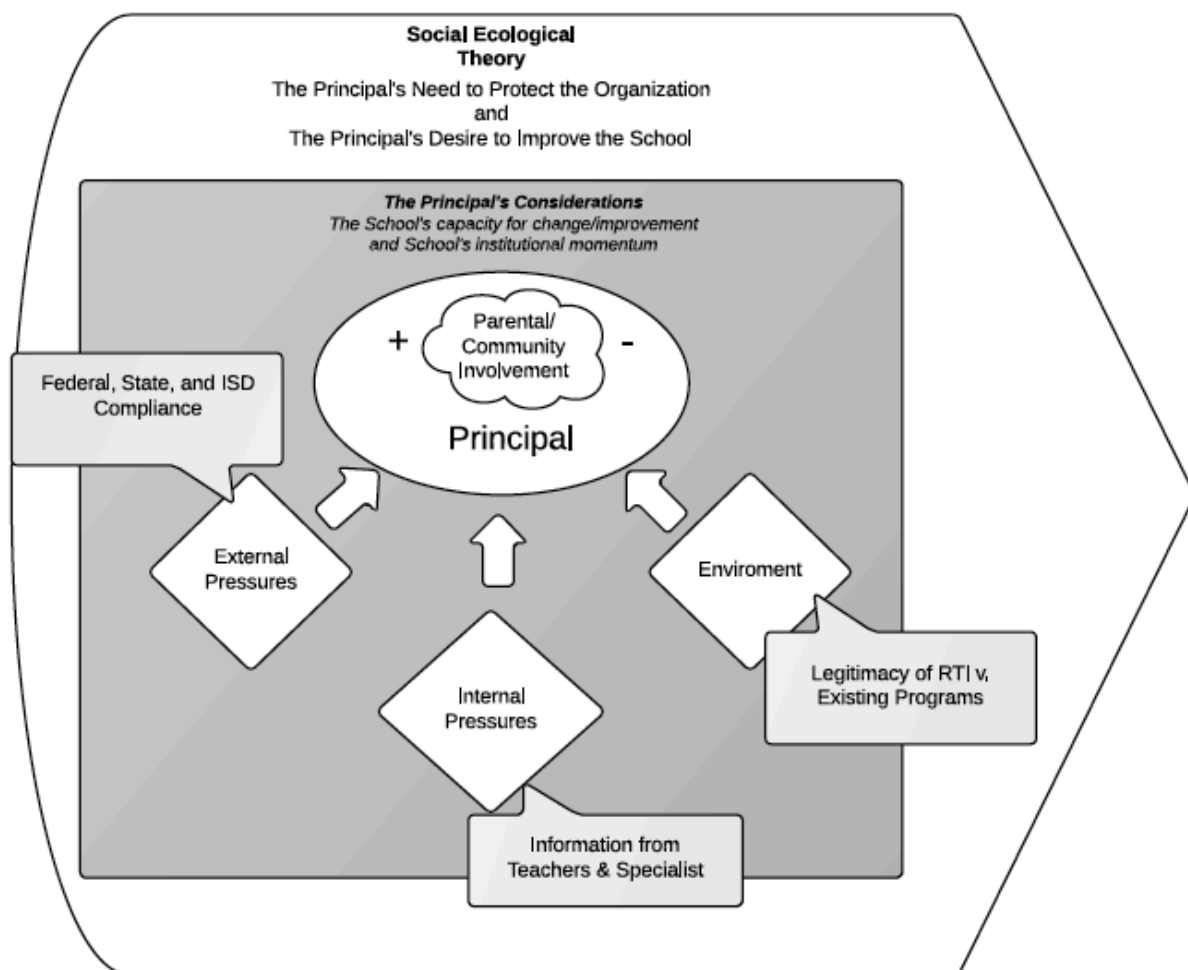
Traditionally, special education teachers have not been utilized as "experts" in general education due their exclusive focus in teaching special education students (Stough and Palmer, 2003). However, Stough and Palmer (2003) found that with the increase in the inclusion of special education students in general education and higher accountability pressures, the need for highly skilled special education teachers to assist with general education issues is increasing. In this study, the move towards implementing RTI in schools has increased the demand for highly skilled special education teachers. These new demands, is in a sense, are altering the expectations of special education teachers.

The inclusion of RTI in schools is not only influencing school curricular and programming designs, within this study it is evident that RTI has also launched special education teachers into the spotlight as resident experts as well. With this new status, principals should consider the expanded role of special education teachers within RTI, and the specific qualities and skill sets that are now needed as they hire future special education teachers.

Implications for the School Reform and Social Ecology literature

This study utilized a framework based on the work of Hannan and Freeman (2003) that described how principals incorporated or dealt with a change in process in response to the demands of RTI. As the study unfolded, a nuance that was not accounted for in the original framework was a contingency for the change in context that parents can play in influencing principals' decisions. Looking at the revised social ecological theory model (figure 13), parents are now found within the principal's consideration, operating as a contextual cloud if you will, that can influence the context of a policy like RTI both positively and negatively.

FIGURE 13. Social Ecological Theory Revised

Social Ecological Theory
The Principal's Need to Protect the Organization
and
The Principal's Desire to Improve the School

The Principal's Considerations
The School's capacity for change/improvement
and School's institutional momentum

Parental/ Community Involvement

\+ \-

Principal

Federal, State, and ISD Compliance

External Pressures

Enviroment

Legitimacy of RTI v, Existing Programs

Internal Pressures

Information from Teachers & Specialist

In the case of Benny Middle School, the parent pressure came in a negative form that discounted programs that were not intending for high achieving students. In contrast, the Lions principal described parents as having positive views towards RTI when speaking about the RTI information session conducted during the schools' curriculum night. It is possible that the school setting, in regards to the location and socio-economic status of the school, plays a role in the context of theses pressures.

Benny Middle School is located in a wealthier suburban environment in comparison to the rural and blue-collar environment of Lions. Within the change in setting, the principal also indicated education goals that seemed unique to Benny, with parents and community expectations for their students to not only attend college, but to attend upper echelon Ivy League schools. The pressure in context to parental goals for education may have influenced how principals embraced or buffered element of RTI.

It is unclear within their own context, if principals intentionally either promoted RTI or buffered RTI based on parental pressure, but there is data within this study that may indicate such behaviors. For example, the Benny principal reported to believe that 1. RTI is a remediation program for struggling students, 2. That RTI detracts from current programming, and 3. Moderately supportive of RTI, may have been influence by the negative parental and community pressures to graduate Ivy League caliber students. Within this pressure, the principal has to consider within the context of Benny Middle School, is RTI a program that will improve the overall standing of the school as an organization? Essentially, the context for what it means to improve the school is skewed by parent pressure. In the case of Benny, these parental pressures narrowly defined improvement to only actions that benefited the students who were already successful.

In contrast, Lions Middle School district and community focus was to simply graduate students to college. The challenge for the Lions principal then depends on their ability to "sell" RTI as program that will help students become ready for college. It is with these contrasting parent and the community pressures between Benny and Lions that may explain why principals have not significantly engaged parents and the community in RTI implementation. It is possible that the principals in this study may feel that current practices of limiting parental and community involvement also minimizes the resistance or support that may lead to additional pressures.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, from a research standpoint, parent and community engagement generally is positive in providing program support and implementation. However, the principals in this study seemed to have chosen to implement RTI quietly with limited parental and community engagement. From this study it is unclear whether this behavior is an intentional strategy by principals, but the trending lack of engagement infers that further research is warranted.

Concluding Remarks:

From this study I found that organizational capacity, program focus, district support, and parent and community engagement were important factors that impacted RTI implementation. I believe that these four factors influence general program implementation efforts beyond RTI. Essentially, if principals understand and support policies, these four factors will potentially hinder program implementation. It was my hope that I could recommend policy designs that would more likely to lead to improved policy implementation. However, not all of these findings are something that can be dealt with easily in a policy design. When you consider schools that have high administrative and teacher turn-over rates, policies will likely fail due to

the lack of the organizational capacity needed to develop the necessary support and skills among teachers. I do not believe a policy maker can create a design that "fixes" this issue, but these details could help policy makers provide additional supports for schools that have these challenges.

There are three factors policy makers could incorporate within procedural directives to improve policy implementation. First, for program focus, policy makers can be more explicit in the sequence of implementation. For example, for RTI, policy makers could state that schools should first incorporate a plan that improves instruction for all students, Tier I, and then incorporate programing for Tiers II and III as students need additional support. This emphasis on Tier I could help establish from the beginning that "all" teachers need to change the way they instruct "all" students.

Second, policy makers can also more explicitly describe the roles of the district. Policy makers can designate the district as the leader of all RTI programing throughout the district. The district can be directed to monitor and evaluate progress regularly, and to identify weaknesses and lead collaborative teams to address these weaknesses. This study focused on direct service to schools; by providing the same service to district level personnel and relying on the district to coordinate district-wide efforts with all of its schools, the implementation model would be more centralized and possibly be more coherent and accountable.

 Lastly, policy makers need explicitly to require the involvement of parents and the community. Many struggling students come from families that have little involvement with school, due to many factors. By requiring districts to reach out to these parents, families may become more engaged in their child's education. Support from home and the school in tandem is a more effective way to support students, and ultimately could lead to an increased value in and

confidence in education among these struggling students

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

academic deficiencies: specified skills below grade level

academic supports: processes in place aimed at supporting student achievement

core curriculum: English, math, science, and social studies

fluency: the ability to read and understand text

progress monitoring: frequent checks of student academic progress

targeted interventions: curriculum designed to address a specific skill deficiency

universal screeners: skill tests designed to measure student ability, no matter how low or high

skilled a student may be

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol for Middle School Principals

Warm Up:
Response to Intervention (RTI) is a federal legislative initiative in education. Currently, schools are in the process of implementing RTI programs nation-wide. In an effort to understand a building principal's role in the implementation of RTI, I have a few questions that will help me understand your perceptions and perspectives regarding the initiative.

A. How long have you been a principal?
B. What are some challenges of being a principal in today's educational environment?

Questions:
1. Please give me some general observations you have regarding the RTI initiative in Ingham county.
2. How do you think RTI has influenced your school?
   a. What are some Positive Effects?
   b. Have there been any Negative Effects? Can you tell me what they are?
3. What are your impressions from other building principals regarding RTI in their schools?
4. What has been the district/ISD's role in training and assistance in implementing RTI in your building?
5. What could the district/ISD have done differently or could do differently in assisting schools with RTI?
6. How have teachers reacted to the changes made to curriculum in response to RTI?
   a. Any resistance/support?
7. To what level have teachers participated in RTI within your school?
   a. Leadership?
   b. Role of Special Ed. Teachers?
8. Has RTI had an influence on your teachers ability implement RTI focused instruction?
9. As a principal, how do you feel the district views RTI?
10. Do you feel the district's leadership understands how your building has implemented RTI programming in your school?
11. How much support does the district offer you and/or your building for implementing RTI?
12. How well do you think parents understand RTI and related programming in your school?
13. Do you think parents see a benefit for their children from receiving RTI instruction?
14. Has there been any negative reactions from parents or the community regarding RTI?
15. Out of all of the programs in your school, in order of importance, where does RTI fit in?
16. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol for IISD Personnel

Warm Up:
Response to Intervention (RTI) is a federal legislative initiative in education. Currently, schools are in the process of implementing RTI programs nation-wide. In an effort to understand a building principal's role in the implementation of RTI, I have a few questions that will help me understand your perceptions and perspectives regarding the initiative.

A. How long have you been in this position?
B. How did the RTI initiative come to be in Ingham County?
C. What are some challenges from your perspective in implementing RTI?

Questions:
1. Please give me some general observations you have made regarding the RTI initiative in Ingham County.
2. How do you think RTI has influenced member schools?
   a. What are some Positive Effects?
   b. Have there been any Negative Effects? Can you tell me what they are?
3. What are your impressions from building principals regarding RTI in their schools?
4. What has been the individual school districts role in regards to training and assistance in implementing RTI in your county?
5. What could the districts have done or do differently in assisting individual schools with RTI?
6. How have teachers reacted to the changes made to curriculum in response to RTI?
7. To what level have teachers participated in RTI within the IISD?
8. Has RTI had an influence or teachers ability to implement RTI focused instruction?
9. As an administrator, how do you feel school districts view RTI?
10. Where did the IISD receive most of its guidance for implementing RTI?
11. How well do you think parents understand RTI and related programming in your county?
12. Has there been any negative reactions from member schools regarding RTI?
13. Out of all of the programs the IISD supervises, in what order of importance does RTI fit in?
14. Do you have any thing else you would like to share?

APPENDIX D: Observation Protocol- Space

Using a notebook, observations will be recorded by answering the questions below. Once the observation is complete, a narrative will be written that discusses the observations made and how they relate to each other.

Questions:
1. What are the different things within this space/event that convey meaning?
2. What are the meanings?
3. Who belongs here and who doesn't? What are their demographics? Their values?
4. How are they supposed to act? Not to act?
5. How do you know?
6. What is explicitly and implicitly "taught" here?
7. What concepts, and behavior matter here and how do you know?
8. What *dominant discourses and myths* operate in this place?
9. Are there *hegemonic ideals* or concepts? Counter-hegemonic? Describe how you understand the *discursive field* of these major "hidden curriculum" concepts and whether the representations in this place are hegemonic or not.
10. What are the boundaries of this place? Where does it stop and start?
11. What other places border it?
12. How is this place internally divided up? What spaces are within the spaces? How is it sub-divided and what does this suggest? How might there be spaces within spaces for different uses and people or ….private within public…..public within economic….male within female….old within young…etc.
13. How does this space and place suggest values?
14. To whom? Who is involved in teaching it ... learning it?
15. How does place control behavior? Is there any surveillance? Presence of law and authority? Who is it directed at?
16. How might place contribute to the production of schoolish "discipline" such as deferred gratification, patience, hierarchy, respect for authority, and so on and so forth. Where does it take place?
17. Explore different ways in which power relations might be present in the values implicitly expressed by places.
18. Explore different ways in which power relations might be present in the gendering of the place.
19. Explore different ways in which power relations might be present in the behavior and forms of knowledge suggested by being in this place.
20. Explore how different groups relate to the place and the ways in which this process might lead to unequal social relations.
21. Critically evaluate the different ways in which cultural identities are thought of as related to this place.
22. Consider an historical perspective: Show how any changes (like population) might contribute to the changing character/meaning of a place. For example: How is the character a place and daily interaction in/with it changing as a result of globalization, deindustrialization, or the development of technology or new electronic media? (going to the bank, for example..)

APPENDIX E: Observation Protocol-Populated

Using a notebook, observations will be recorded by answering the questions below. Once the observation is complete, a narrative will be written that discusses the observations made and how they relate to each other.

Questions:
1. Describe the mood of the students in the building.
2. Describe the mood of the adults in the building.
3. Describe the difference in the mood between the students and the adults.
4. Describe the behavior of the students in the building.
5. Describe the behavior of the adults in the building.
6. Describe the difference in the behavior between the students and the adults.
7. What are the possible meanings of these moods and behaviors?
8. Who belongs here and who doesn't? What are their demographics? Their values?
9. Are there indications for how people should act in this environment?
10. How do you know?
11. What is explicitly and implicitly "taught" here?
12. What concepts, and behavior matter here and how do you know?
13. What *dominant discourses and myths* operate in this place?
14. Are there *hegemonic ideals* or concepts? Counter-hegemonic? Describe how you understand the *discursive field* of these major "hidden curriculum" concepts and whether the representations are this place is hegemonic or not.
15. What are the boundaries of this place? Where does it stop and start?
16. How is behavior in classrooms different from the rest of the building?
17. What types of activities do you see students engaged in?
18. Do you see any constancy in classroom expectations among classrooms?
19. How present is reading in classrooms?
20. Are reading interventions present in classrooms?
21. In courses where reading is present, do you notice specific reading strategies being used/taught?
22. What types of discussions do teachers/staff have regarding students?
23. What types of discussions do teachers have regarding reading?
24. What types of comments do students make regarding reading?
25. Are does anyone discuss RTI specifically?
26. Are there any observable behaviors that indicate attitudes towards RTI?
27. How present are RTI programing/strategies within the school? Where?
28. Are artifacts present that relate to RTI? Where?
29. What general impression emerged during this observation regarding RTI?
30. What expectations did you have about this observation that came out of the observation of the space?

APPENDIX F: The Principal's Role in the Implementation of Response to Intervention–
Consent Form

What the study is about: You are being asked to take part in a research study whose goal is to understand how principals perceive RTI and related program implementation.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your role as a principal related to RTI, and the implementation of RTI programming. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview. **Please understand that participation is voluntary, you may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence.**

Risks, Benefits, Compensation:
- I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study, other than those encountered in day-to-day life.
- There are no benefits to you.
- There is no compensation for participation

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. The researcher will keep this consent form for at least three years beyond the end of the study. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sean Williams. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Sean Williams at willi523@msu.edu or 517-7950978. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____Date _____

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