A qualitative investigation of factors associated with the disproportionate number of students referred for special education testing through the response to intervention process

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE
DISPORPORTIONATE NUMBER OF STUDENTS REFERRED FOR SPECIAL
EDUCATION TESTING THROUGH THE RESPONSE TO
INTERVENTION PROCESS

Committee Chair: Dr. Moses Norman

Dissertation dated July 2013

The purpose of this research study was to determine if teachers responsible for implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) in elementary schools within the district of the study contributed to a disproportionate amount of students being referred for special education testing through the Response to Intervention process. The researcher examined teacher understanding of Response to Intervention and the implementation of the process. The method used involved a qualitative study that included three data collections methods to measure the teacher’s perceptions: individual face-to-face interview sessions, written surveys, and a focus group interview. Participants in the study included 12 classroom teachers for independent interviews from six schools across three clusters of a school district 20 miles outside of Atlanta, Georgia. The focus group included eight
teachers from two additional schools. In addition, each teacher was asked to complete a Teacher Interest Inventory Survey. The data produced from this study provided information to contribute to the understanding of factors that impact the number of children referred for special education testing through the Response to Intervention process. This study created an awareness and overall perception of teachers throughout the district regarding the RTI process. Limitations of this study include the limited number of people involved in the study. However, findings from a study such as this one can increase awareness of how children are referred for special education testing within a district studied that contribute to creating a disproportionate number of children referred for special education testing and could lead to similar studies in other school districts. Suggestions for further research are included within the study.
A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISPORPORTIONATE NUMBER OF STUDENTS REFERRED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TESTING THROUGH THE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION PROCESS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

VANEISA D. BENJAMIN

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

JULY 2013
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I dedicate this research study to the memory of my mother, a life-long educator, Lula C. Davis. She loved children and greatly valued education. She treated all children, from the poorest house to the richest house with the same level of respect, dignity, and dedication. She ensured each day that her students received the best education possible. Her educator’s spirit lives in me.

I would like to thank my two sons Michael and Marlin for constantly presenting themselves as young men of honor. You both consistently gave your focus to school, sports, and developing into great young men, allowing me to be worry and burden free during my time attending school. You allowed me to freely give my energy to learning and growing. You both are the best sons in the world and God must really love me, to give you both to me. I feel so honored.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A treatment method or an educational method that will work for one child may not work for another child. The one common denominator for all of the young children is that early intervention does work, and it seems to improve the prognosis. (Temple Grandin, 2013)

The quote above supports the belief that there is a connection between the value of providing interventions to children that will help to remediate information students do not understand and their ability to be successful in school. The commonly held contention is that the earlier they receive help and the sincerity with which the help is given can make a difference in the life of each child. Intervention many times will allow students to remain on grade level or at least catch up to their academic peers and prevent them from a tracking system that could possibly lead them to special education testing. Through this research study, the researcher investigated the factors associated with a disproportionate number of students referred for formal special education testing through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process in a local suburban school district 20 minutes outside of Atlanta, Georgia.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an early detection and prevention support process that should help in identifying students who struggle and thereby help them
academically or behaviorally before they fall too far behind their academic peers. In 2004 because of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 108-446), states were encouraged to use the Response to Intervention process to identify students with possible learning disabilities and provide support to those students regardless of any disability classification. Response to Intervention was included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) because during the reauthorization bills of IDEA both the House and Senate Committees were concerned with the models that were in existence for identifying students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). At that time IQ tests were used to measure student knowledge of academic material. Then research came along suggesting that there was growing support that Response to Intervention (RTI) was a scientific research supported method that could more accurately distinguish the difference between children who were SLD and children who needed additional academic help through more intensive general educational interventions. During this process the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education made a recommendation that the process for identifying SLD include Response to Intervention. The use of Response to Intervention is required as a part of the process for determining whether or not a student meets the criteria for special education services. Section 300.307(a) (2)-(3) of IDEA requires that a state’s criteria for identification of specific learning disabilities:

- Must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and

- May permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability.
Also, section 300.307(b) of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act states that a public agency must use the state’s criteria in identifying children with Specific Learning Disabilities. Thus, the state’s criteria must permit the use of RTI and may require its use, in addition to other assessment tools and strategies, for determining whether the child has a specific learning disability.

At the district level, IDEA determined if the Lead Educational Administrator (LEA) is using RTI for all of its students, it may require the group establish for the purpose of determining the eligibility of students suspected of having a SLD to review data from an RTI process in making an eligibility determination. Through using RTI, the evaluation time period is generally not as long a time period to complete because data concerning the child’s progress or lack of progress has begun before any formal testing begins, including observation data. If the eligibility group determines that additional data is needed and cannot be obtained within the evaluation time period, the parent and eligibility group can agree to an extension of the time frame. However, parents can request an evaluation at any time, and the public agency must either obtain consent to evaluate and begin the evaluation, or, if the public agency declines the parent’s request, issue a prior written notice.

Section 300.304 (b) of IDEA concerning Response to Intervention further states that in conducting an evaluation, a public agency must use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child, including information provided by the parent, that may assist in determining eligibility and not use any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether a child is a child with a disability and for determining an
appropriate educational program for the child. Response to Intervention data is only a part of the entire evaluation process; it cannot replace the comprehensive evaluation. Under IDEA, an RTI process does not replace the need for a comprehensive evaluation. A public agency must use a variety of data gathering tools and strategies even if an RTI process is used. The results of an RTI process may be one component of the information reviewed as part of the evaluation procedures required. As required in 34 CFR 300.304(b), consistent with section 614(b)(2) of the Act, an evaluation must include a variety of assessment tools and strategies and cannot rely on any single procedure as the sole criterion for determining eligibility for special education and related services.

Response to Intervention can be implemented through an incremental process in a district at individual schools over time and all schools do not have to be trained at the same time. However, if the state or LEA requires the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention, in identifying children with SLD, then all children suspected of having a SLD, in all schools in the LEA, would be required to be involved in the process. There is research that indicates that implementation of any process, across any system, is most effective when accomplished systematically in an incremental manner over time. But for the purposes of RTI, it could not be used for identifying children with special needs if it were implemented incrementally. A state cannot use the Response to Intervention process until it was implemented in all school districts as a scientific, research-based intervention.

RTI is implemented across the state of Georgia as just that, a scientific, research-based intervention. A child with a disability who is already receiving special education and related services also would be eligible to receive services using response to
intervention (RTI). Educators can assist students through RTI that are already identified as SLD in specific areas as soon as those areas are identified unless the remediation is inconsistent with their individualized education program (IEP). Additionally, under IDEA, school districts may use data gathered through RTI strategies in its evaluations and reevaluations of children with SLD. However, children with disabilities who are currently identified as needing special education and related services may not receive RTI services that are funded with IDEA funds used for Early Intervening Services (EIS). This is because EIS is used for students in kindergarten through grade 12 who are not currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment.

Response to Intervention is a federal imitative. Each state has the obligation to set parameters around their process. In the state of Georgia, the parameters are outlined in the Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions. It is the process of aligning appropriate assessment with purposeful instruction for all students. In Georgia, Response to Intervention is based in the general education classroom where teachers are required to implement a standards-based learning environment. The approach is a tiered approach designed to provide layers of intervention for students needing support and requiring a school wide common understanding of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), assessment practices, and instructional pedagogy.

In this 4-Tier model, instructional support is supposed to match the need of the student. It also includes Evidence-based instruction as the core of classroom pedagogy. Evidence-based interventions are monitored using progress monitoring. There is also use
of a variety of ongoing assessment data to determine which students are not meeting success academically and/or behaviorally. Each school must have a data team that meet to make determinations for instruction within the building and instructional resources must be effectively allocated throughout the building.

The design of the 4-tier Georgia model allows for all students to participate in general education instruction. If it is determined that a student needs interventions, they will receive this instruction through a systematic and purposeful process. The premise is that as interventions increase, the number of students needing interventions will decrease. The four tiers are listed as: Tier 1 – Standards-Based Classroom Learning; Tier 2 – Needs-Based Learning; Tier 3 – SST-Driven Learning; and Tier 4 – Specially-Designed Learning.

Under Response to Intervention, Tier 1 is the Standards-based Classroom. All students participate in general education instruction involving giving every student a Universal Screener. These screeners are test designed to identify students who are in need of help and additional support in specific academic areas. Teachers must also implement the required instruction through a standards based classroom structure. Teachers must further provide an environment that meets the needs of the students through differentiation of instruction. It must be fluid, allow for flexible groupings, present the information and assessments in multiple ways of learning and allow students multiple ways to demonstrate what they have learned. In addition, within Tier I, teachers must progress monitor student performance through multiple formative assessments.
Tier 1 is an evidence-based instructional approach and should be provided with fidelity. Monitoring of student progress should happen frequently and notice should be taken for any student receiving remediation within the classroom.

It has come to the forefront of education reform efforts in recent years, with both federal legislation and state initiatives promoting use of RTI and similar initiatives. RTI has promise in serving as a mechanism to address NCLB and IDEA 2004 mandates, concerns about traditional special education identification procedures, the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education, the integration of general and special education, and the delivery of evidence-based programs to students. (Georgia Department of Education, 2008)

Students at the Tier 1 level all receive Universal Screening done to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses. There is no characteristic for instruction at this level other than the expectation that the teacher is going to follow the curriculum and pacing set forth by the district or state. The words such as high quality, rigor, and relevance are seen as important at this time. This use of rigorous academic standards can help identify students who may have academic struggles. After the universal screening process, progress monitoring interventions begin for identified students. It is important to play close attention to the tools used to progress monitor students. Culture and ability to speak the language play a significant role in understanding if a student has mastered academic material or is hindered by barriers beyond their control. These data are used by teams of professionals to decide instruction, limit services, or increase services. Grade-level instruction continues in the classroom for students receiving remediation, which includes research-based interventions of a medium intensity. If the Tier I intervention proves
successful, students may no longer receive the intervention. However, for students who receive the intervention and their data suggest limited or no improvement, interventions can continue, and even increase in intensity. The services students who struggle receive must be in addition to services they already receive through general instruction and more than another child would receive through the standard instruction. For students who really show little to no improvement, their interventions can even be on an individual basis. As outlined below, the State of Georgia has determined that when students are identified who continue to struggle at Tier 1, they are placed in Tier 2 interventions that will supplement the Tier 1 classroom. The classroom teacher must be concerned with the following:

- During the instructional year, Tier 1 progress monitoring is used in the classroom as a part of standards-based instruction. As student assessment data indicate a need for Tier 2 support, the data team will follow school-created procedures for decision making.

- Three important questions must be addressed to determine the reason for the need for additional support:
  
  Is the learning concern a curriculum issue?
  
  Is the learning concern an instructional issue?
  
  Is the learning concern a student issue?

- The questions should be addressed in the order listed.
• Movement between Tier 1 and Tier 2 is fluid and flexible. Adequate time should be given for the Tier 1 instructional program to be implemented before determining Tier 2 supported is needed.

• Common sense is critical in assessing student performance and individual responses to Tier 1 instruction (i.e.; a student with a documented visual impairment would be provided interventions immediately).

If students are not successful at Tier 1, according to the Georgia Response to Intervention plan the next level of assistance is Tier 2. This level is labeled the Needs Based Learning Tier. In addition to Tier 1, identified students participate in learning interventions that are research based instruction for the areas of need. Student progress is continued to be monitored and measured in order to make decisions concerning if the student is making progress or is there a need for additional instruction. The data produced from these interventions guide the decision-making. Tier 2 answers the question of what to do when students are not learning the material in the Tier 1 standards-based classroom. Through use of the Universal Screener data, assessment data, formative data, and information provided by the teacher, content areas that need support and interventions can be identified. Interventions are then developed which are specific to those students who demonstrate a weakness in those specific academic areas. Under Georgia’s Response to Intervention plan for Tier 2, the following should be adhered to:

• All students who need Tier 2 intervention (in addition to Tier 1 instruction) should be identified through the universal screening and formative assessment protocol.
• A school wide understanding of assessment data and projected levels of student mastery during the school year is required for effective Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction in all content areas.

• Tier 2 interventions should be in place for students who are not being sufficiently successful or adequately challenged with Tier 1 interventions alone.

• Tier 2 interventions should be preplanned, developed, and supported at the school level, thereby becoming standard intervention protocols that are proactively in place for students who need them.

• Tier 2 interventions are not a substitution for Tier 1 instruction, but are layered in addition to the Tier 1 instruction that is provided.

• Schools should determine concepts and content areas that are likely to have been mastered by highly able students and, through strategies such as pretesting and curriculum compacting, be prepared to provide acceleration.

• Tier 2 interventions should not be endless for individual students who are struggling. Schools must ensure that specific students are not labeled as being Tier 2 students and thereby create lower expectations, or tracking for those students.

• Progress monitoring should be used for identified students involved in Tier 2 to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. Attention to transfer of learning to the Tier 1 core classroom should be considered.
• The collaboration between the Tier 2 intervention teacher and Tier 1 classroom teacher(s) should be frequent and focused on progress monitoring data.

• Collaborative discussion and planning will support transfer of learning.

• Collaborative discussion and planning will support appropriate and rigorous instruction in the intervention class.

• Collaborative discussion and planning will create the language of a common instructional focus.

• Specific academic interventions should be established for students who are missing core academic skills (e.g. strong reading skills) that will increase the probability that these high risk students will have the necessary skills to be successful.

• The data team will confirm the fidelity of implementation of the intervention through frequent contact and observation during instruction.

• Additional Tier 2 interventions may be required if little or no progress is documented. The data team will follow previously established protocols to determine if additional Tier 2 interventions should be implemented.

• After the appropriate amount of time (time in weeks dependent on the intervention), the data team should assess student progress and determine if continued support through Tier 2 is required, additional Tier 2 interventions are required, or if Tier 3 support, in addition to Tier 1 and Tier 2, is required.
Tier 3 of the Response to Intervention process is labeled the SST-Driven Learning Tier. The previous two tiers offer a different format of learning, targeted assistance through research-based strategies and progress monitoring. Students, who move to Tier 3 under Georgia’s plan, are required to receive unique, individual, diagnostic, data driven instruction that will seek to explain exactly what and why there is an academic problem. By the time a student reaches Tier 3 interventions additional educational support staff becomes involved in the process if they were not earlier. People such as a school psychologist, intervention specialist, behavioral specialist, school counselor, social worker or speech-language pathologist. Additional data are gathered and the problem solving at this stage is more intense. Information is gathered about the student to include strengths, weaknesses, vision and hearing test are performed, and background information is gathered. One important fact to reference, at the Tier 2 level, the instruction should be designed to strengthen the area of weakness. However, at Tier 3, the focus moves to discover the reason for the weakness. This information becomes very important in establishing the individualized intervention that will best help the student. Once the reason for the weakness is determined, many students are then helped at the Tier 3 level and some move back to Tier 2 or even to Tier 1. There are some cases in which the determination is made at Tier 3 that the best support for the student may be a 504 plan with accommodations and not a need to explore further steps. Georgia’s Response to Intervention Plan identifies certain conditions that must be present:

- The appraisal nature of SST lends itself not only to preventing inappropriate referrals (by solving problems) but also to helping meet a requirement for those that were indeed appropriate. That is, Special Education law required
that schools must prove that regular education is unable, with commonly accepted and well documented interventions, to solve the student’s problem; therefore, Special Education was indicated.

- The SST’s role in Georgia’s Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions addresses the concern to ensure that interventions are well documented.

- SST is no longer the sole generator of evaluative and performance data. Some of its functions are being embraced by Tiers 1 and 2, so that by the time SST actively addresses a student case, there is substantial data already available.

- The most recent reauthorization of IDEA states not only that a student’s response to intervention must not only be allowable as a component of eligibility, but also that the interventions themselves must have been proven effective.

- If a student had not had a fair chance to learn in response to solid teaching, then it would be premature to fault the student or suspect a disability. This is a critical consideration in our on-going attempts to remedy the problem of disproportionate placement of minorities in Special Education.

- In any given school or school system, there must be accountability for the soundness of the data gathered on a student in Tiers 1 and 2 before the case can proceed to the SST.

- Interventions must have been implemented with fidelity that is, consistently implemented following the delivery method and program originator’s design (time, frequency, etc).
• Once an intervention is initiated, at least four data points, and preferably many more, will need to be generated to measure progress. Best practice supports progress monitoring the student’s response to the intervention one to three times per week.

• At Tier 3, the length of the intervention will vary by case, but most cases will occur over a 6 to 12 week period. For students who may eventually be considered for Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) eligibility, note that the required time period for data collection is twelve weeks.

• Interventions must be implemented for 12 weeks before a student can eventually be found eligible for special education services for a learning disability, but it does not all have to take place in Tier 3/SST.

• Additional weeks of interventions can take place during the specified evaluation period for special education eligibility. Interventions from Tier 2 may also count toward the required 12 weeks for students being considered for SLD eligibility. For students being considered for eligibility in areas other than SLD, the key consideration is that interventions have been given a reasonable amount of time to work and that there are enough data.

• Prior to the widespread use of the RTI process, it was not uncommon for certain students to be on the active SST caseload for more than a year. With differentiated instruction, RTI and the expanded options for skill strengthening in Tiers 1 and 2, the typical time of active SST status should be substantially less.
• Tier 2 and to an extent Tier 3 try to address systemic, institutional factors related to a student's situation in order to fill gaps, strengthen skills, engender confidence, and find a new way of successful functioning by the student.

• The Tier 3/SST team must go beyond that and consider that there may be one or more factors internal to the student (e.g., needs, fears, attitudes, serious weaknesses, processing problems) that are the primary reasons for lack of adequate success.

• If the team finds solutions for these supposed factors, then the student proceeds back down the pyramid tiers to on-going progress. The Tier 3/SST team closes the case and terminates it from their active caseload.

• After educational/behavioral evaluation, analysis, and intervention their best efforts at remediation repeatedly fail, then they must consider that the student may have a disability. It is at that point that a referral for a Special Education comprehensive evaluation is appropriate.

• Subsequently, due process determines the path of the case, but the student still needs instructional support during the evaluation-eligibility period.

• This is not to say that the SST team has, by referring, diagnosed a disability. However, it is also not their prerogative to decline to refer a student because they doubt that the student would qualify for a disability category.

• In some cases, students may not meet special education eligibility criteria. The student may return to Tier 3/SST team because eligibility was denied for Special Education.
• Cases where severity or type of condition does not qualify for Special Education must still be addressed as best as possible. This is where the team would want to consider possible eligibility for Section 504. In such a case, it may be that a Section 504 Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP) can be crafted that will effectively diminish the effects of the student’s condition.

Once a student has progressed through Tiers 1 through 3 unsuccessfully, identified students participate in Tier 4. This Tier in Georgia is referred to as the Specially-Designed Learning Tier. Students in this tier need additional support and meet certain eligibility criteria for special program placement. The tier does not only include Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), it also includes placement for gifted students. Students in Tier 4 may receive their services within the general education class or in a separate class. Students with special education needs receive an Individual Educational Plan (IEP). This plan now guides the interventions for the student instead of any plan associated to Response to Intervention.

Response to Intervention should not be used as an instructional tool. The premise behind RTI is to use assessment along with instruction, to decide what the best approach to fill the academic gaps for a student should be. If RTI is done effectively, it can greatly reduce the likelihood that a student will continue to have academic difficulty within that academic area or standard. The promise of RTI is that students will no longer have to wait to fail to receive help (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2007). RTI bridges learning gaps for students to help bring them on grade level or closer to grade level performance.
Every child learns in his own way and at his own pace. Society and the world of education have determined a group of factors together that serve as obstacles to academic success or support systems to success. However, even when all surrounding conditions seem to mimic themselves, children still learn in different ways and at different rates.

RTI is a seamless system of continuous, meaningful, and research-based interventions for struggling learners, anchored in high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction and assessments (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009). Teachers are required to devote time for planning and identifying research-based resources for Response to Intervention. There is also a Teachers are required to have knowledge of the process and preparation of how to remediate and document which required additional planning time in addition to planning for general standards-based instruction. The attitude and disposition of teacher’s involved in remediation can play a role in the success or lack of success of remediation. Lastly, the person providing the intervention may be a variable factor in adding to the number of children referred for testing. As a result, there are questions concerning the validity of the data submitted concerning student performance and the number of students referred.

School districts in every state in the country are currently implementing RTI and some have been doing so for over 20 years with impressive results. However, because of the nature of RTI as a school-wide initiative, there are no studies that examine the model in its entirety using a formal design. Although that is problematic from a research perspective, it makes perfect sense from a practical one. While at the same time, some schools use RTI in a very informal way, another school is fully implementing RTI. In the
case of RTI, it is important to examine the different components of an RTI model, unlike a school-wide model (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005).

Urban schools in particular are bombarded with so many instructional initiatives and approaches that they can become fragmented, or indeed contradict one another. Moreover, the professional development used to launch these initiatives and support teachers’ continued learning is too frequently ineffective. The current development and implementation of RTI is a perfect example; many school districts are doing closed-door sessions to develop the framework to “fit” the operational structures already in place and are not developing a plan for institutionalizing the RTI framework as the operating statute of professional learning communities (PLCs), grade level and content meetings, child study team meetings, and staff meetings (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

During the Response to Intervention process there is an increase in intensity of instruction. To increase the intensity of the instruction, it can happen in several ways. One is to increase the length of the instructional time. Another way is to increase how often the instruction takes place. The number of members of the group can also be decreased so that more of the focus is on a single or limited number of students. In addition, adjusting the level of instruction is an option. Providing an intervention specialist knowledgeable of the instructional material at a higher level than the instructional teacher is another strategy. Sixty-five percent of elementary campuses report being in the beginning stages of RTI, with implementation occurring for one year or less. Approximately 79% of the respondents indicated the utilization of a three-tiered model, with many campuses reporting that a referral to special education was made after Tier II interventions were unsuccessfully (Mask & McGill, 2010).
In addition, Mask and McGill (2010) report, “More campuses reported the implementation of an RTI model for reading intervention (86%) than for mathematics (54%). The most frequently cited schedules for intervention team meetings were monthly (32%) or as needed (35%)” (p. 5). The most frequently cited intervention team members included an administrator, counselor, general education teacher, special education teacher, Title I Specialist, and At-Risk/Testing Coordinator. Differentiated tier approaches for culturally and linguistically diverse students most frequently included ESOL Instruction (73%) and extra time in small groups. Comparatively, the article states:

Approximately 25% of respondents indicated that the parents of a child receiving tier interventions were included in the intervention team meetings. Elementary school campuses reported the utilization of a wide variety of reading and math curricula and resources. The most frequently identified reading curricula were Accelerated Reading (49%) and Reading Interventionists (33%). The most frequently identified math curricula were Accelerated Math (32%) and Saxon math (19.29%). (p. 5)

School administrators play a major role in the success or failure of RTI within a school. They link the school with the parents to ensure parent involvement in planning and problem-solving. Professional development is necessary to keep current information about the RTI process in the schools. It requires change in a world where educators often feel overwhelmed and are already skeptical about the success of RTI. There are some teachers that may need additional academic training, which is often hard to detect because few educators are willing to admit they struggle with academic delivery of
materials. Therefore, when data suggest students have not met required expectations, for many it has just been easier to say the students are working below standard as opposed to admitting a deficit on the part of the teacher to deliver the material effectively. That is why the universal screening, progress monitoring, intense instruction, and increased frequency of intervention are so important, along with progress monitoring.

In a recent study done on the RTI practices of Texas school children in 2010 entitled, *Response to Intervention (RTI): A Work in Progress* by Mask and McGill at Austin State University, the following data were revealed:

The most frequently reported lengths of time spent receiving Tier III intensive individual interventions were a six-week time period (29%) and a 12-week time period (26%). The most frequently reported intensive individual intervention strategies were explicit instruction (81%), one-to-one tutoring (79%), and computer-based programs (73%). The most frequently identified professionals to provide intensive intervention to students were the regular education teacher (62%) and the dyslexia and special education teachers (both at 60%). In addition, Tier III interventions were most frequently reported to include an average of 120 additional instructional minutes per week (33%). Tier III non-responders were most frequently identified by the number of weeks spent in tier (23%) of the time, failure to reach grade-level proficiency in 12 weeks (19%), and performance lower than the 25th percentile on a universal screener (17%). The most commonly reported lengths of tier intervention before a referral to special education were 12 weeks (40%) and 18 weeks (35%). (p. 6)
Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate factors that might explain why a disproportionate number of students are referred for formal special education testing through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process within the focus of the district selected for this study. While evidence of an established framework for RTI exists in some of Georgia’s school districts, no such relationship has been investigated within the public schools of the district of this study. The results of studies of other districts are mixed and contradictory, as evidenced by the Texas Study included in this study. Still not enough is known about RTI. This research hopes to provide evidence to help school officials and administrators remove obstacles that may be associated with RTI if any exist.

Further studies could provide additional information by focusing on these areas listed above as well as a focus of comparisons of several districts within the state of Georgia as well as the nation impact of the variables as it relates to the disproportionate number of student referrals within the district of this study. There has been previous research done in the areas of the relationship between teacher perceptions to the success of RTI and the implementation.

A study was done involving RTI and teacher perceptions by Drs. Aksamit and Rankin in 1994 from the University of Nebraska. Paper questionnaires were used to survey teachers about their perceptions of the weakness of SST and RTI. The study did not show a significant difference in perceptions among elementary teachers. This study builds on previous research models concerning teacher perceptions of RTI at the
elementary level. This is an area of research that is new to education and needs further study.

This study looks at the RTI processes in six elementary schools across the three clusters of a school district within the suburbs of Atlanta, approximately 25 minutes south of Atlanta. This study, however, does not address the Response to Intervention program itself, but only the process. It also does not address the referral of students based on gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Several factors are explained in detail later in this study that involve the faculty in this district responsible for participating in Response to Intervention that need further investigation in order to determine if those factors are contributing to the increase of referrals. It is already determined through research included in this study that some of the factors listed are valid concerns of the Georgia Response to Intervention process and have even been addressed by some districts in the state of Georgia. This study did not seek to determine if these factors are necessarily valid factors. This study sought to investigate if these factors are contributing factors to the disproportionate number of referrals within the district of this particular study. This study also sought to determine if the identified factors are evident and consistently the same across the three clusters of the district as viewed by the faculty through interviews and surveys who have the responsible of implementing Response to Intervention. Those factors were addressed as a whole district in an attempt to reduce the number of special education referrals presented each year for further testing once completing the Response to Intervention process.

For example, there is one school in which the researcher has knowledge that is a Title I school with 64% of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch. There
is a steady increase in the number of students who come in each year with some academic concerns in the areas of reading and math and are in need of remediation services. The teachers who educate the children already have the task of educating the standards. They provide acceleration for advanced students in order to hold their interest in the curriculum being taught. In addition, these same teachers must find time in an already high demand, unmanageable class schedule, to help students in need of remediation to receive this small group service.

Logistically remediation takes place in the classroom with the general education teacher during the day. Due to limited resources, few districts have available staff outside of the classroom teacher to provide remediation. The district that this research studied three years ago had a school in which 40 students from a population of 600 students moved past Tier III remediation onto Special Education testing in one academic year. However, of the 40 students referred for testing, less than 12% qualified. This study sought to determine if this is prevalent across the three clusters of the district, the north cluster of schools, central area cluster of schools and the south end cluster of schools and if so, why?

Teachers at the school in which the researcher reviewed the referral data openly expressed reasons for the referrals due to concerns associated with having to provide remediation to students in addition to providing general instruction and not having enough time to complete each task effectively. They cited not having a clear understanding of the process and the expectations associated with remediation in order to effectively perform the task. In addition, there were concerns about the time involved in the lack of time given to allow them to plan and prepare to carry out the remediation, as
well as document progress monitoring data. As a result, they expressed concern about the validity of the data collected used to refer students for special education testing because of many independent variables. This led to an undertaking by the administration of the school to determine if providing the necessary training, time for planning and documentation, and providing specific research-based interventions to teachers would change the mindset of the staff concerning Response to Intervention and ultimately change the number of referrals received during the year. This involved meetings of the school leadership to include the principal, assistant principal, school counselor, Literacy Coach, Math Coach, teacher representatives from each grade level, Special Education Team members, student support specialist, and specialty area teachers. Activities were conducted throughout the year and included: team role-play activities on how to provide interventions to students, a book study on Response to Intervention, a presentation by the school psychologist concerning how to effectively implement Response to Intervention, several professional development sessions on Response to Intervention, question and answer small group sessions, procedural documentation notebooks given to each teacher detailing how to fill out the associated paperwork and document student progress, removal of time consuming task from teachers involving researching effective interventions, and providing coverage for teachers in order to allow for meetings with parents and school administration concerning Response to Intervention. As a result, within a 3 year period, the number of referrals for special education testing dropped from 40 students out of 600 referred in one academic year down to 5 students out of 653 referred in one academic year for special education testing.
Table 1 includes the number of referrals for testing over a 4-year period after using the Response to Intervention process. The data then show the number of students who qualified for Special Education Testing within the district of this study:

Table 1

*Number of Students Referred for Special Education Testing Using Response to Intervention vs. Number of Students Who Qualify*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Students Referred for Testing after Completing Response to Intervention</th>
<th>Total Number of Students referred that did not Qualify for Special Education after testing</th>
<th>Percentage of Students Tested that did not Qualify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>1,596</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>1,282</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>1,431</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>1,267</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because this study sought to investigate the factors associated with a disproportionate number of students referred for formal special education testing through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process across the school district, it became valuable information to determine the opinion of other teachers across the district to determine if the same misunderstandings and interpretations concerning the support for teachers and
time that existed in the one school were prevalent across the district supporting the increase in the number of referrals.

In other districts across the state of Georgia, similar factors have caused the district to strategically create a plan as a district to address similar concerns. The Georgia Department of Education does provide an entire section of their website dedicated to Response to Intervention. It lists a series of Webinars that document Response to Intervention and expectations associated with the process in Georgia. It describes in detail the Universal Screening process for Georgia, progress monitoring, and offers several templates of documentation forms. The website also lists information provided by some other school districts in Georgia that share procedures they have implemented within their individual districts concerning Response to Intervention.

In the Webinar entitled, “Using Research to Select and Design Effective Interventions,” districts share some of the effective tools they have incorporated within their district to see improvements happen with RTI within their districts. Many of the effective tools identified in the other Georgia counties that were enacted to support the teachers, support the variables that will be investigated within this study that if implemented could see effective results within this county as well.

Georgia Virtual Academy decided in 2007 to use their leadership team to develop a 5 year RTI plan that would be used systemically for the entire 5,000 students associated with Georgia Virtual Academy that may need remediation. They developed Professional Development sessions to better explain Response to Intervention as well as hold meetings every other month to provide additional training to teachers. In addition, they have developed what they are referring to as a Share Point site with ready available Webinars
to help teachers, the RTI coordinator update records and track data (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

Charlton County is a small district in Saint George, Georgia. They have approximately 183 students from Pre-K- sixth grade, 98% white population, and 69% free and reduced lunch. In 2008, the district’s Math scores needed improvement after a steady decline. The district researched for the teachers and implemented a district wide intervention program in the area of math and trained the teachers during preplanning and throughout for how to implement the intervention process removing the time consuming duty of finding an effective intervention from the teachers (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

Crabapple Middle school in Fulton County, in Roswell, Georgia, approximately 25 miles north of Atlanta is Fulton County’s First School of Excellence. They reference when referring to RTI that collaboration is key. They cite the school-wide meetings concerning RTI as a factor to their progress associated with RTI (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

According to Georgia’s Department of Education Webinar, Forsyth County found RTI effective once they decided to make collaboration important. Administrators had to begin to support the RTI process and give dedicated time to RTI. Teachers and administrators had to work closely together in order to understand and begin to effectively implement the process. The county also had to develop system specific interventions for specific areas of academic weakness. They provide as a district ongoing discussions and trainings for Response to Intervention and use Professional Learning in order to train teachers and other staff. Walton County added that schools
were required to maintain notebooks of information and samples of documentation, as well as the understanding that time and patience with the faculty was required as the learned the process (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

If one examines the lessons learned by the individual counties above, it speaks to several of the factors identified by the teachers of the district of this study. At this time, there is not a formalized process within the district. Each school has the option to establish what interventions will be used within the building. There is currently no county initiative for professional development concerning the implementation of RTI. In addition, there is no planning time devoted to teacher preparation for RTI or for progress monitoring. There are no additional support staff personnel available to implement RTI and it is currently implemented in the classroom by the classroom teachers. The district does not currently have a district level support team to assist individual schools with the Response to Intervention process. There is a person designated at the county level who serves as the county contact person, but this person is not responsible for managing RTI at the building level or any of the components associated to the process at the building level (Georgia Department of Education, 2001).

The district of this study has seen an increase in the number of students who are new to the county from neighboring counties, within metro Atlanta. Although the population of the county remains constant at approximately 39,500 students, the student demographics have tipped from a majority white population into a majority African-American population at more than 50%. In addition, the economic disadvantaged population has increased allowing the district to increase the number of schools that are classified as Title I schools. Many former families of the district have moved south of
the district as more families from other states and from metro Atlanta have moved into
the suburbs of metro Atlanta to include this district. There are many factors facing school
systems that challenge the effective implementation of RTI. Some of the concerns are
persistent low achievement, limited teacher and leader capacity, poor data and data
inquiry infrastructures, and low expectations of students are not new phenomena but,
rather, are historic conditions in urban schools. It is known information that in some
urban cities, cultural challenges of teacher and leader perceptions about race and class as
limiting conditions and producing intellectual deficiencies, and consideration of culture
in policies and practices, affect conversations about race and class. RTI continues to be
the framework for considering equitable and consistent positive outcomes for all students,
rather than the former practice of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests. It is important to pay
attention, however, to the challenges associated to RTI as well. Otherwise, RTI has the
potential, under the weight of these structural and cultural challenges, to become an
evidence-based mechanism for tracking ability of racial/ethnic, low-income, and
linguistically diverse populations, which would further contribute to low achievement
patterns for vulnerable student populations (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera,
2011). This alone will in turn have the potential to send a disproportionate number of
urban children in as referrals for testing.

In an article entitled, “African Americans Moving South—and to the Suburbs” by
John Sullivan in 2010, the author notes the U.S. Census Bureau findings from the 2010
Census that revealed a migration underway from black Americans. Over the last 10
years, hundreds of thousands of black people have relocated to not only the south but
away from inner cities into the suburbs. Nearly 60% of the African-American population
now lives in 10 states, with six of them in the South. The states with the highest African-American population include Florida, Georgia, Texas, and North Carolina. Overall, between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of the nation’s black population living in the South grew (from 53.6% to 55%), while the percentage living in the Northeast and Midwest shrank (to 17% and 18%, respectively). The number living in the West remained about the same (8.8%). According to Taylor (2001),

The high rates of mobility in and out of communities resulted from push- and pull-factors. The deteriorated environments pushed residents who could afford to escape out of the communities. The low property value and close proximity to workplaces encouraged an influx of low-income earning immigrants. Ultimately, the three indicators of social disorganization represented dynamics that were based on the economic statuses of both residents and locations. (pp. 124-139)

African Americans who are able to afford to move out of the inner city choose to do so leaving inner city schools and inner city problems behind. Some students have been able to escape the inner city classroom environment, but are unable to escape the results of inner city academic concerns that may hinder learning within the classroom environment. Sampson (1985) argued that family disruption could diminish informal social controls because a lack of acquaintance among families in the neighborhood reduced the chance to watch out for juveniles’ delinquent activities. For students coming in who have not been able to escape the delinquent behaviors that may surround them within the inner city environment, those distractions can have an effect on the student’s ability to remain focused within the classroom setting. Over time, students who may have been struggling students due to lack of completion of task, can become struggling students due to lack of
understanding of material and become in need of remediation and intervention as the
migrate into the suburbs in order to bring them up to grade level performance. Some of
these students walk into suburban schools quickly becoming labeled as low performing
and become a part of the Response to Intervention process.

This research study investigated several independent variables that attribute to the
dependent variable. Those factors include teacher knowledge of the Response to
Intervention process, teacher preparation for completing the Response to Intervention
process, teacher attitude concerning their involvement in the RTI process, systemic
resources available for teachers, time for teachers to plan for remediation and
progress monitoring, time for teachers to effectively devote to remediation and
documentation of interventions, classroom teacher providing the remediation to
academically struggling students.

Research Questions

In order to determine the views of teachers in an elementary school environment
concerning why there are a disproportionate number of students referred for special
education testing after completing Response to Intervention, the following research
questions were asked:

RQ1: Was adequate training provided to inform faculty of the Response to
    Intervention process and how to use it in within the building?

RQ2: Are teachers aware of the impact and the role Response to Intervention
    has on the Pyramid of Intervention?
RQ3: Is there Response to Intervention support provided at the district or cluster level?

RQ4: Is there Response to Intervention support provided at the building level?

RQ5: Were teachers given the necessary resources to follow through with the Response to Intervention process, including progress monitoring?

RQ6: As a teacher in the classroom, what is your attitude about having to remediate students in addition to providing general standards-based instruction?

RQ7: Are you aware of the supplemental resources required to perform remediation to students in your building in the areas of Reading and Math?

RQ8: Do you have enough planning time to prepare to implement Response to Intervention each week?

RQ9: Do you have adequate time in order to remediate your students?

RQ10: Do you have adequate time in order to progress monitor and document their progress?

RQ11: What are potential problems or limitations as you see them with the Response to Intervention process as it currently exist within the district?

Significance of the Study

Response to Intervention is a mandate of the federal government and state government. However, with all of the planning associated with RTI, there is not a lot of conversation on the federal level, state level, or local district level of the implementation
of RTI. Teachers across this nation find themselves crippled with trying to figure out how to provide remediation to students within the classroom that is over and above the instructional services in Math and Reading required to take place in the classroom. More research is needed to determine teacher perception and the impact of their perceptions on RTI implementation, initial referral rate, and the validity of referrals. Typical programs are usually twice a week for 30 minutes each session, or 20 minutes three times a week. Teachers are required to provide remedial service to their students in addition to general standards-based instruction.

On a local school level, building administrators would benefit from the knowledge concerning the perceptions of teachers within the Response to Intervention. This information could be used to guide building level discussions, and be a catalyst for schools taking a more active role in creating a more formalized RTI process at the building level. The current framework for RTI is distributed throughout the school systems of Georgia. How these frameworks are used depends on the understanding of administrators and districts in order to deliver the information. It would benefit the Professional Learning Department of the district by providing needed information to help guide useful professional learning that would relate to Response to Intervention. It could guide decision making at the building level concerning which students would benefit from additional remediation, or guided and intensive Tier I level instruction within the regular classroom. It could possible decrease the number of students subjected to special education testing.

On a district level, this study could benefit districts by providing important information to support the increase of referrals across the district of this study.
districts with a significant increase in referrals, it would provide information that may be beneficial at the district level for the purpose of training to aid in decreasing the number of referrals across the district. Although the results of this study may not justify all of the reasons, it would provide from the perspective of the teacher’s across the county a voice of information concerning how Response to Intervention is perceived at the school level by the teachers. The district could provide district level professional development based on the results of the study. Should a decrease in the number of referrals for testing occur, it would provide a significant financial savings to the district by decreasing the number of psychologist needed for testing, special education teachers and decrease funding for remedial instructional materials.

On a state level, the information from this study could provide the same information that it would provide to the district and serve as a catalyst for other districts in the state. It, in turn, could be a financial cost savings to those districts as well, eliminating resources, and possible staff reductions.

Because RTI is a national process and not just limited to the state of Georgia, other states could benefit from looking at similar data to make determinations concerning special education testing within their districts as well. On a federal level, the Department of Education may benefit from using the data from the various districts to develop a more systemic process.

This study could serve as indicators concerning the following:

1. This study could determine if teachers are prepared to provide interventions effectively through the Response to Intervention process and allow the district or school to locate the necessary training materials if needed.
2. This study could inform the district if teachers have the necessary understanding of the Response to Intervention processes and state mandated steps and allow the district to plan effectively to address any concerns for lack of understanding of the process.

3. This study could identify attitudes or the bias of teachers towards the Response to Intervention process and allow the district to address any concerns by meeting the needs of the personnel where possible.

4. This study could identify if necessary resources and intervention materials should be more systemic across the district as it relates to working with students and for the purpose of progress monitoring allowing the district to seek out a systemic remediation process and removing the time-consuming task from individual schools and creating a systemic process across the district that would allow students to transfer from one school to another within the district and still receive the same remediation services related to their academic weakness.

5. This study could determine if teachers have enough time to adequately provide interventions to students in the Response to Intervention process and guide decision-making concerning how to make adjustments to the school day schedules if necessary in order to incorporate time for implementation of RTI during the academic day.

6. This study could determine if additional professional development is needed through support at the school or district level allowing districts to plan
effective professional development sessions to meet the needs of the employees.

7. This study could determine if teachers need additional planning time for remediation and progress monitoring documentation of students allowing for adjustments of schedules at the local school level to offer the time necessary to effectively complete the task.

8. This study could determine the perception of teachers concerning providing the remediation for their students and offer support at the local school level through administration, district level through the county office and provide information as needed through trainings, monthly meetings, and Webinars or support sessions.

**Summary**

In summary, through the research, the researcher explored why a disproportionate number of students are referred for formal special education testing through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. This is a qualitative study of independent variables affecting teachers in elementary schools across the school district. The study sought to understand through interviews and surveys how the teachers perceive the Response to Intervention program within the school. This chapter shared information about the beginning of the Response to Intervention program as an early detection, prevention support system used to identify struggling students and give them the help they need before they fall too far behind. It was introduced in 2004 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Although states were tasked with encouraging the use of RTI
to identify students with learning disabilities districts across the state and county have followed the state guidelines for the implementation of Response to Intervention, but because of the generality of the guidelines, have eliminated portions of the guideline, or have limited understanding at the building level. On the basis of informing instructional decision-making, some researchers assert that there is a lack of evidence of the cost effectiveness and validity of aligning instruction to diagnostic classifications (Canter, 2004; Fletcher, Lyon, Barnes, Stuebing, Francis, Olsen, et al., 2002; Reschly & Tilly, 1999).

Recent RTI-related literature suggests that a central advantage of RTI over the IQ achievement discrepancy model is RTI’s provision of information directly relevant to the design, delivery, and monitoring of student progress to appropriate instruction (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007). Currently, states are shifting from categorizing and labeling students to focusing much more on the instructional needs of students—with the goal of basing instructional decisions on how students are progressing. It is anticipated that this shift will help integrate general and special education, streamline resources, and promote greater inclusion of students with special needs. The Georgia Department of Education has acknowledged that disproportionality represents a serious concern in the state and Georgia is under consent decrees requiring the elimination of this disproportionality. Leading academics have argued that the IQ-achievement discrepancy model has contributed to disproportionality because cognitive measures may be culturally biased and narrowly defined (Fletcher et al., 2002). Response to Intervention is viewed by Georgia as one of the processes that will eliminate this disproportionality.
CHAPTER II
RESEARCH LITERATURE

Introduction

As stated in Chapter I, this study investigated the factors associated with a disproportionate number of students referred for formal special education testing through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process in a local suburban school district outside Atlanta, GA. There are factors that affect teachers in elementary schools and influence the Response to Intervention Program within that school and district. There have been studies done to survey staff concerning their feelings about Response to Intervention. The state of Georgia has a Response to Intervention plan identified under the Georgia Department of Education website that is comprehensive and meets federal regulations. There are scripted programs available to address the academic requirements needed for a Response to Intervention Program to have a systematic approach to intervention. However, more research is needed to understand the perceptions of teachers tasked with completing Response to Intervention. Research exists concerning the process, expected outcome and suggested procedural approaches. But, additional research is needed into understanding the perceptions of the people tasked with undertaking the process. The efficiency and willingness of the teacher in this process is just as important as the process itself.
Cogitative Development Theory

Piaget (1962) proposed under his Cogitative Development Theory that children's thinking does not develop entirely smoothly; instead, there are certain points at which it "takes off" and moves into completely new areas and capabilities. He stated that learning transitions occurred at certain ages, 18 months, 7 years, and at 11 or 12. He felt that children were not capable of understanding ideas in a certain way. This belief has been the basis for scheduling school curriculums of study based on his theory.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a biologist. He began to study the development of children's understanding, through observing them and talking and listening to them while they worked on exercises he developed. Schools are filled with children who have the capacity to learn but may learn at a pace different from the level of instruction. Remediation for those students must rely on a teacher who is knowledgeable of the process of Response to Intervention and can see value in the intervention as a means to provide instruction to the student to allow the student to move along academically, as opposed to progress monitoring only for the purpose of documentation to support a reason to further test a student.

Theory of Intellectual Development

Piaget's Theory of Intellectual Development came about after years of making observations of people in the learning process. This theory is based on the idea of equilibration, or the need for order and predictability (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007).

Equilibration is the force which drives the learning process as we do not like to be frustrated and will seek to restore balance by mastering the new challenge.
(accommodation). People have a need to have order. They will seek order and predictability until equilibrium is achieved. Once the new information is acquired the process of assimilation with the new schema will continue until the next time we need to make an adjustment to it. (Roh & Choo, 2008, p. 1)

Response to Intervention can provide this type of structure for teachers when they have access to an organized well planned process for systemic completing RTI. Teachers and students can find equilibrium by following the framework that will help struggling students move along academically. Student needs are addressed through systemic academic practices provided to teachers that address student areas of academic concern with time, repeated practice and an organized researched-based intervention, equilibrium can be achieved for students. Providing teachers with professional development, an organized process, frequent exposure to procedures, and samples of documentation expectations provides equilibration for teachers. Administrators and the district could review perceptions of teachers and develop plans that will provide equilibrium to teachers responsible for Response to Intervention.

**Schemas**

Piaget (1962) emphasized the importance of schemas in cognitive development, and described how they were developed or acquired. He defines a schema as a set of linked mental representations of the world, which we use to understand and to respond to situations. The assumption is that we store these mental representations and apply them when needed. Piaget called the schema the basic building block of intelligent behavior—a way of organizing knowledge. Schemas can be thought of as “units” of knowledge,
each unit relates to one aspect of the world, including objects, actions and abstract (i.e. theoretical) concepts. This is the force, which moves development along. Piaget believed that cognitive development did not progress at a steady rate, but rather in leaps and bounds. As it relates to perceptions about Response to Intervention for teachers, they need time to build on the knowledge of how to best serve students through remediation. This would be a form of building block of information that can be provided through organized training sessions provided by the district and school level administrators. The training should be on-going giving the teacher an opportunity to build on experiences discovered throughout the process of remediation.

Equilibrium occurs when a person’s schemas can deal with most new information through assimilation, according to Piaget (Roh & Choo, 2008). However, an unpleasant state of disequilibrium occurs when new information cannot be fitted into existing schemas. This supports the belief that when teachers are inadequately prepared disequilibrium exist.

**Social Learning Theory**

The belief with this theory is that learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1986).
Bandura’s Social Learning Theory added a social element to learning. He stated that people learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. This is known as observational learning. It is often also referred to as modeling. Learning of this type can be used to explain a wide variety of behaviors. There are three core concepts at the heart of social learning theory. First concept is that people learn through observation. Next, the internal mental states are an essential part of this process. Finally, this theory recognizes that just because something has been learned, it does not mean that it will result in a change in behavior. For this reason, the perceptions of the teachers play a vital role and should be understood concerning Response to Intervention. In Social Learning Theory even when something is learned, it does not guarantee that it will be implemented with fidelity. Children experiencing the most difficulty should have the most expert teachers (Clay, 1985).

Study of a Northwest Georgia School System

In March of 2012, a study was conducted by Susan Tolbert of Liberty University concerning the “Effects of School Level on Teacher Perceptions of SST/RTI Effectiveness within a Northwest Georgia School System.” The study involved three schools and 11 special education teachers. The teachers took part of face to face interviews and completed written surveys. They expressed their perceptions of the RTI process. The data research from this study suggest that although the Response to Intervention process was aimed at eliminating any bias in referring students for special education and resulting in decisions being data-driven, there was still continued skepticism regarding the procedures and implementations of Response to Intervention.
The study concluded that some of the concerns include the lack of consensus across the board for the procedural steps; there is no definite instruction in place that tells schools what to do and when. To be truly effective RTI requires schools to provide normal instruction and literally change the roles of the general education and special education teachers. This change requires intensive training and additional work from everyone involved. The general education teacher needs to look closer at the individual and develop strategies and skills to reach all levels of learners. The study also revealed that there were two complaints from critics of RTI and it involved reading and elementary school level RTI. Middle and high school RTI is very nonexistent.

A study was done in 2009 by Werts, Lambert, and Carpenter, surveying Special Education Directors about their thoughts about RTI. Even the Special Education Directors could not agree according to the study about what RTI should look like. The study suggested that due to lack of conformity, RTI has too much ambiguity and can be bias in qualification for special education in the eligibility process. From the interviews it was discovered that bias can even occur in the prereferral or referral stages. Lastly, the study through interviews determined that many schools did not have personnel that had adequate training in the RTI process. Each level required interventions and the teachers felt untrained and thought that they were implementing the interventions incorrectly, causing a bias in the results.

A strong RTI framework would not be complete without a team of gatekeepers working together to assist teachers in their classroom work and develop practices from RTI to close gap many at-risk students are identified as having. Although most schools have some type of instructional support team already in place prior to developing an RTI
model, many school districts do not know how to effectively use RTI to respond to students in a way that is data driven, researched based, preventive, and culturally responsive. Without a strong, competent team of professionals to oversee and support the implementation of effective instructional practices, even the most well planned RTI framework can fall apart (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

**Penn State University Study**

In December of 2008, there was a field study of RTI programs done at Penn State University by Charles Hughes and Douglas Dexter. The purpose of the field study was to compare the referral rate for special education testing to actual placement when RTI is used as the process. Sixteen studies were done and information reported concerning the effects of the program on special education referral rates.

In their study, Bollman, Silberglitt, and Gibbons (2007) examined the effect of the SCRED model on the rate of identification for special education services and reported that placement rates dropped from 4.5% to 2.5% over a 10-year period. They indicate that the statewide prevalence rate over the same time period dropped from 4% to 3.3%. Callendar (2007) reported that placements decreased by 3% for 'districts with at least one RBM school,' whereas the state rate decreased by 1%. Marston, Muyskens, Lau & Canter (2003) indicated that special education placement rates stayed constant over time for Minneapolis problem-solving model schools, as did the district as a whole. Peterson, Prasse, Shinn, and Swerdlik (2007) reported similar information: Referrals and placements stayed relatively stable over time after RTI implementation. O'Connor, Harty, and Fulmer (2005) examined the effect of the tiers of reading intervention model
on placement rates. They found that during the 4 years of implementation, rates fell to 8% compared to an historical contrast group (same schools, same teachers) for which the rate was 15%. Finally, Van Der Heyden, Witt, and Gilbertson (2007) reported that for the four schools included in their study, there was a decrease in referrals and an increase in placements. The authors interpreted this pattern as an indication of more appropriate referrals.

**Hare Study at Marshall University**

A study by Christina Hare (2008) at Marshall University entitled, “The Effects of Response to Intervention on Referral Rates for Evaluations” makes reference to the hypothesis that through literature there is a belief that Response to Intervention (RTI) will reduce the number of referrals for special education testing. This research compared the number of special education referrals prior to RTI implementation through the West Virginia Department of Education’s RTI program and the rates of referrals for special education services in the years following the implementation of RTI. The study collects data from two pilot schools using RTI and analyzed together.

Results of this study showed that the RTI pilot project did not have a significant impact on the number of referrals made for special education services year to year. However, when examining longitudinal data, it is evident, that contrary to the research hypothesis, the number of referrals for special education services increased following the implementation of the RTI project, several years after its initial implementation. This study examined the effects of the implementation of the Response to Intervention model on the referral rates in two of the pilot schools using a time-series research design. The
study placed as its focus two schools in West Virginia Department of Education, RTI pilot project. Their data were examined before the implementation of RTI from 2005-2008. In analyzing the data, there was not a significant difference between the data from a year to year basis. However, when making a multi-year analysis, there was significant difference. As a result, the original hypothesis of the study that RTI would decrease the rate of referrals was a null hypothesis and over the course of the study there was actually an increase in the number of referrals.

Students participate in Tier I and Tier 2 interventions. Fuchs and Deshler (2007) estimate that the number of students, based on the assumption of a normal distribution that do not make improvements through RTI who are in Tier 2 who end up moving to Tier 3 should fall between 2% and 7% of the general population. However, there is no clear methodological definition of how or when a student is to be identified as someone who needs more intensive remediation and then, what intervention is to be used, who is to deliver the intervention, or how lack of response to intervention should be measured. This lack of clarity creates the potential for inconsistencies in identification of students not progressing adequately in Tier 2 and for highly variable prevalence rates at the school, district, state, and national levels (Fuchs & Deshler, 2008).

Response to Intervention in Literacy: Problems and Possibilities

When IDEA introduced RTI, it stated that it must permit the use of a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention to address issues of Specific Learning Disabilities (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities, 2006). It was meant to be an alternative to the problems faced with the
former IQ test that were being used, and it also met the requirements the federal
government imposed ensuring that a child received appropriate instruction. Under the
law, it should be determined before a child can qualify for SLD it must be determined
that the student is identified for SLD because of performance and not that
underachievement is due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math. This
requires that the responsible parties examine (a) data that demonstrate that prior to, or as
a part of, the referral process, the child was provided appropriate instruction in regular
education settings, delivered by qualified personnel, and (b) data-based documentation of
repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment
of student progress during instruction (Assistance to States for the Education of Children
with Disabilities, 2006).

Response to Intervention currently is being used as a means of identification, a
measurement tool for prevention and instruction. The issue then becomes that these are
totally different problems in which the same tool is being used for two different processes
requiring different tools and strategies (Fuchs, Stecker, & Fuchs, 2008) and different
discourses and relationships. RTI in many respects is being used to replace the IQ
achievement test procedures. A common example of such an approach to RTI, referred
to as a “standard protocol” approach (Gresham, 2001), would be to use a “scientific,
research-based” phonics package (often scripted), checking to make sure all teachers use
it in the standard way (“with fidelity”).

There is a problem with Response to Intervention as noted by Torgesen (2009)
and Fuchs and Deshler (2007). The standard protocol approach (and related forms of
problem solving) rests on assumptions. First, it assumes that a standardized intervention
will transfer effectively to a new setting regardless of age, teacher experience/ 
expertise, context, or instructional history. Second, it assumes that a practice shown to be 
effective on average with a group of children will be effective with each child 
experiencing difficulty. If the child’s reading improves, it is assumed that the 
instructional package worked; if not, the child is framed as the problem (Torgesen, 2009) 
or a chronic non-responder to interventions (Fuchs et al., 2008).

A study by Wanzek and Vaughn (2008) of low performing first graders showed 
that even when the amount of instruction was increased; it was not effective for each 
individual student. This included using a standard Response to Intervention process 
implemented with high fidelity, and the intensity of the instruction was at a much higher 
rate. They found a modest effect for their intervention but no academic benefit for the 
increased intensity, partly because “tutors reported difficulties throughout the 13-week 
intervention with student fatigue, group management, and increased problem behavior 
during the second 30-minute session” (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008, p. 139). As a result, the 
conclusion was reached that the students were likely non-responders to interventions. In 
the view of the researcher conducting the study, "It appeared that the students were the 
very-difficult-to-teach youngsters that a response to intervention model is seeking to 
identify and consider for special education" (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008, p. 138). The 
researchers suggest that those students may indeed need a different form of remediation 
instead of the one provided before consideration for special education. They do not say 
what this different instruction might be like.

Although their intervention improved children’s performance in selected areas on 
average, Wanzek and Vaughn (2010) took the laudable step of identifying the proportion
of students whose competence actually deteriorated by at least half a standard deviation during their interventions. In the single intervention, 14% deteriorated in word identification, and 24% in word attack—the primary targets of the intervention. With the double dose intervention, the proportion deteriorating was 7% on word identification, 35% on word attack, and in addition 14% did worse on comprehension. Their analysis shows the questionable practice of taking an instructional approach that is effective on average and assuming that if implemented “with fidelity” on other students it should be effective for each of them, particularly for those experiencing the most difficulty (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & Mcknight, 2006).

The study determined that improving teacher expertise in providing instruction and remediation was the most effective tool in helping students. Teachers who do not understand what a child does not know are not equipped in order to teach that skill to the child. In addition, if a teacher is teaching or remediating a skill to a child who has already mastered the material is wasting time, especially if it is a packaged program. Improving teacher expertise has powerful effects. Similarly, a teacher who notices that a child makes many reading errors and attributes it to the child’s inability rather than to the text’s difficulty will keep the child in an unproductive learning situation (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008).

Research-Based Intervention Programs

When one talks about Response to Interventions, it is appropriate to first mention that there are several systemic researched-based intervention programs in existence today. They are highly used and designed to help students move forward academically
and help struggling students reach grade-level performance. There are district-wide programs accepted as the mechanism of instruction that are labeled intervention programs.

"Success for All" is an intervention program designed for students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The focus of the program is on reading, writing and oral language. The purpose of this type of program is to be used school-wide as an improvement approach to assist students. The goal of the program is to get all students reading on grade-level by the time they are preparing to enter fourth grade, or at the completion of third grade. Following the script of the program, it is 90 minutes daily of group-alike instruction where students are paired up with students of similar abilities. As student progress they move to a different level group. The program is designed to allow for input from all stakeholders involved and works best when school administrators take an active role in promoting the program. There is a portion of the program that can serve as an early intervention type program and the documentation be used as an assessment measure to satisfy the Response to Intervention process. However, a prescribed program such as this is subjective to the will of the teacher who has the responsibility for providing the additional intervention.

Another intervention program that has found success in the elementary and early middle school setting of Kindergarten through sixth grade is Open Court Reading. According to the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), this intervention program was found to have positive effects on comprehension for early readers. The program designed by SRA under the company of McGraw-Hill teaches decoding, comprehension, questions and answering skills, and writing logically to students. The early learning part helps the
children to have phonemic awareness in preparation for reading. There is a part that teaches reading and then the last part focuses on spelling, grammar, usage, mechanics and computer skill. The program has also been referred to as the *Imagine It* program. Based on a study done with 900 first through fifth grade students attending five different schools in five states across the United States, the study sees success of the students and meets the requirements of What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) to be declared a successful research-based literacy program without reservations.

Districts use these types of programs to ensure that students across the district are receiving the same level of instruction and removing some of the teacher interpretation from what is expected to be taught. However, as much as this is marketed as an intervention program, portions of the program can be used as tracking data for student interventions of remediation. However, a program such as this must be used systematic across a school or district in order to have comparative data. Also, the program must be followed as prescribed. Could a prescribed scripted program such as this become successful in assisting remedial students? There is clear research data to support the premise that it does. However, these programs also seek dedicated time to implement the programs and staff dedicated to implementing the program, which are two other factors outlined in this study that may be a factor in the dependent variable.

**The Texas Study**

During a study in the state of Texas entitled "A Response to Intervention (RTI): A Work in Progress" by Mask and McGill (2010), the authors sought out information concerning who had the primary responsibility of requesting students to receive the RTI
process. Eighty-seven percent of the teachers surveyed stated that the general education teacher was the person responsible for making the determination who received RTI service. Seventy-seven percent of the educators report that, when students scored poorly on a school-wide assessment the teacher then made the determination that the student should participate in the RTI process.

In Table 2, respondents included information about the make-up of the RTI team to include the general education teacher, special education teacher, administrator, and reading specialist. Parents were also welcomed to attend the meetings, but in many cases, parents were asked their feelings before the meetings and not required or expected to attend. Often when parents were removed voluntarily or involuntarily from the process, it further supported schools making determinations about student performance without the benefit of an advocate for the student. This same study contains a review of questions about the opinions of teachers associated with the study and their feelings about the Response to Intervention process. Table 3 shows the data results associated with that study.

In the research, educators were surveyed concerning their perceptions of the RTI process. They were asked if they believed the process took up too much of their work time. Thirty seven percent felt that the RTI process took too much time. Forty-six did not feel that the RTI process took up too much time. One idea that was present amount people who agreed and disagree was the fact that the part of the process that was time consuming was the paperwork requirement. The amount of paperwork associated with the RTI process was the overarching theme of concern for educators in the study.
Table 2

*Participants' Responses (in Percentages) to How the RTI Process is Initiated in the School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants Responses (in Percentages) to How the RTI Process is Initiated in the School</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Identifies students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low score on Campus Screening</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents attend RTI meetings</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

*Participants' Responses (in Percentages) to Questions about Educator Opinion of RTI*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants Responses (in Percentages) to Questions About Their Opinion of RTI Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RTI benefits students</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI takes up too much time</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting data required to monitor progress is difficult</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators learn a lot about their students through RTI</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI process improves parental involvement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement enhances the RTI Process</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students were better served prior to the implementation of the RTI model</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These same educators were asked if the collection of data for progress monitoring presented a problem. Fifty-three percent of the people surveyed felt that the data collection piece was too difficult and only 33% disagreed. The data results from Table 3 clearly showed that the educators surveyed in this study agreed with the use of documenting student progress through Response to Intervention. However, they also agreed with the premise of this study that the time associated with carrying out the task is a major factor within the Response to Intervention process. These data did not identify whether the schools surveyed were Title or non-Title schools. Once again, the main comment made referred to the amount of time associated with the process. The survey revealed interesting results. The majority agreed that educators learn a lot about their students through the RTI process. One respondent to the survey summarized that the process helped other teachers to know the students. Traditionally the classroom teacher knows the most about a student in the class, but the teacher suggested that it was good that so many team members are able to learn about and identify with and help support the students. Other ideas concerning Response to Intervention in this Texas study were not as favorable. The belief among some of the teachers suggested that teachers would know what was best for their students without the Response to Intervention process and allowing others to work with their students.

In response to whether they thought students were better served prior to the RTI model the majority indicated they disagreed that students were better served prior to the RTI model. Interestingly 30% indicated no opinion. The comments made by the teachers suggest many had uneasiness with the suggestion that they could not help their students.
Other studies suggest successful RTI is determined when schools have a clear plan to identify students who need services and begin early to use a variety of researched-based practices. Discussions must take place among personnel and parents to monitor the process and the progress of the students. A study revealed that many of the school personnel indicated that they were addressing the needs of students through addressing many of the necessary components of RTI proposed by Reutebuch (2008). Within this sample, the majority of the school personnel are practicing early identification by having a system where teachers initiate the process based on campus-wide assessments. In most cases specialists in reading and math are implementing the interventions using a system of tiers. However it was reported that instructional aides and peers were also providing intervention.

Collaboration among school personnel also appears to be the norm in developing and monitoring RTI. However, it does not appear that parents are typically part of this process. The responses also indicated that progress monitoring may be an issue that needs attention in RTI processes adopted by schools. Results show objective measures were not necessarily always a part of data collection and student progress is not always monitored on a regular and consistent basis. Collaboration is hard to do on a consistent and regular basis when you are involving classroom teachers and coaches because of the extra time required in order to make this collaboration happen.

Overall, results indicated the RTI process was perceived positively by educators within the schools participating in the survey. However, many reported that good teachers were already engaging in intervention activities prior to the RTI mandates in
their school. The participants comments seemed to indicate a level of frustration with the RTI process because it was something the teachers were already doing.

**Interview about Role of Response to Intervention**

In the *International Journal of Special Education*, entitled "Response To Intervention: How is it Practiced and Perceived," the authors, Rachel Martinez and Andria Young (2011) from the University of Houston-Victoria, summarized the data in this way from interviews conducted with educators in the state of Texas. The educators spoke about the important role that RTI played in determining eligibility for special education services. They saw RTI not as a requirement, but as a method to be used with other methods in determining special education placement. They felt the data allowed them to gain a better picture of the needs of the students. The authors stated that given the limit of the scope of this study further research must be done to include a larger population of educators engaging in the RTI process in rural and urban schools in order to determine with more confidence the strengths and weaknesses of RTI implementation in the schools.

That being said, the results of this study demonstrate that specific aspects of the RTI process may need additional attention. As noted above, the data collection and progress monitoring aspects of the RTI process in this sample may need some attention. The RTI team must develop measurable objectives and a means to collect the data before interventions are begun. Single subject research designs provide an excellent framework by which to collect data and monitor progress (Alberto & Troutman, 2009) and can be used for this purpose. Single subject research design structures can provide educators
with options for collecting data, creating structured interventions, organizing it, and determining effectiveness of intervention through graphic representations.

Educators and administrators implementing RTI in their schools would also do well to involve parents in the planning, intervention and follow up processes. Research surrounding family involvement in education indicates that students benefit educationally and in post-secondary endeavors from family involvement (Fan & Chen, 2001). Parents are uniquely situated to support student learning beyond the hours students are in the classroom. Consequently, providing parents a voice in the RTI process as well as information on how to help their sons or daughters gain specific academic skills will only make the work of the public school educator less difficult.

The study cites the role that school administrators must take in ensuring who is providing the intervention to the students. Information from the study suggests that teachers, reading and math specialist typically provide the intervention. But on occasion, other people including students and aides provide intervention. Some students may not benefit from instruction provided by non-certified personnel, and the deficits can only be corrected by a trained educator with effective teaching skills who has a clear understanding of research-based interventions.

**Massive United States Curriculum Standards**

When we look at the general curriculum, you will see that there are far too many standards for students with no limitation many times to master within a given year. When the United States compares itself to other nations, data shows that other countries significantly outperform American students. Data from standardized test are used to
make this determination. However, the expected curriculum and rate of instruction among these other countries differ greatly from the requirements in America. Because of the amount of instruction the classroom teacher must provide each day, it is overwhelming to assume they have the time and desire to provide additional hours of remediation and progress monitoring.

In the book, *What Works in School: Translating Research Into Action*, Marzano (2003) talks about the differences in instruction found in other countries. He suggests that even if the school day were to be extended, it would still not be wise to teach all the content identified in the national and state standards. This point is dramatically illustrated in the Third International Mathematics and Science survey (TIMSS). Specifically, one conclusion of TIMSS is that U.S. teachers are expected to cover far more content than teachers in other countries.

In the United States, fourth and eighth grade mathematics textbooks cover between 30 and 35 topics, whereas textbooks in Germany and Japan cover 20 and 10 topics respectively. Although American 4th, 8th, and 12th grade science textbooks address between 50 and 65 topics, and German textbooks cover 7 topics at least at the 8th grade level. In short, the TIMSS study indicates that American mathematics textbooks address 175% as many topics as do German textbooks and 350% as many topics as do Japanese textbooks. The science textbooks used in the United States cover more than nine times as many topics as do German textbooks and more than four times as many topics as do Japanese textbooks. Yet German and Japanese students significantly outperform U.S. students in mathematics and science. In order for the United States to truly compete globally educators must begin to adopt some of the educational methods
that have allowed some of America's competitors to take the lead. Streamlining the curriculum within a given academic year could possibly reduce the need for so much focus on remediation for students who do not have enough time to master the curriculum. This would thereby, allow for more intense dedicated instruction to specific educational topics. There is, however, very limited research to support this position. With so many general educational standards to master, it decreases the amount of time teachers have to devote to planning and implementing remediation during the academic day to small groups of students in multiple areas. It also does not allow teachers time to make determinations if the academic struggles of students are associated with a need for remediation or additional time focused on the general educational material in order to allow students to progress academically.

Math Instruction Response to Intervention

In April of 2009, a Panel of educators listed in this text conducted a survey entitled, "Assisting Students Struggling with Mathematics: Response to Intervention (RTI) for Elementary and Middle Schools" and developed a guide. The panel included the following: Russell Gersten (Chair), Instructional Research Group, Sybilla Beckmann, University of Georgia, Benjamin Clarke, Instructional Research Group, Anne Foegen, Iowa State University, and Laurel Marsh, Howard County Public School System. The team sought out information about how math concepts were being addressed or not addressed in American schools.

Many states have developed RTI programs to address the area of reading. However, addressing the issues associated with Math through RTI is relatively new. The
area of math curriculum is of national concern. In 2008, the National Mathematics
Advisory Panel report shows that, in an international comparison of students globally, the
United States shows poorly in areas for example on the trends in International
Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student
Assessment (PISA). The study also surveys algebra teachers that are a part of the report
in which they note deficiencies of students in algebra. They state that students are having
difficulties with simple math areas to include whole number arithmetic, fractions, ratios,
and proportions. The report suggests that all students should be given the necessary
preparation from the state to make sure that, by the time they reached the level of algebra,
the foundations of math are in place.

The panel saw value in using RTI to help the students prepare for success in math.
However, because there has been little research in the use of math in RTI, there has also
been little to no preparation for how to implement math through the RTI process. There
has been a rich body of research on effective mathematics interventions implemented
outside an RTI framework and fortunately, there are a lot of research-based intervention
programs available in association with math curriculum.

Role of the Classroom Teacher

In the book, *The Dream Keepers, Successful Teachers of African American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009), the author talks about how in many cases
students are tracked almost as soon as they enter the school and how they are traced is
often up to the person responsible for the tracking. When students fail to behave in a
certain way that their teacher finds acceptable, they are often placed on the lower track.
Along with this placement come lack of positive attention and a perceived need of individualized instruction. This leads to the research concerning a need for a different teacher to provide the intervention to the students.

The remediation teachers are really the advocates of all personnel involved in the RTI process, including, the teacher, administrator, student, and parent. They have access to the students, time to devote to student progress and data documentation. They are able to identify and document the strengths and weaknesses of students and they are able to focus on student work and areas of struggle. Because they work with such a small group of students, they also have the time to build relationships with students and help students who are having a difficult time. The use of remediation teachers to relieve teachers of the duties associated with Response to Intervention causes a concern for cost in an already extremely tight economic budget in the field of education. However states can no longer afford not to absorb the cost of identifying staff members who would have the time to work only on remediation.

Remediation Continues into Higher Education

In reviewing an article from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the article shares information about the remediation that extends beyond what happens in a K-12 environment at a college or university, which is a direct link between the two environments. According to the article, 34% of all students at public college and university enroll in at least one remedial course as a freshman after receiving a high school diploma. The percentage is even higher for students enrolling at a community college with the percentage being 43%. For some states, 50% of the students entering
school need remedial courses. Research indicates that lower income African Americans and Hispanics need remediation as opposed to wealthier white students; 41% of Hispanic students and 42% of African Americans require remediation as compared to 31% of whites. There are many students graduating from high school that are not testing at the college readiness level on national assessment to include the American College Test (ACT). Only about 24% met the benchmark in 2010 in all four areas of Reading, English, Math, and Science. Of the 24%, only 4% were African American, and 11% were Hispanic. So in actuality providing remediation is costly at any level whether the state has to supply them at the K-12 level or at the college level. Remediation costs each state about 2.3 billion dollars each year. With all of the money invested, less that 50% of students who need remediation actually finish college, as compared to 58% of students receiving no remediation actually graduate.

Summary

In summary, this chapter reviewed the point that there are developed remediation programs already in existence and some see progress for their school district with the successful use of Response to Intervention. The chapter shared data from a study done in Texas that collaborate this information. The teachers in the survey see the Response to Intervention process as a valid process, but time is a factor that hinders their support of the process. This was one of the variables listed in the study to investigate within the district of the study. Teachers mostly identified students for RTI based on low universal screening scores and most parents did not attend the meetings concerning their children. Research suggested that teachers felt the collecting and monitoring of the student data
was too difficult. Teachers saw collaboration as an effective when the team members could get together to plan. They felt instruction was best done with a certified staff member. However, with so many general educational standards to master, it decreases the amount of time teachers have to devote to planning and implementing remediation during the academic day to small groups of students in multiple areas. It also does not allow teachers time to make determinations if the academic struggles of students are associated with a need for remediation or additional time focused on the general educational material in order to allow students to progress academically.

As a result of the lack of effective remediation as early as the kindergarten through 12th grade level, there is a large number of students entering college who are not college ready and in need of remediation courses there as well, costing the state the same or maybe even more in cost than it would to place remediation teachers into schools. So the effects of ineffective Response to Intervention do not just have financial implications for school districts but continue into higher education.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study as stated in the previous chapters was to investigate the factors associated with a disproportionate number of students referred for formal special education testing through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process in a local suburban school district 20 minutes outside of Atlanta, Georgia. The research paradigm that was used for this research study is qualitative in nature. This paradigm was chosen over the quantitative paradigm because the intent of this student is to examine human behavior through interviews and surveys in order to gain a better understanding of the feelings towards the use of the Response to Intervention process within elementary schools and how those responses influence a disproportionate number of students moving towards special education testing. It allowed for openness of discussion and depth during the focus of this research. This information is restated in more detail in Chapter IV.

Teachers in public schools are required to complete many tasks that extend themselves beyond just the traditional classroom instruction. There is constant data management of student progress, continuous planning, and pacing of the curriculum and formative assessments. In the elementary schools within the district of this study, the district has an expectation for a decrease in the number of students referred for special education.
However, the number of referrals continues to increase. The researcher used Critical Pedagogy in order to conduct research to understand the perceptions and feelings of teachers across the district of the Response to Intervention process. The voices of the teachers were heard through the focus study interviews, individual teacher interviews, and surveys. Critical Pedagogy examined how to diminish social injustices as it relates to students. Teachers are faced with concerns as they understand how to best use Response to Interventions in order to be successful in the academic achievement of students and give students with academic struggles the same opportunities to be successful within the world of academia.

**Behavioral Theory—Operant Conditioning**

Behavioral theory in psychology is a very substantial field. When an organism emits a behavior or chooses to do something, the consequences of that behavior are reinforcing, it is more likely to emit or to do it again. What is considered reinforcement is based on the evidence of the repeated behavior. When educators are allowed to learn a process, specifically in this case the Response to Intervention in an inaccurate manner without redirection or correction, the lack of redirection in essence provides reinforcement for the incorrect manner of providing the remediation and continues and expands the cycle of incorrect activity. However as a result, the effect of this cycle appears to have resulted in creating a disproportionate number of students who have been cycled through a process that was not validated or even a shared practice among school with the same district. Teachers should be retrained collectively in a unified system across the district that will eliminate teacher interpretation. There are students receiving
minimum instruction, and others receiving additional instruction as the data will show later in the study. There are teachers using the same remediation for different children who struggle with the same skills and other teachers within the same district or even the same school using other remedial tasks because of lack of formality with the process. As teachers continue to use an incorrect process without redirection or reinforcement to follow proper procedures, the cycle of disproportionality will continue for students being referred for special education testing through the Response to Intervention process.

**Conversational Theory**

Conversational theories of learning fit into the constructivist framework. Under this theory, the leaner is the one who is active as the "maker of meanings." The teacher serves as the person responsible for dialoging with the learner, ensuring that the learner understands the material and to help her or him to refine their understanding until it corresponds with that of the teacher. Another concern with the results of the data suggest that in many cases, teachers are using the opportunity for flexible or small group instruction to simply place students identified as Response to Intervention students in a group together to work on grade level materials with some interaction with the teacher, and in some cases more of a portfolio style learning which is indirect contradiction to the framework of Response to Intervention. The process is just what the conversational theory suggests. It is the teacher helping the student through conversation and corresponding dialogue to understand the materials. Once there appears to be understanding it is followed by some form of assessment that validates the educational
exchange of knowledge. However, this study reveals through data analysis that in many cases there may be limited to no additional dialogue with students.

**Vygotsky and His Theory of Zone of Proximal Development**

The most significant bases of a social constructivist theory were laid down by Vygotsky [1896-1934] (1964), in his theory of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). "Proximal" is defined as meaning "next." Vygotsky observed that when children were tested without adult interaction, rather than on their own, they rarely did as well as when they were working in collaboration with a teacher. It did not occur each time; however, the process of an adult working with the child, teaching them how to perform and complete the task and engaging the student, enabled the student to refine his/her thinking and become more effective in task completion. The idea that an adult can stretch the mind of a child or learner when working directly with that child supports this theory of zone of proximal development. It is imperative that teachers performing Response to Intervention have an attitude that suggest they enjoy working with students are willing to give of their time and dedication to engage students in remedial learner. Students receiving remediation know that they have struggles with selected materials; however, as teachers are willing to give of themselves in order to help students catch up, according to Vygotsky, the time dedicated to work closely with the student can make a difference. In this study, the data will reveal that the teachers enjoyed providing remediation and working with the students.
Gordon Pask's Theory of Conversation Approach

Along with Vygotsky’s Theory, Gordon Pask's (2001) work is not associated with the mainstream theories of the psychology of education, but is immediately recognized by many learners and teachers in adult education as being very significant. He was a cyberneticist instead of an educationalist and his approach to educational theory is abstract and difficult. It is based on the need of conversation in order to achieve learning. It is modeled after the learning models of Laurillard and Thomas and Harri-Augstein (as cited in Atherton, 2011).

The conversational approach looks at the on-going learner-teacher interaction, and particularly in Laurillard at the process of negotiation of views of the subject-matter which takes place between them in such a way as to modify the learner's perceptions. From this she develops a set of criteria for the judgement of teaching/learning systems, particularly those based on educational technology. Thomas and Harri-Augstein derive the basis for the learning conversation from an analysis of the personal construct system of the learner. (p. 119)

The Process of the Learning Conversation

In Laurillard's view, the pattern of the conversation needs to be:

1. Teacher can set the task goal;
2. Teacher can describe her conception of the subject (or that aspect of it being taught);
3. Learner can describe his conception of it;
4. Teacher can re-describe in the light of the Learner's conception or action;
5. Learner can re-describe in the light of the Teacher's re-description or Learner's action; and

6. Teacher can adapt the task goal in the light of the Learner's description or action.

This requires the following features of the teaching-learning system

1. Teacher can set the task goal;

2. Learner can act to achieve the task goal;

3. Teacher can "set up the world" (i.e. control the learning environment) to give intrinsic feedback on actions;

4. Learner can modify his action in the light of feedback;

5. Learner can modify his action in the light of the Teacher's description or his (the Learner's) re-description;

6. Learner can reflect on interaction to modify re-description; and

7. Teacher can reflect on the Learner's action to modify re-description.

At the "lower" level, students are engaged in the goal-oriented behavior of trying to master the topic of learning, while the teacher is providing the experiential environment within which this can happen, including managing the class or tutorial, setting tests, and delivering resources. As this is going on, the teacher and learner are engaged in a conversation about it, exchanging their representations of the subject matter, and their experience of the lower level, and adapting each to the other. As teachers have more time to plan for remediation, provide remediation, and progress monitor the remediation teachers will be able to apply Pask's (2001) belief that teachers and learners can interact and modify the actions to take place in order to best help students learn. There will be
opportunities for feedback discussions and general planning. However, at the time of this research, the data do not suggest that adequate time has been allocated in order to make this happen within the district under study. This process of talking about what one is doing is one of reflection, and modification of what the person actually does in light of the talk is adaptation. It is reflective of the belief that the teachers associated with the study do want to do what is necessary to support the students in the district under study; however, there are areas that need immediate attention in order to make significant change.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher maintained control of their personal reactions and input at all times during the study. According to Wolcott (1990), the purpose of the interview is to find out what views people hold; their views should be unbiased by evaluative responses on the researcher's part. The interviews took place in an environment in which the participants felt comfortable and at ease in order to speak openly about their points of view. The researcher allowed each participant to explain his experiences in his own words for the data collection purpose. Questions that led to yes or no type responses were avoided. There were both group and individual interviews. Wolcott suggests that group interviews be used as the initial interviews. In addition, Wolcott states that consideration should be given to the degree interview questions are recursive. He believed that interviews should lead to further questioning.

Understanding the perceptions of the teachers is very essential in order to create change. In 2010, Spasovski conducted a qualitative study through interviews of 51 elementary teachers about their perceptions of the roles as inclusion teachers in the
classroom. Interventions for RTI can take place in inclusion classrooms. The results of the surveys demonstrated that there was a lot of confusion of the role of the teacher within the inclusion class. The study also determined that the philosophy of inclusion was not well-understood because there was limited initial training and preparation for this type of setting and teachers were left to figure out how to make it work on their own. This confusion led to low self-efficacy. Some teachers became frustrated, and did not try certain strategies (Spasovski, 2010).

In 2008, Barnes and Harlacher noted that it takes collaboration among all stakeholders in order to provide effective change for struggling students. There must be initial training, ongoing support, and a positive environment for change among teachers and administrators. Any change in educational roles can bring anxiety and stress to professionals who are trying to ensure that no child gets left behind. This research determined, through analyzing perceptions of the teachers, if the anxiety and stress exist that could hinder effective academic interventions for students.

As researcher, the time was spent more as a listener than speaker. According to Wolcott (1990), it is the researcher’s task to properly interpret the responses of the subjects. As the researcher, any opinions offered could bias the opinions of educators who may not want to oppose the viewpoint of the researcher. Therefore, the researcher was very restrictive in any comments made. All of the data records were maintained in the form of notes and electronic recordings. The notes were developed during the interview and not from the interviews. Wolcott suggests that researchers make a rough draft of the study before ever going into the field to collect data. This allows a record to be made when needed. The researcher was more prepared then to focus the data
gathering phase on that information that met the specific identified needs of the project. All of the data were included in the final report so that the reader would understand how the conclusions were developed. Wolcott suggests the researcher should attempt to achieve a balance between perceived importance and actual importance. Often, the information reveals a difference in anticipated and real areas of study significance.

Because the researcher had familiarity with the Response to Intervention process as a former classroom teacher, there was some insight into the barriers that teachers face in attempting to conduct this process. The researcher also served as an Assistant Principal with the assigned duty of being in charge of the Response to Intervention process at the school level and maintaining the data and documentation. The researcher also served as the Lead Educational Administrator in meetings representing the school for students after the Response to Intervention process was completed and the student moved through the tier processes into Special Education testing and a determination meeting was conducted. This gave the researcher insight into some of the views that educators chose to share. However, as stated before, the input into the discussions was very limited so as not to bias anyone’s views or comments.

**Theory of Variables**

In this study the Independent Variables may prove to directly **impact** the Dependent Variables. The study sought to understand the Dependent Variable that a disproportionate number of students in the Response to Intervention (RTI) process are being referred for special education testing. This study looked at the local school district
in metro Atlanta region. There were also many Independent Variables that were having a direct effect on the Dependent Variable.

The first Independent Variable was teacher knowledge of the Response to Intervention process. Unless done at the individual school level, there has not been a district training to prepare teachers for Response to Intervention, how to effectively use the process and detailed information on the relationship of Response to Intervention to academic achievement or lack of achievement on the part of students. Training of the RTI process affords teachers an understanding of how the Response to Intervention process works in relationship to student achievement or lack of achievement and details how the progress monitoring can have a direct effect on referring students for further special education testing. It became imperative to determine if the academic struggle is related to lack of knowledge, student interest or a need for additional instruction of a standard.

The second independent variable was teacher preparation for the Response to Intervention process. One concept was to have the knowledge of what the process may be. Another variable was to have preparation as to how to go about the task, monitor the progress, document the students, monitor and interpret the data results, and fill out the associated forms. This was procedural information that could be handled through a few formal or informal collaborative planning sessions. Accurate data, documented on the correct forms were vital to the process.

The next independent variable was teacher attitude towards the Response to Intervention process. It was important to survey the teachers concerning any misconceptions or bias they may have had toward to Response to Intervention process or
in remediating students. The process was time consuming and required teachers to extend themselves into after school or evening meetings with parents, administrators concerning student progress, and remaining late to document student progress. Teachers were not given additional planning time and were not compensated for the additional duty. Information concerning the perceptions of teachers towards participation in this process helped inform district leaders and could possibly lead to a change in the process of how RTI is implemented.

Systematic resources currently available for teachers can support a disproportionate number of students referred for Special Education testing. Some districts do have a systematic remediation plan for areas of weakness that are used through the district. The district associated to this study does not have a prescribed plan for teachers to follow in offering remediation to students. As a result, students participate in a variety of assessments individualized by the teacher. The assessments vary in difficulty or degree of differences in task at times for students being remediated for the same areas of weakness. This is not a systemic practice and can lead to misleading data concerning student understanding.

Another independent variable focused on was time available for teachers to plan for remediation and progress monitoring students. Teachers are required to complete remedial instruction above and beyond the Tier I standards-based instructional time given to all students. In a district in which there is not a systemic plan for remediating academic areas, teachers must locate research-based remedial academic materials to use with students for multiple areas of instruction. This task must be done before school or after school in addition to the planning associated with preparing for general instruction
for the class. Data must also be maintained concerning the progress of the students. Typically 12 data points of information is maintained and plotted on a data chart. In some cases, teachers may be asked to create a supporting graph of the documented data. This data are plotted based on the results of assessments given to the students by the remediating teacher. Unless completed on a computer or by use of a form of automatic electronic grading device, teachers are required to calculate the number correct in order to plot the data of student progress.

Lastly, the independent variable could be the classroom teacher providing Response to Interventions in the classroom. The classroom teacher is responsible to identifying students who are in need of remediation by first giving district identified universal screeners to all students. Once the screener has been done, teachers use that information along with teacher observations results from common assessments of student progress to make determinations about who should move forward through the tiers towards special education testing. Teachers are required to find time to remediate small groups of students or individuals for additional time within the school day. Some teachers remediate before school, after school, lunch time and some during the school day. There are set academic hours within a school day and the current Tier I instructional demands mandate the use of all designated time for instructional purposes. However, with RTI teachers must remediate students within a small group above and beyond what is being provided by the teacher during the school day for as little at 20 minutes 3 times a week, or 30 minutes 2 times a week.
Definition of Variables and Other Terms

Case Study is a process of research in which detailed consideration is given to the development of a particular matter over a period of time.

Critical Pedagogy considers how education can provide individuals with the tools to better themselves and strengthen democracy.

Disproportionate is defined for the purpose of this study as a number representing a percentage at or greater to 8 % to 10% of a school’s population on average.

Ethics: Rule of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions.

Focus Group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes.

Instructional Review Board (IRB): The board is responsible for approval of a research study.

Progress Monitoring is a scientifically based practice that is used to assess student’s academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.

Qualitative Research is a method of inquiry employed in many different ways to incite, open-ended responses from surveys or defined interview questions.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a process that schools can use to help children who are struggling academically or behaviorally. Students who are at risk are identified, their progress monitored and evidence-based interactions are provided.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD) is a specific learning disability causes one or more of the central nervous system processes in perceiving and understanding concepts
through verbal (spoken or written) language or nonverbal means to be affected. This disorder manifests itself with a deficit in one or more of the following areas: attention, reasoning, processing, memory, communication, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, coordination, social competence and emotional maturity

**Student Support Services** include prevention, interventions, transitions and follow-up services for students and families. They provide direct services for all children and youth, especially those who are experience problems that create barriers to learning.

**What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)** is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education of Education Science (ES). They review research on different programs, practices and policies in education.

Figure 1 shows the relationship of the variables.

**Limitations of the Study**

**Scope and Limitations**

The following were limitations that occurred while conducting the research.

1. Teachers may not provide honest responses although the survey was anonymous.

2. The research was limited in the number of participants.

3. This study did not address the Response to Intervention program itself, but only the process. It also did not address the referral of students based on gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. It only examined one district.
**Independent Variables**

- Teacher knowledge of the Response to Intervention Process
- Teacher preparation for Response to Intervention Process
- Teacher attitude about the Response to Intervention Process
- Systemic resources for Response to Intervention
- Time allocated for teacher planning and progress monitoring
- Classroom teacher providing remediation to students.

**Dependent Variables**

- Disproportionate number of students referred for formal special education testing through the RTI process

*Figure 1.* Relationship of the Variables
Further studies could provide additional information by focusing on these areas listed above as well as a focus of comparisons of several districts within the state of Georgia as well as the nation.

Response to Intervention would require comprehensive change in the educational practice of the district. There is a risk that either the school or district may continually delay implementation of the recommendations as administrators ponder whether the data is valid. This possible response is likely to result in continued wasted outcomes for students and eventually erosion of staff concerning the desire to continue with Response to Intervention. To ensure a well-choreographed RTI roll-out, it is recommended that districts draft a multi-year RTI plan-one that maps out an RTI roadmap over 3-5 years and is updated yearly (McDougal, Graney, Wright, & Ardoin, 2009). Developing a rollout plan would affix with it a timeline. The RTI plan would encourage the district to be realistic in its rollout efforts and move forward at a sustainable pace (Glover & DiPerna, 2007). At the local district level and at schools across the state and nation, stress is placed on teachers who are required to complete RTI would be reduced. In addition, fewer resources for county and district remediation would result in less spending on universal programs, greatly reducing the expenditures from district budgets. A multi-year RTI Plan could also provide at least some assurance to teachers that the district is serious about RTI and that this initiative would have a shelf life beyond a single year. It could have a direct impact on the number of referrals initiated by the classroom teacher for special education testing.

Another limitation or problem associated with this study was that there was not significant improvement with the students. If students had chronic discipline problems or
an unwillingness to work successfully within the program, the data show that the students made little to no progress. On a local and national level, a study was recently released in September of 2012 entitled, "Special Education Spending Reduction To National Median Could Save Districts $10 Billion: Study." The study by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute found that if school districts reduced their special education staff to align with national medians, the country could save $10 billion annually in special education cost. The study determined that spending and staffing for special education was more than for regular education and the wide difference was a result in the number of staff members required meeting the needs of the students.

Summary

Several independent variables had a direct effect on the dependent variable. The independent variables of teacher knowledge of the process and teacher preparation for the process affected the interventions the students received. How accurate the supporting documentation may have been when providing intervention services to students was overwhelming for many teachers and could have resulted in inaccurate information.

The attitude of the person providing the intervention directly affected student outcomes, interest of the students, and willingness of the student to complete the task. Systemic interventions for teachers can also be an independent variable factor in a disproportionate number of students being referred for special education testing. When students are unsuccessful within the classroom and must be remediated, the process of remediation requires time and duration, so finding time to remediate and document
progress of the students may be difficult to maintain and may be another independent variable affecting the dependent variable.

The Behavioral Theory, the Conversational Theory, Vygotsky's (1964) Theory of Zone Proximal Development, and Pask's (2001) Conversational Approach all address the need for educators to receive the necessary training in order to work effectively with students there must be interaction, one-on-one support and instruction and a willingness to engage in dialogue with students in order to understand areas of difficulty in order to help them become successful. The teacher learning inventories there is no question that teachers across the district are dedicated to providing the necessary remediation the students of that district that need Response to Intervention. Even as adults, there must be an understanding of areas that need attention so that as the Behavioral Theory suggest, behaviors that may be inappropriate as it relates to following the Response to Intervention process are not reinforced and continued at the determent of the student involved.

For many teachers, Response to Intervention is done within the classroom setting by the classroom teacher. The remediation is done while other students are working, possibly creating distractions for the other students and for the student receiving the intervention. Allowing the classroom teacher to provide the Response to Intervention can be another independent variable towards the dependent variable. There are many variables that focus on issues involving teachers that this study will explore.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research paradigm used for this research study was qualitative in nature. This paradigm was chosen over the quantitative paradigm because the intent of this research was to examine human behavior through interviews and surveys in order to gain a better understanding of the opinions of teachers who use the Response to Intervention process to remediate and provide interventions to students in elementary schools within a school district. It allowed for openness of discussion and depth during the focus of this research.

Patton (1987) states there are three kinds of data collection in qualitative research. The first one is identified as in-depth interviews. The second form of interviews is called direct observation, and the third form of interviews is written documentation. In this study, individual, in-depth interviews, with open-ended questions were conducted. In addition, there were focus group interviews as well. Open-ended question responses allowed the researcher to gain understanding of the people to be interviewed without assumptions to their points of view. Direct quotations were used with the data associated with this study.

As this is a qualitative study, the research allowed for subjective information and an opportunity to seek an understanding of the entire situation through interviews. Patton
(1987) determined that interviews should use the guided approach. This method is especially useful in conducting group interviews. It keeps the interactions focused but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge throughout the interview. An additional advantage is that it produces more in-depth, comprehensive information.

A disadvantage to conducting this qualitative study was the inability to control bias on the part of the staff. Some educators may have felt uncomfortable admitting to what they do not understand. The data may appear unreliable and not valid because of the approach and information provided, but that is why the data were collected as a case study, as the information was important to the district in which the data were collected.

A case study was conducted because it allowed for detailed investigations of groups of people or individuals. The researcher conducting a case study attempts to analyze the variables relevant to the subject under study (Polit & Hungler, 1991). In choosing a case study, the focus was on the individual case of the district in which the study was conducted and not on the entire population of cases, because the conditions could be very different. In other studies, the search is for what is common among all of the cases and the most pervasive. The study was done under natural conditions so that the information could be obtained for that particular district. In this way, the district could understand its own environment of how to better educate and move forward with the process of Response to Intervention within the district as a means to decrease the number of students referred for special education testing. As stated before in a previous chapter, this study did not address the Response to Intervention program itself, but only the process. It did not address the referral of students based on gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. It only examined one district. Further studies could provide
additional information by focusing on these areas listed above as well as a focus of comparisons of several districts within the state of Georgia as well as the nation.

The goal of this study was to gain a complete picture as the investigator.

According to Stainback and Stainback (1988), a holistic description of events, procedures, and philosophies occurring in natural settings is often needed to make accurate situational decisions. This is different from quantitative research in which selected, predefined variables are studied. This case study did not seek corroboration. The purpose of corroboration is to help researchers increase their understanding of the probability that their findings will be seen as credible or worthy of consideration by others (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). This study did not seek to determine if the perceptions were accurate reflections of the situation involving Response to Intervention within the county, as it sought to reflect the perception of the people whether accurate or not.

**Description of the Setting**

The school district selected for the study is in a county approximately 25 minutes from downtown Atlanta, Georgia. The district has 50 schools. Of the schools, 29 of them are elementary schools, 11 middle schools and 10 high schools. The county has approximately 39,500 students within the county and it is within the 25 largest districts in the state. It has approximately 5,000 employees. The diversity of the county is 45% African American, 40% Caucasian, 5.5% Hispanic, 4% Interracial, and 2.5 Asian; 43.9% of the students are considered Economically Disadvantaged. The per student revenue allocation is 8,195 and the state average is 9,000. The graduation rate for the district is 85.5% and the state average is 80.9%. College enrollment is 48.2% and the state average
is 43.7%. There are 16 Title I elementary schools in this district. The interviews will take place at a central location. The Focus Group study took place at one of the district elementary schools.

**Sampling Procedures**

Three to six teachers from each of the three clusters in the district’s elementary school, from any grade level, who have a minimum of a master’s degree, at least 5 years of teaching experience, and have students who are in the Response to Intervention process, were invited to participate in this study. A letter was sent to randomly selected schools administrators from the three clusters, north, central, and south cluster of the county. Teachers for the study came from the school district in the study and were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews consist of a list of open-ended questions based on the topic to be studied. Because the questions were open-ended in nature, this provided opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss certain topics in more detail. It allowed the interviewer to probe as necessary. If probing was necessary, clarification probing was used to ask the interviewee to explain his answers in greater detail. In addition to the interviews, there was a focus group of about five to seven educators who were unfamiliar with each other and selected because they had similar characteristics which included: five or more years at an elementary school providing Response to Intervention to students. The individuals were selected from multiple schools. Focus groups were originally called “focused interviews” or “group depth interviews” (Marczak & Sewell, 2005). A focus group is a group of people who are asked about their attitudes and opinions about a service issue,
concept, idea or product. Members of the group are free to talk with other members in the group. The role of the researcher is that of a moderator who listens, observes, ask questions, and keeps the group on track.

The sampling rationale used was Purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, one of the most common sampling strategies, groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question. This study involved educators in elementary schools that have students that are a part of the Response to Intervention process within the school district. The data were reviewed as collected and an analysis was done to bring insight when new data were no longer needed. That supports why it may not be necessary to set a participant size. Studies use purposive rather than quota sampling when the number of participants is a target and not a requirement for a specific quota. Although three to six teachers were invited from six schools, the study did not rely on the mandate.

**Working with Human Subjects**

Participants were asked to volunteer as a member of the individual interviews. Teachers meeting the requirements for the focus group were invited to participate. All research was conducted so that no harm would come to those involved. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to each participant in writing and they were not identifiable in any printed document. The district requires that a request to conduct research be submitted before each monthly board meeting for approval. Once approved, a letter from the researcher was given to the participants inviting them to participate, along with a consent form to read and sign. The consent form consisted of the purpose of
the study, the involvement of the participants, and identified any possible risk and time required for the interview. Identifying information also listed who they should contact for questions. It also included a statement assuring confidentiality. Once approved, completion of an IRB application for approval to conduct research was completed in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs of the University.

**Instrumentation**

Teachers participating in the study completed a Teaching Style questionnaire (Appendix A) created by the researcher under the supervision of professors the University, in order to gain understanding about the teacher’s perception of areas that involve teaching. The questions focused on the teaching styles of the teachers. During the interview process this data were used to cross reference the responses to the interview. Teachers also participated in an interview to document their responses to open-ended questions created by the researcher (Appendix B). Teachers were asked their view point on selected questions and allowed to provide unrestricted responses. Notes, as well as recordings of the interviews, took place.

**Participants/Location of Research**

Teachers who serve as elementary classroom instructors in the school district and participate in the Response to Intervention process were invited to participate in the study by letter. Access to the research setting was sought by first applying for permission to conduct research in the school district by completing the necessary forms with the Board of Education, followed by letters to administrators seeking a request to conduct individual research with each of the six elementary schools in the selected district. Once
approved, an individual letter was sent to each teacher meeting the qualifications for the study inviting them to participate.

The first reason to interview teachers in an elementary school who serve students who receive Response to Intervention services was to understand the insight from their experiences over a period of time. The researcher asked questions that allowed teachers to provide open-ended responses to the questions. These teachers represented the kind of teachers who could best provide the needed information.

The second reason to interview teachers in elementary schools in this school district who serve students in the Response to Intervention process was because of the convenience of the people to be easily available to support the researcher's study. The researcher had multiple opportunities to interact with administrators and personnel from the other elementary schools within the county. The principals of the elementary schools and district leaders welcomed the data information to assist them as they move forward in making additions to Response to Intervention at the school and district level. The results of the data have already been requested to be shared at a district meeting with senior staff members of the district.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The first event in the data collection process was a Focus Group Interview with five to seven educators. The questions form Appendix B guided the discussion. They were, however, allowed to respond with in-depth responses. There were no restrictions to the responses so that information can be gained concerning details of their experiences in education, life experiences as educators and how they perceive the Response to process.
After the focus group interviews that took place at a local elementary school in the school district, three to five teachers from two schools in each of the three clusters in the district were interviewed individually by the researcher after setting up appointment times and locations with each participant. Both individual and group interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview questions can also be found in Appendix B of this study. In addition, each participant was asked to complete the questionnaire contained in this study as well (Appendix A).

In the group and individual interviews, notes referencing facial expressions, gestures, emotions, and conversation were noted. A copy of the questionnaire was sent to those participating in the study before conducting the interviews.

**Description of Data Analysis Methods**

The data analysis approach used to analyze the data is consistent with a case study approach to qualitative analysis as outlined in Research Design, a Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches book by John W. Creswell. In a case study approach, the researcher has the opportunity to complete an in depth study of a particular program, activity, process or people. The data are collected using different collection methods over a period of time.

The interviews, field notes, transcripts, and other data were organized in a way the researcher could understand and be able to present the information to others. The data were organized, arranged into data that was manageable, synthesized, examined, and a determination made concerning what was important and what needed to be learned from the study. The analysis allowed the researcher to complete the dissertation. The
audiotapes from the focus group and interviews were transcribed and included in the study. Patterns were coded in the report and events that repeated themselves were coded in order to understand the data. Emergent themes were examined. The themes were then used as information for the researcher to explore further. Patterns were then identified. Data were analyzed and interpreted.

One process involved was triangulation. Denzin (1970) identified several types of triangulation. One type involves the convergence of multiple data sources. Another type is methodological triangulation, which involves the convergence of data from multiple data collection sources. A third triangulation procedure is investigator triangulation, in which multiple researchers are involved in an investigation. Related to investigator triangulation is researcher-participant corroboration, which has also been referred to as cross-examination. Other procedures can be used to improve understanding and/or the credibility of a study. These include research or inquiry audit, peer debriefing, and the seeking of negative cases in the field that might disconfirm interpretations. In this study, triangulation occurred through methodological triangulation. There was a convergence of data from the surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions in order to establish a theme.

Summary

The research conducted in this study was a qualitative case study. It involved a focus group study with five to seven teachers from across the school district. In addition, three to six teachers from six schools in the district had an opportunity to participate in an interview process, as well as complete a questionnaire concerning their thoughts about the Response to Intervention Program. The sampling of teachers represented a cross-
section of the three clusters. The questions were open-ended and allowed for teachers to provide any information they would like to share. All of the data were collected through the school district and the interviews were both recorded and then transcribed.
CHAPTER V
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This qualitative study included data collection from three sources, a focus group interview, individual interviews with 12 classroom teachers across three clusters of the district and results of an interest survey (see Appendices A and B for interview protocols). Individual interviews were given to 12 teachers who had the responsibility of providing Response to Intervention service to elementary students. The individual interviews ranged from 15 to 20 minutes in length. The teachers were encouraged to talk openly and share freely their experiences. The individual interviews conducted included 10 females and 2 males; 5 teachers were of African-American ethnicity, 6 were Caucasian, and 1 of Asian descent.

The focus of this research study was to investigate factors associated with a disproportionate number of students referred for formal special education testing through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process in a local suburban school district 20 minutes outside of Atlanta, Georgia. The researcher found that through this mix-method approach utilizing interviews, focus study, and surveys posed to educators across the district, independent variables emerged that can be associated as a reason to support a disproportionate number of students referred for formal special education testing. As a result of participation in the Response to Intervention process within the district of this study, the manner in which the Response to Intervention process is currently
implemented within the district has little to no conformity. Due to lack of conformity in the process, many critics would say the use of RTI is premature and has too much ambiguity to be truly effective (Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, & Murphy, 2007).

The qualitative data collection occurred during the month of April 2013. Survey reviews, focus group discussion analysis, and interviews provided a depth of understanding regarding each interviewee’s experiences with Response to Intervention within the district. The use of multiple sources of data allowed the researcher to conduct triangulation. The process of triangulation for a multicase study helps to ensure that the audience has a clear understanding, relatively free of bias that could mislead the reader. According to Yin (2009), “Any case study findings or conclusions is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information” (p. 116).

Inventory Survey

Every person who participated in the study was asked to complete a Teaching Style Inventory (see Appendix A). The purpose of the survey was to get an idea about the beliefs of the teachers as it related to working with and serving students who may need additional instruction. Table 4 shows the results of the Teaching Style Inventory.

The results of this inventory suggest that of the teachers who participated in this study, more than half of the respondents suggest that they have the ability to provide instruction to students when the student has some prior knowledge of the material. One third suggested that with a small amount of teacher intervention, students will understand the material once it is presented.
Table 4

*Teaching Style Inventory Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. When teaching the standards, I feel confident that the students will understand the standard when:</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Students have some prior general knowledge of the concept.</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Students need some additional help after I have introduced the concept and then they understand.</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Students struggle and I am able to help them understand the Material</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. When I teach, I often find that I:</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Gravitate towards students who are gifted or advanced.</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Gravitate towards students who are considered average students.</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Gravitate towards students identified as having some learning Concerns</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. If I am not sure of how to teach a standard I:</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Seek help of one of my peers or coaches.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Work it out until I figure out how it is done.</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Skip covering the material with the students.</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. When given the opportunity to choose my style of teaching, it is:</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Performance-based activities using differentiation.</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Small group instruction</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Whole group instruction</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 4 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. I like students who</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Need very little assistance with instruction</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Ask the questions necessary in order to understand the concepts.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Remain quiet and work hard.</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. When providing instruction, I have a hard time when students:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Do not understand the material presented.</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Play around distracting themselves and others.</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Do not do their best by choice.</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When determining what to do for struggling students, my first response is to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Seek assistance through the Response to intervention process.</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Try interventions within the classroom undocumented.</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Seek the assistance or advice of the coach, or other support personnel.</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. To best document student academic concerns, I first:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Contact parents for a conference by phone or in person.</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Speak with the coach or peer teachers for intervention assistance.</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Begin the Response to Intervention process.</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If a student was having behavioral concerns, I would first:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Conference with parents or school administrators concerning behaviors.</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Develop a Behavior intervention Plan for the child.</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Begin the Response to Intervention process.</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 4 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10. When asked to document students through the Response to Intervention process, I:</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. See the process as necessary and valuable towards helping students.</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. See the value of the process but wish someone else could work with the students.</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. See it as nothing more than creating additional paperwork documentation and wish to not be involved in the process.</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was important to learn that as Response to Intervention teachers, most teachers felt they gravitated towards students who had some concerns in learning. They were very willing to seek out assistance from other educators such as fellow teachers or coaches when they were unsure how to teach and standard.

None of the teachers stated that they would leave materials uncovered that were unfamiliar to them. Most teachers chose performance-based activities using differentiation as their chosen style of teaching and all of the teachers preferred students who asked the necessary questions in order to understand the concepts. None of the teachers had a hard time when they encountered students who did not understand the material; in fact they were more displeased with students who did not do their best by choice. When necessary to determine what is best to do for struggling students most of the respondents stated they would try interventions in class that were not necessarily documented as progress monitoring interventions first. However, when necessary to
begin to document students' concerns the first process was to contact parents for a conference. None of the respondents stated they would immediately go into the Response to Intervention process. Equally, the teachers stated that the process would be the same for behavioral concerns as well. They would seek out a conference with parents or school administrators first. However, two teachers did admit to beginning the Response to Intervention process as the first step in responding to behavioral concerns with students. Lastly, when asked to document students through the Response to Intervention process overwhelming the teachers saw the process as necessary and valuable towards helping students.

This survey allowed the researcher to understand the results of the interviews were based on reliable teacher perceptions of the process as opposed to possible disgruntle teachers who had no vested interest in teaching students or in helping students learn. The survey validated, in many respects, that comments made by the teachers were valid and reflective of interviewees dedicated to student success and would be unbiased in relationship to the Response to Intervention process (see Table 5).

Lastly, eight teachers from across the district were asked to participate in a focus group discussion. They were given the same questions given during the independent interviews; however, open discussion was allowed and teachers had the opportunity to add additional information based off of the responses of other focus group members. It allowed for open discussions (see Table 6).
Table 5

*Individual Interview Descriptive Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Area of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Upper Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Early Intervention Classroom (EIP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Upper Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Primary Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Primary Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Primary Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Upper Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Upper Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Upper Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Primary Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Primary Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Primary Grade Elementary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*Focus Group Interview Descriptive Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Area of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3-5 Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Title Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Title Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Title Elementary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Data Analysis

Adequate Training

The first question in the interview seeks to understand if adequate training was provided for the faculty concerning the Response to Intervention process and how to use it within the building. The responses through the individual interviews indicated that 67% of the individual respondents stated that the necessary training to help faculty members understand the Response to Intervention process was not provided adequately. Some interviewee's felt as though no training was provided at all. Some respondents felt that the Student Support Person representing the district provided some information, but thought it was not adequate. The forms presented were useful; however, they still need centralized district training. Teacher 8 was quoted as saying:

I don’t believe that it was. I don’t think there was adequate training because if you are working with a group of students, I am finding that they are all at very different levels and have very different deficits at what they have missed and no one strategy can work for all four to six students in your group. There is only one of you to be able to do that and materials, I feel, I don’t know if that is another
question, but I feel somewhat mislead on what materials to use to provide interventions. (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

In speaking to the focus group, they were given the same questions. Overwhelmingly the focus group restated many of the same comments made by the individual teachers concerning the lack of adequate training concerning how to implement the Response to Intervention process. Teacher 1 from the focus group commented:

I don’t think we were adequately trained, we were very confused about what we were supposed to be doing. We had one idea and everybody kind of thought they were doing it correctly and then it wasn’t until we had more training and more training then we realized we were doing it wrong. In the beginning, we had an old idea of what should be happening. (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Teacher 2 from the focus group suggested a need for follow-up training:

I believe that follow up and next step should take place when it comes to Response to Intervention training. I think an effort was made to introduce the process and tell what the process entails, but I think that the missing link was to follow up with the teachers to make sure that they understood and understand the purpose behind it, because otherwise a lot of teachers see it as something else they have to do and they don’t necessarily understand the true purpose behind Response to Intervention. (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

The use of Response to Intervention is required as a part of the process for determining whether or not a student meets the criteria for special education services.

Section 300.307(a) (2)-(3) of IDEA requires that a State’s criteria for identification of
specific learning disabilities: must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and Tier 2 interventions should be pre-planned, developed, and supported at the school level, thereby becoming standard intervention protocols that are proactively in place for students who need them. In addition, Tier 2 interventions are not a substitution for Tier 1 instruction, but are layered in addition to the Tier 1 instruction that is provided. Lastly, specific academic interventions should be established for students who are missing core academic skills (e.g. strong reading skills) that will increase the probability that these high risk students will have the necessary skills to be successful. It cannot be established through the interviews that teachers who participated in this study understand the purpose of Response to Intervention. It becomes impossible to effectively implement with fidelity a process that could lead students through data collection to Special Education testing if one is unsure if there is no clear process actually may be or why one is outlining that process. Many schools are not equipped with personnel that have adequate training in the RTI process (Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

Role of Response to Intervention on the Pyramid of Intervention

The next discussion question focused on the teacher’s knowledge of the impact and role Response to Intervention had on the Pyramid of Intervention. Of the teachers interviewed through individual interviews, results indicated only 50% of the teachers stated that they understood the role of Response to Intervention in connection to the Pyramid of Intervention. For the focus interview involving the discussion group, overwhelmingly they were unaware of a relationship between Response to Intervention
and the Georgia 4-Tier model Pyramid of Interventions. Teacher 8 from the focus group interviews made this comment:

Last year, I was told if students did not do, it they were not Tier II, Tier III they weren’t RTI’d, but this year, I was told if they were Tier II then they were RTI’d, so it’s like you don’t really know what you are required to do so it’s kind of like what she said, more work to do and it is confusing sometimes for me. (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Under the state’s design of the 4-tier Georgia model, it allows all students to participate in general education instruction at Tier I. If it is determined that a student needs interventions, they will receive this instruction through a systematic and purposeful process. The four tiers are listed as: Tier 1 – Standards-Based Classroom Learning, Tier 2 – Needs-Based Learning, Tier 3 – SST-Driven Learning, Tier 4 – Specially-Designed Learning. Students at the Tier 1 level all receive standards-based instruction. Teachers should follow the curriculum and pacing set forth by the district or state. Grade-level instruction continues in the classroom for students receiving remediation, which includes research-based interventions of a medium intensity. If the Tier I intervention proves successful, students may no longer receive the intervention. If students are not successful at Tier 1, according to the Georgia Response to Intervention plan the next level of assistance is Tier 2. This level is labeled the Needs Based Learning Tier. In addition to Tier 1, identified students participate in learning interventions that are research based instruction for the areas of need. Student progress is continued to be monitored and measured in order to make decisions concerning if the student is making progress or is there a need for additional instruction. Tier 3 of the Response to Intervention process is
labeled the *SST-Driven Learning Tier*. The previous two tiers offer a different format of learning, targeted assistance through research-based strategies and progress monitoring. Students, who move to Tier 3 under Georgia’s plan, are required to receive unique, individual, diagnostic, data driven instruction that will seek to explain exactly what and why there is an academic problem. By the time a student reaches Tier 3 interventions, additional educational support staff becomes involved in the process such as a school psychologist, intervention specialist, behavioral specialist, school counselor, social worker or speech-language pathologist. Additional data are gathered and the problem solving at this stage is more intense. The appraisal nature of SST lends itself not only to preventing inappropriate referrals (by solving problems) but also helping to meet a requirement for those that were indeed appropriate. That is, Special Education law required that schools must prove that regular education is unable, with commonly accepted and well documented interventions, to solve the student’s problem; therefore, Special Education was indicated. During the interviews, due to the fact that half of the participates were not aware of the Tiers process for which to complete the Response to Intervention process, there was a concern about the law that relates to effective documentation of interventions at the appropriate Tiers that might conflict with accurate SST documentation and progress monitoring that is necessary to make determinations concerning further testing.

During the focus group discussion, the individual interviews further revealed that most of the participants did not see the connection between the Response to Intervention and the Pyramid of Intervention. Comments affirmed the belief that teacher’s perceived
RTI as just additional paperwork and something to do. Teacher 6 from the focus group, however, did speak to the impact on teachers, she stated:

It is almost like that child that may not get it all the way and we sometimes as teachers just see it as I have to cover myself just in case at the end of the year that child does not all the way meet the standards or that child does not meet the standard, am I going to have enough to say that this child should be placed or retained and it's just not really in place. We don't know the purpose of this. Is it in place to help the child, but it's more like you are covering yourself. (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

This statement suggests that the RTI process is nothing more than a paper trail of documentation to provide coverage for a teacher taking the necessary steps in order to validate the reasoning for suggestion possible retention of a student. This comment appears to lack any interest in providing successful remediation that could possibly move a child out of remediation back into Tier I performance over time.

**District and Cluster Level Support to Teachers in Response to Intervention**

The next questions sought to determine if there was district or cluster level support provided for Response to Intervention for the teachers. The local district is divided into three clusters. Teachers from each of the three clusters participated in the interviews to get a cross section of the views of the county. Data revealed that 100% of the individual interviews and 100% of the focus group interviewees felt that there was limited to no support from the district or cluster concerning Response to Intervention.
Teacher 2 and Teacher 6 stated that the information they received was provided by the Student Support Service member coming to their school to provide documents and answer questions. However, at the district level they were unaware of any support or training provided by the district. One teacher spoke of not knowing who to contact if there was even a department at the county office that handled Response to Intervention. Teacher 2 and Teacher 6 from the individual interviews stated that the information they received was provided by the Student Support member coming to their school to provide documents and answer questions. However, at the district level, they were unaware of any support or training provided by the district. Teacher 2 from the focus group spoke of not knowing who to contact or even if there was a department at the county office that handled Response to Intervention. Teacher 3 from the focus group was aware that someone at the district was working on some math initiatives that and heard that a discussion had taken place at a meeting about the use of Response to Intervention. However, Teacher 2 felt nothing had been done in reference to Literacy and little to no information provided for math otherwise.

The focus group expressed similar concerns as did the individual teachers with a lack of district or cluster level support for Response to Intervention at the school level. The concern from both the individual and group interviews suggest that directives from the district may provide uniformity to the process that appears to be missing.

**Building Level Support for Teachers**

When asked if there is Response to Intervention support provided at the building level, 58% of those interviewed felt that there was some level of support at the building
level either through assistance by the school administrators, grade level representative
responsible for keeping the forms, or a Student Support Person who floats to a variety of
schools to offer help as needed with the Response to Intervention process. Most of the
teachers who felt that there was support at this level identified the support as beginning
this year with the assistance of providing teachers with a “red book of interventions” that
many talked about, a disc of forms, or a box with forms included. Teacher 9, when
asked, did not seem to value the assistance. She was quoted as saying:

I think the worst they ever did was to get rid of our SST person because she knew
the students, she knew what had to be done, and she got it done. Now, I feel there
are too many people responsible and things are falling through the cracks bigger
than the Grand Canyon. This person is trying to do RTI, this person is trying to
do evaluations, this person is trying to get a folder together, oh wait a second, we
'gotta' get speech involved, we have got to get a gazillion weeks of RTI done and
there is not one central person in the building that is in charge of it, and to think
about putting it back on the teachers, more things are going to get lost. (Personal
communication, March 29, 2013)

Once again, the opinions of the focus groups aligned themselves with the opinions of
individual teachers although none of the teachers from the individual interviews and the
focus groups were from the same schools. They all identified a support base coming
from the Student Support Specialist who provided individual tailored procedures for the
schools in which they served. It did not appear to be district directed.
Availability of Resources to Support Response to Intervention

Additionally, Teachers were asked if they were given the necessary resources to follow through with the Response to Intervention process, including progress monitoring. Only 42% of independent respondents felt that resources were not available. However comments were made to include that this was the first year resources were allocated and many were uncertain of the content or knew of their availability. There are specific forms used to document the different Tiers of Intervention. The documentation is a key component used as evidence during any meeting that would involve the SST process for determining if a child should move forward with formalized special education testing. This question sought to understand their knowledge and use of the forms themselves and the importance the teachers placed on proper documenting of student progress. Most referenced the fact that the necessary forms were provided through the Student Support Specialist. Although there was some confusion about what form to fill out, plotting data, filling it out incorrectly, and having to do it over provided some level of frustration.

During the focus group interview, most of the teachers agreed that resources were available and have increased over the years from a limited variety of resources to use in order to remediate. However, the most difficult part is the lack of interventions specifically identified in the area of math, and the available resources were so massive in nature, over 400 pages, there is a concern for the willingness people to not only use the documents but the repetition associated with each teacher being responsible for finding their own interventions and copying them.
Personal Attitudes of the Teachers

Question six asked teachers about their personal attitude about having to remediate students in addition to providing general standards-based instruction. Twelve respondents (83%) saw the Response to Intervention process as a necessary part of their job and willingly wanted to participate. This question although simple in structure was very complex. It provides an insight into teacher understanding of standards-based instruction and actually what is entailed. It makes the connection to the Tier I level of prescribed instruction on the Pyramid of Intervention. Teacher 7 made this comment concerning standards-based instruction:

I think honestly based off the trends in education, I don’t know if there is a general standards-based instruction anymore honestly everything is different. I can’t think of one thing or one classroom in this building or any building that I have observed that has just standard instruction. There are people with gifted people and people in EIP in the same classroom so that is not standards-based. In my class, I have people who barely pass the CRCT, and struggle and on the cusp of not passing, kids that are doing quite well and some doing better than quite well, almost exceeding. Some other people may have EIP, so I don’t know anybody that has one particular type. So, therefore, I think the trend in education is that the mentality of what a teacher does almost has to be redefined from the college level on up because there is no standard instruction anymore, I don’t believe so. (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

A lack of a clear understanding of what a Tier I standards-based classroom is has a direct impact on a teacher’s ability to make determinations concerning whether a child
should move up the Tier for remediation which can then have a direct impact on how that student is progressed monitored which could lead to inappropriate assessments as it relates to future testing. In addition, it also sought to understand if teachers themselves understood the relationship in providing remediation while serving as a classroom teacher. The responses provided to this question was both encouraging but yet puzzling. Although almost all of the teachers either through individual interviews or through the group focus sessions spoke of providing remediation as part of their jobs as educators and welcomed the opportunity to work with students. A few teachers referenced being overwhelmed with the process. Teacher 8 stated the following:

I feel overwhelmed because if you know for example like in my class, I have gifted, Special Ed., general education and the lower students that need remediating. And if I want to have a personal life outside of work and not be planning for seven differentiated activities every day, it is overwhelming and it is hard to be the best teacher that you can be when having to provide seven different lesson plans a day. There is not enough time in the day when you need this group to pass, this group to exceed, this group you know to just get by, it is so overwhelming. (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Although most of the teachers did not respond in this manner and actually spoke fondly of working with students who needed the remediation, one factor prevailed over both the teachers who valued the time to remediate, as well as those who did not. Only three teachers all from the same school, as well as three teachers included in a focus group interview all from the same school clearly understood that the Tier II documented Response to Intervention was instruction provided over and above the regular standards-
based instruction. The other teachers spoke of it as small group instruction provided during differentiated classroom, small group instruction. They referenced what some referred to as the new flexible groups in which they could group students based on ability to complete class work as the time the provide Response to Intervention by grouping the students receiving Response to Intervention together. However, according to IDEA, this is in direct contrast to the expectation that students will receive additional instruction. The premise behind the additional instruction suggest that if students get almost a double dose of the material, they have an opportunity to catch up and not continue up the Tier of remediation leading to formalized testing. Many of the students if based on the responses of the teachers are receiving remediation in the manner suggested; they are not receiving a double dose of instruction and are actually be progress monitored on the initial introduction of instruction. The only modification they are receiving is the opportunity to work in a small group in proximity to the teacher. Because each level of the RTI process requires more individualized interventions, teachers involved in implementing interventions without proper training might do so incorrectly, also causing a bias in results (CEC, 2007).

 Teachers in the focus group agreed with teachers in the individual interviews. All of the teachers were willing to perform Response to Intervention and saw it as a great opportunity to help students. Although all of the members were willing to perform the remediation positively, one teacher did share a comment. Teacher 6 from the individual interviews stated:

Initially RTI can be frustrating because plates are already full. There are lots for us to do and we are in the middle of a curriculum shift where we are also in the
middle of a full adoption of a new evaluation process, so it can be and we have more responsibility but less resources and more students, no the plate is full. So initially it is quite frustrating to be quite honestly, but I think it depends on the attitude of the teacher. Me personally, when I have o think about remediating students, initially the first feeling is frustration but then I turn that frustration into an opportunity to utilize differentiation in my classroom and make myself a better instructor because with the new evaluation system they are looking for evidence of differentiation, so what better opportunity that this possible instance for frustration to turn it into an opportunity, a chance to make my instruction better and make what the students learning better and more customized for them.

(Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Use of Supplemental Resources

The next question focuses on the actual supplemental resources used to provide remediation in the building in the areas of Reading and Math. Teachers were asked if they were aware of the materials and what was to be used to remediate the skills in Reading and Math. Sixty-seven percent of the twelve independent respondents felt that they were aware of a list of resources that was made available to them. Some stating for the first time this year, however, resources were available. The teachers appear to have a variety of resources from which to choose activities to meet the individual needs of the students. The interventions are not structured in design and do not follow a specific program. Students receiving the same skill intervention in the same district, school, grade level or even classroom may be completing an entirely different intervention
activity and are being progress monitored with recorded data. So depending on the
difficulty of the task itself, it could provide differentiation in the student understanding
compared to peer understanding of the same skill for remediation, provided by the same
teacher. The focus group was aware of the supplemental resources through the same
manner as the individual interviews through information provided by the Student Support
Person assigned to the designated schools.

**Planning Time for Response to Intervention**

Most teachers responded to Question 9 that they clearly did not have enough
planning time in order to prepare to implement Response to Intervention. Actually 9 out
of 12, or 75%, felt they had no to very limited planning time. However, the referenced
the fact that issues of planning extends itself to not having enough time for standards-
based classroom instructional planning as well. Teacher 6 stated the following:

*No, I really wish we did but no unfortunately with Art and Music being every
other week, like when we had Art and Music we would have that extra day we do
meet as a grade level once a week and then one of those meetings each month is
RTI, but our administrators have been really good about Wednesday is our school
day where we stay after school for either a faculty meeting, or at least one a
month is for RTI also, so if we don’t get finished in the grade level meeting then
that Wednesday plus meeting committee time we can get RTI stuff done. We get
back together and finish up what we need to do.* (Personal communication,
March 29, 2013)
Interestingly enough, another teacher from the same school and grade level as Teacher 6 commented that there was no time to plan for RTI instruction at all. Teachers 4, 5, and 6 from the individual interviews commented that they had adequate time, used general planning time meetings for grade level. However there was no additional time allocated specifically for Response to Intervention Planning. Absence of planning time may not allow for teachers to discuss students, effect research-based practices or to develop common materials in order to remediate students, creating an environment in which each person is doing what works best for them from a management standpoint and not providing a prescribed effective program based on the needs of the students.

The focus group members talked mostly about planning for Response to Intervention during grade level planning times and after school meeting, similarly to the independent interviews. Of course many of the teachers expressed even with the current allocated time, additional time would be used if provided. The teachers all seem to want time to plan together to share ideas and attempt to implement consistency according to the prescribed plans for students.

**Implementation Time for Response to Intervention**

When presented with the question concerning adequate time in order to remediate the students, the responses to this question differed based on school and or cluster location. One hundred percent of the teachers at one school referenced having enough time to complete Response to Intervention because of the method used to provide the instruction; it replaces the daily classroom instruction and is not an extension or additional instruction provided to students. Fifty percent of teachers within another
cluster felt that time was allocated in the morning for RTI; however, one teacher from
the same school as the teacher who felt there was enough time, felt that the school did not
provide adequate time for Response to Intervention to occur within the school day.
Another school within the same cluster, 100% of those surveyed saw no time for
remediation because the viewed it as it was prescribed as an addition to the academic
instruction and had difficulties in finding the time to remediate. The schools stated that
they had flexible time allocated in the morning commented that this was the first year that
this time had been allocated. However, a concern brought by one of the teacher’s
focused on the idea that this morning time was not being used across the building for RTI
instruction but utilized for morning routines, such as roll call, lunch count, and collection
of notes from home. Teacher 3 commented:

It is pushed, no I don’t. We are given a block from 8 to 9 to work with the
students but still it is pushed because of announcements go over and I feel rushed
and I don’t feel that I am making as great of an impact as if I had more time.

(Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Other teachers spoke of providing the remediation during differentiated instructional
time. This one again direct contradicts the expectation of IDEA that the remediation will
be in addition to regular classroom instruction. Teacher 6 spoke of providing remediation
in this manner and planning for remediation for the coming year:

I think I am kind of struggling with that right now trying to have, and that’s just
what we have been talking about as a grade level too, is using each other as a
resource and then we have paraprofessionals and by using other teachers. We talk
about how we will use flexible grouping next year so that is more successful next
year and we are catching students earlier in the year. I have kind of made a
metamorphosis within my own classroom to work out groups differently and they
have a folder that have differentiated activities in and then I will put some of that
stuff in there for them to work and for the RTI students it is going to look
differently from what another student is doing and we are not going to get it done
within that thirty minute time period or whatever we are doing in the group and
this is something that can carry them through the day and they are getting that
remediation throughout the day in different areas, you have to be creative. Yes,
you have to be creative so that way you are catching all areas, all levels.

(Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Teacher 6 and others with similar responses do not appear to understand that Response to
Intervention should be done, yes in a small group, but with the intervention of a teacher
guided lesson that is a remediation of an introduced skill, followed by monitoring of the
progress of the student above and beyond the regular classroom instruction. The idea of
providing a RTI student with a folder of work that looks different than the work given to
other students is not Response to Intervention. Student data provided for progress
monitoring purposes for students in this incidence might suggest when unsuccessful that
those students may need further testing, when actually there performance is a result of
classroom work not mastered through small group activity. Other schools that attempt to
provide the remediation in addition to the classroom standards-based instruction time find
it difficult to manage the time to fit it in. The comment made by Teacher 6 seemed to be
a common trend among several of the teachers that providing different work and putting
the children together in smaller group during the instructional time would meet the
requirement of remediation, although clearly it would not. Limiting or failing to provide adequate remediation to students can have a direct impact on the number of students referred for formalized testing, especially if students are not given an effective opportunity and time to improve.

Teachers within the focus group were as equally divided as the individual interviews. Some of the schools were allocating an hour in the morning for remediation with similar comments that many times it will require time past the allocated hour. Other schools that had not introduced the morning hour of remediation spoke of finding to provide the additional instruction, but they did see it as additional instruction and not replacement instruction. Teacher 9 from the individual interviews commented:

I do think that time is a factor, it is in addition, and so they have to be remediated in one area and they still need to be grade level in all the other areas, so it is an issue, you have to be like a monitor, and manage your time, manage everything else, manage the other students too, so I think it is an issue. (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Progress Monitoring Time for Response to Intervention

Question 10 asks teachers if they have adequate time in order to document the progress of students as required by the Response to Intervention Process. Thirty-three percent of the teachers interviewed individually felt they had adequate time in order to document the process because it was done during the time they were working with the student. Others felt that there was not enough time during the day, but it was something they did on their personal time. However, several comments were raised concerning the
need to document the information in written form. Both teachers interviewed individually as well as comments from the Focus group interviews suggested that the process should be automated and elevate the paper process so as students move from grade level, and to different schools, or even districts, the paperwork was not lost in the process requiring schools to begin the process all over again. Teacher 9 stated the following:

I think it is redundant. I thinking keeping something a hard copy and then putting it on the computer, and then making somebody a copy of it is redundant. I am not a bookkeeper; I have been taking data since my 27 years in education. It has gotten so out of control from I would have a child reading to me, but the whole time they are reading to me, I am trying to take notes and that is wrong. That child deserves 100% of my attention and that means that I have got to go back to the computer and enter data, this, that, and the other, as my class is getting ready to starts so I end up starting class late. That is not good. Streamline this, give us one-thing to do, then we will have the flexibility to work with the children. This multiple form thing for documentation it bothers me to know I will have 14 to 18 data points on some children and it may never be seen by anyone and passed on. That bothers me thinking of the hours that are invested in that child. A lot of those children don’t qualify. I have a feeling that most of these children will go straight to middle school. It is more important to us, and it has happened with at least 3 children that had data coming over from another school 10-12 or even 14 weeks, and we were told that data is too old. You got to start again. Seriously, we
are going to make this child wait another 4 to 5 months, where is the reasoning in that? (Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

The response suggests that the papers do have the ability to become misplaced or unnoticed that this child is in the RTI process if they travel to another school or district. In addition, based information as it is prescribed for the Response to Intervention process it becomes important to note a concern with a child having 10-12 or even 14 weeks of documented data and a prescribed plan not be in place to either remove a successful child down a Tier or to advance a child to another Tier with more intensive interventions at far less than 10-12 or 14 weeks. Once again, there appears to be a breakdown that could suggest either unfamiliarity on the part of the teacher of the Response to Intervention process that could have a direct impact on the number of children referred for special education testing. If a child has that many weeks of interventions, a committee should have been compiled to review the child’s progress to include SST members, psychologist, parents, and other necessary staff members. Another comment made by Teacher 3 speaks directly to an inability to focus on the needs of the students without effective time to review the data and can lead to misrepresentations of student abilities or lack of abilities. Teacher 3 said the following:

I don’t feel that I have adequate time, I feel as though if I had more time, I could really sit down and really look at the Pros and the Cons, the areas where remediation is needed. I scan it, but I don’t go deep into it like I should.

(Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Response to Intervention requires an independent plan based on review of student data and identification of areas of weakness through review of student data. Data results may
not demonstrate true ability or lack of ability in an area if the remediation is not based on clear defined areas of concern which can lead to over or under reporting of student need for further remediation or testing. The focus group suggested that the paper work portion of Response to Intervention was manageable; however, as commented by one of the individual interviews, the duplication of paperwork appeared time consuming and unnecessary.

**Potential Problems or Limitations of the Response to Intervention Process within the District**

The last question asked teachers to identify potential problems or limitations as they saw them with the Response to Intervention process as wit currently exist within the district. Of the 12 teachers interviewed individually through the district, 100% of them identified some concern that could potentially create a problem or limitation for the Response to Intervention process within the district as the program currently exist. One overarching problem is the feeling that teachers all have their own interpretation of RTI and by having their own interpretation; everyone is doing something different but having to make similar decisions concerning the education of children. There is still confusion about exactly what areas children should receive Response to Intervention, how long and by whom the interventions should be given. There was concerned expressed by Teacher 1 from the individual interview, who said:

> Teachers are not doing it because it is too much paper work. There is no consistency in the county. Our school is using something, another school is using something else and if a student transfers in and that school was using this
information and we don’t have that available, then we have to start over with what we have and the lack of consistency even in the curriculum limits us.

(Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Any limitations placed on the teachers can have a direct effect on limiting the quality and fidelity of the interventions students receive creating ineffective data results that could add to an increased number of children being referred because of inaccurate data for special education testing. Teachers spoke of the need for consistent resources being another source of confusion that could potentially lead to inaccurate data. Teacher 4 from the individual interviews stated: “I think what the district wants to accomplish with RTI, the results will be skewed” (personal communication, March 29, 2013). Teacher 6 from the individual interviews said the following:

If you want the best bang for your buck they need to hire RTI reading and an RTI Math teacher in every school. They set up a schedule to have these same children 45 minutes or what they decide with a reading or with a math specialist. They would be required to keep up with all the data, you would see progress then, but you are not going to see progress now, you will see little blips go up and down, it kind of goes up and then it kind of goes down. It is like putting a band-aide on a broken arm. Ask any classroom teacher or any Title teacher, they pull these children for 30 minutes a day, two days a week and then given them an assessment. We really have not had the time to identify the particular area they need the intervention in. We can’t even group them, it’s like 7:40 everybody goes to this room, hire the teachers and have that. Free up the teachers in the
classroom to teach and let the RTI teachers do what they are supposed to do.

(Personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Based on the interviews, the findings do suggest that a lack of adequate training for the faculty in the Response to Intervention process has created a process that forces teachers to make individual decisions about procedure, materials, and processes associated to Response to Intervention. As a result, there does not appear to be a consistent manner in which decisions are addressed concerning the basis for structured interventions to refer children through the SST process for Special Education testing. Because of the perceived lack of support at both the district and cluster level teachers are unclear of how to implement RTI, when to implement RTI and what to use to implement RTI. In addition, the personal attitudes of teachers perceptions of not having enough time to prepare, implement or progress monitor as well as the perceived excessive amount of paperwork by some of the teachers creates an additional concern about the fidelity in which the interventions are implemented that could possibly lead to excessive referrals for special education testing or refusal to submit the necessary paperwork therefore not identifying correctly students that may need further testing.

Each member of the focus group identified similar concerns as the independent interviewers that they felt the district should address in order to ensure that an effective Response to Intervention process was in place within the district. At the current time however comments suggest that there are some issues with validity of data and the process due to either lack of understanding on the part of the teacher or lack of follow through in preparation at the hands of the district. Whatever may be the cause, there is a concern for how students were moved through the process and how valid the process
actually was at the time due to limited information. This information provides a
direct correlation to the belief that a disproportionate number of children may have been
referred for special education testing within this district in recent years with the
introduction to Response to Intervention.

Summary

The data from this chapter suggest a response to the hypothesis of whether a
disproportionate number of students were referred for special education testing through
the response to intervention process within the district of this study. Learning
inventories were conducted with each participant within the study and the results support
the teachers support for the students.

In addition, 12 teachers from across the district divided among the three clusters
of the district were interviewed one-on-one concerning 11 questions that determine
sought to determine teacher perception about the effectiveness of the Response to
Intervention process within the district of the study and if there were associated variables
that could be the source of increased referrals for students for special education testing.
In addition, the same questions were asked of a focus group of educators. Similar results
to each of the 11 questions, although the teachers from the focus group were not from the
same schools as the teachers from the individual interviews. It appears that the same or
similar practices occur across the district that give rise to concern about the validity of the
process and the idea that it could have a direct effect on the referral process due to lack of
accurate information. This chapter includes data percentages and actual comments from
some of the interviews.
CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

This study determined that the teachers involved in this study were not adequately provided a clear understanding of the Response to Intervention process during the original implementation of the current process in its original implementation within the last five years. The teachers were in need of training support through professional development sessions, or any manner of formalized training. Only during the last academic year, according to the teachers in the study, have building level administrators and support staff members started to provide training that allows teachers responsible in the building for providing the service to have a clearer understanding of the Response to Intervention process. Some schools have made a better effort than others to assist teachers in understanding the purpose of Response to Intervention. However, due to the original lack of information and preparation, there still exists confusion with the process among different schools associated with this study within the district as well as individual teachers within the same building.

These findings support the data displayed in Table 1 in Chapter I of this study. After the reintroduction of IDEA in 2004, the district of this study began to implement a form of Response to Intervention during the 2007-2008 academic year. There were
limited parameters and understanding of how to implement the process. During the academic years of 2006 and 2007 prior to the county’s implementation of the Response to Intervention process within the district, the number of students referred for Special Education testing at the Tier 4 level was 1,596, with 33% of them not qualifying for a special education service after completion of testing. Based on a total of 27 elementary schools at that time, that is an average of 59 students referred per school, with an average school enrollment of approximately 400 to 500 students per school. In the following year, the number of students referred for Tier 4 level special education testing decreased to 1,157; however, 404 of the students formally tested for special education which is a total percentage of 34% of students tested at the Tier 4 level not qualifying. Table 1 in Chapter I displays that in the academic year 2008-2009, 1,282 students were referred for Tier 4 testing that year and 23% of them did not qualify. That alone is an average of about 25 students referred per school in one year based off of 52 schools. Within the district of this study, most students are referred for initial special education testing in elementary school. This represents a large number of referrals for a district of 40,000 students. The number of referrals for Tier 4 testing increased the following year to 1,431, with 20% of those referred not qualifying the year of the initial full implementation of Response to Intervention under the current plan. This suggests an average number of students tested at the Tier 4 level per school to be about 49.3 students referred and tested per school for special education within one year. However, when reviewing 2011-2012 year, and the beginning of the effective training as identified by the teachers associated with this study within their interviews, the number of referrals for formal Tier 4 testing dropped significantly to 1,127, with only 15% of those referred for formal special
education testing not qualifying, an average of 33.7 students per school. The decrease in the number of referrals for Tier 4 formal special education testing within one year, coupled with the decrease in those not qualifying suggest that teachers are beginning to understand how to complete the process. It still suggests, however, a need for additional training in order to significantly decrease the disproportionate number of referrals. The findings of this study suggest that more systemic practices and protocols should be identified so that students participating in Response to Intervention are exposed to the same types of assessments and systemic practices. This will ensure that the number of referrals is reflective of all students receiving the same interventions and assessment practices.

This study suggests that teachers associated with this study in the district were not aware of the impact of the Response to Intervention processes and were unaware of the Tiers and the relationship to providing standards-based instruction and then allowing the district to plan effectively to address any concerns for lack of understanding of the process through the Pyramid of Intervention. At this time, the teachers are not satisfied with the lack of support from the district and see a possible disconnect between the work they perform in the building and the district’s understanding of their process and level of difficulty to complete task. They do, however, feel that building level administrators and Student Support personnel are making an effort to provide them with the necessary resources within the last year in order perform RTI in somewhat of an organized, systematic manner. However, there should be an increase in building level leadership commitment to ensure that all staff members have the proper training and materials necessary to carry out Response to Intervention.
Many of the interviewees associated the only reason some order is placed into understanding what resources to use is because of the systemic manner in which the coaches have compiled notebooks of resources, and given them disk with available forms. Although there is still some confusion concerning which form to use for some of the teachers, they see the assistance in a positive manner in order to help them perform and document Response to Intervention correctly. Most of the teachers interviewed were highly in favor of providing the remediation to students. They welcomed the opportunity to help and saw it as of their job function and not something in addition to their job. A few teachers contributed the Response to Intervention process with interfering with their personal lives which they resented having to take personal time in order to plan or progress monitor. Through the interviews it was revealed that the teachers would like for the entire process to become systemic and driven by remediation task that are almost scripted in nature associated to the specific skill or area of academic weakness. This would benefit teachers who felt that they did not have enough time to plan for remediation due to issues of scheduling and intense instruction; they also felt they did not have time to complete the remediation task, even when given a prescribed morning time. Some felt that unless it was mandated, some teachers would use the prescribed time to complete other task. They also felt that there was not sufficient enough time to review the data collected on the students to effectively plan further how to be remediate the student. There appears to be confusion among the teachers of this study concerning when and how to implement Response to Intervention. More help is needed in order to designate specifically when and how it should occur.
This study revealed a need for the data associated with Response to Intervention to be monitored to make determinations about the number of referrals, which schools are associated with large number of referrals, and if those students referred for Tier 4 special education testing do qualify. Maintaining this data could better assist the district in making determinations about the need to revise any portions of the process or retain specific schools, clusters, or even additional training needed for leaders, or the district as a whole.

This study also revealed different levels of understanding concerning the processes associated with Response to Intervention and a concern about whether new teachers to the building had access and understanding to the same information provided to other teachers in the building. This study revealed a different understanding of the process within the same building among teachers.

Conclusions

In conclusion, there is a current framework for RTI distributed throughout the school systems of Georgia. How these frameworks are used depends on the understanding of administrators and districts in order to deliver the information. The district of this study implemented Response to Intervention throughout the district in a manner that had a direct impact on an increase in the number of children referred within one year for special education. Although the number of children referred for Tier 4 formal Special Education testing has decreased over the years, and the percentage of children who do not qualify for formal special education services based on the testing has decreased as well, the number of referrals for Tier 4 formal testing has not decreased
significantly with the introduction of Response to Intervention. Based on the responses of teachers throughout the study, there seems to be a significant number of children who are still caught in the Response to Intervention cycle of continued improper interventions. This could possibly lead to a disproportionate number of children participating in formalized testing. However, it could also lead to students who need additional assistance through formal educational testing not getting the assistance they need. In conclusion, the district of this study must correct some procedures and create systemic processes in order to begin to further understand if the number of students referred is reflective of a need for increased remediation, further testing, or just a result of ineffective remediation.

Implications

The results of this study may not justify all of the reasons for the significant number of referrals; however, it does provide from the perspective of the teacher’s across the county a voice of information concerning how Response to Intervention is perceived at the school level of this district and offer suggestions to attempt to bypass some of the obstacles associated with newly developed district Response to Intervention processes, saving other districts wasted time and money. Because Response to Intervention is a federal mandate and associated with effective standards-based instruction, effective knowledge of the process could have an effect on Leader Keys for administrators and Teacher Keys for teachers. On a state level, the information from this study could be compared to similar studies to suggest to the state an opportunity for the state of Georgia to create a more systemic process that would elevate the time, invested energy, and
money of already crippled local boards to try and develop effective Response to
Intervention processes. Because RTI is a national process and not just limited to the state
of Georgia, other states could benefit from understanding the effects of inadequate
training correlating to the number of children referred for special education testing within
one year and make cost saving determinations concerning special education testing
within their districts as well. It is financially feasible to train teachers to effectively
administer effective Response to Intervention practices that result in more accurate
referrals, as opposed to the cost associated with testing and placements. On a federal
level, the Department of Education may benefit from using the data from the various
districts to develop a more systemic national process.

Limitations of the Study

In an earlier chapter, possible limitations to this study were identified. A few of
the teachers did appear to hesitate in response to interview question number four. This
question asked if there was Response to Intervention support provided at the building
level. Some of the teachers appeared reserved in responding to that particular question
slightly because they were aware that they were being recorded. It was as though they
did not want to speak out against their place of work. Some of the respondents would
even lower their voices as if to whisper when responding favorably or negatively
concerning this question. The concern was that the respondents did not fully reveal
possible concerns for fear that it would somehow get back to the building administrator.
This impacted the findings concerning whether or not effective support was provided at
the building level. Each teacher appeared to provide honest responses and asked for clarification for any question that seemed unclear to the interviewee.

The research was not limited in any way in the number of participants and all of the interview participants had students who were at the Tier 3 level of intervention. Because this study only addresses the concerns of one district, further studies could provide additional information by focusing on these areas listed above as well as a focus of comparisons of several districts within the state of Georgia as well as the nation.

**Recommendations**

The findings of this study revealed several recommendations to be considered by the district of this study, the school, and staff members involved in the implementation of Response to Intervention. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations should be given consideration for future use. The district should (a) provide professional development training to all staff members, including principals, leaders, central office staff, school psychologist, behavioral specialists, and anyone associated with the implementation of Response to Intervention on a yearly basis; (b) provide systemic practices for remediation that are clearly documented and communicated through written documentation and formal training; (c) develop a more standardized protocol approach to remediation materials based on area of need; (d) increase district level visibility and involvement in the Response to Intervention process; (e) increase building level leadership commitment to training staff through building level procedure reviews, (f) designate specific time dedicated to Response to Intervention task, (g) monitor effectiveness of process at the county level by monitoring
data associated with the number of referrals for formal testing at the Tier 4 level and
the number of students qualifying and not qualifying each year looking for trends in how,
when, and from where students are referred; (h) revise process as necessary, and (i)
include Response to Intervention training during county level Teacher Induction
programs yearly.

Professional Development

Based on interviews, training in the form of professional development to include
teachers, administrators, Student Support Specialist, school psychologist, Behavior
Intervention Specialist and county personnel should be conducted through a systemic
delivery format so that all aspects of those responsible for interacting in any manner with
Response to Intervention are engaged in understanding the same information. Systematic
delivery of the information will be key in ensuring that everyone has the same
information. First, professional development in the understanding of the District’s design
for the Response to Intervention process should be shared. In addition, professional
development should include a correlation between Georgia’s four-tier Pyramid of
Intervention and the relationship between Response to Intervention (RTI), Student
Support, and Response to Intervention (RTI). Secondly it would be beneficial to provide
professional development on the process of remediation, progress monitoring and review
of RTI data.

The interviews suggest a need for definition and training of what resource
materials should be allocated to specific skills. This could be accomplished by
developing a team of professionals who will review the materials and designate specific
materials in a more scripted format based on skill deficiency as a form of next step process. By implementing professional development teachers will have a clear knowledge of the process and opportunities will develop for a more formalized, consistent understanding across the school and district of the process itself and the materials to use.

Systemic Practices to Use

Both the individual interviews and focus group interviews suggest a need for a district level development of systemic practices in relationship to Response to Intervention. Less emphasis was placed although some of a focus of systemic practices of activity. More of the focus through the interviews was placed on development of system methods of remediation and documenting of remediation. This can be accomplished by developing a district level team with the responsibility of identifying the systemic practices of the district and communicating the identified practices through both oral and written communication to school level leaders, teachers, and all staff member associated with the remediation process. Systemic documentation amongst all teachers involved would be beneficial and increase fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model.

Develop a More Standardized Protocol Approach to Remediation

Decisions should be made at the district level involving county Response to Intervention staff, building level administrators, other county personnel to include SST, school psychologist, and behavioral specialist. A specific remediation process, allocation of time, staffing and procedures should be agreed upon and communicated concerning an expected standard within the district. Interview questions revealed a variance in how
remediation is presented within individual buildings as either a replacement for standards-based instruction, and in other places an addition to standards-based instruction. IDEA clearly defines the instruction as an addition to the grade-level instruction provided within the classroom. Specific allocated time district-wide may eliminate the substitution of remediation for direct grade-appropriate instruction. In addition, clear established building level times to review remediation and progress monitoring could eliminate comments made by certain interviewed teachers that suggested that there was not time to plan for remediation or to discuss the progress of student achievement.

**Increase District level Visibility and Involvement in Process**

The district should lead the way in establishing common practices through district level members associated to the Response to Intervention Process meeting with teacher teams at individual schools to answer questions and ensure that schools have in their possessions the materials necessary for a successful program. Visibility will give the appearance of ground-level support and allow teachers an opportunity to make a connection between the work done and the district’s support for the work done. Through the interviews on interviewee even referenced the fact that if they had a question concerning Response to Intervention, they had no idea who to even contact at the county office to get a question answered. The district meeting with teachers establishes also the connection of allowing the individual schools to see the commitment the district displays in showing a concern enough for the process to visit each school.
Building Level Commitment of Scheduled Time

The district should require each school to designate a specific time for remediation across the building. This time should not conflict with scheduled academic subjects so that the remediation does not serve as a replacement for classroom instruction but a scheduled addition to. In addition, each school should designate a specific time for response to intervention meetings after school to ensure that each person at the building level has an opportunity to ask questions as necessary and to measure their progress against the progress of their peers. In addition, this time could be used to ensure that everyone involved were using the correct forms to document, monitor progress and could be used to discuss students.

Monitor Effectiveness of Process

The district should designate someone with the responsibility of monitoring and maintaining data reports concerning the number of students involved in the Response to Intervention process and track data concerning the number of students that continue in the process and move to Tier 3 level involving the SST process, then monitoring the number of students who proceed from the Response to Intervention process into referrals for Special Education testing.

Revise the Response to Intervention Process as Necessary

Revisions to the Response to Intervention process should be considered if necessary. Monitoring the process through consistent review of the data is an effective measure to allow the district to make determinations concerning the need for additional
support. Personnel need to monitor the Response to Intervention information concerning the number of referrals from specific schools and other important factors.

**Response to Intervention Training during Teacher Induction**

The process of Response to Intervention training should be incorporated into the county’s professional development training given to any teachers transferring into the district of this study as either a new teacher, returning teacher, or a transfer teacher, regardless of the numbers of years of service in the area of education.

**Summary**

Response to Intervention is a required and necessary tool to support student interventions. The government requires it, the state requires, the district requires it, however the guidelines for implementation are wide and varied. Each state makes decisions how to implement the process and delegate outside of general guidelines to individual districts to provide specifics. Many districts in Georgia, including the district of this study has offered some guidelines that are used to ensure the process is fair and equitable for the students of that district. However, due to lack of adequate training and preparation on the part of the district and in some cases the individual schools, children are participating in remediation in manners that in some cases are in direct contract to the required procedures. Teachers are unclear, and in some cases creating a process out of lack of a formalized process which in turn creates validity issues in reference to the number of students referred for testing and the process itself.

Through the interviews with the teachers, this information was validated through their statements filled with frustration at the process. They are willing to do what is
necessary for the children, but want clear directions, procedures, and process, none of which has successfully happen until recently some of the schools have started to take the lead and make some school-based decisions. Creating an effective process at the district level can serve as a model for creating a successful state process, which could eventually influence a national move that would allow children wherever they may attention school to be offered the same remediation that is a proven, researched-based process. Response to Intervention will not go away any time soon. Any delay in creating a systemic process will only allow for continued referrals based on ineffective remediation, placing children through lack of support into programs that do not need, and possibly excluding children who could best be served by the special education services.
APPENDIX A

Teaching Style Inventory

I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW YOUR TEACHING STYLE. PLEASE CIRCLE THE ONE THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR METHOD OF PROVIDING INSTRUCTION.

1. When teaching the standards, I feel confident that the students will understand the standard when:
   
   V: Students have some prior general knowledge of the concept.

   A: Students need some additional help after I have introduced the concept and then understand.

   K: Students struggle and I am able to help them understand the material.

2. When I teach, I often find that I:

   V: Gravitate towards students who are gifted or advanced.

   A: Students who are considered average students.

   K: Students identified as having some learning concerns.

3. If I am not sure of how to teach a standard I:

   V: Seek help of one of my peers or coaches.

   A: Work it out until I figure out how it is done.

   K: Skip covering the material with the students.
Appendix A (continued)

4. When given the opportunity to choose my style of teaching, it is:
   V: Performance-based activities using differentiation.
   A: Small group instruction.
   K: Whole group instruction.

5. I like student who:
   V: Need very little assistance with instruction.
   A: Ask the questions necessary in order to understand the concepts.
   K: Remain quiet and work hard.

6. When providing instruction, I have a hard time when:
   V: Do not understand the material presented.
   A: Play around distracting themselves and others.
   K: Do not do their best by choice.

7. When determining what to do for struggling students, my first response is to:
   V: Seek assistance through the Response to Intervention process.
   A: Try interventions within the classroom undocumented.
   K: Seek the assistance or advice of the coach, or other support personnel.

8. To best document student academic concerns, I first:
   V: Contact parents for a conference by phone or in person.
   A: Speak with the coach or peer teachers for intervention assistance.
   K: Begin the Response to Intervention process.

9. If a student were having behavioral concerns, I would first:
   V: Conference with parents or school administrators concerning behaviors.
Appendix A (continued)

A: Develop a Behavior Intervention Plan for the child.

K: Begin the Response to Intervention process.

10. When asked to document students through the Response to Intervention process, I:

V: See the process as necessary and valuable towards helping students.

A: See the value of the process by wish someone else could work with the student.

K: See it as nothing more than creating additional paperwork documentation and wish to not be involved in the process.
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. Was adequate training provided to inform faculty of the Response to Intervention process and how to use it within the building?

2. Are teachers aware of the impact and the role Response to Intervention has on the Pyramid of Intervention?

3. Is there Response to Intervention support provided at the district or cluster level?

4. Is there Response to Intervention support provided at the building level?

5. Were teachers given the necessary resources to follow through with the Response to Intervention process, including progress monitoring?

6. As a teacher in the classroom, what is your attitude about having to remediate students in addition to providing general standards-based instruction?

7. Are you aware of the supplemental resources required to perform remediation to students in your building in the areas of Reading and Math?

8. Do you have enough planning time to prepare to implement Response to Intervention each week?

9. Do you have adequate time in order to remediate your students?

10. Do you have adequate time in order to progress monitor and document their progress?
Appendix B (continued)

11. What are potential problems or limitations as you see them with the Response to Intervention process as it currently exist within the district?
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISPROPORTIONATE NUMBER OF STUDENTS REFERRED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TESTING THROUGH THE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION PROCESS

You are invited to be in a research study of identifying factors that may be associated with the disproportionate number of students in the Response to intervention (RTI) process to be referred for Special Education testing. You were selected as a possible participant because you meet the necessary requirements for participation. Participants can come from any grade level in the district’s elementary schools; have a minimum of a master’s degree, and at least 5 years of teaching experience. Teachers who participate in the study must have students who are in the Response to Intervention process. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Teachers for the study will come from the school district in the study and be interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews consist of a list of open-ended questions based on the topic. Because the questions are open-ended this provides opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss certain topics in more detail.

In addition to the interviews, there will be a focus group of about 5-7 educators who are unfamiliar with each other and selected because they have similar characteristics which include: five or more years at an elementary school, providing Response to Intervention to students. The individuals will be selected from multiple schools.

This study is being conducted by: Vaneisa D. Benjamin of Clark Atlanta University

Background Information: Doctoral Candidate School of Educational Leadership

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors associated with a disproportionate number of students referred for formal special education testing through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process within this district. The intent of this study is to examine human behavior through interviews and surveys in order to gain a
Appendix C (continued)

better understanding of the feelings towards the use of the Response to Intervention process within elementary schools and how those responses influence a disproportionate number of students moving towards special education testing. It allows for openness of discussion and depth during the focus of this research. The voices of the teachers will be heard through the focus study interviews, individual teacher interviews and surveys.

Procedures: Participants will be asked to volunteer as a member of the individual interviews. All research will be conducted so that no harm will come to those involved. Anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed to each participant in writing and they will not be identifiable in any printed document. Teachers participating in the study will complete a Teaching Style questionnaire (Appendix A), in order to gain understanding about the teacher’s perception of areas that involve teaching. The questions focus on the teaching styles of the teachers. During the interview process this data will be used to cross reference the responses to the interview. Teachers will also participate in an interview to document their responses to open-ended questions created by the researcher (Appendix B). Teachers will be asked their view point on select questions and allowed to provide unrestricted responses. Notes as well as recordings of the interviews will take place. The interview process will take approximately 30 minutes per person. There will be no restrictions to the responses so that information can be gained concerning details of their experiences in education, life experiences as educators and how they perceive the Response to process. Both individual and group interviews will be recorded and transcribed. In the group and individual interviews, notes referencing facial expressions, gestures, emotions and conversation will be noted. The copy of the questionnaire will be sent to those participating in the study before conducting the interviews. No payment or other compensations will be included.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: There are no known risk to the study however limitations of the study are listed below as well as benefits.

The following may be limitations that occur while conducting the research.

1. The research may be limited based on the open-ended responses allowed.

2. Teachers may choose not provide honest responses although the survey will be anonymous.

3. The research may be limited in the number of participants.

4. Interviews may be limited because all teachers may not have students at the Tier III level of intervention needed.

5. The views of the participants may be different or not congruent with views of other teachers in other schools or districts.
Appendix C (continued)

6. This study will not address the Response to Intervention program itself, but only the process. It also does not address the referral of students based on gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. It will only examine one district. Further studies could provide additional information by focusing on these areas listed above as well as a focus of comparisons of several districts within the state of Georgia as well as the nation.

The benefit of this study could provide important information to the district in developing a county-wide Response to Intervention process.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. The data collected will be retained for 5 years and then destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researcher, or Clark Atlanta University. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the freedom to withdraw at any time without affecting any relationship previously identified. No monetary benefits will be given. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, and data collected will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this survey is Vaneisa Benjamin, (cell), or the researcher can be contacted at vbenjamin@henry.k12.ga.us. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact the researcher(s) at: Phone (770) 474-8265 or (404) 202-7293.

If you have any questions now, or later, related to the integrity of the research, you are encouraged to contact Dr. Georgianna Bolden at the Office of Sponsored Programs (404 880-6979) or Dr. Paul I. Musey, (404) 880-6829 at Clark Atlanta University.
REFERENCES


Burns, M. K., & A. M. VanDerHeyden (Eds.), Handbook of response to intervention: The science and practice of assessment and intervention (pp. 319–330). New York: Springer.


