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RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: A PERSONNEL PROBLEM

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the key personnel are in place for effective implementation of the core components of Response to Intervention in a prototypical elementary school. This is a qualitative study using responsive interviews and artifact collection. The key findings were that two sites were fully implementing RtI and two were implementing some of the core components of RtI. The sites with full implementation had support teachers and extensive professional development on RtI. The key findings concluded that three key factors relating to complete implementation at the sites include adequate staffing of support teachers, access to time to collaboratively engage in data-based decision making, and high-quality on-going professional development.

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To my children Jimmy, Tommy, Roy, and Jeff,

and

To my husband and parents. Thank you for all your support.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The current iteration of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) enacted in 2006 includes new regulations for identifying students with disabilities and for early intervention services (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that a “state’s criteria must permit the use of Response to Intervention (RtI) and may require its use, in addition to other assessment tools and strategies, for determining whether the child has a specific learning disability” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, section E-1). The inclusion of RtI in the new iteration of IDEA has created a sense of urgency for local education agencies (LEAs) to launch full-scale RtI implementation (Zirkel, 2012).

This chapter provides an introduction to and overview of this dissertation, which examined the key personnel needed to implement core components of RtI. This study also examined the pertinent RtI training and professional development that personnel need in order to implement RtI. This chapter begins with the background of the problem, follows with the statement of the problem, and then concludes with an overview of the proposal.

#### **Background of the Problem**

IDEA clearly requires RtI implementation, but the law does not provide clear guidelines for implementation. The U.S. Department of Education (2008)

identifies the flexibility LEAs have in RtI implementation and explains that “state and local officials are in the best position to make decisions regarding the provision of early intervening services, including the specific personnel to provide the services” (Section E-3). While many districts and schools appreciate the freedom to allocate personnel resources as they see fit, RtI has core components that are essential for proper implementation, and district and site administrators would benefit from a model that demonstrates the type of personnel resources necessary for full RtI implementation.

The core components of RtI implementation are identified in implementation research; however, the flexibility left to state and local agencies presents a challenge for busy practitioners, who are expected to implement a myriad of initiatives. Danielson, Doolittle, and Bradley (2007) explain that the U.S. Department of Education left significant flexibility to the individual states and LEAs when they included RtI in the 2004 amendment of IDEA. Zirkel and Thomas (2010) explain that, as of 2010, 12 states wrote legislation requiring LEAs to use RtI in their special education identification process. Zirkel and Thomas’s (2010) research indicates that as more states are including RtI as a requirement in their special education eligibility requirements, states and districts will need to prepare to implement RtI programs in order to be compliant with state law.

This research took place in California; as of 2016 the California Department of Education (CDE) does not require RtI as part of the eligibility requirements for special education, but staff at the CDE strongly advocate for RtI

implementation. California Education Code Sections 56333-56338 suggest that Rtl be used as a means to support students and qualify them for special education. The CDE's website under Curriculum and Instruction includes a working definition and philosophy of Response to Intervention and Instruction (Rtl<sup>2</sup>) (California Department of Education, 2015), which, for the purpose of this study, will be understood to mean the same thing as Rtl. The CDE states the LEAs "must harness and coordinate the full resources of the school, district and community" (California Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). The literature suggests that Rtl is a promising practice; however, the limited implementation experience and lack of models are a barrier to effective large-scale implementation (Danielson et al., 2007).

### **Problem Statement**

Rtl implementation is flexible by design; however, without models for districts and schools to use as implementation guides, students may not receive the support that an effective Rtl system provides. Without the proper support in the form of implementation guides and models, only students attending schools with administrators who have expertise in Rtl will receive the multitiered levels of support provided by Rtl.

The problem this study addressed was to identify a framework for adequate personnel resources to implement Rtl in a prototypical elementary school as there is a lack of such a framework for Rtl staffing. The framework will serve as a guide for district and site administrators as they hire and provide professional development for site Rtl implementation teams. Results from this

inquiry could inform schools and districts as they strive to adequately staff their Rtl initiatives.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to identify the key personnel needed to effectively implement the core components of Rtl. In examining implementation at four sites, the study helped to identify existing human capital and illuminate the need for reallocation or additional personnel resources needed for full Rtl implementation. Finally, the study will assist the school district to create a systematic approach to Rtl implementation by creating an Rtl adequacy staffing model.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. What are the key personnel required to effectively implement the core components of Rtl?
2. What training and skills do the key personnel require to effectively implement the core components of Rtl?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will make a significant contribution to educational leadership because it will provide information for district and site leaders regarding adequate staff and training for Rtl implementation. This research is important because districts and schools across the country are required to implement Rtl as a means to support students and identify students for special education; however,

lack of experience in implementing Rtl on a large scale leaves LEAs guessing about personnel resource needs (Zirkel & Thomas, 2010).

Most of the existing research focuses on the core components of Rtl and the factors barring effective implementation. There are many resources that provide information on the core components of Rtl, but there has been little published on key personnel needs and the training and experience the key personnel require. This case study provides a starting point for site and district administrators to develop a budget and an adequate staffing plan to support large-scale implementation.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study has related assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. This qualitative study assumes that the respondents speak honestly about their perceptions. Delimitations were selected to limit the study to three school sites in the district and focus the study on the site administrators and the key implementers. Limitations were considered throughout the study. The limitations concern the accuracy of the responses and the limited number of respondents at each site.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Several assumptions ground this qualitative study. I assume that the administrators provide responses that properly represent Rtl implementation at their respective school sites and that they accurately identify the key personnel. Along with the accuracy of the administrator's interview data, I assume that the data I retrieve from the follow-up interviews with the key implementers is also

accurate. Finally, I assume that the artifacts I collect are used as indicated in the interviews.

### **Study Delimitations**

This study was limited to three of 22 elementary schools in a medium-sized suburban school district located in Southern California. I selected the four elementary schools based on their varying demographic make-up. Additionally, I selected the schools because they have operational Rtl programs, and they are demographically similar to other schools in the district. Thus, the findings will be generalizable across this district and similar districts elsewhere.

This study focused on the personnel who are implementing the core components of Rtl and on what training and experience they have had. This focus is deliberate because creating a budget for staffing and training is an important starting place for district-wide implementation.

### **Study Limitations**

This qualitative study is limited in the fact that it does not include observations to confirm the accuracy of respondents' statements. The site administrator's interview data and artifacts were used to identify key personnel. The timing of this study, year two of California's Common Core State Standards (CCSS) implementation, also serves as a limitation. School staffs are implementing new English language arts and math CCSS standards-based curriculum, and school resources are being diverted to support these curricular efforts. Thus, the resources that might have been used for Rtl in the past, or

could be allocated for Rtl in the future, might be used to support CCSS implementation.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*Academic Performance Index (API).* API scores are the ranking given to districts and schools based on state standardized test scores.

*CALPADS.* CALPADS is the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System which is used to maintain data including student demographics, district course data, discipline, assessments, personnel, and other state and federal data used for reporting.

*Data-based decision making.* Data-based decision making is a process in which educators use data to inform decisions regarding instruction and interventions, use and allocation of resources, and the development of programs and policies.

*DIBELS.* DIBELS stands for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills and are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade.

*Differentiated instruction.* Differentiated instruction occurs when educators adjust either content, process, or environment for a student in order to improve achievement levels.

*Evidence-based intervention.* An evidence-based intervention is an intervention for which there is research supporting the efficacy of the intervention.

*Individualized Education Plan (IEP).* An IEP is the legal document that defines a child's special education program.

*Professional Learning Community (PLC).* A PLC is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students.

*Progress monitoring.* Progress monitoring is a type of assessment used to measure a student's progress in response to a particular intervention. Educators use progress monitoring data to adjust instruction and determine the intervention's effectiveness.

*Screening.* Screening tools are used to identify who may be at risk for below-benchmark outcomes. Screening assessments are generally short and given to all students at a particular grade level. Results help educators determine who needs interventions and progress monitoring.

*SIPPS.* SIPPS is a systematic and sequential foundational reading skills program that covers the skills of phonological awareness, phonics, and sight words using a differentiated approach

*Specific learning disability.* A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations and may result from conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; or

environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. Specific learning disability is one of the disability categories defined in IDEA 2004 [34 CFR 300.8(c)(10)].

*STAR*. STAR is a computer-based assessment created by Renaissance Learning that measures student's reading skills and determines a student's reading level.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 1 I introduced the study by providing some background information, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the research, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework and provides a review of the scholarly literature related to Rtl. Chapter 3 addresses the design of the study and includes information on the data collection and data analysis methods. Chapter 4 contains the findings of the research, and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the implications of the findings and suggestions for further research on Rtl.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The achievement gap between English language learners and their majority-language peers persists, and California's new Smarter Balanced Assessments indicate that with the new standards and assessment system, the gap has widened (Torlakson, 2011). The CDE identifies Rtl as a promising practice with which to support students and close the achievement gap (California Department of Education, 2015). If Rtl implementation is to become systematic and district supported, districts and schools need consistent formulas and strategies for funding, recruiting, training, and retaining the staff needed. This study examined Rtl implementation at four elementary schools in a medium-sized school district. Using the four core components of Rtl as a framework, this study identified the key staff necessary for the implementation of each component.

The literature suggests that while it is generally accepted that Rtl is an effective system for preventing and responding to learning difficulties and is therefore written into the 2004 IDEA legislation, there is no consensus for a single model for implementation (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; King Thorius, Maxcy, Macey, & Cox, 2014). Johnston claims that Rtl implementers "perceived the language within the (Rtl) policy initiative as intentionally vague and ambiguous, often resulting in implementation that was variable, particularistic,

and sensitive to local needs—yet lacking some level of standardization in its implementation” (as cited in Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012, p. 487). States, districts, and schools are left to develop systems to support Rtl implementation, including funding, recruiting, training, and retaining qualified staff. At the beginning of this chapter, I review the theoretical foundation of this study. Next, I present the conceptual framework for the study. Finally, the empirical research related to Rtl implementation is described. I conclude with a chapter summary.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation of this dissertation is grounded in the adequacy model for school funding, specifically the evidence-based adequacy model. In order to discuss the shift to an evidence-based adequacy model, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of horizontal and vertical equity. Banicki and Murphy (2014) define *horizontal equity* as the equal treatment of equals; in a system that promotes horizontal equity all students receive equal resources. *Vertical equity* is defined as the unequal treatment of unequals (Banicki & Murphy, 2014). In a system built on the theory of vertical equity, students with certain disadvantages and needs get more resources in order to obtain the same educational outcomes as those students with fewer needs (Banicki & Murphy, 2014). Adequacy models identify a connection between funding inputs and student performance outputs (Conley & Picus, 2003), and contend that, in order to get increased student outcomes for students performing at lower proficiency levels, increased funding inputs are needed.

Macropolicy changes in education funding have taken place over the last 100 years, moving from a system that provided education to only children of privilege to a system that provides education to all students (Banicki & Murphy, 2014). Legislation dating as far back as 1971 in *Serrano v. Priest* has called for a funding formula that favors vertical equity similar to the evidence-based adequacy model. According to Banicki and Murphy (2014), in *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) the courts concluded that “education is a fundamental interest as all future opportunities of a child are impacted by the quality and completeness of that child’s educational experiences” (p. 4). This ruling instigated a revision in funding formulas. Education funding has slowly begun to move toward an adequacy funding model, but a more demarcated shift is needed. School funding needs to shift from a system in which each district and school gets the same funding level to a model in which schools and districts receive the funding they need to provide adequate educational opportunities for all students.

Odden and Picus (2008) explain that in an evidence-based adequacy approach to school funding, decisions identify “research or other evidence-based educational strategies, price them out, and then aggregate them to identify adequate school site, district, and state expenditure levels” (p. 80). Banicki and Murphy (2014) add that in an evidence-based model, specific interventions are recommended and the resources needed to support them are determined. Odden et al. (2007) argue that this funding model not only helps to provide adequate educational opportunities but also supports the use of effective practices that will lead to improved student achievement. Instead of allocating

funds to districts and schools and hoping for better results, educators and legislators would tie funds to programs that have proven track records in improving teaching and learning (Banicki & Murphy, 2014).

This dissertation presents the evidence-based adequacy model as the theoretical foundation for the study of adequate staffing needs for RtI implementation. The evidence-based adequacy model was selected for this dissertation because it requires specificity in funding allocations. In other words, districts must be specific in costing out a program, considering both direct and indirect costs, for a particular initiative. This specificity will allow districts and schools to create a budget for adequate staffing for successful RtI implementation. Without specific budget allocations, schools might not have the resources they need to successfully implement RtI with all its key components.

Table 1 presents Odden and Picus's (2008) adequate resource model for prototypical elementary schools. The table presents the characteristics of a prototypical elementary school and provides a formula to apply this model to schools with different characteristics.

Table 1

*Adequate Resources for Prototypical Elementary School*


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Prototypical school size	432 students
Class size K-3	15 students
Class size 4-5	25 students
Full-day kindergarten	Yes
Number of teacher workdays	190
Number of training days	10
Disabled population	12%
Low-income (free and reduced price lunch) population	50%
English language learner population	10%
Minority population	30%

---

While Odden and Picus's (2008) adequacy model includes policies, procedures, and programs, for the purpose of this study I focus on the staffing resources as illustrated in Table 2. Odden and Picus (2008) do not outline adequate staffing allocations for RtI implementation specifically, however this study will use Odden and Picus's staffing model as a framework for examining the staffing resources needed to implement RtI. Table 2 indicates that, in addition to core teachers, a school should have 20% more of the core teachers to serve as specialist teachers.

Table 2

*Adequate Personnel Resources*


---

Core teachers	24
Specialist teachers	20% more: 4.8
Instructional facilitators/mentors	2.2
Tutors for struggling students	One for every 200 poverty students: 2.16
Teachers for ELL students	Additional 1.0 teachers for every 100 ELL students 0.43
Extended-day	1.8
Summer school	1.8
Learning and mildly disabled students	Additional 3 professional teacher positions
Severely disabled students	100% state reimbursement minus federal funds
Teachers for gifted students	\$25/student
Substitutes	5% of above lines
Pupil support staff	1 for every 100 poverty students: 2.16
Non-instructional aides	2.0
Librarians/media specialists	1.0
Principal	1.0
School site secretary	2.0
Professional development	Included above: instructional facilitators Planning and prep time 10 summer days Additional: 100/pupil for other PD expenses (trainers, conferences, travel, etc.)

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*Note.* Adapted from *School Finance: A Policy Perspective* (pp. 132-133), by A. Odden and T. Picus, 2008, New York, NY: The McGraw-Hill Companies.

An additional two teachers should be staffed for every 100 low-income students, and an additional one teacher provided for every 100 English learners. An additional three teachers for each 432 students is recommended for learning disabled students. This study uses Odden and Picus's (2008) formula and creates a similar staffing adequacy model, but with specific components of Rtl implantation assigned to school personnel. Odden and Picus's (2008) supplemental personnel to support English learners, low-income students, and learning disabled students will be assigned to one of the four key components of Rtl implementation (Odden & Picus, 2008, p. 132).

California's Assembly Bill 97 introduced the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in 2013-2014, a funding reform based on the idea that students with greater need require greater resources to achieve desired outcomes (Affeldt, 2015). The LCFF's weighted formula provides base funding for all students and supplemental funding for what the bill refers to as unduplicated high-need students (Affeldt, 2015). Although LCFF is based on an equity principle, it still fails to address adequacy (Affeldt, 2015). Funding still needs to shift from a model where schools and districts with more students in need get more money to a formula where districts and schools get the money they need in order to implement evidence-based programs and strategies like Rtl effectively. In order to successfully make this shift, educators and legislators need to know exactly what resources are needed to fund each evidence-based practice. This study will begin to provide the answer to how much funding is needed to successfully implement Rtl in an elementary school.

## **Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature**

The following section will review the scholarly empirical literature as it relates to staffing and training staff in order to implement a complete Rtl program.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in two main concepts. The first identifies the core components of the Rtl framework and the second is a working definition of Rtl. The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) outlines the main components as

- Evidence-based instructional strategies
- Multileveled tiers of support
- Screening and progress monitoring assessments
- Data-based decision making

The four main components of Rtl will serve as a framework to create the working definition of Rtl that was used for this study. These components must be present in order to have a system qualify as Rtl. The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) defines Rtl as a system that “integrates assessment and intervention within a multilevel prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems” (“New to Rtl?,” para. 1).

The most recent iteration of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) identifies Rtl as a system that identifies students for learning disabilities, but this study only focuses on the Rtl as a “systematic and data-based method for identifying, defining, and resolving

student' academic and/or behavior difficulties" (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005, p. 2).

The first and second components that define Rtl are evidence-based instructional strategies that are delivered in multiple tiers (Batsche, Kavale, & Kovalski, 2006; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). While the level of tiers isn't articulated in IDEIA (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), the most commonly accepted Rtl model definition includes three tiers of instruction (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). Tier I is designed for and administered to all students in a grade level and is often referred to as core instruction. Tier II instruction includes interventions that are administered to students who need more intensive and targeted instruction in order to experience success. Tier III interventions and assessments are for the small percentage of students who are not experiencing success with Tier I and II instruction. While Tier III is not special education, the information gleaned from a student's response to these intensive interventions can help determine if the student needs to be assessed for special education services. Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) explain that "Tier 3 activities include comprehensive assessment to identify whether a student has a specific disability and meets the criteria for special education" (p. 3).

The tiered levels of evidence-based instruction are tied to the other two core components of Rtl: screening and progress monitoring and data-based decision making. Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) explain the connection of tiered instruction, assessment, and data-based decision making and say that

“essentially, Rtl is an objective examination of the cause-effect relationship(s) between academic or behavioral *intervention* and the student’s response to the intervention” (p. 2). Students in Tier II need more intensive intervention and more frequent progress monitoring than students in Tier I. Students in Tier III need the most intensive intervention and assessments in order to meet their goals. Tier III is for students who have not yet found success in school. Rtl identifies these students and uses the above-mentioned system and its components to develop a plan to help Tier III students succeed.

The conceptual framework, including the key components of Rtl and the working definition, guided the review of the existing literature on Rtl to see how different staff members play different roles in Rtl implementation. The conceptual framework also guided the focus of the data collection instruments. Interview questions and artifact collection focused on which of the school personnel implemented each of the core components of Rtl. The following section reviews the existing literature on Rtl implementation. The literature review focuses on the key personnel needed to implement each core component and Rtl professional development for key personnel.

### **Rtl Implementation**

The Rtl framework clearly identifies key components that are critical to Rtl implementation, including evidence-based instruction, multileveled tiers of support, screening and progress monitoring, and data-based decision making. I will be using the core components as a conceptual framework to review the literature across the key personnel. The specific implementation of Rtl can vary

significantly between districts and between schools within districts, but there are guidelines and support materials for implementation that assist administrators, teachers, specialist and paraprofessionals (Bender & Shores, 2007; Columbia County Schools, 2007; Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2006; Griffiths, VanDerHeyden, Parson, & Burns, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2007; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010; Scammaca, Vaughn, Roberts, Wanzek, & Torgesen, 2007; Wright, 2007). Ehren (2013) explains that the RtI framework can be interpreted in a variety of ways and points out that this is a positive quality based on the “diversity of populations, resources, and infrastructures from school to school” (p. 451). Ehren (2013) does, however, advocate for the importance of cultivating collaboration in RtI implementation across settings. She argues that successful and authentic RtI implementation can only happen if “educators work together in substantive and sustained ways” (p. 452) and elaborates on the kinds of collaboration needed by RtI personnel:

This work involves many different collaborations—classroom teachers working with each other and instructional support professional, resource professionals working together with to support teachers, all instructional staff working with administrators, and all school staff working respectfully and in partnership with families and students. (p. 452)

Along with collaboration, implementation builds on existing strengths and knowledge of the personnel implementing the initiative (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Burns et al., 2013; Hardcastle & Justice, 2006; McCook, 2007), the existing components of RtI at a particular school site should

be used, and components that are missing should be established. Building on existing knowledge and practices allows teachers to make as few changes as possible, helping ensure a stronger implementation (Burns et al., 2013). It is important, however, to let the school personnel who are doing the implementation provide services without receiving significant support. If too much support is provided, implementing personnel will not experience short-term successes that support strong long-term implementation (Burns et al., 2013).

Ehren (2013) is not alone when she advocates for collaboration among professionals, and it is the aim of this study to not only highlight the importance of creating a system that supports collaboration but also identify the key staff needed to implement RtI in an elementary school. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss personnel identified in the literature as key to RtI implementation: educators in formal leadership positions, interventionists, special education teachers and specialists, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals. I will also discuss the RtI-related professional development provided to key personnel.

### **Leadership**

The literature reviewed supports the belief that strong leadership is important in RtI implementation, and both district and site leaders are identified as important to a successful operationalization of the RtI initiative (Lose, 2008; McCook, 2007; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Praisner, 2007; Schmoker, 2002). Mellard, Prewett, and Deshler (2012) claim that when they interviewed RtI staff about the roles that their site principals played in RtI, "The nearly universal

response was that principal leadership was essential” (p. 31), noting that full involvement by the principal in the process was a key factor in success.

Mellard et al. (2012) identified the principal's key responsibilities as facilitating understanding of RtI, creating a culture that supports RtI, protecting the master schedule to ensure that staff had time to conduct key RtI functions and duties, coaching and providing feedback, listening to concerns, and providing on-going professional development.

Case study research by Murakami-Ramalho and Wilcox (2012) suggests that the leader's character traits of listening to teachers' suggestions during implementation and optimizing teachers' strengths were contributing factors to the initiative's success. Averill, Baker, and Rinaldi (2014) say that, along with providing general support for the initiative, principals can participate as interventionists if an “all hands on deck” approach is utilized in order to maximize personnel resources.

Principals play an important role in RtI implementation, but the literature indicates that other leadership roles are also important to a successful initiative. Case study research conducted by Hoover and Love (2011) identified three successful implementation sites which had site team RtI leaders who possessed extensive training and skills. They did not clarify whether the team leaders' sole responsibility was to lead the RtI initiative, or if they had other professional responsibilities. They did, however, explain that each RtI team leader possessed more than seven years of teaching experience, had a master's degree in special

education, and had received specialized training in RtI. The team RtI leader in each case was supported by an outside RtI expert.

The case study stated that the outside experts could be a variety of different educators like “state department personnel, educational consultants, university faculty, or district- or statewide RTI trainers” (Hoover & Love, 2011, p. 42). The outside experts helped site team leaders address issues identified at their site and find various solutions to their school’s specific needs.

### **Interventionists**

Averill et al. (2014) define an interventionist as a “licensed educator who is able to provide direct instructional intervention in a particular area of the curriculum” (p. 31). They suggest that one approach to satisfying personnel needs for RtI implementation is to employ an approach to staffing the intervention block where all available personnel are involved, including staff that are not usually involved in instruction, such as the librarian and administrators. Ehren (2013) believes that interventionists may include classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, English language learner teachers, and speech language pathologists. Averill et al. (2014) expand the list to include music, art, or science teachers. They also propose that a school utilize their psychologist, speech language pathologist, or principal to serve as an interventionist. They claim that literacy specialists and English as a second language teachers can also play the part of interventionist. Averill et al. (2014) believe that all of the above-mentioned personnel are possible interventionists but mention that they might need additional training and support before they

assume the role, including training in classroom management to monitor independent work.

Averill et al. (2013) recommend that the most highly qualified staff be assigned to work with the students with the greatest needs. They provide an example where paraprofessionals are assigned to work with students who are performing at benchmark and special education teachers and literacy specialists are employed to work with the students needing the most intensive level of support.

### **Special Education Teachers and Specialists**

Ehren (2013) considers one of the myths surrounding Rtl to be that it is simply a pre-referral system for special education. This study focuses on Rtl as a means to provide students with the effective instruction they need to succeed and rejects the concept of Rtl as a function of special education. Special educators, however, play an important role in Rtl implementation. Special education teachers, school psychologists, and speech pathologists are all identified in the literature as important players in successful Rtl implementation. Berkeley et al. (2009) identify the need to form a problem-solving decision team that includes special education teachers and school psychologists. They also note that Utah and West Virginia assigned special educators, including teachers, speech language pathologists, and other specialists, to serve as the designated Tier II support providers.

## **General Education Teachers**

Classroom teachers are referenced as key to RtI implementation throughout the literature, and specific roles have already been identified in previous sections. Murakami-Ramalho and Wilcox (2012) believe that there is a “fuzzy divide between the roles of special education specialists and generalist teacher, with frequent juggling of students before proper identification of needs were made” (p. 487). They also state that general education teachers lack a model to follow, which leads to frustration.

Classifying RtI as a change initiative, case study research (Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012) indicates that not all teachers are receptive to reforming practice or working collaboratively to operationalize the RtI framework. The collaborative nature of RtI requires general education teachers to give up some of their traditional practices. Listening to teachers and providing initial and on-going professional development and support in the form of resources have all been identified as ways to support general education teacher buy-in to the RtI initiative (Averill et al., 2014; Mellard et al., 2012)

General education teacher support is important to a successful RtI initiative. Bradley et al. (2007) call attention to the importance of general education teachers in a successful RtI model when they identify the following features: “students receive high quality, research-based instruction in their general education setting and education staff members assume an active role in student’s assessment in the curriculum” (p. 10).

Bradley et al. (2007) reiterate the importance of general education teachers in RtI implementation when they identify the greatest challenge of initial scale-up to be general education staff preparation and participation. Getting all general education teachers prepared to support all students, including those identified as learning disabled, in the general education setting can be a trial. Marston agrees that general education teachers play a crucial role in successful RtI implementation when he says that “general education teachers must assume active responsibility for delivery of high-quality instruction, research-based interventions, and prompt identification of individuals at risk while collaborating with special education and related service personnel” (2005, p. 541; as cited in Berkeley et al., 2009)

While there is an understanding that collaboration is crucial, and general education teachers must be involved in RtI implementation, there is no clear-cut model for key personnel responsible for implementation. If implementation is left solely to general education teachers, they will be overwhelmed because of their myriad other professional responsibilities. Noll (2013) identifies the most important role of general education teachers as providing high-quality Tier I instruction. High-quality instruction for all students that includes small-group differentiated instruction will reduce the number of students who need Tier II and Tier III intervention.

### **Paraprofessionals**

Paraprofessionals can play an important role in RtI implementation. Averill et al. (2014) suggest that paraprofessionals be used to support classroom

teachers during the intervention blocks. They provide a proposed student-to-staff ratio of approximately 1:11 during the intervention block, reduced from a 1:22 ratio during the core instructional day.

### **Professional Development**

Discussion of professional development is common in the literature on Rtl. Research has shown that investments in teacher expertise through quality professional development yield greater learner achievement outcomes than any other expenditure of school resources (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Averill et al. (2014) discuss the need to train those serving the role of interventionists on specific intervention strategies. They also suggest that some teachers might need training and support in classroom management strategies in order to manage independent activities. Mellard et al. (2012) believe that one of the principal's key roles is to ensure that ongoing professional development is available for all implementers.

Danielson et al. (2007) suggest that far too little attention has been paid to preservice preparation of Rtl service providers. They identify two kinds of necessary professional development, depending on the roles of the service providers: Some educators will need training in first and second tier interventions and in administering and using assessments and data. Special educators will need training in more intensive interventions, in using Rtl to identify learning disabilities, and in evaluating students for special education qualification.

Rtl is a collaborative effort, and Burns et al. (2013) argue that, along with training in tiered interventions, progress monitoring, and data-based decision

making, implementers need professional development involving teaming strategies. The inability to implement a working school-based team is one of the most serious and well-documented threats to successful RtI implementation (Burns, Vanderwood, & Ruby, 2005).

Danielson et al. (2007) believe that, beyond initial training in evidence-based interventions and assessments, practitioners must receive training and technical assistance in effective implementation strategies. Professional development is crucial to continuous school improvement, and training in all components and aspects of an initiative must be ongoing (Bergstrom, 2008; Burns et al., 2013; Schmoker, 2002; Webster-Wright, 2009). This ongoing professional development needs to cover all the core components and skill sets of RtI and examples that include a broad range of forms that the primary components of RtI can take. The theory of broad training also applies to personnel. Personnel implementing RtI need to be proficient in all aspects of the RtI process (Burns et al., 2013). Implementation tools like protocols and checklists assist RtI implementers to self-assess, and continuous feedback to school personnel help ensure effective implementation (Burns et al. 2013).

### **Chapter Summary**

RtI has been identified as a promising initiative that has the power to not only reduce the number of students labeled and misidentified as learning disabled but also provide every student with effective instruction and therefore close the achievement gap that exists in California. The empirical literature, however, suggests that much work needs to be done to determine effective

models for implementation, including the recruitment, training, and maintenance of qualified staff. This study will address the lack of a clear staffing model to implement RtI at an elementary school site.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The problem that this study addressed is the lack of clear direction provided by the IDEIA in the implementation of Rtl, specifically regarding minimum adequate staffing guidelines. Features of Rtl have existed in schools for many years, but Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, and Saenz (2008) explain that Rtl's inclusion in the 2004 revision of IDEIA prompted educational leaders and policy makers to focus on Rtl as a viable means to close the achievement gap. For the district in this study, the board of education made district-wide Rtl implementation a priority as a way to ensure that all students succeed under the CCSS; however, there is no systematic approach to implementation and no systematic allocation of staffing to support implementation.

This study researched the following questions:

1. What are the key personnel required to effectively implement the core components of Rtl?
2. What training and skills do the key personnel require to effectively implement the core components of Rtl?

The study identified successful practices and resource allocation in the implementation of Rtl. The results of this study will allow district leaders to share effective practices and develop a systematic approach to Rtl implementation district wide. In this chapter I will present the methodology selected for the study.

I will discuss my position as researcher, the setting of the research, and the specific research sample used in this study. I will review the data collection methods and approach to data analysis, including methods to support trustworthiness of data and the transferability of findings. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary.

### **Qualitative Research**

This research study used a qualitative design in order to identify what key components of Rtl exist at each site and which personnel implement each component. The qualitative research design is appropriate because it allows for the exploration of human behaviors within the context of their daily lives (Hatch, 2002). Rtl has guiding principles, but the way it is interpreted and implemented depend on the individuals involved in the process. Hatch (2002) explains that qualitative research supports the constructivist paradigm where knowledge is a human construction. Rtl implementation can be best understood if participants and researcher coconstruct understandings as to how Rtl is being implemented at each site.

### **Research Design**

The study employed the responsive interview design as outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2005). The responsive interview process helps achieve the research goal of learning about the experiences participants have with Rtl and the rules under which they are operating. Additionally, responsive qualitative interviewing supports the constructivist paradigm, or what Rubin and Rubin refer to as the naturalist-interpretive paradigm. Rtl outlines key principles; however, only

through in-depth interviewing and listening will we gain an understanding of how these principles are being applied at individual sites in an effort to identify successful practices and create a replicable system.

## **Research Methods**

### **Setting**

The school district in this study is located in suburban Southern California and serves approximately 22,000 students, preschool through 12th grade. The district showed an API of 840 in 2013, with the White subgroup demonstrating an API of 900, Hispanic or Latino 762, and English learners 762. CALPADS data indicate that 43% of the students tested are Hispanic or Latino and 49% of the students are White. Forty-four percent of the students qualify for free and reduced price lunch. Twenty-two percent of the students are designated as English learners. My study focused on four different elementary schools. The focus schools are represented in Table 3 below, with demographic information including ethnic, performance on most recent standardized test, socioeconomic data, and available school funding sources.

Table 3

*Elementary Schools in Study*

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
English language learners	73%	15%	4%	2%
Hispanic/Latino	97%	35%	14%	5%
Eligible for free and reduced lunch	96%	45%	14%	5%
2013 API	766	833	861	943
2013 ELL API	766	724	562	929
Title I funded	Yes	No	No	No
Funds raised by parent groups (approximates)	\$5,000	\$50,000	\$150,000	\$200,000

The specific sites were selected because they represent the varied demographic profiles found in the school district and the state of California. Additionally, the four schools receive funding from different sources, including Title I (School 1), LCFF Supplemental Funds (Schools 1 and 2), and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Parent Faculty Organization resources (Schools 1, 2, 3, and 4). Along with different funding sources available to allocate to RtI implementation, the four elementary schools vary greatly in parent education level, which was recorded on a Likert-type scale ranging from one (*not a high school graduate*) to five (*holds graduate degree*). School 1 has an average parent education level of 1.74, School 2 a 3.26 average, School 3 a 3.93, and School 4 a 4.48 average. Based on this data, the free and reduced price lunch data, and the standardized test data, more students need intensive intervention

at School 1. The study used artifacts such as school budgets and school-wide progress monitoring data to determine whether the allocation of resources at each school is equitable in light of the level of student need.

### **Sample**

The participants for this study included site administrators (principals) in a suburban school district with a student enrollment of 21,800. A follow-up survey administered to key personnel identified in the site administrator interview was also conducted. The site administrators were from four of the 22 elementary schools that house grades K-6 with a student enrollment of  $N = 556$ ,  $N = 422$ ,  $N = 498$ , and  $N = 617$ , respectively.

The site principals were chosen as the focus for the one-to-one interviews because the school district practices site-based decision making regarding budgeting and implementation of Rtl. Each site administrator's experience and training in Rtl implementation are contributing factors to implementation. The responsive qualitative interview process, including open ended questions, allowed me to gain insight into what skills the site administrators draw on to implement Rtl. Additionally, the principals' interview responses helped determine follow-up survey participants and artifact collection.

### **Data Collection and Management**

**Interviews.** The one-to-one administrator interviews were the key data source used to identify the key personnel at each site. The interview protocol consisted of nine questions, the first of which was open ended and asked about the site's Rtl program in general. The seven subsequent questions asked about

the four primary components of RtI, as outlined by the study's conceptual framework. Follow-up and probe questions were included to ensure that each of the four primary components of RtI were present at each site. The questions helped determine the personnel responsible for each component along with identifying when one of the primary components of RtI was missing due to lack of personnel resources.

The last question asked specifically about the training and experience that the site administrator and key implementation personnel have relating to RtI. While training might have come up during the first eight questions, question nine of the interview protocol ensured that data were collected to answer the second research question relating to professional development.

The one-to-one administrator interviews were carefully recorded, transcribed, and stored to maintain participant confidentiality. A Sony digital flash voice recorder was used to record interviews, and the recorder was used exclusively for the study. A total of four administrator interviews were conducted and key portions were transcribed and analyzed for patterns. The administrators answered the questions about how RtI is being implemented at each individual site through the eyes of the positional instructional leaders. Through the administrator interviews the key personnel involved in RtI implementation were identified. (See Appendix A for a sample of the administrator interview protocol.)

**Follow-up survey.** The follow-up survey was used to gather additional data and, along with artifacts, to triangulate the data gathered in the one-to-one administrator interviews. The survey was created using Google Forms and

consisted of 13 questions. Three of the questions were multiple choice and gathered demographic data from the informants. An additional two multiple choice questions and checklists allowed informants to identify personnel connected to the four primary components of RtI implementation. The remaining three questions were open ended to glean additional information unique to the site's implementation that was helpful to the study, including a narrative response question regarding professional development that relates to this study's second research question. The survey data were analyzed to look for patterns and themes, and I used the data to validate the responses of the one-to-one administrator interviews..

**Artifacts.** Along with interview and survey results, artifacts relating to RtI implementation were collected, including school budgets with funding sources and expenditures, student achievement data, and meeting protocols and minutes. These artifacts already existed at each site and were identified during the one-to-one administrator interviews. The artifacts assisted me in data triangulation. The school budgets verified how much was allocated for student support, the data confirmed that screening and progress monitoring took place consistently, and the meeting protocols and minutes verified that data-driven instruction was happening at the sites. The meeting protocols and notes also helped me verify what personnel were responsible for each component.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data analysis of this study follows a deductive framework, leaving room for inductive coding of administrator interviews and survey data. The study

identified four key principles of Rtl as a conceptual framework and used these principles as initial parent codes in data analysis. Entering the data analysis with a tighter research design kept the study focused on Rtl, instead of looking at all aspects of student support. However, since the study was grounded in critical theory and focused on the most marginalized student population, the data analysis phase leaves room for inductive coding and grounded theory development.

**Procedures to ensure validity and/or trustworthiness.** Trustworthiness of the data collected during the study was considered by addressing credibility, confirmability, and transferability. The credibility was addressed by piloting the administrator interview protocol with a colleague and asking for feedback on the design. The survey questions were also shared with colleagues and professors prior to administration. Member checks were employed in the one-to-one interviews by giving the informant a copy of the interview transcript for review.

Confirmability was addressed through triangulation of data, including administrator interviews, artifacts, and follow-up surveys. Site administrator interviews served as the primary resource for data collection, and site administrators identified key personnel and artifacts that are pertinent to Rtl implementation. Artifacts such as rotation schedules, meeting minutes, budgets, and screening and progress monitoring data helped to verify the responses given during the administrator interviews and gave me a better understanding of the Rtl program at each site. Additionally, the survey results of the key implementers were used to verify administrator testimony and give a broader picture of both

implementation and the training and experience of key personnel. Confirmability was bolstered by my memos, which focused on keeping a clear link between research questions, data, and research findings.

I addressed the transferability of findings by providing a thick description and rich documentation of administrator interviews. The transferability was also supported by the diverse site selections. One of the sites serves primarily Latino English-learner students. One of the sites serves a small population of English learners and does not receive Title I funding. Two of the other sites are in the highest socioeconomic status communities in California. The four sites represented the economic and cultural diversity of the district studied and the diversity seen in the state of California and beyond.

**Role of the researcher.** The focus groups were organized and conducted by a nonbiased third party. This was done intentionally, because I am a member of the school district's management team in the capacity of a school principal and an open supporter of consistent and effective district-wide Rtl implementation. My belief in Rtl is grounded in critical theory. Critical theory goes beyond just discovering the problems, giving voice to society's most marginalized members. Noddings (2012) explains that critical theorists engage in the discussion of domination. Rtl supports literacy for all students, and Noddings suggests that "withholding literacy can be seen as a means of complete domination" (p. 73).

As the research design and philosophical framework are grounded in critical theory, my philosophical beliefs are another bias. Not all educators believe that vertical equity is ethical, but I believe that students with greater

needs should receive more resources. More resources provide additional opportunities to learn and assist in closing the achievement gap. During implementation of the No Child Left Behind policy and the race to stay out of Program Improvement, the Safe Harbor formula kept many schools focused on the students who were just below Proficiency. The most struggling students were not provided the most support, because they had little hope of reaching Proficiency and were not worth any points in the Safe Harbor calculation. I am mindful that the philosophy of focusing on the students that are just below benchmark might still be in effect in our district's schools.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the qualitative methodology selected for a study examining Rtl implementation in a medium-sized suburban school district. I discussed the rationale for the selected methodology and the study's theoretical framework. I discussed my position as researcher, the setting of the research, and the specific research sample intended for the study. I concluded by reviewing the data collection methods and approach to data analysis, including methods to support the data's validity. The methodology outlined for the Rtl study will support transferable results that will assist the school district in creating a systematic and equitable approach to Rtl implementation across the school district.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This research study used a qualitative design in order to identify what key components of Rtl exist at each site in the study, which personnel implement each component, and what Rtl training key implementers have. The study employed the responsive interview design as outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2005). The participants for this study included site administrators (principals) in a suburban school district with a student enrollment of approximately 22,000. The site administrators were from four elementary schools that serve Grades K-6 with a student enrollment of  $N = 556$ ,  $N = 422$ ,  $N = 498$ , and  $N = 617$ , respectively.

In addition to the administrator interviews, a follow-up survey administered to key personnel identified during the site administrator interview was conducted. The purpose of the follow-up survey was to validate the data gathered from the administrator interviews. The survey data was used in conjunction with artifacts like meeting agendas and minutes, rotation schedules, school budgets, and staffing reports to triangulate data. Table 4 shows the survey respondents from each of the four schools. After all administrator interviews were conducted, 26 key implementers were identified from the four schools. Invitations and consent forms were sent to the 26 key implementers, and a total of 17 key implementers agreed to participate and responded to the survey.

Table 4

*Survey Respondents*

School	Gen Ed. Teachers	Support Teachers	Special Ed. Teachers
School 1	1	2	0
School 2	2	0	1
School 3	3	3	0
School 4	4	1	0

I will begin by presenting findings to Question 1 by providing a brief description of each school and then going into detail about each personnel category. I will also provide a section discussing the funding for the positions and a section discussing release time at two of the four sites. The findings from Question 2 will also be presented individually from each school. I will conclude with a chapter summary.

### **First Research Question**

The first research question that guided this qualitative study asked, “What are the key personnel required to effectively implement the core components of Rtl?” The literature review identified specific personnel used to implement Rtl, including general education teachers, intervention teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and leadership. The four key categories identified in the administrator interviews include special educators (psychologists and special education teachers), general education teachers, support teachers, and paraprofessionals. Leadership is not included as a category in Table 4, but the role of the site leader will be addressed as a category in the narrative of each

school's findings. If a category is not included in the presentation of the data for each school this does not mean that the school does not have this personnel on staff; rather, it means that personnel from this category were not identified as key implementers in the school's Rtl program by the site administrator.

### **School 1**

School 1's building was constructed in the early 1960s and looks like many of the schools in the district. The school's vintage façade, however, is updated with a high tech digital sign, which, on the day I conducted my interview, announced to the school community that there was an upcoming spirit rally and to remember to pick up their kids on-time for early release Wednesdays: "salida temprana el miercoles." The bilingual front office assistant greets visitors with a smile and the principal's office is visible from the front office through a glass wall. The walls are papered with student art work and pictures of the latest students of the month.

Principal 1 expressed pride in the school's focus on meeting the needs of each student, and School 1 employs a gardening theme to inspire staff to work together to "meet the need of every seed." Principal 1 shared in the interview that the school's focus on meeting the needs of each student is exemplified in their Rtl program, and the school has been implementing Rtl for 6 years. In addition to general education teachers who conduct screening, progress monitoring, Tier I and II instruction, and data review, School 1 employs five part-time intervention support teachers to operate their Rtl program.

Table 5 illustrates the Rtl staffing and funding sources used to pay for the staff, and Table 6 illustrates the core components that the key implementers are responsible for at School 1. The data from the tables was reported by the administrator interview, key implementer follow-up surveys, school budgets reports, and staffing reports. Principal 1 reported that key staff implementing the Rtl program at the site include general education teachers and five intervention teachers who work 19.5 hours per week. The intervention teachers will be referred to as “support teachers” in this study. The following paragraphs provide a description of the primary duties of each personnel category as related to Rtl implementation at School 1.

Table 5

*School 1's Rtl Staffing*

	Psychologist	Special Ed. Teachers	General Ed. Teachers	Support Teachers and hours per week	Instructional assistants
Quantity	n/a	n/a	22	5 at 19.5 hours per week	n/a
Funding source	n/a	n/a	District funded	Title I; Site supplemental allocation	n/a

Table 6

*School 1's Key Rtl Implementers' Responsibilities*

Component	Key Implementer
Screening	General education teachers
Progress monitoring	General education teachers Support teachers
Data-based decision making	General education teachers Support teachers Principal
Tier I Instruction/Intervention	General education teachers Support teachers
Tier II Instruction/Intervention	Support teachers
Tier III Intervention	None for K-3 4-6 support teachers

**General education teachers.** Principal 1 explained that School 1 employs 22 general education teachers who are responsible for administering Tier I and Tier II interventions. The one general education teacher from School 1 who responded to the survey answered Question 12 regarding additional resources needed at the site, stating that they would benefit from additional intervention resources like “math manipulatives and leveled reading texts” in order to provide Tier II interventions for their students.

Principal 1's interview data stated that at School 1 the general education teachers utilize DIBELS and STAR as screeners, and SIPPS and “Language!” program assessments as progress monitoring tools. DIBELS stands for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills and are a set of procedures and

measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. STAR is a computer-based assessment created by Renaissance Learning that measures student reading skills and determines a student's reading level. SIPPS is a systematic and sequential foundational reading skills program that covers the skills of phonological awareness, phonics, and sight words using a differentiated approach, and Language! is a replacement English language arts program for students who are performing 2 or more years below grade level. DIBELS, STAR, and SIPPS are evidence based and are used at all the schools in the district. The general education teacher who responded supported Principal 1's report and said that the school administers DIBELS and STAR as screeners and that the general education teachers are primarily responsible for administering the assessments.

Data from Principal 1's interview indicated that the general education teachers meet monthly during PLC meetings to review data. The general education teacher who responded to the survey agreed with the administrator and said that teachers meet monthly on Wednesdays during PLC, and sometimes this time is used to review data. In response to Questions 8, 9, and 10 regarding data review, the general education teacher reported that, in addition to meeting formally, the teachers at School 1 use daily assessments to pull small groups and reteach concepts, especially in math. Principal 1 stated that the support teachers also attend the monthly meetings and that some teams provide meeting notes to the administrator, although Principal 1 did not report save the meeting notes.

**Support teachers.** Principal 1 explained that School 1 employs five support teachers, each of whom work 19.5 hours per week. Two of the support teachers from School 1 responded to the follow-up survey. The support teachers work 5 days a week for 3.9 hours each day. Principal 1 explained in the interview that the support teachers at School 1 deliver SIPPS and Language! instruction to students in Grades K-6 in collaboration with the general education teachers. Principal 1 shared that, because School 1 serves primarily English learners, “The intervention program focuses on foundational skills.” While both general education teachers and support teachers deliver the foundational reading program, the support teachers deliver more sections of SIPPS. All of the support teachers who responded stated that the support teachers in primary grades deliver the Tier I and II instruction using SIPPS as their resource. Principal 1 explained that SIPPS becomes an intervention when School 1 sends their students to a lower grade level for another dose of foundational skills instruction. Principal 1 explained that, in addition to SIPPS and Language!, the support teachers also provide small-group instructional support centered on vocabulary found in the CCSS to students in fourth through sixth grade.

**Special education teachers and paraprofessionals.** Principal 1 indicated that neither the special education teacher nor paraprofessionals play a significant role in any of the key components of RtI at the school. Principal 1 said that the special education staff focuses on support for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and while the special education teacher and the special education paraprofessional do provide interventions and

assessments and engage in data-based decision making, it is not within the school's Rtl system. There were no special education teachers or paraprofessionals who responded to the study's survey, because Principal 1 did not identify them as key implementers. Neither the one general education teacher who responded to the survey nor the two intervention teachers who responded to the survey identified the special education teacher or any paraprofessionals as key implementers to the school's Rtl program.

**Leadership.** Principal 1 has been a principal for about 15 years and has been serving as site principal at School 1 for over 5 years. Principal 1 reported providing oversight and leadership in creating the intervention schedules as well as focus and inspiration for the Rtl instructional team to meet the needs of each learner. In the interview, Principal 1 shared,

I'm really good at building school culture. That's my thing. I inspire my team to meet the needs of every student, and I focus on restorative practices and a positive school climate. The teachers do what they need to to make sure that the students get what they need.

Principal 1 shared the belief that developing a school culture where staff see student success as a shared responsibility is the most important thing the principal can do to develop the Rtl program at the site.

**Funding.** Funding for all full-time general education teachers is supplied by the school district, and full-time teachers are allocated based on the number of students at each grade level. While this study was being conducted, the funding sources for the support teacher positions went through modifications at

School 1. School 1 began the year with only three support teachers; two were funded out of Title I and one was funded out of what was referred to as LCFF Supplemental Funds. Because of changes in LCFF funding and budgeting decisions at the district level, two additional support teacher positions were provided to the school and funded at the district level. The existing three hourly support positions were all moved to Title I funding lines. Principal 1 and district staffing reports indicated that for the school year following the study School 1 expected to have six hourly support positions, one funded at the district level out of LCFF Supplemental funds, two funded at the district level out of Title I funds, and two funded out of School 1's discretionary Title I budget. School 1's budget for the school year following this study also showed additional Title 1 site discretionary funding available if the school chooses to hire more support staff.

## **School 2**

School 2 and School 1 look very similar from the outside, but School 2 greets you with a courtyard garden constructed and maintained by the school's PTA. The front office and staff lounge also boast personal touches provided by the PTA, such as table linens, fabric-lined bulletin boards, and framed photos. There is no electronic marquee, but the nonelectronic marquee advertises events such as a jog-a-thon sponsored by the PTA. During the interview, Principal 2 shared that the PTA funding raised from the yearly jog-a-thon goes to funding a part-time computer lab assistant, and while this position does not play a role in the school's Rtl program, the teachers value the support.

Table 7 illustrates the Rtl staffing and funding sources, and Table 8 illustrates the core components that key implementers are responsible for at School 2. The data from the tables was reported in the administrator interview, surveys, school budgets, and staffing reports. Principal 2 shared that key staff implementing the Rtl program at the site include general education teachers; the special education teacher, who is referred to as the Resource Specialist Program teacher (RSP); the RSP instructional assistant, and an hourly intervention teacher who works a total of 10 hours per week and is referred to as a support teacher in this study. The following paragraphs provide a description of the primary duties of each personnel category as related to Rtl implementation at School 2.

Table 7

*School 2's Rtl Staffing*

	Psychologist	Special Ed. Teachers	Support Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Quantity	n/a	1	1 at 10 hours per week	1 at 30 hours per week
Funding source	n/a	District funded	Site supplemental allocation	District funded

Table 8

*School 2's Key Rtl Implementers' Responsibilities*

Component	Key Implementers
Screening	General education teachers Support teacher
Progress monitoring	General education teachers Special education teacher Support teacher
Data-based decision making	General education teachers Special education teacher Principal
Tier I Instruction/Intervention	General education teachers Support teacher
Tier II Intervention	General education teachers Special education teacher Support teacher
Tier III Intervention	n/a

**General education teachers.** School 2 employs 16 general education teachers. Table 7 illustrates that the general education teachers at School 2 provide both Tier I and Tier II instruction. One of the two general education teachers who responded to the survey said in regard to Tier II and Tier III intervention, "I do everything mostly myself. I utilize other things I find (other than SIPPS) to supplement . . . focus heavily on sounds, blends, etc. and fluency . . . moving on after successful results to comprehension and vocabulary meaning." The other general education teacher at School 2 responded to Question 12 regarding additional resources needed for Rtl. The teacher said that the Tier II intervention in her class consists of small groups daily after she teaches the

primary math lesson, but she lacks resources to provide Tier II support in reading. This teacher from School 2 stated:

At this point, if I could have access to one additional resource, it would be a variety of leveled chapter books. This would allow me to continue running my reading groups with lengthier texts and informational articles, rather than the majority of my interventions involving informational texts. A teacher in another grade level and I have even discussed combining our classes for reading groups, but a variety of leveled texts would be a required resource for us to implement this rotation amongst our classes.

Principal 2 shared that the Tier II instruction takes the form of small-group instruction, but it is not done systematically. A variety of methods and a schedule are employed by the general education teachers, and not all general education teachers run small-group Tier II instruction.

Principal 2 also reported that, in addition to having primary responsibility for Tier I and II instruction, the general education teachers at School 2 are responsible for administering all the screening and progress monitoring assessments. As did the administrator of School 1, the administrator at School 2 reported that the school uses DIBELS and STAR for reading screening and progress monitoring. Principal 2 shared that, while all general education teachers employ DIBELS and STAR as screening tools, only some teachers use the DIBELS and STAR assessments as progress monitoring tools, and progress monitoring is not done systematically. Principal 2 shared that one third-grade

teacher uses STAR as a progress monitoring tool and one fourth-grade teacher uses a fluency measure weekly to monitor her students' progress.

When answering Questions 6 and 7, both of the general education teachers who responded from School 2 stated that they look at STAR and DIBELS data to make instructional decisions. Principal 2 explained that the teachers meet as grade-level teams and that there is no site-level schedule for the meetings nor do they provide artifacts from their meetings. Both general education teachers' responses to Questions 8, 9, and 10, regarding data analysis, support Principal 2's report of a lack of systematic data review. One general education teacher responded that they look at data weekly, while the other general education teacher respondent from School 2 stated that they look at data "every 6-8 weeks if the student is in the [Student Study Team] process." Principal 2 receives a list of the groups that are formed as a result of the STAR and DIBELS data review, but there is no set schedule for when this happens school-wide.

**Support teachers.** School 2 employs a support teacher who works two hours daily, five days a week. Principal 2 stated that the support teacher was hired midyear and delivers primarily SIPPS instruction and teaches foundational reading skills. Principal 2 classified the instruction as Tier II because the students in the groups are functioning below grade level. Principal 2 stated that the support teacher works with four groups per day for approximately 30 minutes with each group. The support teacher administers SIPPS mastery assessments, which serve as a progress monitoring tool for the groups, but she does not meet

with general education teachers or the RSP teacher to review data and make instructional decisions. Principal 2 requested that the support teacher not be surveyed, because she was so recently hired in the position.

**Special education teachers.** Principal 2 identified the RSP teacher, who is the school's only special education teacher, as a key implementer and crucial part of the Rtl team. The RSP teacher provides Tier III instruction to the school's students who have IEPs. Principal 2 stated that the students with IEPs are the only students who receive Tier III intervention. The RSP teacher at School 2 also administers screening and progress monitoring to students who have IEPs. In addition to administering screening and progress monitoring to the students she works with, School 2's RSP teacher ensures that mastery assessments are administered and entered into the district's on-line data system. Describing the RSP teacher, Principal 2 stated, "She really drives everything. She makes sure mastery test data is in. She puts a lot of emphasis on it. The consistency she puts in it. She never misses a day with the kids."

The one special education teacher from School 2 who responded to Question 12 about needed resources for Rtl reported a need for both more time to collaborate with other staff implementing interventions and more attention given to scheduling so students do not miss out on core instruction while they are receiving specific interventions.

**Paraprofessionals.** School 2 recently eliminated a paraprofessional position in order to hire the 10-hour-per-week intervention teacher; however, the district-funded special education instructional assistant participates in the site's

RtI program and was identified by Principal 2 as a key implementer. The instructional assistant from School 2 did respond to the invitations to participate in the survey. Principal 2 explained that the special education instructional assistant supports the RSP teacher and also provides Tier III instruction, progress monitoring assessment administration, and screening administration to students with IEPs.

**Leadership.** Principal 2 has been in education for about 15 years and has been at School 2 as principal for five years. Principal 2 is responsible for distributing the assessment schedule, reviewing benchmark data with staff twice a year using a data dashboard, and reviewing intervention rotation groups. Principal 2 said, “At the beginning of the year, I pass out the assessment schedule and I say—and I repeat it several times during the year—that you need to give the assessment when the kids are ready to take the assessment. So we have a lot of value in the data we get from the assessment.” Principal 2 indicated support for grade-level teams that are struggling with collaborative data analysis and data-based decision making.

**Funding.** Funding for all full-time general education teachers is supplied by the school district, and full-time teachers are allocated based on the number of students at each grade level. While this study was being conducted, School 2 received additional funding from the district through LCFF Supplemental Funds and was able to hire the 10-hour-per-week support teacher. Principal 2 reported that they began the year without any certificated instructional support and added the support position in January of 2016. Principal 2 reported that this is due to

changes in LCFF funding and budgeting decisions at the district level. Principal 2 and district staffing reports indicated that for the upcoming 2016-2017 school year, School 2 will have two 19.5-hour-per-week support teacher positions, both funded at the district level out of LCFF Supplemental Funds.

### **School 3**

School 3 was built much earlier than Schools 1 and 2, and as is common with older buildings, the school consists of many little rooms and cubbies. School 3's front office secretary buzzes visitors inside from a small office at the front of the school and escorts visitors to Principal 3's compact office through a maze of hallways and doors.

Table 9 illustrates School 3's Rtl staffing and funding sources, and Table 10 illustrates the core components key implementers are responsible for at School 3. The data from the tables was gathered via the administrator interview, surveys, school budgets, and staffing reports. Principal 3 shared that key staff implementing the Rtl program at the site include general education teachers; six support teachers, who work 19.5 hours per week; three special education teachers; and the school psychologist. The following paragraphs provide a description of the primary duties of each personnel category as related to Rtl implementation at School 3.

Table 9

*School 3's Rtl Staffing*

	Psychologist	Special Ed. Teachers	Support Teachers	Paraprofessionals
Quantity	0.8	2	6 at 19.5 hours per week	n/a
Funding source	District funded	District funded	Parent foundation	n/a

Table 10

*School 3's Key Rtl Implementers' Responsibilities*

Component	Key Implementers
Screening	Support teachers
Progress monitoring	Support teachers General education teachers
Data-based decision making	Support teachers Principal General education teachers Special education teachers Psychologist
Tier I Instruction/Intervention	General education teachers
Tier II Intervention	General education teachers Support teachers
Tier III Intervention	Support teachers

**General education teachers.** School 3 employs 18 general education teachers. Principal 3 explained that the general education teachers at School 3 deliver Tier I core instruction and Tier II supplemental instruction. All of the

survey respondents concurred that general education teachers participate in Tier I and Tier I instruction. Tier II groups and Tier II instruction are based on the essential standards, and both general education teachers and support teachers deliver Tier II instruction. Principal 3 explained that *essential standards* are those standards that “will have endurance, leverage and readiness at the next grade level, so if a standard is going to have endurance over the years, like summarizing for example, if it’s going to help them learn in other content areas, or readiness at the next level. If it fits these criteria, it’s deemed essential.”

Principal 3 reported that screening is not a responsibility of the general education teachers; however, both general education and intervention support teachers take part in progress monitoring. The three general education teachers and three support teachers who responded to the survey supported Principal 3’s statement when they responded to Questions 6 and 7 about administering screening and progress monitoring tools. Principal 3 explained that teams that include the general education teachers, the support teachers, and Principal 3 meet weekly to review data and plan instruction. The meetings yield minutes, rotation schedules, and flexible groupings. One of the three general education teachers from School 3 who responded to the survey discussed the value of the results of these meetings when responding to Question 11, which asked why School 3’s Rtl program is successful:

A meticulously planned full grade level rotation schedule for every classroom K-6 for ELA and math rotations. This is when RTI meets needs for Tier II and III (and at times an enrichment group), while grade level

teachers meet needs for instruction for Core 1 and Enrichment students to be provided with necessary instruction, practice and support.

Principal 3 explained that School 3's support teachers provide the general education teachers with detailed data sheets that triangulate screening and benchmark data, including Lexia reading levels, STAR reading levels, DIBELS composite scores, and SIPPS lesson status. Lexia is a computer-based foundational reading program. The data sheets are used to monitor student progress and determine next steps for instruction and intervention. Principal 3 provided examples of the rotation schedules and data sheets created by the school's support teachers.

**Support teachers.** Principal 3 explained that School 3 employs six support teachers who each work 19.5 hours per week and perform the duties of releasing teachers to collaborate and review data, delivering Tier II and Tier III interventions, administering screening and progress monitoring assessments, and analyzing data to guide instruction. One of the six serves as a physical education and science teacher in order to give each general education teacher between 60 and 120 minutes of collaborative preparation and planning time each week. The other five out of six hourly support teachers are directly involved in RtI instruction, assessment, and collaborative data analysis. Principal 3 stated that the Tier III intervention at School 3 is provided solely by the intervention support teachers. All of the survey respondents from School 3 identified the support teachers as the key implementers of Tier III instruction.

Principal 3 explained how the tiered support at the site operates:

We'll sit down and agree on what are the most important essential standards in each unit or chapter. Then after that they determine what prerequisite skills the students will have had to have mastered to access the essential standard. And then they plan that when they pace it, and kids who need extra support will get grouped. Tier II is smaller group and more scaffolding. Tier III, if the kid is missing some fundamental skill.

A general education teacher from School 3 described how the support teachers play a crucial role in the school's Rtl program:

The amount of Rtl teachers we have provide more support to our students, allowing the teachers to group the students into smaller more tailored groups. This provides direct instruction to a multiple small groups allowing the teacher to target specific standards.

Principal 3 shared that while the support teachers exclusively deliver Tier III instruction, the general education teachers participate in the planning and data analysis of Tier III instruction and progress monitoring for their students. Each of the six survey respondents from School 3 responding to Questions 8, 9 , and 10 on data analysis indicated that general education teachers meet weekly with the support teachers to review progress monitoring data.

Principal 3 explained that the support teachers also assume sole responsibility for screening and for data entry of screening data, which Principal 3 referred to as benchmark data. The support teachers create detailed reports three times each year to provide benchmark assessment data for teachers to review. Principal 3 shared a recent example of this report, which contained four

data points, color-coded proficiency levels for each student, and tiered groups. Principal 3 explained the rationale for having the support teachers deliver the Tier III instruction and administer and prepare the benchmark and screening assessments and data:

Because it takes a long time, a heck of a long time, so much so that we all came to the agreement that it's not realistic to have (general education) teachers doing this, because what's going to happen to your kids while you're doing all that? Quite frankly, the teachers can look at data and be able to understand it, and believe it or not, because our teachers are so busy with new curriculum, new standards, it just makes more sense to leave the foundational support to the support teachers. So when the teachers are told that all of your benchmarking and diagnostic are going to be done for you, and we are going to put together this folder for you based on what you're teaching, it's kind of like, all right.

Principal 3 shared that the support teachers work closely with the site principal to create rotation schedules, prepare data, and support the general education teachers at School 3. Principal 3 talked about the importance of the support teachers: "You have to have the support teachers, it doesn't work without that. No ifs, ands, buts about it." Principal 3 does not believe that School 3 could run an effective RtI program without the support teachers.

One of the three support teachers from School 3 remarked on the impact a carefully planned schedule makes on the program when responding to Question 11 regarding what makes School 3's RtI program successful:

A meticulously planned full grade level rotation schedule for every classroom K-6 for ELA and Math rotations. This is when RTI meets needs for Tier II and III (and at times an enrichment group), while grade-level teachers meet needs for instruction for Core 1 and Enrichment students to be provided with necessary instruction, practice and support. [Principal 3] and the support team work hard to create a schedule that works for everybody.

**Special education teachers and school psychologist.** Principal 3's interview data and district staffing reports indicate that School 3 employs three full-time special education teachers and a school psychologist who is at the site four days a week. Two of the special education teachers teach stand-alone special day classes (SDC) and one of the special education teachers supports students who have IEPs but are fully included in general education classes.

Principal 3 explained that the special education teachers at School 3 participate in both academic interventions and behavior interventions. School 3's Rtl model includes support for English language arts, math, and behavior. The special education teachers primarily support the general education students through Rtl by attending monthly intervention team meetings focused on behavior. Principal 3 explained that the intervention team is made up of "a lot of people—upper and lower grade teacher, psych, SDC teachers." Principal 3 went on to define the role of the intervention team as one that looks at students who need extra support with behavior. Principal 3 explained that School 3 has school-wide behavior expectations and the "intervention team," including the special

education teachers, develop Tier II and Tier III supports for students who are not able to exhibit the agreed-upon school-wide behaviors.

**Paraprofessionals.** School 3's interview and survey data did not identify any paraprofessionals who are instrumental to Rtl implementation at the site.

**Leadership.** Principal 3 has been in education for almost 20 years, has been a site principal for about 10 years, and has been principal at School 3 for about three years. Principal 3's responsibilities in the site's Rtl program include providing training for the staff, guiding and overseeing the scheduling of intervention rotations, and attending meetings to identify essential standards, plan instruction, and analyze data to drive instruction.

One of the three general education teachers responded to Question 11, regarding what makes School 3's Rtl program successful, and stated, "[Principal 3's] model is what makes RTI at [School 3] a successful program." Additionally, Principal 3's interview data and the survey responses from the three general education teachers and three support teachers to Questions 8-13 indicated that the principal at School 3 is involved in all four core components of Rtl.

Principal 3 commented that the site leader is key to Rtl implementation:

The key person is the administrator . . . So a lot of managing personalities and supporting people, keeping people in check. And that's all the administrator. It's like being a coach, a general manager and an owner all at the same time.

**Release time.** Principal 3 reported that grade-level teams of teachers have between 60 and 120 minutes weekly of common planning and collaboration

time during the school day, where general education classroom teachers and support teachers work on what they refer to as essential standards. The collaboration time is provided by music, physical education, library, and computer time for students. One of the three general education teachers from School 3 credits the systematic release time as one of the keys to their Rtl program's success, when responding to Question 11 regarding what makes School 3's Rtl program successful.

**Funding.** Funding for all full-time general education teachers is supplied by the school district, and full-time teachers are allocated based on the number of students at each grade level. In addition, special education teachers and school psychologist time is allocated at the district level and determined by the number of special education students at the site. Principal 3's interview responses and the school budget indicated that the support teachers at School 3 are funded by the school's parent foundation. Principal 3 indicated that School 3 expected to employ the same number of support teachers in the 2016-2017 school year.

#### **School 4**

School 4's buildings are significantly different from the physical structures of Schools 1, 2, and 3. The school's architecture mirrors that of the affluent community it serves, and the buildings are surrounded by expansive green lawns and manicured courtyards. Table 11 illustrates the Rtl staffing and funding sources, and Table 12 illustrates the core components that key implementers are

responsible for at School 4. The data from the tables was reported by the administrator interview, surveys, school budgets, and staffing reports.

Principal 4 shared that the Rtl program is implemented by general education teachers; the special education teacher, referred to as the RSP teacher by Principal 4; two 40-hour-per-week teachers, referred to as Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) by Principal 4 but considered support teachers for the purposes of this study; and the school psychologist. While Principal 4 did not identify paraprofessionals as key implementers, all four of the general education teachers who responded to the survey identified paraprofessionals as also part of the Rtl staffing at School 4 who take part in tiered interventions and data-based decision making. I was not able to obtain data on how many paraprofessionals are employed at School 4, but the school budget indicates that the school spent \$35,981 on teacher assistants, and they were paid for by the parent groups. The following paragraphs provide a description of the primary duties of each personnel category as related to Rtl implementation at School 4.

Table 11

*School 4's Rtl Staffing*

	Psychologist	Special Ed. teachers	Support teachers	Paraprofessionals
Quantity	0.4	1	2 at 40 hours per week	Information not available
Funding source	District funded	District funded	Parent foundation	Parent foundation

Table 12

*School 4's Key Rtl Implementers' Responsibilities*

Core Component	Key Impementers
Screening	Support teachers General education teachers
Progress monitoring	Support teachers General education teachers
Data-based decision making	General education teachers Support teachers Principal
Tier I Instruction/Intervention	General education teachers
Tier II Intervention	General education teachers Support teachers
Tier III Intervention	Support teachers

**General education teachers.** School 4 employs 23 general education teachers. Principal 4's interview data explained that general education teachers provide core Tier I instruction and Tier II support for students in collaboration with the two support teachers. Principal 4 explained that the general education teachers meet weekly in teams to identify the essential standards for the grade level, create a common assessment, and plan instruction. According to Principal 4, the Tier II instruction at School 4 centers on these essential standards identified by the grade level teams. Collaboration happens around English language arts, math, and behavior. Principal 4 reported that the support teacher assigned to the grade level is usually part of those conversations but not always. General education teachers in Grades 4, 5, and 6 meet during district-

funded release time provided by science, physical education, and music specialists.

Principal 4's interview data revealed that general education teachers collaborate in data-based decision making during weekly collaboration time. Teams use collaboration time to look at standards, plan lessons, and look at data. Each of the four general education teachers who responded to survey Questions 8, 9, and 10 regarding data-based decision making also reported that collaboration takes place on a weekly basis and includes the support teachers.

Principal 4 explained that, in order to administer tiered interventions, the general education teachers work in close collaboration with the support teacher assigned to their grade level. The support teacher provides a fifth person to each four-person general education team to provide tiered support, and the students performing below benchmark work in the smallest groups.

Principal 4 commented that the school employs a philosophy about their tiered instruction where the educator best equipped will take the most intensive group. Principal 4 went on to explain that, based on this philosophy, it is common for the general education teachers to work with the group or groups of students that need the most intensive support during Tier II instruction.

Principal 4 explained that screening and progress monitoring assessments are administered by general education teachers in collaboration with the support teachers. For example, sixth-grade general education teachers look at STAR data as both a screener and a progress monitor. Principal 4 said,

The nice thing about doing something like that, it's all about changing behavior, right? It's all about moving teachers towards changing behavior. So when you're looking at IRL (STAR), the conversations it brings about is am I teaching vocabulary, how am I teaching vocabulary. Am I motivating students to read? Why are that teacher's kids checking out more books from the library and what do I need to do to make that happen? I think it brings about a lot of conversations, I don't think the IRL is going to direct teaching strategies, no way, but I do think it brings about some really good conversations.

**Support teachers.** Principal 4 explained that School 4 employs two 40-hour-per-week support teachers who collaborate with general education teachers to identify essential standards, develop and administer screening and progress monitoring assessments, and analyze data. One of the four general education teachers from School 4 who responded to Survey Question 11, regarding what makes School 4's Rtl program successful, identified the support teachers, who the school refers to as TOSAs, and said that the "TOSA positions are important for extra groups for intervention." Another of the four general education respondents from School 4 stated that more "TOSA positions" would allow the school to provide more help for students," in response to Question 12 about additional resources the school needs for implementation.

Principal 4 explained that at School 4 the two support teachers take primary responsibility for Tier III intervention, and Tier III happens at a time of the day that is separate from core Tier I and scheduled Tier II instruction. Each of the

five respondents from School 3 confirmed that support teachers provide Tier III instruction. Principal 4 defined Tier III intervention as “adult behavior filling in gaps that are outside of the skill area that you are working on now.” Principal 4 said that “you need to fill in these gaps and you need to go back outside of Tier II time to fill in these gaps.” Principal 4 explained that School 4 uses SIPPS, Houghton Mifflin extra support resources, and support resources derived from the core math instructional program, Swun Math, as the primary resources used for Tier II and Tier III intervention support.

Principal 4 said that the support teacher providing Tier III support also administers the progress monitoring. School 4 uses DIBELS, STAR, Swun Unit assessments, and teacher-created assessments to progress monitor students. Principal 4 explained that Tier III students need to be screened every two weeks while Tier II students are monitored every 6-8 weeks.

Principal 4’s interview data revealed that the support teachers participate in data analysis meetings at least once a week with grade-level teams. Each the five respondents supported Principal 4’s claim that support teachers participate in data analysis and planning, as indicated by their answers to Questions 8, 9 and 10. Principal 4 explained that since the support teachers are full time they are able to meet with the general education teams during their weekly collaboration time and after school on Wednesday afternoons. The support teachers look at data and plan Tier II and Tier III instruction with grade-level teams.

**Special education teachers and school psychologist.** Principal 4 identified the special education teacher, whom he referred to as the resource

teacher, as a key implementer and stated that the RSP teacher plays a critical role by taking a Tier II rotation. Principal 4 explained that the groups does not necessarily consist of only students with IEPs. Principal 4 shared that the RSP teacher also attends the weekly data analysis and planning meetings with grade-level teams.

Principal 4 reported that the psychologist who worked at School 4 before the 2015-2016 school year was key in helping the school develop processes and protocols for data analysis. Principal 4 expressed interest in assisting the current psychologist in getting training in data analysis and data presentation, specifically in the area of progress monitoring.

**Paraprofessionals.** Principal 4's interview data did not identify any paraprofessionals as key implementers in their Rtl system. However, survey data from each of the four general education teachers who responded to survey Questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 identified paraprofessionals as staff that implement Tier II and Tier III intervention, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making. Since Principal 4 did not identify paraprofessionals as key implementers, the survey was not sent out to paraprofessionals at School 4. Principal 4 was not available for clarification regarding paraprofessional staffing during the data review phase of this study.

**Leadership.** Principal 4 has been in education for about 20 years, has been a site administrator for 12 years, and has been principal at School 4 for over 5 years. In addition to participating in the training, scheduling, and oversight of the Rtl program at the site, Principal 4 also models a functional meeting

protocol during staff meetings and observes in grade-level team meetings to identify teams that need additional support. Principal 4 described the collaboration meetings:

They have an agenda, but I don't require that they turn it in. But I know that there is an agenda, and there are minutes. And I know which teams are really healthy, and which teams are unhealthy. Healthy teams have minutes, have an agenda, and so on.

Principal 4 shared that teams report data, specifically data that they are proud of. Principal 4 attends as many meetings as possible and provides extra support to teams that are demonstrating unhealthy team behavior.

**Release time.** The release time for teacher collaboration is provided by specialist classes, including music, science, and physical education. Primary teachers have an earlier release time than do upper grade teachers, and they meet after school. One of the four general education teachers who responded at School 4 explained that "we have weekly PLC meetings built within our workday." Another general education teacher from School 4 said about their Rtl program's success that "most important of all is consistency." Principal 4 maintained that the structured collaboration time built in the school day promotes consistency of data-based decision making and planning for tiered instruction.

**Funding.** Funding for all full-time general education teachers is supplied by the school district, and full-time teachers are allocated based on the number of students at each grade level. In addition, special education teachers and school psychologist time is allocated at the district level and determined by the

number of special education students at the site. Principal 4's interview data and School 4's budget reports indicate that the support teachers and paraprofessionals at School 4 are funded by the school's parent groups. Principal 4 indicated that School 4 was considering a different schedule and formula for support teachers in the 2016-2017 school year. Principal 4 talked about support teacher staffing:

And next year we won't do that though [have two 40-hour-per-week support teachers]. Part of that is because of SIPPS. We realize that we need more bodies in the room. So we'll probably be doing two four-hour, maybe an 8-hour for the upper grade. A lot of that will be based on what staff recognizes.

Principal 4 indicated that, regardless of the staffing formula, the funding for the Rtl support positions will come from the parent groups.

### **Second Research Question**

The second research question that guided this qualitative study was, "What training and skills do the key personnel require to effectively implement the core components of Rtl?" The findings of this question will be presented individually by school with subsections addressing the training of the site administrator and key implementing staff.

#### **School 1**

**Principal training.** According to the interview data, Principal 1 has had no formal Rtl training "other than the past Language! trainings and SIPPS trainings and some occasional TOSA time." The district in this study employs TOSAs to

support English language arts instruction. While TOSA support was part of the Rtl training Principal 1 received, data did not specify which core component the TOSAs trained on. The TOSA support occurred during the 2015-2016 school year in order to support the school's implementation of SIPPS and DIBELS.

**Training for key implementers.** Principal 1's interview data indicated that the staff at School 1 has received little training specifically related to Rtl. Principal 1 stated that the staff has received training on the specific interventions and assessments, specifically referring to training on SIPPS, Language!, and DIBELS. The general education teacher who responded to survey Question 13, regarding Rtl training, identified "some" district training on SIPPS and DIBELS as the training related to Rtl. The support teacher who responded to Question 13 had received SIPPS training.

## **School 2**

**Principal training.** Principal 2 reported having, Done research and printed stuff out [such as] the book on executive functioning. I've dabbled in books, internet searches, we've reworked our SST process many, many times. The times I talked to [Principal 3] was probably the best training I've had. I'm not blessed with the resources [Principal 3] has. [Principal 3 is] the master. [Principal 3] did the same thing at [a previous school] and those systems still run.

Principal 2 identified having received primarily informal training related to Rtl, like independent reading and collaborative conversations with colleagues, and no formal training.

**Training for key implementers.** Survey responses to Question 13 from the three respondents at School 2 identify a combination of formal and informal training related to RtI. One of the general education teachers who responded to Question 13 had received “district training in RtI, Reading First, SIPPS, DIBELS, and various others.” The special education teacher from School 2 reported that “as a special education teacher, all my training relates to RtI.” The second general education teacher respondent from School 2 described a credential program and past teaching experiences that provided on-the-job training in specific interventions and assessments, targeted instruction, and flexible grouping. None of the three survey respondents reported recent formal training on RtI.

### **School 3**

**Principal training.** Principal 3 responded to the question about the amount of training received relating to RtI:

It’s a little different for me. Um, a lot. I’ve read and reread about PLC and culture. About RtI . . . And the trick is this. The trick is to know that there is a wide gap between theory and practice and people don’t like to separate the two . . . A lot of training is in the way of thinking. We question everything here just to get to the why.

Principal 3 expanded on the topic of training and said that the training in the specific interventions, like SIPPS, is much less valuable than training about how they implement the programs, suggesting that the systems related to RtI are more important than the specific interventions used within the model. Principal 3

explained that, in order to be a part of an Rtl system like the one that operates at School 3, one must have humility.

Principal 3 reported reading a lot of related books and attending a lot of seminars, identifying the book *Simplifying Response to Intervention* as a starting point for training. Principal 3 also described having brought in a consultant from Solution Tree while serving at another school. Solution Tree is a national organization that specializes in providing professional development on PLCs and Rtl. It offers an array of services and products, including educator conferences, customized district solutions for long-term professional development, books, videos, and online courses. Previously the principal at School 4 of this study, Principal 3 was at School 4 for for the beginning of its Rtl initiative. Principal 3 explains the experience with Solution Tree in more detail:

My first school [School 4], I brought in an expert consultant. I couldn't get into a Solution Tree conference, so I called the guy that was going to write one of their books and he came over and we started talking and we clicked. So he did some work with my staff a couple of times.

Principal 3 shared that the consultant who worked with School 4 was Austin Buffum. Principal 3 has professional relationships with Richard DuFour, Mike Mattos, and Buffum, all nationally renowned leaders in both Rtl and PLCs. Principal 3 reported,

[Buffum] also introduced me to a couple of his colleagues and they started working me. That's when I started reading and it was just very, very interesting. They have a model that they ended up putting in one book and

I knew it very well because I was working on it with them and then from that point on I started doing all the training myself. I don't tell many people, but I do trainings through Solution Tree. And my take on it is that I'm still at the site, so when I do the trainings, they connect.

Principal 3 currently does national trainings for Solution Tree and provides similar trainings to staff at School 3.

**Training for key implementers.** Principal 3 reported taking each group to a PLC conference after they had received training for a year and a half, to “get them fired up” and so the staff can acknowledge that “we’re already doing this.”

The three support teacher survey respondents answered Question 13 related to training and identified the trainings specific to the SIPPS intervention as the primary Rtl training they have had. One of the three support teachers also identified on-the-job experience as part of the training related to Rtl. One of the three general education teachers from School 3 who responded to Question 13 reported having received training on Rtl at conferences and professional development. Principal 3 shared that School 3 has approximately seven new staff members who have not had formal training related to Rtl. However, Principal 3 says that “they’ve jumped right into the model and the culture. They don’t realize how much collaboration is going on. They just start living it.”

#### **School 4**

**Principal training.** Principal 4 was appointed as site administrator to School 4 about five years ago and reports that the staff had already received extensive training related to Rtl. Principal 4 received formal training through the

experience of helping to create a video with DuFour, Buffum, and Mattos, national leaders in Rtl who work with Solution Tree. The video used School 4 as a model for Rtl implementation. Through the production of the video, Principal 4 received in-depth training from leading experts at Solution Tree. Principal 4 also read books on PLC's and Rtl. In addition to Solution Tree training, Principal 4 identified receiving district-provided training led by Linda Diamond from CORE Literacy Consultants.

**Training for key implementers.** Principal 4 shared that the staff at School 4 had been working with DuFour and Buffum for two years before arriving at School 4 to serve as site principal. Principal 4 believes that it takes four years of hands-on training and implementation to become proficient, and the staff at School 4 has been working and training in Rtl for eight years now.

Survey data from School 4 demonstrate the staff's familiarity with the current model. One general education teacher who responded to Question 13 regarding training shared the following:

I've been using the Rtl model for about six years now as a sixth-grade teacher. I've been trained in building our tier intervention pyramid, implementing effective practices, such as small grouping or taking multiple approaches to instruction; working collaboratively as a grade-level team to organize the logistics of our Tier II and III groups (who teaches, how, when, what, etc.); and finally, building an effective system that moves students in and out of the intervention process seamlessly depending on their needs at that time.

Along with the detailed explanation provided above, three other general education teachers at School 4 who responded to Question 13 of the survey identified having received training from Buffum on Rtl. School 4 data findings identify training from national Rtl experts as key to their professional development related to Rtl.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 reviewed the study and research questions and presented the findings for each of the four schools in the study. The data were presented for each school and organized according to key implementers' personnel categories. This established which key implementers were responsible for the core components of Rtl and provided data to relating to Research Question 1. Research Question 2 was also addressed individually by school, and the data identified training that both the principals and key implementers had received relating to Rtl implementation. Chapter 5 will present conclusions based on the synthesis of all the findings, identify implications for theory, policy, practice and future research, and provide recommendations for Rtl leadership and implementation.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents a summary of the study and offers five main conclusions associated with the findings identified by analysis of the interview, survey, and artifact data. In addition to the conclusions drawn from the findings, I propose implications for theory, policy, practice, and future research, and I provide recommendations for RtI leadership and implementation. I conclude with a chapter summary that reviews the dissertation.

#### **Summary of the Study**

This study was designed to address the problem of a lack of an existing framework for adequate personnel resources and training for staff to implement RtI in an elementary school. The purpose of this study was to identify the key personnel needed to effectively implement the core components of RtI and identify training to properly prepare staff to implement RtI. The following research questions guided this qualitative study.

1. What are the key personnel required to effectively implement the core components of RtI?
2. What training and skills do the key personnel require to effectively implement the core components of RtI?

In order to answer the above research questions, this study used a qualitative design. The participants for this study included four site administrators

(principals) in a suburban school district with a student enrollment of approximately 22,000. Interviews for the site administrators took place in the site administrators' offices, and the interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length. I conducted, recorded, and transcribed all interviews.

In addition to the administrator interviews, a follow-up survey administered to key personnel identified in the site administrator interview was conducted using Google, and a link was sent out to respondents via email after the respondents agreed to participate in the study and signed letters of informed consent. Artifacts gathered for the study include meeting agendas and minutes, rotation schedules, staffing reports, assessment data reports, and school budgets. The data were compared for common themes and patterns that were presented in Chapter 4. In the following sections I present conclusions based on the findings offered in Chapter 4.

## **Conclusions**

I present five major conclusions. The first conclusion relates to the completeness of the Rtl program at each school. The remaining four conclusions relate to the two research questions and discuss key staff needed to implement the core components of Rtl and the professional development related to Rtl.

### **Conclusion 1**

Two of the four schools are operating complete Rtl programs.

In order to answer the research questions and determine if the school is effectively implementing Rtl, the study needed to determine if all four core components were being implemented at each school. Table 13 illustrates the

finding that the Rtl programs at Schools 1 and 2 are incomplete, and Schools 3 and 4 are operating complete Rtl programs per the study's conceptual framework. For the purpose of this study, the complete implementation indicates that Schools 3 and 4 are effectively implementing Rtl. This study uses the National Center on Response to Intervention's (2010) framework that defines the core components of Rtl as evidence-based instructional strategies, multileveled tiers of support, screening and progress monitoring assessments, and data-based decision making.

Table 13

*Completeness of Programs*

	Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies	Tiered Instruction	Screening and Progress Monitoring	Data-Based Decision Making
School 1	Yes	No	Yes	No
School 2	Yes	No	Yes	No
School 3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School 4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

**Completeness of program at School 1.** Findings in Chapter 4 indicate that while School 1 is delivering evidence-based instructional strategies and tiered instruction, the only systematic Tier III intervention is provided to fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. Therefore, School 1 lacks fully developed tiered instruction. The support teachers deliver SIPPS instruction that includes evidence-based strategies to students who are working below grade level;

however, since it is a core program that all students receive, it cannot be considered an intervention.

School 1 also lacks systematic data-based decision making, as indicated by a lack of data reporting in regular meetings to review data and plan for instruction. The administrator interview stated that monthly PLC meetings occur where teachers collaborate but there is no evidence that School 1 uses data systematically. The one general education teacher who responded to the survey stated that teams meet as PLCs monthly. The two support teachers who responded to survey Questions 8, 9, and 10 regarding data meetings indicated that they meet in PLC meetings, but they did not indicate the frequency with which they meet. The principal was not able to provide any artifacts from the meetings.

**Completeness of program at School 2.** Findings in Chapter 4 indicate that at School 2 Tier I and Tier II instruction is provided to students by the general education teachers, support teachers, special education teacher, and special education instructional assistant. Principal 2 stated that Tier III intervention is only provided to students with IEPs and is provided by the special education teacher. Therefore, there is an absence of Tier III intervention for general education students. The responding special education teacher from School 2 reported delivering Tier III instruction but did not specify who receives the interventions.

In addition, findings from Chapter 4 suggest a lack of systematic and on-going data-based decision making at School 2. Principal interview and survey

data from both general education teachers who responded to survey Questions 8, 9, and 10 regarding data-based decision making indicate that there are no regularly scheduled meetings to review progress monitoring data, and benchmark data is reviewed at the team's discretion with the expectation that it will happen twice a year. The special education teacher who responded to the survey also suggested that the school could benefit from additional time to collaboratively look at data, indicating that the school is lacking this core component of RtI.

Findings from Chapter 4 indicate that the School 2 does implement evidence-based instructional strategies using the SIPPS program for reading and Swun for mathematics. Findings also suggest that School 2 conducts regular screening and progress monitoring assessments.

**Completeness of programs at Schools 3 and 4.** Findings in Chapter 4 indicate that all four core components of RtI are implemented at both Schools 3 and 4. Data from interviews, survey, and artifact review show evidence of screening and progress monitoring assessments, tiered instruction, data-based decision making.

## **Conclusion 2**

Support teachers are a necessary staffing component for complete RtI implementation.

Averill et al. (2014) define an interventionist as a "licensed educator who is able to provide direct instructional intervention in a particular area of the curriculum" (p. 31). They suggest that one approach to satisfying personnel

needs for Rtl implementation is to employ an approach to staffing the intervention block where all available personnel are involved, including staff who are not usually involved in instruction, such as the librarian and administrators. There is no evidence in the findings of this study to suggest that librarians or administrators are serving as interventionists at any of the four schools. Ehren's work on Rtl implementation (2013) suggests that interventionists may include classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, English language learner teachers, and speech pathologists. The findings presented in Chapter 4 did show evidence that the four schools used classroom teachers and special education teachers as interventionists, but none of the schools mentioned staffing reading specialists or English language learner teachers nor that they used speech pathologists as interventionists. Averill et al. (2014) expand the list of who can serve as an intervention support teacher to include music, art, and science teachers. They also propose that a school utilize the psychologist, speech pathologist, or principal to serve as an interventionist. None of the findings presented in Chapter 4 indicate that the four schools utilize their psychologists or speech pathologists to deliver instruction or intervention, nor do they employ their content specialists as interventionists.

Instead of using the "all hands on deck" approach suggested by the empirical literature, my interpretations of the findings presented in Chapter 4 lead me to the conclusion that support teachers employed specifically for the purpose of implementing one of the four core components of the school's Rtl program are a necessary staffing component for effective Rtl implementation. Findings and

conclusions relating to the completeness of Rtl implementations indicate that School 2, the site that had the least amount of support teacher time, does not implement tiered instructional supports or systematic data-based decision making. School 1 does staff support teachers; however, the amount of support staff is not sufficient when compared to the number of students with needs, for example, English language learners and students from low-income households. Considering the myriad of duties that staff like librarians, speech pathologists, and administrators have, I do not believe that it is reasonable to assume that consistency needed for Rtl interventions can be maintained unless schools staff with support teachers dedicated to Rtl.

In order to judge the adequacy of staffing in relation to student need, this study uses Odden and Picus's (2008) adequacy staffing model as a theoretical framework. The adequacy staffing model suggests that a school should have additional support staff for ELLs and low-income students. Using the formula suggested by Odden and Picus's adequacy model that was presented and discussed in Chapter 2, Schools 1 and 2 have inadequate staffing for the number of English learners and low-income students at the school, and Schools 3 and 4 have more support staff than is suggested by Odden and Picus's formula (2008). Table 14 compares the recommended versus the actual support staff for each site. The numbers are presented in intervals of 0.25 because it is protocol in the district of the study to staff in these increments. In order to easily compare theoretical to actual, the existing staffing was measured in relation to full-time, 40-hour-per-week positions. For example, two support teachers working 19.5

hours per week were counted as one full-time support teacher. Using Odden and Picus's formula, School 1 should have 6 support teachers and employs 2.5, School 2 should have 1.5 support teachers and employs 0.25, School 3 should have one half of a support teacher and employs 3, and School 4 should employ one half of a support teacher and employs 2.

Table 14

*Odden and Picus's Theoretical Staffing vs. Actual Staffing*

	Theoretical Adequate Staffing for ELL Support	Theoretical Staffing for Low-Income Students	Total Recommended Support Staffing	Actual Support for Rtl
School 1	3.50	2.50	6.00	2.50
School 2	0.50	1.00	1.50	0.25
School 3	0.25	0.25	0.50	3.00
School 4	0.25	0.25	0.50	2.00

In each case where the school is falling short of recommended support staff (i.e., at Schools 1 and 2), core components of Rtl are missing. Conclusion 3 discusses how each of these schools is missing the component of data-based decision making, this is in part due to a lack of access to time.

**Conclusion 3**

Weekly release time for teachers during the instructional day is necessary for teams to engage in data-based decision making.

Conclusion 3 does not directly answer Research Question 1 or 2; however, findings point to the conclusion that staff cannot implement data-based

decision making without having the necessary time to meet during the instructional day to look at data and use it to plan instruction, no matter how many key implementers are available for RtI. In order for this study to find that RtI is being implemented completely at a site, all four components must be in place per the study's conceptual framework. The findings from Chapter 4 suggest that consistent data-based decision making is taking place at Schools 3 and 4. School 3 employs additional staff in the form of a certificated teacher who works 19.5 hours per week in conjunction with district-funded specialist teachers to provide teachers with the necessary meeting time. School 4 uses district-provided specialist teachers who take over instruction for the classroom teacher.

Data-based decision making is not happening with any regularity at Schools 1 and 2 and was therefore determined to be a missing component at these schools. Interpretations of the findings point to the conclusion that teachers need release time during the workday to ensure that RtI implementers are engaging in regular and systematic data review and instructional planning in a collaborative manner. This study's conceptual framework includes a working definition of RtI. The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) defines RtI as a system that "integrates assessment and intervention within a multilevel prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems" ("New to RtI?," para. 1). The key word in the definition is *integrates*, and this integration of assessment and intervention in a multitiered system requires not only additional support personnel in the form of certificated support

teachers but also sufficient time for all key implementers to collaborate and engage in data-based decision making and planning.

Findings from the administrator interviews from Principals 3 and 4 also suggest that, in addition to providing time during the workday for teachers to meet, training on how to use this time is an important element of implementation. Conclusions from findings that answer Research Questions 1 and 2, however, suggest that necessary staffing and the training of that staff are inextricably linked in regard to complete and effective implementation. The key implementers must have professional development in order to completely and effectively implement RtI.

#### **Conclusion 4**

High quality professional development for key implementers is critical to a site's complete implementation of RtI.

RtI is a collaborative effort, and Burns et al. (2013) argue that, along with training in tiered interventions, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making, implementers need professional development involving teaming strategies. This study's findings support Burns et al.'s philosophy on professional development. Interview data gathered to answer Research Question 2 on professional development from Principal 3 speaks specifically to this. Principal 3 commented on the importance of professional development supporting the creating of a culture that supports RtI and argued that this is far more important than training on the specific programs and assessments like SIPPS and DIBELS. Burns et al. (2005) also agree that the inability to implement a working school-

based team is one of the most serious and well-documented threats to successful RtI implementation. Based on the analysis of the findings, my interpretation is that the training in teaming strategies is one of the key factors that led to complete implementation at Schools 3 and 4 and that the lack of training is a factor leading to incomplete implementation at Schools 1 and 2.

Although Schools 1 and 2 lack the support staff that Schools 3 and 4 have in relation to their students with needs, I believe that a lack of high-quality and on-going training also contribute to the incomplete implementation at these schools. I arrive at this conclusion based on the fact that at Schools 1 and 2, teams do not engage in the collaborative and integrative planning that RtI requires. Schools 1 and 2 have not leveraged time and resources in order to meet to review student data and plan for instruction, although they have access to time blocks provided by district-funded specialist teachers. Schools 1 and 2 have not developed schedules to facilitate tiered instruction, and their interview and survey data do not convey the perception that they have received high-quality or on-going training related to RtI. I believe that high-quality and on-going professional development on the systems and collaborative culture associated with RtI would assist Schools 1 and 2 to move forward in their implementation of on-going and systematic data-based decision making.

Danielson et al. (2007) believe that professional development is crucial to continuous school improvement. Training in all components and aspects of an initiative is crucial and must be on-going (Bergstrom, 2008; Burns et al., 2013; Schmoker, 2002). Schools 3 and 4 in this study received on-going professional

development from National Rtl experts, including DuFour, Buffum, and Mattos, and training on the specific instructional programs and strategies. Based on the descriptions provided by Principal 3, training like the one offered by Solution Tree follows the theory of broad training for Rtl as suggested by Burns et al. (2013). Burns believes that broad training and on-going professional development needs to cover all the core components and skill sets of Rtl and examples that include a broad range of forms that the primary components of Rtl can take. Personnel implementing Rtl need to be proficient in all aspects of the Rtl process (Burns et al., 2013). The findings of this study, specifically the interview data from Principals 3 and 4, lead to the conclusion that broad and on-going professional development are key to building a school culture and specific practices that will support complete and effective Rtl implementation.

### **Conclusion 5**

The site leader's level of expertise and training in Rtl is critical to a school's implementation of Rtl.

The role of the principal in procuring professional development is crucial. The importance of the leader's role in relation to quality professional development is supported by Mellard et al.'s work (2012) that states that one of the principal's key roles is to ensure that ongoing professional development is available for all Rtl implementers. The findings of this study support Mellard's determination that leadership and high-quality professional development are paramount for complete and successful implementation. Again, Research Questions 1 and 2 cannot be separated. The amount of staffing and the quality of

the training the staff receive are both critical to implementation. Staff will be most effective as key implementers if they receive high-quality and on-going training.

### **Implications**

The findings from Chapter 4 were analyzed and five major conclusions emerged from the data used to answer the two research questions in the study. The following paragraphs explain how the conclusions were used to identify implications for practice, theory, policy and future research.

#### **Implications for Practice**

This study concluded that support teachers are necessary for complete implementation of RtI. This finding has implications for district and site leaders as they budget and plan for staffing of RtI implementation. The district in this study serves a diverse demographic, with some schools serving primarily low-income students and English learners and other schools serving affluent families that have the ability to provide significant monetary support to the school. This study included schools from a variety of demographics, a strength of the study as the results can be generalized to other schools in the district.

Implications for my practice as a site principal include the decision to employ ample support staff and add to our RtI implementation team as budgets allow. I will work with principal colleagues to share the results of this research and assist them in adequately staffing for full RtI implementation.

In addition, based on findings indicating the importance of high-quality and on-going professional development, I will ensure that my staff and I receive training from national experts on RtI theory and implementation. The expert

training as described by Principals 3 and 4 revealed not only the technical aspects of Rtl at Schools 3 and 4 but also the collaborative culture that is necessary for such a system to take root and thrive.

In addition to procuring high-quality and on-going training for staff, I will work at leveraging time and resources in order to get teachers and key implementers time during the workday to review data and plan instruction and interventions. This is based on the findings from this study that suggest that staff members need common release time and specific training on how to use the time to effectively collaborate and make informed data-based decisions,

### **Implications for Theory and Policy**

In addition to practical implications for implementation and leadership at the site and district level, the findings of this study have theoretical implications that include providing concrete examples for the effects of inadequate and adequate staffing per Odden and Picus's (2008) adequacy theory. Schools 1 and 2 are not adequately staffed to implement Rtl, and they do not show evidence of effective implementation.

This study also has implications for educational policy that relates to the adequacy theory, particularly the new LCFF funding formula in California. California's Assembly Bill 97 introduced the LCFF in 2013-2014. This is a funding reform based on the idea that students with greater need require greater resources to achieve desired outcomes (Affeldt, 2015). LCFF's weighted formula provides base funding for all students and supplemental funding for what the bill refers to as unduplicated high-need students (Affeldt, 2015). This study

demonstrates the need for additional support for students who are English learners or who come from low-income households, adding to the scholarly research on adequacy theory and policy based on adequacy theory.

In addition to adequacy theory, this study supports the existing theory on the importance of investing in high-quality professional development. Research has shown that investments in teacher expertise through quality professional development yield greater learner achievement outcomes than any other expenditure of school resources (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study explored categories and number of personnel in relation to each core component of Rtl. This is helpful to determine key implementation staff in order to begin to develop an Rtl staffing formula for the school district. A limitation of this study, however, is that it equated an effective program with a complete program. There is room for future research looking at number of personnel in relation to program effectiveness as measured by gains in student achievement.

LCFF is based on an equity principle, but it still fails to address adequacy. In the case of Rtl, complete and effective implementation as measured by student achievement gains equate to educational adequacy (Affeldt, 2015). Therefore, further research is needed to conclude whether a school with adequate staffing, high-quality and on-going professional development, and release time would be able to completely and effectively implement an Rtl

support system for students, with effectiveness measured by the program's effects on student achievement.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of the findings and conclusions in relation to existing scholarly empirical literature, I present the following four recommendations:

1. All site principals in the district should receive high-quality, formal and on-going training in Rtl theory and implementation.
2. All key implementers, including general education teachers, special education teachers, and support teachers, should receive high-quality, formal, and on-going training in Rtl theory and implementation. Specifically, I recommend that the district use the successful model employed at Schools 3 and 4 and contract with national experts on Rtl theory and implementation.
3. I recommend that district staffing formulas include adequate staffing for support teachers for Rtl implementation.
4. Release time for teachers should be systematically scheduled into each site's schedule to teachers to collaboratively look at data and plan for instruction scheduled during the instructional day.

### **Summary of the Dissertation**

This dissertation studied four schools in order to identify key Rtl implementing staff and determine the experience and training of each implementer. These data were gathered in an effort to assist in implementing Rtl

at the site and district level and to contribute to the scholarly literature on Rtl staffing, training, and implementation. Rtl is a relatively new initiative, and schools and districts benefit from research documenting effective implementation practices. The specific goal this study aimed to achieve was to provide information to help develop a staffing formula for Rtl implementation in the district of the study.

Data from the study came from interviews with principals, surveys administered to key Rtl implementers identified by the principals, and artifacts, including meeting agendas and minutes, rotation schedules, budget reports, and staffing reports. The findings showed that three key factors relating to complete implementation at the sites include adequate staffing of support teachers, access to time to collaboratively engage in data-based decision making, and high-quality on-going professional development. The data will be shared with district leadership to help with staffing and professional development for the district's Rtl initiative.

Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) state that, if successfully implemented, Rtl will ensure that all students receive effective instruction from the very first day of their school careers and will allow schools to deliver the instructional methods to help students who would otherwise fall through the cracks achieve academic success. Brown-Chidsey and Steege claim that Rtl, if successfully implemented, will help eliminate the overidentification of ELL students for special education that exists in our state. After researching the existing scholarly literature and existing, fully implanted models in the study, I believe that Rtl, if successfully

implemented, will be a key factor in the closure of the achievement gap that exists in the state of California. I intend to use the findings from this study to effectively and completely implement RtI at my site and other sites in the district in an effort to ensure that all students receive effective instruction from the very first day of their educational careers along with the support they need to be successful.

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## APPENDIX A

### ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Researcher Intro

Thank you for the agreeing to the interview. I know how much you have on your plate, and I really appreciate you helping me get a closer look at how you implement Rtl at your site. Before I dive into the questions, can I get some basic information from you?

How long have you been in education?

How long have you been a principal?

How long have you been a principal at this particular site?

#### Question 1:

Tell me a little about the Rtl program you have currently running at your school.

Probe: How long have you been implementing Rtl at your site?

#### Question 2:

What Tier II interventions do you have in place?

Probe: For ELA

Probe: For math

Probe: For behavior

#### Question 3

What Tier III interventions do you have in place?

#### Question 4

Who is responsible for delivering the interventions?

#### Question 5

What screeners and progress monitoring tools do you use?

#### Question 6

Who is responsible for administering these assessments?

Probe: How frequently do you screen and progress monitor?

#### Question 7

Tell me a little bit about how you review data.

Probe: How often do you have these meetings?

Probe: Who attends each meeting?

Probe: What artifacts do you have from these meetings?

#### Question 8

What kind of training have you had related to Rtl?

Follow up: What kind of training has your staff had related to Rtl?

#### Question 9

Who are the key people at your site for Rtl implementation?

Follow up: What specific skills and experience do these staff members have that equip them for Rtl implementation?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **FOLLOW-UP SURVEY**

1. What is your school site?
2. What position do you currently hold?
3. Who is responsible for core instruction at your site?
4. Who is responsible for Tier II interventions at your site?
5. Who is responsible for delivering Tier III interventions at your site?
6. Who is responsible for administering the DIBELS screening tool?
7. Who is responsible for administering reading progress monitoring?
8. Who participates in your Rtl data meetings?
9. How often do you meet to review benchmark data?
10. How often do you meet to review progress monitoring data?
11. What are a few things that you believe make your Rtl program successful?
12. If you had access to additional resources to augment Rtl implementation at your site, what might they be?
13. What training and experience do you have in relation to Rtl and its various components?