DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING AN RTI MODEL FOR ONE MIDDLE SCHOOL:
A CASE STUDY OF STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

This paper explores one middle school’s process of developing and implementing a Response to Intervention program for students performing below grade level in reading and language arts. To frame this descriptive case study, this paper examines the history of Response to Intervention and its potential to address a large number of students struggling with literacy at the middle school level. How teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators experienced the changes will be the lens to focus this case study. A major goal of this paper is to identify the components of an RTI program at the middle school level and to gather input regarding practices that are successful. At the conclusion of this paper, suggestions for future research are described.

Keywords: Response to Intervention, middle school, literacy, remediation, teacher perceptions, intervention specialist
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Rich, Richie, and Addisyn. You are the best distractions.
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Chapter 1: Study Overview

Statement of the Problem

**Topic**

Teaching children in the least restrictive environment and ensuring that their literacy struggles are addressed are the primary legal and moral obligations of public education. Traditionally, to address the learning needs of students achieving below grade level, schools in the United States have implemented an IQ-achievement discrepancy model to determine which students are eligible for remediation and support through special education services. This method for providing help for struggling students requires that a student has been diagnosed with a learning disability to receive support in school. To identify a learning disability requires the documentation of a discrepancy between the student’s performance and the student’s ability (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

That means that there must be clear evidence, from testing a child who is struggling to achieve academic success in the classroom, that the student has a high potential ability to achieve academic success. If a struggling student’s test results indicate that the student has limited academic potential due to a lower IQ, the school is not required to provide the student with any additional support in instruction. With an IQ-achievement discrepancy model, students that struggle to achieve academic proficiency in the classroom are referred by teachers or parents to the school’s child study team (CST) of psychologists, social workers and learning disability consultants who then evaluate the child for a discrepancy in his or her ability compared to his or her academic performance (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).
Students with test results showing that they have academic potential based on their intelligence testing can be given extra support in the form of smaller class sizes, additional teachers, and modifications to instruction, assignments, and assessments in the classroom. On the opposite end, students who are determined by the CST to have lower ability do not receive special education services and are not entitled to any additional services from their schools even if they have deficits that can be remediated (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In summary, those children whose academic struggles are determined to be caused by low academic ability do not receive additional support because there is no gap between their potential and their performance. These children are left to struggle on their own.

Additionally, inconsistencies in the identification of learning disabilities among schools can occur because the definition of what constitutes a discrepancy can vary from district to district. Critics of the IQ-achievement model have noted that this model can lead to inequitable distribution of services (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). Advocates against this model support that students with a lower socioeconomic status who are tested for services are often found not to have enough of a discrepancy to be classified when compared to their middle-class peers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Also of concern with the IQ-achievement discrepancy approach is the over-identification of students from diverse backgrounds. Studies have reported that in some school districts, minority subgroups of students are labeled as learning disabled at disproportionately high rates when compared to general populations (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). Response to Intervention (RTI) has the potential to close the achievement gap in literacy for students who struggle while preventing the over-classification of children from diverse backgrounds (Bean &
In order to address the number of students struggling to read and write on grade level, a Response to Intervention (RTI) program can provide students with remediation and support outside the scope of the traditional special education model. There is no requirement with an RTI model first to confirm that a student has a learning disability before providing assistance. RTI allows schools to provide services to students who need remediation without first going through the long process of identifying a gap in a student’s achievement versus the student’s ability (Pyle & Vaughn, 2012).

Response to Intervention was written into law in 2004 as part of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004). A main goal of the RTI model is to prevent the disproportionately high rate of culturally and linguistically diverse students who are placed inappropriately in special education programs. When districts use the previously mentioned IQ-achievement discrepancy model, students with diverse backgrounds tend to be tracked into special education programs at a higher rate (Klinger & Edwards, 2006).

Although RTI was written into law in 2004, districts have struggled for over ten years with developing programs for implementing services. The law allows a percentage of federal funding previously allocated for special education to be dedicated to students who struggle academically but may not have met the criteria for special education services. The laws allow funds to be allocated for RTI, but districts are on their own in determining how to spend that money. Choices regarding which students receive RTI services and what actual services are provided differ from district to district and even within one school system, from school to school.
Research Problem

Schools across the country have been implementing RTI programs over the past ten years. Almost all of the research that is available on the topic focuses on early elementary literacy because the model started at the early elementary level. Little research has been conducted at the middle school level leaving leaders at a loss for sources of information or evidence. Despite the potential for an RTI model to improve the achievement of struggling students, there is limited evidence that the model positively impacts student achievement at the middle school level due to a lack of research.

Justification for the Research Problem

More research is needed to unlock the potential of RTI programs to remediate skill gaps and to provide schools with models to reflect upon and emulate as they build their programs at the upper-grade levels. In a recent report on RTI, Fuchs, Fuchs and Compton (2010) advocate for more research on effective RTI models and concede that researchers may avoid examining middle and high schools because of scheduling conflicts, and in addition, there is an added level of difficulty in working with adolescents who may not be receptive to working in the classroom with a support teacher or receiving pull-out instruction. Brozo (2011) asserts that “RTI is far from a clearly structured, highly research-validated program with universally agreed-upon features; RTI is still more rhetoric than reality, still more of a work in progress than a refined and developed product” (p.8).

Because there are no scripts to follow or specific plans of what procedures to put in place, having examples of what other schools have done could be very useful. Districts and schools need to be able to consider the process that other educational
professionals have experienced to design their practices for their setting and student population. Although there is a current shortage of scientific evidence supporting the success of RTI, many middle schools across the United States are implementing programs, and more research will become available.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Gaps in the research stem from the fact that RTI is relatively new, and programs in the upper grades have only been established within the last few years. In a recent study of the RTI model and its impact on school personnel, Bean and Lillenstein (2012) conclude that more research is necessary to gain a better understanding of how RTI works in individual schools. Additionally, Martinez and Young (2011) suggest that additional research is needed to focus on the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the effectiveness of the RTI model. A case study examining the process of one school and describing the experiences of the professionals involved in designing and implementing the program could help in filling the need for more research.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to determine the successes and challenges as perceived by the educators involved in developing one RTI program at the middle school level. This information could be useful in identifying effective practices for the development of new programs and the revision of existing ones. The RTI model has the potential to enhance student achievement in literacy. Future research that is conducted will be instrumental in allowing successful models to be duplicated in other schools. A case study of one school’s process of implementing an RTI program could potentially
provide a tool for reference in the process of developing a successful middle school program.

**Audiences**

Teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators could use the research collected from a case study to initiate or revise their RTI programs. Also, the study could provide a resource for parents and students to use as a tool for understanding the RTI program at the middle school level.

**Significance of the Problem**

Diane Ravitch asserts that “the most radical of all American ideas is the idea that everyone can be educated- not just that everyone can go to school, but that everyone can be educated” (Mondale & Patton, 2003, p.70). An essential goal of education at the local, state, national and global level is to produce citizens equipped with the necessary literacy skills to contribute to society. As previously stated, Response to Intervention has the potential to close the achievement gap in literacy for students who struggle and prevent the over-classification of children from diverse backgrounds (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

RTI provides hope that every child can be educated. The model demands that attention from schools remains focused on best practices in reading instruction and research-based interventions implemented in one-on-one, small group or whole class instruction (Allington, 2009). Literacy skills are crucial to success in school at every grade level. As students move up to the middle school and high school levels, those who have difficulty with reading are at a much higher risk of failing in their content area classes and dropping out of high school (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).
Every day students across the country drop out before graduating because they do not see what they are learning as valuable, relevant or worth the effort (Guthrie, 2008). Educators know that literacy skills impact students for life; reading engagement has been identified as having a greater impact on student achievement than a family’s socioeconomic status or a parent’s level of education (Guthrie, Schafer, & Huang, 2001).

At the same time that RTI programs are being implemented across the nation, our students continue to struggle with literacy by the millions (Allington, 2009; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). RTI has potential because it allows more students to receive literacy support who may not qualify for special education services. Unfortunately, schools have few points of reference in developing programs to support struggling students outside of the special education program, especially at the upper-grade levels.

**Positionality Statement**

In examining this problem of practice, I recognize that I perceive this problem with particular biases. I have the experience of having been a literacy intervention specialist for five years at a suburban middle-class middle school in New Jersey. Previous to the specialist position, I served as a sixth-grade language arts teacher in a high-achieving, affluent suburban community.

I went into teaching with the belief that schools should provide all students with a path to a successful future. My vision of schools is that they should provide students with a positive experience that is tailored as much as possible to the individual needs of students. I feel that schools are responsible for teaching all students and that efforts must
be concentrated on preventing a child’s socioeconomic background from negatively impacting his or her academic achievement.

As a public educator who works to advocate for struggling students, I have a favorable bias towards a Response to Intervention model being implemented. I recognize that there are students who struggle with reading comprehension and study skills well into the upper grades.

Having participated in various teams and committees of educators to address the needs of students who are not performing well academically, I strongly support a program that identifies struggling students and targets specific skills gap A conscious effort was made to minimize the impact of this on my research. As Denzin asserts, "Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher" (1986, p. 12).

Having a personal attachment may lead to a bias that must be acknowledged and managed (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). Authors of the literature regarding Response to Intervention tend to praise the model for its potential to increase academic achievement for struggling students (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). I am aware that what I found as I conducted my review of the literature served to reinforce my positive bias towards this topic.

My personal history and biases have led me to develop a positive inclination toward the Response to Intervention model. Available literature regarding the Response to Invention model at the middle school adds to my positive bias toward the topic. My positionalities, as well as the researchers who have contributed to the available literature on the subject of Response to Intervention and the models potential to increase student
achievement, have led me to develop a potentially biased view that could influence my conclusions and interpretations. Triangulation, defined by Yin (2011) as three or more independent sources of data pointing to the same set of facts, events or interpretations, was an essential strategy to help ensure that my results represented the views of the participants in this study. This idea is discussed further in the data analysis section of this report.

**Implications**

More research is needed to develop and refine RTI programs at the upper-grade levels. A case study of the implementation process for establishing an RTI program at the middle school level can be used as a tool for reflection in schools that are in the stages of developing and refining their models. This project could be a reference point in the discussion of effective practices for designing and revising individual programs.

**Research Questions**

**Problem of Practice**

Middle schools across the country have been implementing Response to Intervention programs over the past ten years. What the program looks like in each school can vary considerably leaving schools with minimal points of reference in designing or revising their programs. Despite the potential of an RTI model to improve the achievement of struggling middle school students, there is limited evidence of its success because of the limited amount of research available on RTI programs at the middle school level.
Central Research Question:

What are the experiences of teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators in the development and implementation of a Response to Intervention (RTI) program at one suburban middle school in central New Jersey?

Sub-questions:

• What do teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators describe as the most significant challenges of the process of developing and implementing an RTI model?

• What do teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators describe as the most significant successes of the process of developing and implementing an RTI model?

The intent of these open-ended questions was to gather input from teachers, administrators and intervention specialists regarding the process of implementing a middle school RTI program. The research questions were developed to gain an understanding of how participants made sense of the process. This study takes a realist approach by seeking to uncover the perceptions and beliefs of the different individuals involved (Maxwell, 2005). A qualitative study was appropriate as the research goal was to create an understanding of the meaning participants have constructed within the context of the phenomenon of developing and implementing an RTI model in one middle school (Merriam, 2009). A more detailed description regarding the design of the research questions is included in the methodology section of this paper.
Theoretical Framework

An Overview of the Theory

Fullan’s theory of change in education supports that there are three separate phases in the process of change in education. The phases include initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. A brief overview of each of the stages is useful in understanding Fullan’s theory. The initiation process is Phase I. Fullan (2007) describes this phase as the “process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change (p.65). The next phase, implementation, involves attempting to put the changes into practice. Fullan (2007) supports that the implementation phase is typically two to three years long. The final phase, institutionalization, is “whether the change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system or disappears by way of a decision to discard or through attrition” (Fullan, 2007, p.65).

The Theories Align: Theories of Organizational Change

Considering Fullan’s theory (1991, 2001, 2007) within the context of theories related to organizational change is useful as his work aligns with other theories of organizational change. In analyzing Fullan’s work, it becomes evident that his theory of change in education parallels foundational theories of organization change, specifically the work of Kurt Lewin (1951) regarding managing change. Similar to Fullan’s theory of change in education, Lewin’s theory is also a three step model. While Fullan’s phases include initiation, implementation, and institutionalization, Lewin’s theory organizes change into unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. In alignment with Fullan’s initiation stage, Lewin’s first step of unfreezing is to motivate participants by preparing them for change, building trust, and promoting recognition for the need to change (Kritsonis,
Both Fullan’s and Lewin’s theories in the second step follow with the actual changes taking place through a process of implementation, and they end with the changes becoming part of the new norms in the final phase. Where they differ is that the implementation phase in Fullan’s model considers personal responses to change within the organization. Lewin’s model, while rational and goal oriented, does not consider personal factors that can influence change as part of the theory (Kritsonis, 2005).

Additionally, the Open Systems Theory and the idea of Living Systems align with Fullan’s work. Fullan’s theory specifically addresses the idea that schools as organizations are not self-sufficient. This concept is a significant component of multiple theories related to change in organizations. In explaining the Open Systems Theory, Burke (2011) includes that “an organization is open because of its dependence on continual interaction within the environment that it resides” (p.56). Hargreaves (2009) is a contemporary education change theorist who is in agreement that schools cannot act alone. He asserts that “They cannot excel alone; they need communities and society to work with them” (p. 25). In his work of exploring and describing change theory in organizations, Burke (2011) makes the point that organizations cannot be self-sufficient and will require active and deliberate effort from the members of the organization who also must trust each other (p.58).

Phase II of Fullan’s (2007) theory, implementation, expressly addresses this idea that change in education is dependent on continual interaction with the community. Fullan’s theory includes that at Phase II, social conditions at the local level and external factors related to broader society impact the success of change. This idea is similar to
Hargreaves’ (2009) second pillar of public engagement; schools must continually seek to involve parents and communicate the goals of the school and how parents can be involved and support the school. Burke (2011) explains as part of the Living Systems model that, “although cells are autopoietic, they, like human organizations, are not selfsufficient and depend for survival on the external environment” (p.71).

Both the Open Systems Theory and the idea of Living Systems support that organizations function within a larger system and depend on outside interaction. Hargreaves Fourth Way of Change Model is founded on the Five Pillars of Purpose and Partnership, which each emphasize and support individuals within the school organization working together and engaging others beyond the school itself.

Teleological theory, proposed as one mode for change by Van de Ven, also aligns with the work of Fullan. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) conducted a review of hundreds of reports regarding organizational change and determined that there are four modes of change theory including life cycle, evolution, dialectic, and teleological. Teleological theory supports that change cycles through "formulation, implementation, evaluation, and modification of goals" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p.516). Similarly, Fullan’s theory of change in education is founded on the idea that multiple factors influence the success of a particular change including the position of the school within the larger society as well as the resources that are available to support the change.

Austin and Bartunek (2003) describe organization change from the teleological perspective as goal-driven with the impetus for change emerging from participants finding their current situation is preventing them from achieving desired their goals. The teleological theory also supports that organizations are purposeful and adaptive (Burke,
The idea that organizations form goals, go through an implementation process, evaluate, modify, and set new goals, aligns with Fullan’s three-tiered model of change in education. Austin and Bartunek (2003) also describe that teleological theory supports that “the focus is on processes that enable purposeful activity toward the goal.” Both Fullan’s theory and teleology theory align in supporting that organizations are not static and experience change as a deliberate process.

In summary, Fullan’s theory (1991, 2001, 2007) parallels other theories of organizational change that have been developed. In line with Lewin’s (1951) theory, change is a process that is implemented in stages including promoting the need for change, making the changes, and adopting the changes permanently as part of the organization’s future. Additionally, Fullan’s work supports that schools, as organizations, do not function alone and interact with broader society (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2009; Burke 2011). Also of significance is the idea that schools as organizations are not static and in a continual process of setting and pursuing goals (Fullan, 2007; Van de Ven & Pool, 1995; Burke, 2011).

**Fullan’s Theory and RTI**

Fullan’s work is readily applicable to the process of implementing an RTI model as noted by multiple scholars. Datnow (2006) asserts that Fullan’s model of education change (1991, 2001, 2007) has provided direction for researchers, policymakers, and educators for multiple decades and that his theory of educational change has direct applicability to current practices of RTI. Also, Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) write that because of a lack of research that examines factors that could “promote or inhibit successful implementation of RTI, it is useful to review prior theoretical models and
efforts of educational change with the intent of informing future educational practice” (p.57). The researchers specifically cite that Fullan’s theory of educational change applies to examining the process of adopting an RTI program.

In analyzing Fullan’s theory of educational change and its relationship to implementing RTI, Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) found specific connections. The researchers conclude that Fullan’s theory suggests that to affect change, school leaders, and policymakers “must include supportive leadership, collegiality, affirmative teacher beliefs and knowledge, and sufficient capacity of both systems and individuals” (p.65).

Fullan’s work has proven to be an effective framework for developing and implementing changes in schools. Specifically, the idea of applying Fullan’s work to the implementation process of developing an RTI model provides a lens to frame the process of the change stakeholders experienced and their responses to the process of implementing a new program. Fullan’s work offers a foundation for planning, implementing, evaluating and institutionalizing best practices related to successful changes in education.

The Influence of the Framework

**Shaping the Problem of Practice.** This study values the perceptions of teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators. These perceptions are viewed as significant sources of data. There is a lack of qualitative research to address stakeholder perceptions; therefore, a theoretical framework that positions individual opinions as important, valuable sources of data is highly desirable for this study.

Fullan (2007) asserts that research regarding the change process must be used less for developing instruments of application and more as a way to help practitioners
understand and make sense of planning and implementation strategies. The goal of this case study is to provide insight into the experiences of teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators who have been part of the change process in one school. The intent is not to document every detail for another organization to replicate the process closely, but to provide a better understanding of one school’s process. The intent is not to surmise a detailed how-to list to initiate a new RTI model at the middle school level, but as Fullan suggests, to provide a better understanding of the process that one school experienced from the view of the stakeholders.

**Shaping the Research Question.** In addition to informing the problem of practice, the theoretical framework clearly shapes the main research question as well as the sub-questions that have been developed. Fullan’s (1991, 2001, 2007) theory of change in education centers on the perceptions and understandings of those involved in developing and implementing reforms in education. The research questions for this case study are open-ended and focused on the experiences of the professionals involved in the process of planning and implementing the RTI program. It is not uncommon for a qualitative study to address the perceptions of participants.

This study takes a realist approach by seeking to understand the perceptions and beliefs of the different individuals involved. The sub-questions were designed to allow an opportunity during the research process to analyze the data that emerged from each group of professionals. This allowed the researcher to consider how the professional role of teachers, administrators, and intervention specialists may have impacted their perceptions of the new program.
Also of importance is the idea that questions address both the development and the implementation process. The goal is to gather reflections from these educational professionals about their challenges and successes from the conception of the idea to start an RTI program through to their perceptions of present-day practices. The separate phases of the change process are the foundation of Fullan’s (1991, 2001, 2007) theory of educational change.

The research questions center on one school’s process. Maxwell (2005) would categorize the questions for this study as particularistic as the questions are framed as a group of educators within a particular context. The primary concern of the study with particularistic questions “is not with generalization, but with developing and adequate description, interpretation, and explanation of the case” (Maxwell, p. 71). In this case, the focus is on the experiences of the individuals in one context, a single middle school.

**Informing the Methodology.** Finally, the theoretical framework informs the methodology employed in this study. Fullan’s theory clearly aligns with a case study methodology. In qualitative studies perceptions and beliefs are considered real phenomenon (Maxwell, 2005). For a change to be successful, understanding the perceptions of stakeholders is essential. Fullan (2007) explains that describing the specific steps that one school used to implement a successful reform and expecting another school to have the same experience is unrealistic. Fullan’s theory of change in education values a better understanding how stakeholders perceive the process of change. A case study approach can provide insight for policy makers and school leaders to inform their implementation process; however, the goal is not to provide a how-to paper or list of prescribed steps for another school to follow in implementing their changes.
Conclusion

Fullan’s (1991, 2001, 2007) theory of change in education is a solid lens to use in understanding the change process of one school in implementing an RTI model at the middle school level. Fullan’s theory clearly aligns with theoretical frameworks that have been used to inform studies of change in organizations. In addition, the theory has been used in published studies specifically considering an RTI model. In addition, Fullan’s theory can be clearly applied to shaping the problem of practice, research questions, and methodology of this study.

Limitations of the Study

In seeking to understand the process of developing and implementing an RTI program at one school, this case study was designed with potential limitations. Because of the limited sample size, the ability to generalize the findings is difficult. The context of the study is unique as it was limited to one middle school and included only the perspectives of the 10 participants in addition to the data that was collected through the document review. The overall design will be introduced in the following section and explored more in-depth in Chapter 3 of this report.

Research Design Overview

The research was conducted using a descriptive case study approach. A descriptive case study is used in exploring a situation where the intervention that is being examined does not have a clear set of outcomes (Yin, 2003). Qualitative studies can focus on how participants make sense of the events that have occurred and how their perceptions have informed their actions versus determining precisely what happened.
(Maxwell, 2005). This research focused on exploring the particular issue of the implementation of an RTI program in one school.

This case study takes place within a bounded system, a single suburban middle school in central New Jersey. Multiple sources of data, including a document review and interviews described in detail in Chapter 3, will inform the study and provide a rich context for addressing the research questions. Yin (2009) asserts that the most significant goal of the design for a case study is to ensure the data being mined throughout the study answers the research questions. For this study, the research questions were used to plan and develop each phase of data collection and focused on understanding the experiences of the professionals involved in developing the RTI program at one middle school.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

An important goal for this chapter is to explain the need for Response to Intervention programs at the middle school level. This chapter will first define the concept of what it means to be a struggling reader and describe the challenges that students face as struggling middle school readers. The impact that content area reading has on the performance of students performing below grade level will be addressed along with describing effective practices for the remediation of struggling readers. RTI will be reviewed as a possible solution to the number of students struggling to read in the upper grades. This review will describe the typical components of RTI, potential challenges to implementing an RTI model, and educator perceptions of RTI models that have been implemented across the country.

Challenges for Middle School Literacy Instruction

For middle school students who struggle to read on grade level, the impact is one that spreads beyond their daily experience in an English and language arts classroom. The impact of their struggles is felt across the day, in every classroom, on every writing assignment, and on every reading task. As millions of students who read below grade level move to the upper grades, they begin to give up hope that their academic performance in school can be a path to a successful future (Allington, 2009; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). Of monumental significance is that high school attrition has been directly linked to difficulty with reading grade level material (Guthrie, 2008).
The National Council of Teachers of English wrote in their NCTE Principles of Adolescent Literacy Reform that each day three thousand students who have been identified as having limited literacy skills drop out of school (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006). In almost every middle and high school across the country, some students are only attending school because it is compulsory. Guthrie (2008) asserts in his recent book that many struggling readers are “demotivated, apathetic, or expressly resistant to reading school content” (p.2). As students move up to the middle school and high school levels, those who have difficulty with reading are at a much greater risk of failing in their content area classes and eventually dropping out of high school (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). A recent report of the National Council for Teachers of English stated that eight million students in the United States are reading below grade level in grades four through twelve (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006). Unfortunately, once a student falls behind, it is difficult ever to get back on grade level, and struggling students tend to fall even further behind their peers (Allington, 2009). As students move into the upper grades, they are presented with fewer opportunities to read in school and have even fewer opportunities to cultivate their interests in reading, to read at a pace they chose, or to self-select their books (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

Reading engagement can only happen if students are reading. It is conceivable for a student to attend school for seven hours, and in that entire day, not spend one minute reading a textbook or a novel (Guthrie, 2008). A national survey of reading engagement for high school seniors indicated that 93% of the students sampled did not read in school on a daily basis, and 69% did not find enjoyment in reading (Grigg, Daane, Jin & Campbell, 2003).
As students transition to the middle school, they are expected to read independently with less teacher support. For students who are struggling with reading, these expectations can cause the gap to widen between students reading on grade level and students who are reading below grade level. In a report on working with struggling readers in the middle school, researchers Palumbo and Sanacore (2009) assert that “intermediate and middle school texts are written at a more challenging level than the narrative texts common in primary grades and contain a greater thought and word density and a more specialized vocabulary” (p.276).

Every day students across the country drop out before graduating because they do not see what they are learning as valuable, relevant or worth the effort (Guthrie, 2008). Of major significance is the fact that reading engagement has been identified as having a greater impact on student achievement than a family’s socioeconomic status or the parent’s level of education (Guthrie, Schafer, & Huang, 2001). Although RTI has been in place for a number of years at the early elementary level, implementing an RTI program is a relatively new approach for middle schools to take in attempting to improve achievement for struggling readers (Johnson & Smith, 2008).

**The Struggling Middle School Reader.** To better understand the need for literacy intervention programs, it is important to realize the struggles students are experiencing as they advance into higher grade levels. Defining what is meant by struggling reader is a good place to start. Guthrie (2008) writes that struggling readers fall into one of three categories: (1) lower achievers who are externally motivated; (2) lower achievers who lack comprehension skills and are resistant to reading; and (3) lower achievers who struggle with decoding. The first group is described as being grade motivated, but only
doing the minimum to get by. Guthrie (2008) points out that these students do not have a sense of joy or ownership associated with learning. The second group actively avoids reading; therefore, these students end up with significant gaps in their understanding of content area coursework. Within this second category of resistant readers, Guthrie indicates that students are still struggling with basic comprehension skills including summarizing the text, and they are rarely proficient on standardized tests. Guthrie describes students who fall into the third category as seriously disabled readers. He asserts that a student who falls in this category will have already struggled and failed academically, and suffered a humiliation while at the same time developing further avoidance strategies and a lower self-esteem as a student before reaching high school. The students that Guthrie describes that at this level, students are still reading on a first or second-grade level as middle school students. These readers are in real danger of dropping out of school as the expectations for independent reading increase. Having defined the concept of a struggling reader, the next goal is to describe the impact of reading below grade level in the upper grades.

Implementing an organized approach to supporting struggling readers at the upper-grade levels is additionally challenging because literacy skills such as fluency, decoding, and basic comprehension skills are not consistently assessed and remediated beyond the elementary years. Pyle and Vaughn (2012) assert that the focus of reading instruction at the upper-grade levels is different than the early elementary grades regarding focusing on specific literacy skills.

A recent meta-analysis that focused on reading instruction at the upper-grade levels concluded that educators have historically emphasized improving reading
proficiency at the elementary level, with reading instruction in the upper grades being been far less prevalent (Edmonds et al., 2012). The study found the result to be that secondary students who struggle with reading difficulties are less often provided with reading instruction contributing to a widened gap between the achievement of students who struggle and that of their grade-level peers. When support for literacy is provided at the upper levels, it is often not in the form of remediation and skill instruction. Another study of reading instruction in the upper grades found the focus shifts from literacy remediation and supplemental support to content recovery with the outcome focused on passing core courses and exams for graduation (Pyle & Vaughn, 2012). This approach leaves students struggling to get by each year versus actually having instruction to improve their literacy skills.

The Impact of Content Area Reading on Struggling Readers. For students who are struggling to read at grade level, the middle school presents more of a challenge since content-area textbooks are often written above a student’s current grade putting struggling readers at an even further disadvantage (Wilson, 2004). Students are being presented with greater expectations and less support ultimately leading to a widening gap in performance for students who struggle in literacy. Middle school is the time where students’ literacy skills will begin to impact their performance in their content area classes.

Starting at the middle school level, struggling readers are at a higher of failure in their content area classes as the reading becomes increasingly challenging and students are expected to learn from the text (Wilson, 2004). When a textbook is too difficult for students to comprehend, it is possible that some teachers will present the material in other
ways rather than require the reading and address the lack of skills that makes the course reading such a challenge. Content area courses at the middle school and high school level may reduce or eliminate required reading because students will not complete assigned reading at home, and alternatively, it would take a tremendous amount of time to do the reading in class (Wilson, 2004).

Content reading opportunities can help struggling students if the right supports are put in place. Research shows that time spent reading in content area classes such as science or social studies leads to greater gains in reading achievement versus students who are only reading in their literacy classes (Allington, 2009). Also, there are nonfiction reading strategies that content area teachers can model for struggling readers that would assist them in making meaning from text (Wilson, 2004). In content area classes such as science or social studies, students can also be taught specific strategies to engage more deeply with the text, but the strategies must also be applied to textbooks that are within a student’s independent reading level (Guthrie, 2008).

Effective Practices in Working with Struggling Readers. The struggle that students experience in content area classes is only a small part of the problem. All students need time to read, especially struggling students. Surprisingly there are very few opportunities to read in school; schools must focus on providing time to engage in reading across the school day (Allington, 2009). What struggling readers need to do to improve in reading is to spend as much time as possible reading; this is what leads to higher reading achievement (Allington, 2009; Guthrie 2008). To ensure that students have time to read each day, some middle schools have placed independent reading time into their daily schedules (Wilson, 2004).
For readers who struggle, providing students with choice is also essential in increasing reading engagement (Guthrie, 2008). Being able to choose from many options of engaging books written on a student’s independent reading level can dramatically improve a struggling student’s level of reading engagement (Allington, 2009). If selfselecting the actual book to read is not possible, the choices that students are provided with can be which partner to read with, which strategy to practice, or which assignment to complete for homework; the primary goal is simply that students feel ownership over the learning process (Guthrie, 2008).

In addition to time and autonomy, it is also important for struggling readers to have opportunities to collaborate and discuss their reading with peers (Guthrie, 2008). Guthrie (2008) explains that these opportunities to collaborate must be carefully planned to ensure that the social interaction is a positive and productive experience. Struggling readers require additional scaffolding in the form of modeling appropriate questions and answers for whole-class and small group discussions (Wilson, 2004).

Studies have shown that teaching students specific strategies such as questioning or monitoring for meaning can be used to increase both reading engagement and reading achievement (Allington, 2009; Guthrie, 2008; Wilson, 2004). It is essential that students practice specific reading strategies using text that is written at their appropriate independent reading level to avoid frustration (Allington, 2009; Guthrie, 2008; Wilson, 2004). As an example, a particular strategy that aids struggling readers in social interactions is Note Cue, which involves the teacher providing questions and answers related to the reading created by the teacher for a struggling student to use during the reading discussion (Wilson, 2003). The student’s job is to then choose the best time to
share the information during the discussion. As the student experiences success and becomes more confident with collaborating, the scaffold can be reduced or removed.

Reading engagement is closely linked to reading achievement, and efforts to increase reading engagement will serve students for life (Allington, 2009; Guthrie, 2008; Wilson, 2004). Bender (2011) explains that "As reading skills decline, so does motivation to read, which, to continue the vicious causal cycle, leads to even poorer reading skills. For this reason, teachers at all grade levels must focus some attention on a student’s motivation to read." Reading below grade level is strongly correlated with dropping out before graduation, and it is clear that in order to improve every student’s chance of success, schools need to focus on improving reading achievement (Allington, 2009). One of the most valuable resources that schools have at their disposal, aside from the students and the teachers, is time.

Schools struggle with providing remedial support in an organized, measurable way that encourages more reading (Allington, 2009). Many interventions that are planned for students who are struggling address isolated skills such as phonemic awareness or decoding with little time spent with the students reading; therefore, the remedial help often does not address reading engagement (Allington, 2009). Allington suggests that most of the time that a student spends receiving intervention should be dedicated to reading books at the student’s independent level as opposed to skill practice. Guthrie (2008) writes that even for students who struggle with decoding, his third category of struggling reader, that attention should be given to both decoding and engagement with meaningful texts. He shares Allington’s concern that addressing
isolated skills should be in addition to time spent reading and should not take the place of students engaging in meaningful reading experiences.

One suggestion is that the school day can be structured so that more time can be spent with students engaged in reading in both language arts and across the content areas. Time spent on intervention should mainly be spent reading (Allington, 2009). In addition to providing time to read, providing students with the opportunity to discuss what they have read and providing students with a wide variety of choices to select from can lead to gains in reading engagement and reading achievement (Allington, 2009); (Guthrie, 2008; Wilson, 2004). Students who struggle with reading can benefit from reading strategy instruction that is specific to the textbooks and nonfiction reading material being used in class (Wilson, 2004).

Clearly there are a significant number of middle school students across the United States continue to struggle with their literacy skills (Allington, 2009; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). The strategies for addressing the needs of struggling readers are well documented including providing students with opportunities to read, increasing reading engagement through autonomy, and providing strategy instruction in language arts and content area classrooms (Allington, 2009; Guthrie, 2008; Wilson, 2004).

In summation, a real challenge to providing these resources to students is developing an organized method for delivery of intervention and monitoring growth on a school level (Allington, 2009). An RTI model could potentially address the skill gaps that cause these students to struggle and with improved literacy skills these students would be a decreased risk of dropping out of high school (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).
Although a tremendous amount of research has been published supporting the potential of RTI to address the needs of struggling students, much of that literature is written specifically for the early elementary grades (Johnson & Smith, 2008).

**RTI as a Solution**

Because of the success of RTI at the lower grade levels, upper-grade level schools began looking at the model as a solution to address the number of students in middle school and high school who were struggling academically (King, Lemons & Hill, 2012; Duffy, 2007). In order to address the number of students struggling to read and write on grade level beyond the early elementary years, an RTI program can provide students with remediation and support outside the scope of the child study team and without a diagnosis of a learning disability since this model allows schools to deliver services to students who need remediation without waiting for a gap in achievement versus ability.

**Defining RTI.** Once a school has established that there is a need for an organized approach to aid struggling students, a clear understanding of RTI is needed. The RTI model was developed as a school-wide approach that could provide support services for students without waiting for students to fail or to be identified as having a learning disability (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). For students achieving below grade level, many schools use an IQ-achievement discrepancy approach for the identification of students with learning disabilities that require the identification of a specific learning disability in order for a struggling student to receive additional support. If a student is struggling, he or she can be referred to the child study team, which is the group of professions responsible for testing assessing whether the student qualifies for services.
This team of social workers, learning disabilities teacher consultants, and psychologists evaluate the child for a discrepancy in his or her ability compared to his or her performance. For students who are found to have lower ability, even if they demonstrate low performance, they do not receive special education services and are not entitled to any additional services from their schools even if they have deficits that could be remediated (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

What is considered to be a discrepancy can vary from district to district, and there are inconsistencies in the identification of learning disabilities among schools. Critics of the IQ-achievement model have noted that this model can lead to inequitable distribution of services (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). Advocates against this model support that students with a lower socioeconomic status who are tested for services are more often found not to have enough of discrepancy when compared to their middle-class classmates (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This means that students from families with lower incomes are more often considered to be low-achieving students who do not qualify for additional support or instruction. Also of concern with the IQ-achievement discrepancy approach is the over-identification of students from diverse backgrounds. In some districts minority subgroups of students are labeled as LD at disproportionately high rates when compared to general populations (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). Due to difficulties in meeting the diverse needs of middle school learners through using the traditional IQ-achievement discrepancy approach, schools have begun working to adapt Response to Invention models in the upper grades (King, Lemons & Hill, 2012). An added challenge of adopting an RTI model is that there are minimal points of reference beyond the early elementary years. The RTI model has been implemented and researched at the
elementary level for a longer period of time because it was developed to provide a structure for delivery early intervention and primary reading instruction (King, Lemons & Hill, 2012; Duffy, 2007).

In summary, the RTI model was created as a way to provide services to students who were struggling academically without having to establish that the student was learning disabled (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The RTI model can also be used an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model which requires that there must be a discrepancy between a child’s ability and his or her performance (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). RTI provides more flexibility in identifying students and in providing services.

**Typical components of RTI.** Although Brozo (2011) asserts that there is not a clear list of policies and procedures to follow in developing an RTI program, there are typical components that are involved. Yell, Shriner, and Katsiyannis (2006) assert that “a Response to Intervention model is designed to identify students who are having academic problems when the problems first become apparent and then matching evidence-based instruction to their academic needs” (p.13). The RTI model consists of several defining features. The crucial components include tiered instruction, which will be detailed in this section, high-quality classroom instruction for all students, progress monitoring, and school-wide screening to identify students who are struggling (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Allington, 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Duffy, 2007; King, Lemons & Hill, 2012).

In order to match the needs of learners, support is provided in three levels or tiers (Allington, 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Duffy, 2007; King, Lemons & Hill, 2012). Tier one instruction is the least intense form of intervention and is provided at the classroom level while tier two services are traditionally provided in small groups, and tier
three intervention is most often delivered to one or two students (Allington, 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Ridgeway et al., 2011).

Tier One instruction involves providing high-quality instruction to the entire general population of students through research-based classroom instruction (Ridgeway et al. 2011; Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle; 2007). If students are not successful in the whole-class setting, a teacher could then target their instruction to meet the needs of the students who need additional support through small group instruction within the classroom setting (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This additional support in the form of small group instruction to provide remediation would be considered tier two support. Students who are not successful with this second tier level of intervention are given more intensive support in the form of one-to-one or one-to-two support in which an intervention specialist works to provide more individualized instruction (Allington, 2008; Ridgeway et al., 2011).

If a school is using an RTI model, all students are considered to be a part of tier one instruction which requires high-quality, differentiated instruction from classroom teachers (Allington, 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Duffy, 2007). The goal of an RTI model is for 85% of students to have their learning needs met in the mainstream regular education. Universal screening is frequent, and if significantly more than 15% of students require additional support, the curriculum and instruction provided in the classroom should be reviewed for effectiveness (Johnson & Smith, 2011). A goal of this case study is to identify what measures of success have been put in place at this middle school to understand better the process of one school for identifying and proving remediation to students who need support.
The need for universal screening at the middle school level has been a topic of debate among those who research the effectiveness of RTI (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2010). Some researchers believe the resources of time and teachers could be put to better use and that schools have enough information from the history of each student in previous grades to determine who should qualify for services (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010). In order to preserve resources Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010) assert that in the upper grades, it no longer makes sense to allocate limited resources to screening for the purpose of identifying students at risk of academic failure. As an alternative, the researchers claim that it makes more sense to use teacher nomination or existing assessment data that the school has developed in order to identify students with academic difficulties. In other words, if teachers look at the past history of students or sort through existing resources such as standardized tests that students are already participating in, there is less of a need to create additional assessments to screen students for skill gaps and remediation needs.

It is essential in an RTI model that benchmarks are established, and students are continually assessed for progress (Ridgeway et al., 2011). A challenge of implementing an RTI program is determining what measures will be used to identify students for support and to measure growth. Educators have always strived to meet the learning needs of individual students; however, the difference with an RTI model is the emphasis on “an institutionalized, systematic, data-driven approach to determine which students may need extra support and to ensure appropriate levels of support” for the student who have been identified as struggling (Brozo, 2011, p.12). The goal of the model is to target instruction to the needs of the learners in order to provide appropriate levels of support and remediation.
Monitoring student growth and adjusting instruction accordingly are cornerstones of the RTI approach (Ridgeway et al., 2011). The RTI model screens all students through school-wide assessments and does not wait for students to fail over a long period of time. Continuous progress monitoring for all students resolves a significant challenge to supporting struggling students when a school only uses the IQ-achievement discrepancy model to address students performing below grade level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Progress monitoring for all students across a grade level is essential because it provides a more objective lens to evaluate student achievement and growth. There is no need to wait until the end of a school year to gather the child study team and begin testing for special service qualification when students are being assessed and provided with remediation throughout the school year.

The goal of the model is to target instruction to the needs of the learners in order to provide appropriate levels of support and remediation. Tiered instruction, high-quality classroom instruction for all students, progress monitoring, and school-wide screening to identify students who are struggling are the core features of an RTI program (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Allington, 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Duffy, 2007; King, Lemons & Hill, 2012). What schools are left to determine is what is considered high-quality instruction, how students will be screened, and what measurements will be used to assess student achievement. Monitoring student growth and adjusting instruction accordingly are essential components of the RTI approach (Ridgeway et al. 2011).

**Challenges to implementing RTI.** RTI is a possible solution, but it is not without significant challenges to overcome. Schools that have started implementing RTI programs at the upper-grade levels have run into multiple problems. As described in
chapter one in explaining the problem of practice for this case study, a significant challenge to implementing an RTI program at the middle school level is the lack of other programs and models to refer to.

It is possible that part of the reason middle school programs are less common is because RTI can be more challenging to plan and implement at the upper-grade levels. Bronze (2011, p.48) asserts that “secondary classrooms and schools as potential contexts for RTI-like systems are vastly more complex spaces than their primary and elementary level counterparts." (p.48). One reason for the added complexity at the secondary level is scheduling. Scheduling students was noted as a challenge in a case study of a middle school that was developing its own RTI program. Bender (2011) wrote, "while elementary schools can and should be in a position to change a student’s schedule whenever data indicate a need for a change, such modifications in middle and high schools are unrealistic."

Pyle and Vaughn (2012) identified areas of struggle from their three-year study of middle schools implementing an RTI model. Their report includes defining the roles and responsibilities of educational professionals, scheduling and structuring the school day to provide time for instructional support and fitting in a new program with graduation requirements as challenges to implementation. Pyle and Vaughn also noted that facilitating the practice of teachers discussing student achievement and collaborating to meet the academic needs of students could pose a challenge to an existing school culture if teachers are used to working in isolation.

The cost of RTI as concern is a common thread in most of the literature that is available. Vaughn, Cirino et al. (2011) attempted to address if RTI could be a cost
effective program, and concluded with a need for more research. Their year-long study of an RTI program focused on tier two interventions for sixth-grade students. Based on their work, the authors suggested that one year was not sufficient in raising the achievement of middle school students who were below grade level and suggested that more research was needed to determine the success of RTI programs over the span of two of more years. Vaughn, Cirino et al., (2011) also assert that one intervention period a day may not be enough to remediate a student who has been performing below grade level for multiple years and suggested that schools may need to adjust their expectations of how much growth is possible in a year. It was also suggested that schools may have to dedicate more time and more individualized instruction to students who are reading significantly below grade level. The cost of one-to-one instruction is a preventative challenge for some schools. Although resources for remediation are limited, Martinez and Young (2011) cautioned in their study of perceptions of RTI programs that despite the expense, schools should be encouraged not to use aides or peer tutors for students who require intervention and insisted that the most skilled teachers should work with the students who have the lowest performance.

A lack of differentiated instruction in the general education classrooms has also been a noted challenge. Johnson and Smith (2008) found teachers are not tailoring their instruction to individual students as a barrier to success in implementing an RTI program. For successful identification of struggling students, differentiated instruction must be taking place in the classroom. An even bigger challenge noted by Johnson and Smith (2008) was the lack of a systematic process to monitor the progress of students once they have been identified and are targeted to receive additional support.
Similar to the conclusion of Johnson and Smith (2008), Fuchs, Fuchs and Compton (2012) found that a lack of systematic process for implementing RTI in a school can be a struggle. Their report includes that successful implementation of RTI requires “ambitious intent, a comprehensive structure, and coordinated service delivery” (p.263). The researchers caution against a rush to orthodoxy explaining that “there has been too frequent unexamined acceptance of untested practices, which may not represent the smartest way of implementing multilevel prevention” (pp.276-277).

In summary, researchers have identified multiple challenges that schools encounter when implementing an RTI program. The cost of the program is only the beginning. Scheduling times for students to receive the remediation is another challenge (Vaughn, 2012). The lack of a systematic process to monitor the progress of students is a significant hurdle (Johnson & Smith, 2008; Fuchs, Fuchs & Compton, 2012). Another major struggle for middle schools that are in the process of implementing an RTI model is that there is limited research that documents the success of RTI leaving school with limited points of reference in developing a program for themselves (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs, Fuchs & Compton, 2010). It is clear that schools could use more guidance and support in taking on the challenge of developing a program.

**Educator perceptions of RTI.** As schools across the country have started implementing RTI programs, researchers have paid attention to educator responses to the model and its implementation. Perceptions of the success of RTI are mixed with teacher responses to new RTI programs being both positive and negative. Swanson et al. (2012) conducted focus groups and interviews to gather input from teachers regarding their perceptions of the model after five years of their school district implementing the model.
The researchers note that teachers commonly cited the benefits of RTI for identifying academic needs of students early, which allowed students to receive services quickly (p.119). Teachers in the study also cited increased opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues in problem-solving for students as a benefit to RTI. Bean and Lillenstein (2012) assert in their report on the changing roles of school personnel in relation to RTI that teachers must shift from working in isolation to working as a team with colleagues and administrators.

Finding the time to collaborate can be a challenge for teachers. Swanson et al. (2012) cited that teachers found that RTI meeting requirements strained their schedules. In order to collaborate with colleagues and discuss student achievement, teachers may have to meet before school, after school or during their prep periods. Teachers also noted that scheduling students for intervention was difficult. Finding time within a school day to provide remediation without the student missing important can be a challenge. In his work with middle schools that were planning and implanting RTI programs, Brozo (2011) noted that teachers were concerned with scheduling time work with students who were identified as needing additional support. Teachers felt the curriculum was already packed with content that is was impossible to cover in 48-minute class periods in addition to preparing for annual testing.

A significant conclusion of Martinez and Young (2011) was the fact that teachers had somewhat negative views of the RTI process. The teachers felt that good teachers have always followed the RTI model of tailoring instruction for individual students based on their learning needs, and they did not believe that the RTI process was anything different than what they had always done. The teachers did, however, concede that the
RTI model required more documentation of the work that they were doing with their students who struggle. Because teachers may become frustrated and disengage from the RTI process, Martinez and Young suggest that schools acknowledge and affirm the efforts of teachers in their implementation of the program.

Swanson et al. (2012) also noted that teachers found the amount of paperwork required to document measures of achievement and growth to be a source of frustration. In a related study of teacher perceptions of implementing an RTI model at the elementary level, teachers noted that turnover among the staff was a challenge because of the high levels of collaboration that are needed to monitor progress and provide services for students (Greenfield et al., 2010). The researchers also noted that teachers were not confident that they would continue to implement the model if their principal were assigned to another school the following year. Also, of significance was the fact that teacher perceptions were described by the researchers as more positive as the implementation process continued from the first year through the third year. Teachers were also described as perceiving themselves and the school culture as being more collaborative in addressing the needs of struggling learners.

The conclusion of Greenfield et al. (2010) relates to the work of Prewett et al. (2012) in finding that buy-in from the faculty was a key underpinning of the implementation process for RTI. In a study of 40 middle schools that were in the process of implementing an RTI program, researchers concluded that for successful implementation school leaders must “work with the existing culture to help establish a climate that facilitates a change in staff perceptions of roles and responsibilities” (Prewett et al., 2012, p.146).
Teachers have noted positive results from starting RTI programs. Benefits found in a study of teacher perceptions related to RTI included that teachers were excited for a process that could identify the academic needs of student early and allow students to receive services more quickly (Swanson et al., 2012). Researchers also noted that teachers described themselves and the school culture as being more collaborative in addressing the needs of struggling learners after implementing an RTI program (Greenfield et al., 2010).

**Limited evidence of success.** Despite the potential of an RTI model to improve the achievement of struggling students, there is limited evidence of its success. Brozo asserts that “RTI is far from a clearly structured, highly research-validated program with universally agreed-upon features; RTI is still more rhetoric than reality, still more of work in progress than a refined and developed product” (2011, p.8). Faculty buy-in could be easier if there were more evidence of success to present.

Few schools have documented their approach to implementing RTI or have followed the impact of the model on the performance of their students. Although there is a current shortage of scientific evidence supporting the success of RTI, many middle schools across the United States are implementing the model, and more research will become available (Brozo, 2011). Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010) conclude in their recent report that more research on effective RTI models is needed and assert that researchers may avoid examining middle and high schools because of scheduling conflicts. In addition, they found there is an added level of difficulty in working with adolescents who may not be compliant with receiving additional instruction or support from teachers and intervention specialists (Fuchs, Fuchs & Compton, 2010). The authors
of this report focused on comparing successful elementary school models and attempted to address why models of intervention in the upper grades are often not as successful.

There is limited research available in part because of the lack of resources for remedial reading programs beyond the elementary level. Gaps in the research mainly stem from the fact that RTI is relatively new in the upper-grade levels, and programs have only been established within the last several years (King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012). More research is necessary for targeting which specific interventions are successful in increasing achievement with middle school students who are reading below grade level. Martinez and Young (2011) also suggest that more research is needed to focus on the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the effectiveness of the RTI model. Vaughn, Cirino et al.,(2010) add that research that follows students for more than a year is also needed to analyze the long-term impact of RTI on student success. Clearly the RTI model has potential in enhancing student achievement in literacy and the future research that is conducted will be instrumental in allowing successful models to be duplicated in other schools.

Vaughn and Fletcher (2010) conclude that more research must focus on the students who do not respond to intervention and believe that many students in previous RTI studies may not have had adequate instruction prior to being referred for RTI services. They also support that the population of students receiving the most intense level of intervention should be limited to 2-5% of the total population of students, and in order for this to happen districts need to remediate as many students as possible before they come to the middle school.
In summary, there is a dearth of research to support middle schools in implementing their own RTI programs (Brozo, 2011; Fuch, Fuchs & Compton, 2010; King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012). Middle schools can reference what has been published regarding RTI at the elementary levels, but what is written may not always apply. In addition, the middle school presents its own unique challenges such as scheduling that would make it difficult to simply copy what is happening in the lower grades.

**Summation**

Middle school students across the United States continue to struggle with their literacy skills (Allington, 2009; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). An RTI model could potentially address the skill gaps that cause these students to struggle, and with improved literacy skills, these students would be a decreased risk of dropping out of high school (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Although a tremendous amount of research has been published supporting the potential of RTI to address the needs of struggling students at the early elementary grades, very little has been published focusing on middle school level implementation (Johnson & Smith, 2008).

At any grade level, there are core components of an RTI model. These features include tiered instruction, high-quality classroom instruction for all students, progress monitoring, and school-wide screening to identify students who are struggling (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Allington, 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Duffy, 2007; King, Lemons & Hill, 2012). School level monitoring student growth and adjusting instruction accordingly are important components of the RTI approach (Ridgeway et al. 2011).
means that it is not just classroom level assessments created by individual teachers that are determining what a school views as academic success and grade level performance.

It is important to address educator perceptions throughout the implementation process. The culture that exists in a school can be a challenge to implementation, especially if it centers on teachers working in isolation (Prewett et al., 2012). On a positive note, researchers have noted that teachers describe themselves and their school culture as being more collaborative in addressing the needs of struggling learners after implementing an RTI program (Greenfield et al., 2010).

There are potential benefits to adopting an RTI model. With this model, students do not need to have a learning disability in order to receive remediation (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Allington, 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Duffy, 2007; King, Lemons & Hill, 2012). RTI is a school-wide process for identifying the academic needs of student early, before a grade level failure. A significant goal is for students to be able to receive remediation more quickly (Swanson et al., 2012). Another significant goal of the RTI model is to prevent a disproportionately high rate of culturally and linguistically diverse students who are placed inappropriately in special education programs when districts use the previously mentioned IQ-achievement discrepancy model (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). Increased student achievement is the ultimate goal. By aligning instruction and assessment and developing a more cohesive program of instruction, student achievement can improve (Mellard & Johnson, 2008).

Despite the benefits and the desire for middle schools to implement RTI programs, there are significant challenges to overcome. Defining the roles and responsibilities of educational professionals, scheduling and structuring the school day to provide time for
instructional support, and fitting in a new program with existing graduation requirements are all challenges to implementation (Pyle and Vaughn, 2012). The potential cost of hiring additional staff is another significant challenge. Pyle and Vaughn also noted that facilitating the practice of teachers discussing student achievement and collaborating to meet the academic needs of students could pose a challenge to an existing school culture. At the same time that RTI programs are being implemented across the nation, our students continue to struggle with literacy by the millions (Allington, 2009; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003).

In conclusion, research supports that too many students are struggling in their literacy skills as they progress to the upper grades from elementary school (Allington, 2009; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). Although implementing an RTI program at the upper-grade levels has the potential to aid educators in addressing the achievement gap, there are challenges that have been noted to be associated with implementing an RTI program. What has been published to date supports that more research is needed to develop and refine RTI programs at the upper-grade levels in order to make them more effective. A case study of the implementation process for establishing an RTI program at the middle school level could be used as a tool for reflection and growth at the local level and a springboard for discussion at schools across the state and country that are in the stages of developing and refining their own models.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

The research for this project was conducted using a descriptive case study approach. Qualitative studies can focus on how participants make sense of events and how their perceptions informed their actions as opposed to determining precisely what happened (Maxwell, 2005). This research focuses on exploring the specific issue of planning, initiating, and implementing an RTI program. The program took place within a bounded system, a single suburban middle school in central New Jersey. Multiple sources of data described below informed the study and provided a rich context.

Justification

Although a case study is linear, it can allow for reflection and adjustments along the way, which was instrumental for this case study. The initial research design gave direction to the researcher in the course of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Gall et al., 2007). Yin (2009) describes a case study as “a linear but iterative.” The research followed the process Yin organizes into six steps including (a) planning the study, (b) a research design, (c) preparation for the study, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) reporting the findings” (p. 2).

This study was conducted using a descriptive single case study design (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009), this specific type of case study is used as a way to describe an intervention or phenomenon along with the real life context in which it occurred. The rationale for this design stems from the fact that there is limited research on the design and implementation of RTI models at the middle school level, and the middle school that is the focus of this study is one that is experiencing this process. Creswell (2007) asserts
that a case study examines a topic by exploring the phenomenon in a bounded system. In this case, the bounded system is one middle school.

**Research Questions**

One main research question focused on the experiences of the individuals involved in designing, implementing and revising the program guided this study. Additionally, sub-questions were developed to focus the study on identifying the struggles and successes of the program. The questions, explained in greater detail in the first chapter, are listed here.

**Central Research Question:**

What are the experiences of teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators in the development and implementation of a Response to Intervention (RTI) program at one suburban middle school in central New Jersey?

**Sub-questions:**

- What do teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators describe as the most significant challenges of the process of developing and implementing an RTI model?
- What do teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators describe as the most significant successes of the process of developing and implementing an RTI model?

**Research Question Design**

The most significant goal of the design for a case study is to ensure the data being mined throughout the study answers the research questions (Yin, 2009). The main goal of this case study was to gather input from teachers, administrators and intervention
specialists regarding the process of implementing a middle school RTI program. The questions were open-ended in order to gather qualitative data on the lived experience of professional educators involved in implementing the new RTI model.

Because qualitative research has a flexible design that evolves throughout the research process, the questions could have been revised as at a later point in the research process; however, the researcher found that they were sufficient to guide this study (Meadows, 2003). The questions were as broad as possible in order to gather as much as data as possible related to the implementation process. Creswell suggests that researchers using qualitative methods begin their questions with “what” or “how” (p.106) which conveys the evolving design of a case study.

Maxwell (2005) asserts that many qualitative studies focus on how the participants make sense of events and how their perceptions informed their actions as opposed to determining precisely what happened. For this study, the questions were developed to include titles because each of the different job positions played a different role in the process of developing and implementing the program. Depending on an individual’s role in the process, his or her thoughts and reactions to the same events could have been very different.

This study took a realist approach by seeking to uncover the perceptions and beliefs of the different individuals involved. The sub-questions were designed to allow an opportunity during the research process to analyze the data with each group, the teachers, administrators, and intervention specialists, in order to identify commonalities among each group. Also of importance is the idea that questions address both the development and the implementation process.
The goal was to gather reflections from these educational professionals about their challenges and successes from the conception of the idea to start an RTI program through to their perceptions of present-day practices at the time of the study. The research questions focus on one school’s process. Maxwell (2005) would categorize the questions for this study at particularistic because the questions are framed as a group of educators within a particular context.

Maxwell asserts that the primary concern of the study with particularistic questions “is not with generalization, but with developing and adequate description, interpretation, and explanation of the case” (p. 71). In this case, the focus was on the experiences of the individuals in one context, a single middle school. In conclusion, the goal of the research questions for this study is to help frame out a case study that will provide qualitative research. The data gathered provided a window into the process and the thinking of teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators as they developed and implemented an RTI program at the middle school level in one school.

**Participants**

**Identification.** The sampling design was purposeful as the study focused on uncovering the experiences of educators directly involved in the process of developing and implementing the program. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) define the case study as “the in-depth study of one or more instances of a phenomenon in its real-life context reflecting the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (p. 447). The researcher consulted with administrators and faculty members to determine which staff members were involved in the new program and received suggestions from participants for other potential sources of information.
Purposeful sampling does have limitations; however, this method can be one of the facets of a case study which leads to a rich and deeper understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Merriam, 2009). Purposeful sampling was used because it was essential to understand the perceptions of the professional stakeholders and the thinking that went into creating the new model. In this case, the focus was specifically on professional educators directly involved in planning and implementing the new model because they lived the process. The target population for this research project included middle school intervention specialists, administrators, and teachers who have been involved in the process of planning and implementing the RTI program at a single location.

Participants for this study included intervention specialists, teachers, and administrators who have been involved in the development of the program at the middle school. The researcher was able to interview four intervention specialists, four classroom teachers, and two administrators who were involved in developing and revising the program, in this case, study through observations and interviews. Each of these individuals represents a different perspective of the process, and it is essential to the study to represent accurately the experiences of the professionals involved.

**Recruitment.** For a case study to be successful, having access to the individuals who understand the case, the best was essential. In their work on examining rigor in qualitative research, Marshall et al. (2013) found that aside from selecting a research topic and identifying the appropriate research design to match, “no other research task is more fundamental to creating
credible research than obtaining an adequate sample” (p.11). This study focused on gaining the experiences and perspectives of individuals based on their role within the program as defined by their job titles with multiple representatives for each of the defined job titles.

For this study, ten participants were recruited. The three categories of professionals involved in this study included intervention specialists, teachers, and administrators. It was important that the professionals that are recruited were those directly involved in designing and implementing the program. This list was generated by consulting with both a building supervisor and director of student programs to identify teachers and intervention specialists involved in the program.

The intervention specialists included in the study were new to the district and brought in after it was determined at the central office that there was a need for the program. The classroom teachers were part of the planning and transition to an RTI model and worked with the RTI students and intervention specialists as part of their school day. The administrators included both a building level supervisor and a district level administrator, and both were part of the process of developing, initiating and implementing the program at the middle school.

In terms of demographics of the individual participants, there was a range of experience, gender, and socioeconomic status. The years of experience ranged from nine years to thirty years in education. Subjects included both males and females. Socioeconomic levels ranged of potential participants ranges from middle-class to uppermiddle class. All potential participants including teachers, administrators, and
intervention specialists have educational backgrounds that range from bachelor degrees to doctorates in the field of education.

Inclusion criteria involved inviting intervention specialists, administrators and teachers who were involved in the process of developing and implementing the program to participate in interviews. All potential participants will be invited to take part in the study. No potential participants who have been involved with the design or implementation of the RTI program will be intentionally excluded from an invitation to participate.

Volunteer participants were recruited by email after identifying a list of professionals, in consultation with a current intervention specialist, who have been involved with the design and implementation of the program. Professionals who were interested, as determined by their response to the email, were invited to an initial consent meeting at their convenience before or after school. The initial consent meetings took fifteen minutes to explain the project and the role of the participants. Teachers, administrators and intervention specialists who agreed to participate during the consent meetings were asked to take part in an individual interview scheduled at a later date convenient to each of the participants.

Participants who agreed to take part in the study were asked to engage in one 60 minute interview related to their experiences with developing and implementing the RTI program at the middle school level. Interviews were conducted one-on-one with the researcher at the participant’s convenience. Follow-up included checking data for accuracy and participants offered additional forms, agendas, and paperwork related to the
program for the document review. Follow up discussions took place at the convenience of participants in person, by phone or email.

Access. The initial step in this case study was to gain permission from the school district in order to collect data. The researcher gained access to the site by contacting the district superintendent. A formal copy of the proposal was presented to the district superintendent in order to provide a clear understanding of the research design, methodology, data collection procedures, and proposed analysis techniques. The superintendent reviewed the material and followed up with questions regarding protecting student privacy. These concerns were addressed through revising the description of the study to include that data specific to individual students in the RTI program would not be reviewed or included in the final report. Appendix One on page 133 includes the letter of request for permission to conduct the study which was signed by the superintendent.

Setting

The site of a descriptive case study is the foundation of the research as it allows the researcher to explore a specific phenomenon in its natural, real-life setting (Yin, 2009). Spending time at the site for a case study potentially increases the richness and the depth of the researchers understanding (Schwandt, 2007). Creswell (2007) describes that the goal of the time spent in the field is for the researcher to be as accurate as possible in developing an analysis of the experiences of participants.

This case study took place at one regional middle school in central New Jersey. The school pulls in students from a few local, suburban communities. The community
population provides rich diversity in every aspect. Reflective of the community, the socio-economic status of students varies widely.

The district in which the school is positioned prides itself on preparing a majority of its students for college. Community engagement is a core component of the district’s mission. The predominant goal of the district is to meet the varying needs of its diverse learners through special programs and differentiated instruction through in-class instruction as well as pull-out programs. The district developed the RTI program, as a revision of the basic skills program, in order to address the needs of struggling students who were not falling under the umbrella of special services provided through the district’s special education program.

**Data Collection**

A case study should have multiple forms of data in order to provide a rich, detailed description of the case (Yin, 2009). Depending on what is available to the researcher, Yin (2009) suggests six possible common sources of data that are relevant for mining data in a case study including (1) direct observation, (2) interviews, (3) archival records, (4) documents, (5) participant observation, and (6) physical artifacts. This case study was able to incorporate each of these common sources at various points throughout the research phases.

The data collection process was organized into two main phases. These phases are outlined below. Data was collected over a period of three months. All data was collected by email, on site at the middle school or through a visit to the school’s district office to meet with the supervisor of the RTI program for the district.
Document Review

Phase One was a document review of district program descriptions, board minutes, meeting notes, department memos, and curriculum documents related to RTI. In a recent report examining the value of reviewing documents in qualitative research, Bowen (2009) describes that “bearing witness to past events, documents provide background information as well as historical insight” (p.29). Bowen’s report summarizes the main contributions of a document review to a qualitative study as the following; provides context, suggests new questions to be asked, broadens the researcher’s knowledge of the case, contributes to tracking changes and developments within the case, and provides a tool to verify data gained from other sources. The documents reviewed in this study were especially helpful in contributing to the context that is needed to observe and understand participants and the RTI program.

The document review for this study included district memos regarding the initiation of the RTI program, a district manual that was developed by the district as part of the planning phase of the program, staff development agendas handouts, memos related to scheduling students for services, and materials related to the referral and identification process for students.

As agreed upon with the superintendent and stated in the plan, no data specific to individual students and their achievement was collected or included in the final report. To clarify, the researcher did not review spreadsheets of student performance on state standardized tests or review individual student portfolios of work as part of this research project. The objective of the document review was to gain a clear understanding of the
sequence of events and thought processes of the professionals involved in designing and implementing the RTI program.

**Interviews**

The second phase involved conducting semi-structured individual interviews with four classroom teachers, four intervention specialists, and two administrators. Interviews can offer richer and more extensive material than other forms of data such as surveys; therefore, the researcher planned to interview as many involved stakeholders as time would allow (Yin, 2011).

As much as possible, the interviews were conducted on-site at the middle school in order to gain a better understanding of the program. Yin (2011) writes that direct observation in the field setting is “one of the most distinctive features of a case study” (p.11). Being on-site allowed the researcher to understand better the physical environment, human action and real-world events that took place (Yin, 2011).

In order to facilitate accuracy and the transcribing of the interviews, a digital data recorder was used to capture the interviews only with the permission from the participants, and the audio files were destroyed upon completion of the transcriptions after checking the transcriptions for accuracy. The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed using the service Rev, which provided typed transcripts in the form of .pdf files.

Participants were provided with open-ended questions to explore their experiences with developing and implementing the program, see Appendix Four on page 139. Yin (2011) writes that open-ended interviewing questions allow participants to
share their construction of reality and individual thoughts about the specific situation, which can provide important insight into the case. Similarly, Patton (1990) emphasized, “The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone’s mind…but to assess the perspective of the person being interviewed” (p. 278). The questions were open-ended in order for participants to be able to elaborate and share their own perceptions and experiences.

**Alignment of the Research Question**

As identified in the main research question of this study, the focus of this research was to uncover the experiences of teachers, intervention specialists and administrators in the development and implementation of a Response to Intervention (RTI) program at one suburban middle school in central New Jersey. The document review focused on gaining an accurate, clear understanding of the planning process, the initial stages of designing the program, implementation, revisions, and continued management of the RTI model in one school. The interview phase of the study centered on addressing the sub-questions of this study with a focus that is more specific to uncovering the successes and strengths of the program as perceived by the professionals involved in the process of developing and implementing the program.

**Data Analysis**

An “along-the-way” approach was used to analyze the data. During each phase of the collection process, the researcher processed the data that was collected. Overall, the research design and data analysis process followed the General Inductive (GIA) approach as outlined by Thomas (2003).
1. Preparation of raw data files (“data cleaning”)

2. Close reading of text

3. Creation of categories

4. Overlapping coded and uncoded text

5. Continuing revision and refinement of category system

The initial step of analysis for qualitative data is to prepare and organize the data (Creswell, 2007). For the document review phase, the raw data files including program descriptions, department meeting agendas, district resources materials, referral process documents, staff development materials, and other collected documents were prepared for analysis by organizing the documents into spreadsheets to review, annotate, and code. As this is a case study, the focus of the analysis was to develop a detailed description of the case and its setting, an RTI program at one middle school (Creswell, 2007).

After phase one of data collection, the researcher developed an initial description of each document and explored emerging codes using lean coding. Creswell defines this type of coding as “assigning very few codes during the first reading of a manuscript in an attempt to reduce codes to broad themes” (p. 244). Creswell asserts that using fewer themes is best when writing a detailed qualitative report which is the goal of this case study. After gaining a better understanding of the data that had been collected through lean coding, an exploratory approach was applied for coding the data from this study (Saldaña, 2013). In applying an exploratory method of coding, the data was reviewed three more times.

During this round of coding, for each of the documents and interview transcriptions, In Vivo Coding was used. In Vivo Coding is “the practice of assigning a label to a section of data, such as an interview transcript, using a word or short phrase
taken from that section of the data” (King, 2008). This method was especially useful in coding the interviews as In Vivo Coding can utilize a participant’s own words as the code for a particular passage (Saldàña, 2013). For the next round of coding Descriptive Coding was applied in order to process and synthesize larger sections of that data. The final round of coding employed Provisional Coding (Saldàña, 2013, p. 144). The third round analyzed the data related to a list of codes based on the theoretical framework and literature review for study.

Interviews were sorted into a database of spreadsheets to read closely and code. The researcher continued to review the coding categories and refine the themes that were emerging as the data was reviewed. The four forms of data analysis advocated for by Stake (1995) were employed in this study including categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, establishing patterns, and naturalistic generalizations.

**Data Storage**

Aside from the protection of the confidentiality of the participants, data security of the materials collected was insured. The identity of each participant was protected through the use of pseudonyms known only to the researcher. Data was collected and maintained on a single laptop password protected by the researcher. Data was also backed up on a password-protected Google account with Google Docs. Transcriptions will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study through deletion on the laptop and the Google account. The data will not be used for any further studies or reports.

Additionally, any physical materials such as documents, field notes, and memos were stored in a locked filing cabinet drawer with a key that is only controlled by the researcher. Any audio files from interviews, which were stored on a password-protected
iPod device, were destroyed upon transcription and the identity of participants was removed from transcriptions.

**Trustworthiness**

Precautions were taken in order to ensure a credible study with reliable data and a valid analysis. In line with Merriam’s (1998) assertion that validity and reliability are accounted for before the investigation in experimental research while “rigor in qualitative research derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description,” the researcher focused on gathering as much data as possible related to answering the questions that guided this study.

Prolonged engagement was employed; the researcher interacted with participants over a period of four months in order to gather accurate, descriptive data and clearly understand the RTI program as implemented. In addition, the researcher addressed researcher bias from the onset and reflected on any potential biases that could develop throughout the process in order to try to eliminate any bias from influencing the results. An important objective of this study was to report accurately a rich depiction of the setting, events, and perspectives that participants provide (Merriam, 1998).

**Ethical Considerations**

For this project, every attempt was made to protect participants and to report accurately their experiences related to the topic of this study. Mills (2007) asserts that ethical considerations in a research project involve “doing the right thing through the entirety of the project.” The main goal of this case study was to represent accurately the experiences of participants with an equal emphasis on protecting participants from any
potential harm. Creswell describes that “the researchers need to protect research participants; develop trust with them; promote the integrity of the research; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on the organizations and institutions; and cope with new challenging problems” (p.87). Before the commencement of the study and recruitment of participants, all relevant procedures required by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board were completed. Documents from this process are attached at the end of this report. The study did not begin until the approval to begin the study was received from the university.

All participants have been afforded the protections outlined in the Health & Human Services (HHS) regulations for protecting human subjects and the relevant Northeastern University policies and procedures. There were no risks or discomforts anticipated for participants. There was a very limited likelihood of loss of confidentiality, and had there been a loss of confidentiality; there were no anticipated consequences for participants.
Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present the findings from the data that was collected and analyzed during this case study. In order to frame the findings, this chapter will begin with a review of the main objectives and guiding research questions followed by an overview of the data collection and analysis procedures. A site description and an overview of participants are included to give context to the findings of the study. Next a summary of the findings and an explanation of the themes that emerged from the document review and participant interviews are presented. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings and will lead the reader into Chapter 5, which will be a discussion of the findings.

Research Purpose and Questions

As discussed in Chapter 1, middle schools across the country have been working to create and implement their own Response to Intervention models in their schools with few points of reference. This single case study, focused on exploring the process one school experienced in designing a program, allows other educators and researchers a glimpse inside one school’s successes and struggles. As more teachers, intervention specialists and administrators take on the challenge of creating their own programs to remediate skills for struggling readers at the upper-grade levels; this study can be another point of reference. The questions for this study were developed to gather as much information as possible regarding one school’s experience with planning and implementing their own RTI program.
This study employed a primary research question and a set of sub-questions. The primary research question focused on the experiences of the individuals involved in designing, implementing and revising the program. Additionally, sub-questions were developed to identify the struggles and successes of the RTI program.

**The Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

As described in more detail in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, the research was conducted using a descriptive case study approach. This method was used in order to explore a situation where the intervention that is being examined did not have a clear set of outcomes (Yin, 2003). Additionally, this type of research could focus on how participants made sense the events that occurred and how their perceptions have informed their actions versus determining precisely what happened (Maxwell, 2005).

The data that was gathered through reviewing documents and conducting interviews focused on gaining a clear understanding of the process that the professionals involved experienced in planning, developing and implementing the RTI program at one middle school. An inductive analysis process (Thomas, 2006) was applied to the data collected from the documents reviewed and the interviews that were conducted. The overall analysis process included three phases: (1) an initial review and descriptive summary based on the initial documents and interview transcriptions that were collected (2) a content review and identification of initial codes within each document or transcription through multiple rounds of coding and (3) a re-classification of the codes into major categories/themes based on final review of the content of the codes.

An initial document review was conducted using documents gathered from the district’s website and the forms and program descriptions that were gathered from
participants at the time of the initial consent meetings. During the scheduled interviews that followed, more documents were provided and analyzed using the constant comparative method. The objective of this sequence was to provide a rich context and a clear understanding of the timeline of important events involved in the development of the program followed by the insights and perceptions of the individuals involved.

The artifacts reviewed and analyzed for the document review component of this research project provided the researcher with details regarding the programs design and plans for implementation. One document in particular, a 47 page RTI guide developed by the assistant superintendent, was especially helpful in developing an understanding of the process of program implementation and the supports that were put in place at the district level. While the document review focused on providing an objective overview of the process that was used to design and implement the new intervention program, the individual interviews sought to gain a better understanding of the insights and perceptions of the professionals directly involved in creating the new program. The next section of this report provides a detailed site description in order to provide context for that data that will be presented in this chapter.

**Site Description**

This section of the report is intended to provide context for that data is presented next section of this chapter. This sub-section of Chapter 4 provides a description of the student population and describes the organization of the school, student scheduling, and academic programs. A description of the school’s performance according to annual state evaluation reporting is included followed by a summary of the section.
**Student population.** The middle school is one of eleven schools in the regional suburban district. The school serves just over 1400 students in grades seven and eight. The student population is divided almost equally between male and female students. As cited in the New Jersey Department of Education’s School Performance Report (2014), the specific demographics for this school include that just over 18% of the student population at the middle school is identified as having a learning disability. The state report also includes that 9% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch in 2014. Additionally, at the time of the report, .5% of the student population was identified as Limited English Proficient according to state criteria.

**Organization of the school.** Classes are organized into grade-level interdisciplinary teaching teams with an average of 120 students assigned to each team. Students are scheduled each day for science, history, two periods of reading and language arts, a leveled math class, physical education, a cycle class of art, music, graphic design, home economics, and a daily world language class. School begins at 7:30 am and ends at 2:15 pm with class periods of 40 minutes. Students also have a 28-minute lunch.

Teaching teams are designated as either special education or RTI teams. Special education teams have resource room and in-class support special education certified teachers working with content area teachers. RTI teams have Intervention Specialists assigned to work with tiered students on the team in math or literacy. Each grade level has four teams designated as special education teams and two teams designated as RTI.

Teachers have five instructional periods a day. In addition, team teachers attend a team meeting period daily for one full period and supervise the lunchroom, a restroom or a study hall of students not participating in world language for another period. Teachers
also have a lunch period and a prep period each day. Teachers are required to offer one day of extra help from 2:30 pm to 3:40 pm when the late bus arrives for students in need of extra help. In addition, a majority of content area teachers offer help during lunch each day.

**Scheduling and academic programming.** The school does not track students by performance level or academic achievement for most classes; however, math classes are leveled by achievement according to a matrix of state standardized testing, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing, and department created assessments. Language arts, science, and history have enriched sections of one section per team. Close to 25% of students take one or more enriched classes which provide more opportunities for project-based learning and student-led inquiry. Students are scheduled for enriched classes by the application. Enriched sections are considered a way to differentiate the academic program for students who excel in a specific content area.

According to school staff members, the intention is not for students to be grouped together each day for every class period, but to allow students an opportunity to experience a more challenging, in-depth curriculum than the mainstream classroom. In addition, the school has an extensive special education program which provides resource room support and in-class support for academic content areas for students who have been identified as qualifying for special education services.

**Academic achievement.** Overall, the middle school has high academic achievement. Academic success is a central focus of the community, the administration, and the teachers. The school routinely has the vast majority of students pass the state tests
for math and language arts. The students who struggle to pass the state tests are provided with additional coursework when they transition to the high school. The New Jersey Department of Education’s School Performance Report (2014) cites the passing rate for the 11th grade High School Proficiency Assessment in the district as above 99%.

The middle school’s most recent ratings determined by the New Jersey Department of Education’s School Performance Report (2014) showed that the school’s academic performance was rated as “very high” when compared to other middle schools across the state. In the same report, the middle was also rated “very high” compared with peer schools. The report included that “peer schools are schools that have similar grade levels and students with similar demographic characteristics, such as the percentage of students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch, Limited English Proficiency programs or Special Education programs.” In other words, the middle is performing well based on the state criteria being used to assess student achievement at the time of this report.

Participants

This study focused on the experiences of the professionals directly involved in the evolution of the RTI program. This study centered on the participation of key stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of the RTI program. The researcher identified four intervention specialists, four classroom teachers and two administrators directly involved in the development of the program.

Potential participants were contacted by email and agreed to participate in an informed consent meeting to explain the study. Participants willing to participate in the study agreed to a 60-minute interview to describe their experiences related to the RTI program at the middle school. In addition, participants were asked to provide any
nonconfidential documents such as referral forms, meeting agendas, program descriptions or memorandums related to the program that would be useful to the researcher in learning as much as possible regarding the history and current practices of the model to be used in the document review.

Professionals involved in the program are seasoned educators with years of experience working in education ranging from 9-30 years. Collectively the group had a range of experience that covered teaching at the early childhood levels through high school. The participants also had a range of their own educational experiences at the time of this study. Each of the participants had taken coursework at the graduate level after completing their BA degrees and teaching certifications. Graduate work ranged from taking additional coursework in teaching to completing a doctoral program with a majority of the participants having completed a Master’s Degree related to teaching and learning. In summary, the participants of the study represent a range in the number of years teaching at the middle school, but each participant was considered an experienced teacher at the time of the study.

Summary of Findings

The following section of this chapter will present the themes that emerged from an analysis of the interview data and the document review of materials gathered from key stakeholders involved in developing and implementing the RTI program. Guided by the topics that were covered in the interview questions, seven themes emerged to addressed the central research question, which focused on understanding the experiences of the professionals involved in the development and implementation of the RTI program.
Perceptions of the new program varied in terms of what participants considered to be successful components of the new RTI program. The professional role that a participant filled in the process of developing and implementing the program often influenced whether a facet of the change to the new model was viewed positively or negatively.

The sub-questions helped to focus the data that was collected in terms of the overall challenges and successes of the RTI program at the middle school. Challenges teachers identified included understanding program goals, communication, professional roles, collaboration, and scheduling intervention as challenges while the impact on students and the selection criteria were viewed as successes of the program.

Intervention specialists and administrators had similar perceptions. Both groups felt that goals of the program, collaboration and communication were successes of the program. The impact of the program on students and the selection criteria were viewed as successes of the program. Challenges identified included defining professional roles and scheduling intervention. Overwhelming, all of the participants agreed the impact of the program on students was a success. The following section of this chapter will explore each of the themes that emerged from this case study.

**Emerging Themes**

This finding of this study included seven themes that emerged from the data as a result of coding the data. The themes were as follows: program goals, communication, professional roles, collaboration, student selection criteria, scheduling intervention and impact on students. A definition of each theme is provided in Table 1 below.
Table 1

Summary of Themes and Related Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Goals</td>
<td>The overall goals of implementing the RTI program as defined by the program description and perceived by participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Methods by which professionals communicated, formally or informally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Roles</td>
<td>The job descriptions and responsibilities for professionals involved in the RTI program organized by specific job title (ex. Teacher).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Opportunities for professionals to work together engage in planning, reflection, or discussions related to the program and/or students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Selection Criteria</td>
<td>The process and materials used to determine which students received services and the level of support that would be provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling Intervention</td>
<td>The setting and time that additional support would be provided through either in-class support or a pull-out model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Students</td>
<td>The perceived impact of the RTI program on students as determined by the professionals involved in this study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Program Goals. The first theme emerged clearly from both the document review and the interviews that were conducted. The district manual regarding RTI had an entire section specifically devoted to describing the overall goals of the new RTI model that was going to be implemented. In addition, each participant discussed his or her perception as to why the program was initiated. The following paragraphs will describe
how the goals of the program were determined, a description of the goals that were
developed, and the responses of the stakeholders to these goals.

The main goals of the RTI program were determined at the central office level for
the district. According to the district’s guide for the district and school administrators, the
program was “designed to meet the needs of struggling learners in a flexible
environment.” The assistant superintendent of the district sent out a memo explaining to
administrators that, in alignment with the 2004 IDEA, the district was developing a new
process for serving students who were struggling academically without having to “take
into consideration whether a student had a severe discrepancy between achievement and
intellectual ability.” A major goal of the program was to create “a process that would
determine if a student was responding to scientifically-based interventions as part of a
multi-assessment determination that a student was in need of special education services.”

The same memo that was distributed to district administrators describing the main
goals of the RTI model explained that RTI would not function as a pre-referral process
for special education services. The assistant superintendent included in the memo that the
“the ultimate goal is to provide early, effective services at a necessary level of intensity
so that students maximize their academic and behavioral potential and proficiency.”

Additionally, the memo from the Assistant Superintendent explained that the
Math/Literacy Support (MLS), also known at the Basic Skills Instruction Program (BSI)
program in the district was not meeting the needs of the students in the district as
determined by analysis of student achievement data conducted at the central office level.
The report also found that the effects of the district’s Reading Recovery program were not sustained over time. An important goal of the new RTI model was to replace the district’s MLS/BSI program.

All of the participants who participated in the interview process indicated that the RTI program was developed to replace the Basic Skills Instruction program that was in place at the time. One of the Intervention Specialists interviewed offered the following explanation of why the program was created:

The program was implemented to help struggling students who were not classified. RTI replaced the former basic skills teachers. The basic skills teachers did not have to be certified in reading or mathematics. The intervention specialists raised the level of instruction provided for these students. The goal of the program is to fill in skill gaps for these students in the hope these now mastered skills will help the student be more successful in the regular curriculum.

From the both the document review and the interviews it became clear that the essential goal of the new RTI program was to provide intervention in math and literacy for struggling students. With the district’s former MLS/BSI program model to supplement instruction, the instructors who were working with struggling students did not have to be certified teachers, but did need to be in possession of a bachelor’s degree. A teacher who worked on an MLS/BSI team before the RTI program was developed explained:

RTI was put in place because the feeling was the basic skills instruction with a classroom assistant was not meeting the needs of students. The idea was that if a certified, experienced teacher was working with students, the students would experience more growth.
The interviews with intervention specialists, teachers and administrators confirmed the Assistant Superintendent’s report that the MLS/BSI program was not working to improve student achievement and needed to be revised. Professionals at every level agreed that an important goal of the new model would be to positively impact achievement for students who were struggling within the general education population.

Teachers and intervention specialists were acutely aware that as their students moved up to the high school, there are greater expectations placed on students to be able to read more complex texts in all of their classes and complete the work independently. Teachers and intervention specialists also expressed concerns about the increased amount of writing. Teachers who participated in the interview expressed that they had been clear that the old MLS/BSI model was being replaced to better address the specific learning needs of struggling students. However, the teachers were unclear as to how RTI would be different other than replacing the aids with certified, experienced teachers. This leads to the next theme of communication.

**Communication.** Another significant theme that developed from the interviews conducted for this project was communication. Participants from every professional role discussed their perceptions regarding how the new program was communicated to the staff as well as how communication took place as the program started in the middle school. This theme emerged as both a success and challenge of the program. The interviews revealed that teachers were notably displeased with how the program was initially communicated and found the communication within the school during implementation to be less successful than administrators and intervention specialists viewed it to be. The following section of this report will be organized into two
subsections including *communication from the central office level to the school* followed by a description of *communication within the RTI program at the school*.

**Central office communication to the school.** The RTI program was developed at the district level before the program was communicated to individual schools and building level administrators. One of the methods of communication was a guide that was developed by the assistant superintendent to communicate her vision from the new program to the rest of the district. The guide provided an overview of what the new program would look like in terms of profession roles, building level expectations, and annual meeting calendars. The guide clearly defined the roles of professionals within each building and at the district level which is discussed in the next section of the report.

In terms of communication, there were some staff members who found the communication of the new program to be surprising.

When the new model was implemented, it was explained that the RTI model would be put in place using a three-tiered system for placement. Students who were the most in need of instruction support and performing more than a grade level below their peers in literacy would be considered Tier 3 and would work with an intervention specialist each day for targeted instruction. Students who were struggling with grade level work could also work with the intervention specialist through small group instruction and push-in support as Tier 2 students. Tier 1 students were considered to be every other student in the grade level who would receive support from their classroom teacher through differentiated instruction during the regular instructional time. Administrators were tasked with communicating the model to teachers in their schools.
Because the district RTI program was being put in place to replace the district’s Basic Skills Instructional (BSI) program, there was a potential for staffing changes. When the new model was communicated, the description of the program also included information regarding layoffs of the staff members who were part of the BSI program. One teacher described how the changes were communicated to the staff at the time the program was being shared from the district level to the individual schools:

Probably the way they learned about wasn’t the best way in the whole world. It was an end of the year spring PowerPoint presentation, and it just said these are the changes that we’re bringing to the district. It listed that all of the BSI teachers were being replaced with Teaching Specialists. Then everyone was like, “Oh, what does that mean?” That’s when people realized that jobs would be lost.

After the initial plan had been communicated to the individual schools, BSI teachers were informed that they would be allowed to interview for the intervention specialist positions in order to continue their employment in the district in the fall if they had the proper certification.

At the middle school, none of the BSI teachers moved into the Intervention Specialist roles because of the certification requirements. The positions were filled with teachers from outside of the district and the new hires were informed that would be learning more about their roles as the first year progressed.

During the first year of the new RTI program, communication was mainly disseminated to the schools from the central office through the new intervention specialists. Intervention Specialists had monthly meetings at the district office to learn more about their roles and the district vision for what RTI should look like in each
school. At times, this presented somewhat of a challenge for the individuals in the Intervention Specialist positions who felt they were being asked to communicate new information and changes to the seasoned staff members in the building who were not always receptive to the information.

**Communication within the RTI Program at the School.** During the first year of the program, intervention specialists had many opportunities to meet and share information regarding the program and the students that they were serving. Communication among the intervention specialists was mostly conducted in person during weekly meetings at the middle school. Because of the weekly meetings together, and the monthly meetings with the central office, the intervention specialists perceived that there was clear communication among the intervention specialist staff. The monthly district meetings and staff development training were in place for the first two years of the program.

Teachers involved in the RTI program perceived that there was less communication than what was necessary. One teacher described the following concern:

> There were unclear expectations from the top down. Communication was missing. Until we had a mid-year meeting with administrators where we were told the RTI was meant to be a pull-out program, not push in and students should be excused from work they miss in class when working with the Intervention Specialist, teachers were not sure what was expected.

Intervention specialists also felt challenged in communicating with classroom teachers. The intervention specialists were assigned to work with students spread among four to five teachers, and keeping up with what was happening across so many classrooms felt overwhelming. There were not specifically scheduled meetings for teachers and
intervention specialists to discuss RTI students or the program; however, there were daily
meetings with time available each day depending on what else was being discussed
or reviewed at the meeting for teachers and intervention specialists to talk.

Professional Roles. The specific roles of staff members involved in the RTI
program was another significant theme that emerged. The document review provided
descriptions for profession roles that were defined by the central office administration
before the program was implemented. During the interviews, the professionals who
participated in the interview process shared their reactions to the roles that were created
with the new program. The defining and adapting to the new professional roles of the
RTI model proved to be a challenging aspect of transitioning to the new model. This
section of the report will first describe the roles of teachers, intervention specialists, and
administrators, as defined by the district assistant superintendent at the time the program,
was implemented. A description of the participant’s perceptions of the newly created
roles will follow.

Professional roles related to the program were determined in the planning stage of
the program. When the program was initiated, the assistant superintendent developed a
plan for what the program would look like in each school across the district. As part of
the framework that was developed at the central office level, roles within the RTI
programs would be assigned to professionals based on their job titles. Roles were
organized into district level staff and building level staff. Table 2 illustrates the job titles
and responsibilities that were defined by the assistant superintendent at the district level
and Table 3 illustrates the job titles and responsibilities that were defined by the assistant
superintendent at the school level:
### Table 2

**Roles and Responsibilities of District RTI Staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Level Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>Develop the framework for the district. Ensure that district staff members understand the purpose of RTI. Assist building principals in establishing school level student achievement goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director of Special Services</td>
<td>Provide staff development to special education staff and district supervisors regarding the interplay between RTI, Section 504 of the American Disabilities Act, and Special Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>504 Coordinator</td>
<td>Assist in making determinations regarding the need for 504 plans related to learning, behavior or health as part of the RTI problem-solving process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor of Special Programs</td>
<td>Direct program supervisor of RTI, assist in providing professional development for RTI staff, serve as a resource to schools in implementing their individual programs across the district, and coordinate the collection and distribution of student achievement data regarding the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor of School Counseling</td>
<td>Train counselors in their roles related to RTI and ensure that counselors can provide relevant information regarding a referred student’s social, emotional, behavioral and academic history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Area Supervisors</td>
<td>Serve as a resource to principals and RTI committees during the problem-solving process, serve as a resource for Intervention Specialists, and consult with the Supervisor of Special programs regarding assessments, data analysis, and progress monitoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Supervisors</td>
<td>Provide assistance in determining whether a student should be referred for special education or their needs could be served in the general education population through RTI.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

**Roles and Responsibilities of Building Level RTI Staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Level Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Establish and maintain an RTI team, collaborate with district supervisors, and report annually student achievement and the work of the RTI team to the Assistant Superintendent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Specialist</td>
<td>Be a resource for the RTI referral process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Gather relevant information for referred students to present at RTI Team meetings, communicate with parents regarding student achievement and behavior, monitor student behavior and achievement, and advise students in meeting long-term and behavioral goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Nurse</td>
<td>Serve as a resource for the RTI team in situations of developmental, academic or behavioral manifestations or physical disabilities. Work with the team in determining if a 504 is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Study Team Member</td>
<td>The school psychologist, learning consultant or school social worker who assists in making a determination regarding a special education referral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Specialist (s)</td>
<td>Work with a “caseload” of students who have been referred to RTI to provide intervention. Assist in the collection of assessment data on students and report progress to teachers, collaborating with the teacher on instruction and intervention planned and implemented for the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher(s)</td>
<td>Serve as the primary source of information regarding a student and his or her progress academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. Collaborate with other professionals in planning support and intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>Serve as a resource for instructional strategies for at-risk students that could be applied in the general education environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The roles that are defined in Table 2 and Table 3 were determined before the program was implemented. The roles were developed by the Assistant Superintendent in collaboration with the Director of Special Programs, and then this information was disseminated to the rest of the school district.

Principals were given flexibility in developing their own RTI teams at the building level. Because the middle school was organized into teaching teams with guidance counselors assigned to each team, the RTI meetings were held during team meeting time as needed. The intervention specialist would invite the assistant principal to attend as needed for a new student referral or a potential change to a student’s program.

The challenge of defining professional roles related to the RTI program within the district and within the middle school came up frequently during the interviews. Even though the roles were defined by the Assistant Superintendent, there were some challenges with staff members understanding and accepting how different professionals would function within the new model. Teachers and intervention specialists felt as though their roles were sometimes in conflict. The following excerpt illustrates one intervention specialist’s description of her role in conflict with the teacher’s role in instruction:

Teachers were not thrilled that as Intervention Specialists, we were not assigned to report to them or take direction from them like the basic skills aides had done. They were also not very comfortable with us pulling students from class to focus on targeted skills because the teachers felt their students were missing important
instruction. It became a balancing act of working with each teacher to find times and activities that students could miss without consequences.

Similarly, a teacher described the challenge of adapting to new professional roles from her perspective:

I'd say the biggest challenge was when the IS worked with general education teachers who worked under the old system of BSI. Those teachers didn't necessarily see the IS as a specialist and thought the program should operate as it did in the past with the IS acting like an aide in the classroom. Defining exactly what RTI and the role of an intervention specialist was and how it should work was unknown in that first year. Everyone was trying to define it, and no one had a clear idea of what it should be.

Another intervention specialist addressed the same concern in terms of defining professional roles:

Teachers missed their aids and were resentful of having a second teacher in the classroom. They also did not want students to be pulled out for small group instruction nor did they want RTI students to receive special attention during class time.

Having new positions was compounded by the challenge of transitioning from a previous model that had been in place for fifteen years. Teachers expressed having close relationships with their previous assistants and felt a sense of loss when the assistants were removed from their classrooms. With the changing program and new professional roles, the next challenge became finding time to work together to make the new model work.
Collaboration. Collaboration was another significant theme that emerged from analyzing the data. The document review, specifically examining the district handbook, revealed that collaboration was an important objective of the RTI model. There were planned weekly opportunities for stakeholders to work together in meeting the learning needs of students as a foundation of the new program. The subsequent interviews supported this conclusion, although not everyone found collaboration to be a success of implementing an RTI program. Teachers most clearly found collaboration with intervention specialists to be a struggle while intervention specialists were content with the opportunities they had to work with other intervention specialists. This section of the report will first describe the planned collaboration opportunities that were put in place when the RTI program was implemented as dictated by the assistant superintendent. The next subsection of the report, collaboration at the building level, will present the perceptions of participants regarding the challenges and successes related to collaborating will other professionals in implementing the RTI program.

Planned collaboration. The RTI program was designed at the district level with collaboration as the foundation of the program. The district guide developed by the assistant superintendent outlined a suggested schedule for professional collaboration within each school that included weekly RTI meetings. These meetings were intended to bring together teachers, interventional specialists, administrators, guidance counselors, and the school nurse as needed. Ideally, the team would meet to discuss new referrals, review the progress of current students, gather achievement for school data reports and problem-solve together. The reality of the school’s schedule made weekly meetings a challenge to bring together representatives from each of the specified areas. Instead,
Intervention Specialists met daily with classroom teachers and guidance counselors who shared the same students. When new students were referred for the RTI program, the assistant principal overseeing the RTI program would attend the team meeting with the teachers, intervention specialists, and guidance counselors.

For students who were determined to be part of the RTI program as a Tier Two or Tier Three student, classroom teachers, and intervention specialists were directed to collaborate on a plan for the student that would involve push-in support from the intervention specialist as well as pull-out support. The challenge of scheduling the support for struggling students is addressed later in this report. As part of their collaboration, teachers and intervention specialists were also directed to share data and monitor each student’s growth together in order to plan for future instruction.

**Collaboration at the building level.** This subsection addresses the challenges and successes that professionals identified as part of the program design and implementation related to professional collaboration. Depending on a participant’s professional role, there were variations in perceptions related to how successful collaboration within in the school was as related to the RTI program. Intervention specialists tended to believe that collaboration was more positive and meaningful than classroom teachers.

One intervention specialist described her experience related to collaboration during the first year of the program:

We attended district meetings and developed assessments, procedures, and record keeping forms. We worked collaboratively with each other to have a "uniform approach” and then helped educate the general education teachers about what we do.
Intervention specialists seemed to feel more ownership of the program’s design and implementation compared to classroom teachers. During the initial years of the program, intervention specialists were pulled for workshops and staff development training each month and were able to collaborate at both the building and district level giving them the perception that their voices and experiences were a valued component of the new program. Classroom teachers were not provided with any additional support or training.

A classroom teacher expressed her concerns regarding her perception of a lack of collaboration among professionals in implementing the RTI program:

No meetings have taken place with the Supervisor of RTI and the classroom teachers which I feel is grossly inadequate.

Another teacher shared similar concerns and added that more input from teachers needed to be gathered in terms of developing the program and providing students with academic support. There were many opportunities for intervention specialists and supervisors to collaborate, but fewer opportunities were planned for classroom teachers to provide input on the program because their role in providing instruction as part of the general education program did not change.

**Student selection for intervention.** Student selection for RTI support was a significant theme that emerged during the interviews as well as by reviewing the documents provided by participants. Teachers and intervention specialist spent a good deal of time during the first year of the program developing specific criteria to identify students in need of intervention. The interviews revealed that all categories of professionals viewed the selection of students for RTI services as a strength of the program. The following section of the report will explain how the criteria was
determined at the school level before describing the criteria that were selected. This section will conclude with the responses of the stakeholders to the criteria that were developed from the middle school.

The process of selecting students for the RTI program was left up to individual schools in the district. During the first year of the program, students were selected through a teacher nomination process at the middle school. After intervention specialists were hired and began working with students, criteria were developed and used for identifying students to receive support from the intervention program. This section of the report will present the initial teacher recommendation process, the revised process for referring students, and the change of program process that was put in place.

During the first year of the program, before the criteria had been developed for selecting students, teachers were asked to nominate students for the program. A challenge that occurred with this process was that some teachers had significantly more struggling students than others in terms of their academic achievement in the classroom and on the NJASK, which was the standardized state test in place at the time. By comparison across the grade level, one teacher’s “most struggling” student would have been considered a much more successful student when compared to the struggling students in another class. In addition, the teachers were asked to write a narrative describing a nominated student’s struggles in the classroom. This selection process provided a population of students to receive support the first year. Participants noted that had the same process continued, it could have potentially led to an uneven distribution of services to students who were struggling across the grade level.
There was strong collaboration for this aspect of the program. During the first year of the new program, intervention specialists, the school’s teaching specialist and the assistant principal met together, in consultation with classroom teachers, throughout the year to develop more specific criteria that would be applied consistently across the grade level to screen students for the RTI program. It was determined that multiple measures of student achievement would be used to assess a student’s level of performance in literacy.

The goal of the criteria was to ensure that the most struggling students received intervention at each grade level from the intervention specialist. Table 4 provides an overview of the selection criteria used for students to receive intervention support at the middle school. Of the nine facets that were selected as criteria for RTI support, a minimum of five needed to be present in order to assign placement in that tier. If less than five of the required performance indicators were present, students were considered Tier 1 and their needs were determined to be able to be met through differentiation within the classroom.
### Table 4

**RTI Selection Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 3</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>QRI-4</strong> <em>Instructional</em> level 2 or more grade levels below documented deficits in comprehension</td>
<td><strong>QRI-4</strong> <em>Instructional</em> level 2 or more grade levels below documented deficits in comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QRI-IV</strong> <em>instructional</em> level 2 or more grade levels below documented deficits in decoding</td>
<td><strong>QRI-IV</strong> <em>instructional</em> level within 1 grade level below; documented deficits in decoding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Words Their Way Spelling Assessment:</strong> Within Word Stage</td>
<td><strong>Words Their Way Spelling Assessment:</strong> At or below middle Syllables/Affixes Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NJ ASK:</strong> below 200</td>
<td><strong>NJ ASK:</strong> below 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Report Card Grade, LAL : C- (70% average) or below</strong></td>
<td><strong>Report Card Grade, LAL : C (75% or below)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAP results:</strong> 4 or more sub-scores LOW on Reading and Language tests combined</td>
<td><strong>MAP results:</strong> 1, 2 or 3 sub-scores LOW on Reading and Language tests combined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher nomination form/observable behaviors checklist</strong> indicates breakdown of understanding and deficits in learning and includes an on-demand writing sample</td>
<td><strong>Teacher nomination form/observable behaviors checklist</strong> indicates breakdown of understanding and deficits in learning and includes an on-demand writing sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fluency/Rate</strong> Oral reading rate less than one grade level below current placement (Word Count Per Minute)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6:110-160</td>
<td>Grade 6:110-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7:120-170</td>
<td>Grade 7:120-170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8:130-180</td>
<td>Grade 8:130-180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle School Reading Assessment:</strong> Total points less than 11 on Assessment <em>two</em> grade levels below.</td>
<td><strong>Middle School Reading Assessment:</strong> Total points less than 11 on Assessment <em>one</em> grade level below.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The criteria selected by the team used a variety of commercial measures, standardized assessments, district, and teacher created materials. *The Qualitative Reading Inventory IV* (QRI-IV) is a commercially developed reading assessment of word lists and leveled reading passages that were used by the school to assess both decoding and reading comprehension (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). The school also used the commercially developed assessment for spelling, *Words Their Way* to determine if spelling was an area of concern (Invernizzi, Templeton & Johnston, 2000). Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing is an online standardized testing service provided Northwest Evaluation Association. This assessment provided student achievement data in reading and language arts in the areas of informational text, vocabulary, literature, writing, usage, and mechanics. To assess reading fluency, the RTI program used *3-minute Reading Assessments: Word Recognition, Fluency & Comprehension, Grades 5-8* (Rasinski & Padak, 2005). The results of a student’s state testing were also considered as part of the matrix of data in a student referral.

In addition to commercially developed assessments, the RTI team decided to use department-created grade level reading assessments that teachers had previously developed in grade level teams. These assessments consisted of short reading passages, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses. A student writing sample was requested, and teachers were asked to submit an on-demand sample to demonstrate what the student was able to produce on his or her own without support. Report cards were also considered as well as a teacher nomination form (see Appendix 5). The teacher nomination form asked teachers to comment on a range of student behaviors related to academic performance as well as effort in the classroom.
Overall, the interviews revealed that the selection criteria organized the process of the selection of students for RTI support. The first year provided an opportunity for reflection and allowed the staff time to develop a selection process that would screen for struggling students in multiple aspects of literacy achievement including decoding, spelling, reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary, conventions, and a range of other areas. Teachers who referred students for RTI found the referral process to be useful in collecting data and understanding the learning needs of referred students even if the student did not end up qualifying for intervention at the end of the process.

During the interviews teachers, administrators, and intervention specialists expressed concerns regarding the changing standards and state tests. Department measures created in alignment with the NJASK tests as measures of student achievement became outdated as they aligned with the old standards. New measures were being developed at the time of this study to align with new standards as well as PARCC testing, which the state currently participates in. Once students are selected for services, the next question becomes when will the support be provided? This leads to the next theme that emerged from the data, scheduling RTI.

**Scheduling Intervention.** Scheduling time for intervention at the middle school was clearly a challenge as revealed in every interview. Students who were identified as being in need of RTI services could receive support in their English Language Arts classroom through a push-in, in-class-support model where intervention specialist worked closely with the classroom teacher to plan instruction that would support the RTI students, or the student could be pulled out for more intensive, one-to-one or small group
instruction. The following section of this report will describe the challenges stakeholders described with scheduling students for pull-out support as well as push-in support.

Scheduling for pull-out instruction was supposed to take place during a student’s English class. This was a source of conflict for teachers who expressed frustration with students missing instruction to receive additional support. Teachers felt that pulling a student out of an English class was creating a new problem to solve an existing one.

Students can also receive pull-out support during a physical education (PE) period once every two weeks or during a study hall period, called ISP at the middle school. Teachers and intervention specialists both expressed that a majority of students did not want to miss PE class. Many, but not all, RTI students have a study period scheduled in their school day in place of a world language class. Providing support to students who do not have an ISP class period during the day is even more of a challenge.

An intervention specialist described the scheduling challenge in detail: It is very challenging for us to find time to work with students to provide intervention. Pulling the students from their class may result in a new skill gap, and only working with them during their ISP period is not sufficient. During ISP, students may need support in their other classes as well as possibly working with the IS in LAL.

Another intervention specialist expressed concerns with being able to provide push-in support and pull-out services when students were spread among many classroom teachers:

The first year my schedule was spread between 4 teachers who each had a double block of LAL. It was nearly impossible for me to get into each class one period
because I also wanted to be in ISP's and pull students from the gym. I was overwhelmed trying to communicate with so many teachers.

Without a doubt, scheduling has been a challenge. Despite the struggle of scheduling students for RTI support, overall the interviews revealed that the professionals involved in the development and implementation of the RTI program at the middle school have positive perceptions of the impact of the program on student performance. The next section of the report of the report will present the results related to the impact of the program on students.

**Impact on Students.** The final significant theme that emerged exclusively from the data gathered during the interview process was the impact that the new RTI program is having on students. The impact of the program overall has been perceived as positive by all of the teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators involved in the program. Perceptions of the program’s impact on students are positive for various reasons which are detailed in the following section.

Participants felt positive about the additional monitoring of student growth that the RTI model provides. With the new program struggling, students are identified, and their progress is tracked. One teacher noted that having an additional adult who takes an interest in the growth and learning of individual students who are struggling is critical in middle school and especially in literacy. Another teacher felt that having access to more data related to student achievement related to literacy has been helpful to her instruction and benefits students.
Despite the challenges of finding time to collaborate, participants found the opportunities that existed to collaborate with colleagues were benefiting students. A teacher expressed her impression of the program in terms of student growth:

A willing classroom teacher and intervention specialist who have a good working relationship can make giant leaps and bounds with students and fill in their skill gaps.

Overall, that is the goal, to remediate the skill gaps that students have and help them move to the next level. Multiple participants felt that structure of the program allowed for teachers and intervention specialists to help students in making great strides in their academic achievement and their attitudes toward school and learning:

I believe the most significant success of the RTI program has been getting individual students to believe they can learn and be successful. Many of the students who are referred to RTI have had difficulties throughout school due to many different factors. The intervention specialist works individually with students and strives to make the students believe in themselves and show them they can be successful students. The intervention specialist became the voice for many students who did not have one before.

Another intervention specialist had similar thoughts regarding the impact on students: I always feel good when you have those disengaged, downtrodden, negative 7th graders enter school in September as a Tier 3, but transition into more empowered, persevering students by June. When a student makes great strides academically but also believes in himself and exhibits confidence in literacy, it is priceless. These kids can do great things. We have had schools come to meet with
us to see how we set up and run the program and used our program as a model for their school, so that is a compliment

Based on the perspectives of the participants in the study, the RTI model is successful. Teachers and intervention specialists have worked together to provide struggling students with more opportunities to read. Another noted success is the increased collaboration among professionals to give students more choices in book selection for reading, and to provide additional reading strategy instruction in class and during one-to-one pull-out sessions (Allington, 2009; Guthrie, 2008; Wilson, 2004). The program is perceived to have a positive influence on student growth and is creating opportunities for students to be more successful. These results lead to the summary of the research findings that are reviewed in the final section of this chapter.

**Research Findings Summary**

In summary, this chapter presented the findings from the data that was collected and analyzed during this case study. In order to frame the findings, this chapter reviewed of the main objectives and guiding research questions and provided an overview of both the data collection and analysis procedures. A description of the middle school and an overview of participants involved in the interview process provided context for the findings of the study which centered on the successes and challenges of implementing the new program. Overall seven themes emerged from the data. Key points related to each of the seven themes are presented in Table 5.
### Table 5

*Summary of Themes and Key Points*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key Points</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Goals</td>
<td>The overall goal of implementing the RTI program as communicated by the Assistant Superintendent was “to provide early, effective services at a necessary level of intensity so that students maximize their academic and behavioral potential and proficiency.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Perceptions regarding communication were mixed. Intervention Specialists felt communication was strong while teachers felt left out important communication from the central office to the middle school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Roles</td>
<td>Defining professional roles was perceived as a challenge to implementing the program. Teachers missed having instructional aides, and intervention specialists were initially unsure of their role in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Perceptions regarding collaboration varied depending on a participant’s professional role. Intervention specialists felt that there were opportunities to work together with other intervention specialists, but working with teachers was more of a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Selection Criteria</td>
<td>The development of selection criteria for the program was perceived as a success. This process added consistency to the program and provided teachers with more data regarding students who were struggling even if they were not placed into the RTI program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling Intervention</td>
<td>Identifying a time for an intervention specialist to work with a student to provide additional support provided through either inclass support or a pull-out model was perceived to be a challenge by all participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Students</td>
<td>The perceived overall impact of the RTI program on students as determined by the professionals involved in this study was positive. Regardless of their professional role, participants found that the new RTI model was successful in monitoring progress, documenting student growth, closing skill gaps and increasing student attitudes toward learning and school.</td>
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The seven themes that emerged from the data were guided by the topics that were covered in the interview questions. The interview questions were developed in
alignment with the central research question which was focused on understanding the experiences of the professionals involved in the development and implementation of the RTI program.

Reviewing the transcripts of the interviews revealed that perceptions of the new program varied based on the professional role of the participant in the process. Overall, teachers found the new model to have more challenges including understanding goals for the new program, communication with colleagues, understanding and implementing accepting new professional roles, collaboration with intervention specialists, and scheduling intervention.

There was alignment in the perceptions of intervention specialists and administrators. Both groups were in agreement that the goals of the program, collaboration with intervention specialists, and communication from the central office and at the school were all successes of the program. Challenges identified by both intervention specialists and administrators included defining new professional roles and scheduling intervention. Overwhelming, all of the participants agreed the impact of the program on students was a success.

In the next chapter of this report, the findings presented in this chapter will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and the literature review introduced in Chapter 1. Additionally, how the findings from this study address the significance of the problem of practice will be reviewed. Recommendations for future practices, along potential areas for future research, will also be reviewed.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

In order to frame the research findings, this chapter begins with a brief review of the research problem and the methodology used to conduct the research, followed by a discussion of findings in response to the research questions. Next, the relationship between the findings and the theoretical framework is presented followed by relating the research findings to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The implications of the findings for educational practices and for future research conclude this chapter of the research report.

Review of the Problem

As discussed in Chapter 1, Response to Intervention was written into law in 2004 as part of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities act (IDEA, 2004). Since then, schools across the country have been working to create and implement RTI programs. A challenge for middle school leaders and educators is that a majority of the research that is available regarding remediating literacy skills has focused on the early elementary grade levels. With the limited amount of research that is available, educators and school leaders at the upper-grade levels are at a loss for references to consult in developing their own programs. The purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore the process of how one middle school planned, designed and implemented an RTI model for their school.

Review of the Methodology

The research was conducted using a descriptive case study approach. Taking a realist approach, this qualitative study was designed with the understanding that perceptions and beliefs are considered real phenomenon (Maxwell, 2005). This approach
enabled the researcher to consider how participants made sense the events that occurred and how their perceptions informed their actions versus determining precisely what happened (Maxwell, 2005).

This case study took place within a bounded system, a single suburban middle school in central New Jersey. In order to gain an understanding of the program, the researcher conducted a document review and interviewed participants who were directly involved in the process of designing and implementing the program at the school level as well as the district level. Participants included administrators, teachers and interviews with multiple representatives from each role.

**Review of the Findings**

This case study focused on understanding the experiences of the professionals directly involved in developing a new Response to Intervention (RTI) program within one school. As a result of coding and analyzing the data collected throughout the research process, seven themes emerged. The themes included the following: program goals, communication, professional roles, collaboration, student selection criteria, scheduling intervention and impact on students.

Analyzing the transcripts and data gathered from the interviews revealed that perceptions of the new program varied in terms of what participants considered to be successful components of the new RTI program and what aspects were considered challenging. The following section of the report will summarize the results of the research in terms of successes and challenges as perceived by participants.

**Successes.** Overwhelming, all of the participants agreed the impact of the program on students was a success. The impact of the new program on student achievement in
reading was viewed as a success by all participants in the study. There was a consensus among teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators that the students who were identified for services because they were struggling academically benefited from the additional contact time with skilled intervention specialists versus working with teaching assistants as was practiced in the past. The selection criteria to identify students for services in the RTI model that was developed during the first year of the program was also viewed as one of the successes of the program.

There were differences in what aspects of the RTI program were viewed as successful among the different groups of professionals. Intervention specialists and administrators had similar perceptions regarding their perceptions of the successes of establishing the goals of the program. Both intervention specialists and administrators perceived having opportunities for collaboration and having clear communication to facilitate the program as overall successes.

Teachers who participated in the interview process did not share the same views in terms perceiving clear program goals. Teachers also noted fewer opportunities for collaboration and found the communication from intervention specialists and administrators to be a challenge. A possible reason for the differences in perceptions based on professional roles could be that intervention specialists were provided with extensive professional development and time to meet with administrators during the first year of the program. Professional development related to establishing an RTI program is discussed in greater detail in the section of this chapter regarding *Implications of the Findings for Educational Practice.*

**Challenges.** The challenges to planning and implementing the model varied by professional role with teachers experiencing more challenges than either intervention
specialists or administrator. Challenges identified by both intervention specialists and administrators included defining professional roles and scheduling intervention. Challenges teachers identified included understanding program goals, communication, professional roles, collaboration, and scheduling time for intervention.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

Fullan’s theory (1991, 2001, 2007) of change in education was the theory used as the foundation of this research project. Fullan’s model was selected in part because it considers personal responses to change within an organization. This study centered on the changes brought about in the school by the implementation of a new model as perceived by the professionals involved with the program.

This theory supports that multiple factors influence the success of a specific change. The position of the school within the larger society, as well as the resources that are available to support the change significantly influence a reform (Fullan, 1991, 2001, 2007). This case study positions the change in terms of the national and state laws. The demographics provided in the report provide context for educators and school leaders to consider in reviewing the data that was collected in the study.

The idea that organizations form goals, go through an implementation process, evaluate, modify, and set new goals aligns with Fullan’s three-tiered model of change in education (1991, 2001, 2007). Fullan’s theory supports that there are three separate phases in the process of most major changes that take place in schools; initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. The theory used to shape this study provided a logical framework to organize the data.
Viewing the RTI program at the middle school through the lens of Fullan’s theory of change in education, and its separate phases, provided insight into how the program evolved over time. Bender (2011) asserts that the planning process and beginning stages of development and implementation for RTI “frequently takes more than a single year, and most proponents of RTI indicate the need for a three-to-five-year implementation process.” In this case, the program has been planned and implemented over a period of four years.

For the RTI program that was the focus of this case study, much of the initiation phase took place at the district level. Fullan (2007) describes this phase as the “process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change” (p.65). In this case, the central office initiated the changes at the district level. Some decisions were left up to the individual schools to work out during the next phase, which is implementation.

Implementation is the step that involves attempting to put the changes into practice. Fullan (2007) supports that the implementation phase is typically two to three years long. During the first year of the program, the staff was challenged to establish professional roles and worked to create selection criteria. A challenge for the teachers involved was to adjust to losing their classroom assistants while working to schedule students for intervention with new intervention specialists as colleagues.

The final phase, institutionalization, is defined as whether the changes become built into the school as an ongoing part of the system versus disappearing by way of a specific decision to discard the program or simply through attrition” (Fullan, 2007). At this point, the RTI program is in the final phase. The program has been in place for five years, and there have been no moves to eliminate the program at the central office level.
or the building level. The program continues to evolve and undergo minor revisions such as revising the student selection criteria with new curriculum standards, but there are no indications that the program will be eliminated or replaced.

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

An important consideration for analyzing the data gathered from this case study is to examine how the findings from the research relate to the literature that was gathered and reviewed for this project and presented in Chapter Two. The following section of the report addresses how the data that was collected from the interviews and document review relate to the major sections of the literature review. This section of Chapter Five is divided into two main sections, *Challenges in Middle School Literacy* and *RTI as a Solution*.

In alignment with the literature review for this study, *Challenges in Middle School Literacy Instruction* is subdivided into the topics of *The Struggling Middle School Reader*, *Content Area Reading in The Upper Grades*, and *Effective Practices for Working with Struggling Readers*. *RTI as a Solution* is also covered and addresses the subtopics of *Defining RTI*, *Typical Components of RTI*, *Challenges to Implementing RTI*, and *Educator Perceptions of RTI*. After discussing the findings as they relate to the literature review, the implications of the findings for educational practice as well as the implications of the findings for future research are presented.

**Challenges in Middle School Literacy Instruction**

In order to understand the findings of this research project, it is important to frame the school’s challenge of addressing the needs of struggling readers within the context of
a national struggle for students to read on grade level. As discussed in Chapter 2, the students struggling to read at this school are part of the over eight million students in the United States are reading below grade level in grades four through twelve (NCTE, 2006). The faculty at the middle school is well aware of the research that once a student falls behind, it is difficult ever to get back on grade level, and struggling students tend to fall even further behind their peers (Allington, 2009).

The Struggling Middle School Reader. A major goal of the new RTI program was to identify which students were the most in need of intervention. Administrators, teachers, and intervention specialists agreed that the school had students who were in need of additional support in literacy beyond what they were getting in their regular language arts classroom as evidenced by their performance in the classroom and their standardized test scores on state assessments. The old model used by the district provided teaching assistants to help students complete classwork assignments, but there was no opportunity for remediation. The focus was on completing individual assignments. The Director of Special programs cited that when students move up to the middle school and high school levels, those who have difficulty with reading are at a much higher risk of failing in their content area classes. Research also supports that these struggling students are also much more likely to eventually dropping out of high school (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).

Content Area Reading in the Upper Grades. Both the teachers at the middle school and the intervention specialists expressed a sense of urgency in preparing students for the material that they would need to access independently at the high school. The concern is a logical one as nationally high school attrition has been directly linked to difficulty with reading grade level material (Guthrie, 2008). Teachers, intervention
specialists, and administrators expressed concerns that without additional support and remediation, students who struggled in reading were in for an uphill battle across the curriculum as they advanced into the upper grades. The observations of the educators at the middle school are supported by research that concludes texts for content area reading are often written at a more challenging level than the narrative texts students are more comfortable with from the earlier grade levels (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2009). At the middle school level, struggling readers are at a higher of failure in their content area classes because as the reading becomes increasingly challenging, students are expected to learn from the text (Wilson, 2004). Another study found that secondary students who struggle with reading difficulties are less often provided with reading instruction which contributes to a widening the gap between the achievement of students who struggle and that of their grade-level peers (Edmonds et al., 2012). The sense of urgency described by the faculty at the middle school to address the needs of struggling learners is clearly founded on research.

**Effective Practices for Working with Struggling Readers.** The school staff members are accurate in their concern for students reading below grade level. Effective practices that teachers and intervention specialists have implemented include increasing time in class to read, offering students choice for books during independent reading time, and providing strategy instruction in language arts as well as content area classrooms (Allington, 2009; Guthrie, 2008; Wilson, 2004). Research supports that time spent for intervention should mainly be spent reading, which teachers and intervention specialists agree with (Allington, 2009). Both teachers and intervention specialists felt that it was difficult to find time to balance the need for students to read with addressing specific skill
issues such as phonemic awareness or decoding. The middle school is like most middle schools across the country that struggle with providing remedial support in an organized, measurable way that encourages more reading (Allingston, 2009).

**RTI as a Solution**

The goal of the new RTI model was to better meet the needs of struggling learners in a more organized, consistent manner. The RTI model was selected as the framework for the change from the original program that was only providing teaching assistants. An RTI program was decided upon as it can provide students with remediation and support outside the scope of the child study team and without a diagnosis of a learning disability allowing schools to provide services to students who need remediation without waiting for a gap in achievement versus ability (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

**Defining RTI.** As described in the district’s staff manual, the middle school RTI program was “designed to meet the needs of struggling learners in a flexible environment.” In alignment with the 2004 IDEA mandates, the district developed a new process for serving students who were struggling academically without having to consider whether a student had a severe discrepancy between his or her academic achievement and his or her intellectual ability. The main goal of the district’s RTI program was to develop a process for determining whether a student was responding to scientifically-based interventions or if the students would need special education services. This initiative was in alignment with the general description of what an RTI program is, a school-wide approach that provides support services for students without waiting for
students to fail or to be identified as having a learning disability (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

**Typical Components of RTI.** The district staff manual for RTI was intended to define the RTI program for the district. While Brozo asserts that there is not a clear list of policies and procedures to follow in developing an RTI program, there are components that are typically involved. These elements include tiered instruction, which will be detailed in this section, high-quality classroom instruction for all students, progress monitoring, and school-wide screening to identify students who are struggling (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Allington, 2009; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Duffy, 2007; King, Lemons & Hill, 2012). Each of these components was clearly outlined in the district manual.

How to select students for RTI was a concern that was addressed in the first year of initial implementation. The need for universal screening at the middle school level has been a topic of debate among those who research the effectiveness of RTI (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2010). The choice was made not to MAP test each student in the upper-grade levels as data from other assessments was available. State test scores and department assessments that already existed were used to identify students who were potentially in need of support. If a student was identified, more assessments were given by the intervention specialists. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010) assert that in the upper grades it no longer makes sense to allocate limited resources to screening for the purpose of identifying students at risk of academic failure. As an alternative, the researchers claim that it makes more sense to use teacher nomination or existing assessment data that the school has developed in order to identify students with academic difficulties.
Challenges to Implementing RTI. The literature reviewed for this report identified challenges that have been noted with implementing an RTI model in the upper grades. The challenges presented in this study were alignment with previous research. Despite the benefits and the desire for middle schools to implement RTI programs, there are significant challenges to overcome. This middle school experienced many of those challenges. Defining the roles and responsibilities of educational professionals, scheduling and structuring the school day to provide time for instructional support, and fitting in a new program with existing graduation requirements are all challenges that have been documented in the research for implementing RTI that was also evident in this study (Pyle & Vaughn, 2012).

Scheduling was a significant concern. Due to the changing of classes and students being assigned to multiple teachers for multiple subjects, there is less flexibility in the school day. Research that has emerged from other schools implementing RTI programs supports that this struggle is not unique to this middle school. Elementary schools are organized so that to adjust a student’s schedule is much more flexible, and similar modifications in the upper grades become unrealistic (Bender, 2011).

Teachers and intervention specialists at the middle school felt challenged in finding the time to meet together. When there was time, organizing the meeting with a clear agenda was a challenge. Pyle and Vaughn (2012) reported facilitating the practice of teachers discussing student achievement and collaborating to meet the academic needs of students can pose a challenge to an existing school culture.

A challenge that was unique to this middle school was that classroom teachers were required to part with their teaching assistants in order to fund the new program.
Some of the teachers had been working with their teaching assistants for more than ten years and relied on their support in implementing lesson plans each day. The removal of the assistants left some teachers skeptical of the new program and created trust issues with the new intervention staff that was brought in. Research supports that in order for a reform to be a success, establishing trust and building relationships is key (Borgemenke, Blanton, Kirkland, & Woody, 2012).

**Educator Perceptions of RTI.** All stakeholders were in agreement that the program was benefiting student learning, which aligns with previous studies regarding how RTI is perceived by educators (Swanson et al., 2012). An interesting observation is that teacher perceptions of the RTI program were not always in alignment with the perceptions of intervention specialists or administrators. This study confirmed that it is essential for educational leaders to address the perceptions of educators throughout the implementation process (Prewett et al., 2012). In previous studies, teachers were noted to find the increased opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues in problem-solving as a benefit of the RTI model. This contrast with teachers from the middle school for this case study who felt left out and perceived a lack of opportunities to collaborate. Intervention specialists, however, found there to be plenty of opportunities for meetings with other intervention specialists, administrators and teachers. This difference in perception could be due to the more flexible schedules of intervention specialists.

**Implications of the Findings for Educational Practice**

It is clear from the study that teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators found the RTI model to be beneficial for students. Despite the overall perception of success, there were challenges that were quite evident. Some of the challenges that the
staff faced can be addressed through applying research that has emerged in previous related studies. Although there is limited research available specifically on developing an RTI model at the middle school, there is a relevant research that has been published regarding the implementation of other educational reforms.

A literature review of strategies that school leaders have used to initiate successful reforms concludes that establishing trust, building relationships, and focusing on a vision can lead to successful reforms (Borgemenke, Blanton, Kirkland, & Woody, 2012). Initially teachers felt unclear on what implementation would look like even though they understood that BSI aides were going to be replaced with Intervention Specialists. The teachers felt that there was limited time available to build relationships with the new intervention specialists once the program had been implemented after they had worked with their classroom assistants for years. Having a clear, unified vision for all stakeholders could ease the adjustment in future similar situations.

Harris (2008) writes that “substantial research has consistently underlined the importance of teacher involvement in decision-making processes and the contribution of strong collegial relationships to positive school improvement and change” (p.176).

During the initial planning stages of the change from a BSI program to an RTI model, teachers were interviewed to assess how effective the teachers viewed the BSI program. In addition, informal teacher feedback was collected throughout the implementation process by principals and supervisors. While steps were taken to involve teachers in the process, teachers still felt largely left out of the process.

An important theme that emerged from the study was that is that clear communication is essential. A related study of elementary teachers implementing
curricular reform found that teacher attitudes and beliefs regarding a reform must be addresed before the teachers can effectively implement the model with students (Anfara & Mertens, 2012). The researchers concluded that order for the school to run as a unit, a clear mission, and supports in place for collaboration and communication have to come first. It may have been beneficial to spend more time planning the implementation with classroom teachers ahead of the changes.

The idea that school leaders are understanding and accepting that that program changes may be perceived differently by the participants involved is important. Collinson and Cook (2007) assert that a leader who avoids confronting differing assumptions and understandings could be impairing potential progress (p. 201). Teachers, intervention specialists and administrators varied in terms of what they viewed as successes and struggles, and examining the differences in perceptions could lead to a more positive reception of the new program.

There were a few aspects of implementation that could have been more supportive of a collaborative culture and learning community. With such a major change it may be a good time for the teachers, the supervisors, and the intervention specialists to work together to address varying perceptions of the program, clarify the vision, and communicate clear expectations. Harris (2008) includes that “the implication from both empirical studies is that improvement is more likely to occur when there are opportunities for teachers to work together to lead development and change” (p.177).

Involving more stakeholders could have a positive impact. The program design and implementation did not consider input from members of the school community beyond the professional staff in the district. Parents and even students may have been
able to offer insight that would have enhanced the program. Fullan’s (2007) theory of change in education assumes that change in education is dependent on continual interaction with the community. Fullan’s theory is founded on the idea that social conditions at the local level and external factors relate to the success of change. Understanding how the changes are perceived by additional stakeholders relates to the following section of this report.

**Implications of the Findings for Future Research**

Engaging an entire staff in a monumental change such as implementing a new RTI program is a process that requires carefully planned staff development. Research supports that teacher resistance to change increases when the reforms impact their classroom practice (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). Teachers who viewed themselves as empowered perceived the occupation of teaching as a true profession and that it is critical in any initiative being implemented that teachers are granted a level of flexibility (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Proudford, 1998).

Taking a closer look at the research focused on the professional development that can be provided to the staff could be beneficial. Brozo (2011, p.40) asserts that "an efficacious program of professional development must be the heart of any reform effort intended to help all adolescents maximize their literacy and learning potential.” Fullan’s theory of change in education supports that leaders and policy makers need to provide an environment of collegiality and affirm teacher beliefs and knowledge in order to build capacity and affect change (Noltemeyer, 2008).

Involving the parents and students in future research is a necessary step to gather a broader scope of perspectives related to the successes and challenges of creating an RTI
program. As students move into the upper-grade levels, they can more clearly articulate their perceptions regarding a specific reform that is impacting their learning. Bender (2011) noted that as students become older, they may actually refuse to engage in tasks that they do not find meaningful or engaging including extra support in literacy. It is essential that educators understand the perceptions of students in order to ensure that the instruction that is being provided has the potential to be effective for students.

Also of significance in this case study was the challenge to find the time to provide remediation and coordinate instruction for remediation with the content being addressed in the classroom. Research supports that intervention instruction should be provided in addition to the regular education program rather than in place of it (Allington, 2009). This means that students should not simply be pulled out of their reading and language arts classes and miss that instruction in order to receive extra support. More research that examines programs that provide both push-in support and a pull-out model at the upper-grade levels with coordinated instruction could benefit current practitioners in planning and revising their own RTI programs.

Summary

This report presented a detailed description of one school’s experience with creating an RTI program to serve students struggling with reading on grade level. In order to summarize this case study, the following section of the report will synthesize the findings of the study and provide a brief overview of its limitations. The study’s implications for future practice and future research will also be reviewed.
There is tremendous potential for an RTI model to improve the achievement of struggling students at the middle school level. Using the lens of Fullan’s Theory of Change in Education (1991, 2001, 2007) to shape the research, this descriptive case study explored one middle school’s process of developing and implementing an RTI program for students performing below grade level in reading and language arts. Specifically, the research examined the process of creating the new program from the perspectives of teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators. Data was also collected and analyzed from a document review. The themes were as follows: program goals, communication, professional roles, collaboration, student selection criteria, scheduling intervention and impact on students. The results of the research were then analyzed in relation to the literature that was reviewed for this study.

By design, this case study had limitations. The impact of specific interventions on student achievement was beyond the scope of this project. This case study centered on the perceptions of the program for the professionals directly involved with design or implementation. The collection of data did not involve data specific to individual students or their growth in terms of literacy skills. Another limitation of the study was that the research focused specifically on the implementation of only the components related to literacy instruction.

The main goals of this paper were to identify the successful components of the RTI program at the middle school as well as to identify the challenges that the professionals involved in the process experienced. In terms of success, the selection criteria that the staff developed gave the school a place to begin when having conversations about student achievement and remediation. Another major success of the
program was the positive impact that study participants felt new model had on student performance. As with any reform in education, challenges were also evident. Having a clear, unified vision communicated to everyone involved may have eased the transition to a new model. Involving all of the professionals more throughout the process of designing and implementing the program could have been a useful source of information for school leaders and could provide opportunities for reflection and adjustment.

Lastly, opportunities for future research projects to benefit professionals in planning and implementing RTI programs can be drawn from this project. In order for schools to initiate RTI programs at the middle school level, more research is needed in order to explore specific practices for effective instruction in middle-level RTI programs as well as more research related to how and when to schedule students for push-in and pull-out support at this level. These areas of potential research directly relate to a need for research that is focused on effective staff development training for staff members involved in designing and implementing RTI programs.

In conclusion, this research project was designed to explore the process that one population of middle school educators experienced in planning a new RTI program, putting the changes into practice, and revising and adjusting the program over its initial years of implementation. The results of the study support that although there were challenges and growing pains, there was also growth as evidenced by the fact that the program made it to Fullan’s (2007) Institutionalization Phase by continuing to exist after the fourth year. While this study only addresses the process that one middle school experienced in developing their program, there are aspects of the study that can be considered by other schools as they initiate or revise their own RTI programs.
References


Government Printing Office.


REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear [Name],

My name is Kathalyn Messano, and I am currently an English teacher at the high school. I am also a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University. The research I wish to conduct for my doctoral thesis involves a case study of developing and implementing a Response to Intervention program at the middle school level. This project will be conducted under the supervision of my advisor and dissertation chair Dr. James Griffin at Northeastern.

I am seeking your consent to interview a small sample of professionals involved in the process of developing and implementing the RTI program at _____________. My goal for participation among those who volunteer for an interview would be to include three intervention specialists, three teachers involved with the program, and two administrators who supervise RTI. In addition, I would like to conduct a document review to gather data regarding the program design. All references to names and identifiable locations will be changed or omitted in the final transcripts and in any documents or publications relating to the study. No data specific to individual students will be used for this study at any point.

I have attached an executive summary of my thesis proposal as attachment one. I have also included an attachment of copies of the consent forms to be used for interview participants as attachment two. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at kmessano@husky.neu.edu. I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. If you consent to my research project, I would be happy to meet with you and/or _______ to additionally gain her consent and address any additional questions or concerns before beginning my work.

Sincerely,

Kathalyn Messano

☐ I grant permission to the researcher to conduct the study as described in the proposal.

☐ I DO NOT grant the researcher permission to conduct the study as described in the proposal.

__________________________
Signature
Appendix Two: Recruitment Email

Dear ________________.

My name is Kathalyn Messano. I am a teacher at ________________, and I am currently working on my dissertation at Northeastern University. My research project is a case study that will focus on how one school has developed and implemented a Response to Intervention program at the middle school level.

I am looking for teachers, administrators, and intervention specialists who have been involved with the RTI program at ______ to participate in 60-minute interviews that will focus on how the RTI program has developed evolved at ______. If you will consider participating, I would like to meet with you to discuss the study and your role in this research project. This short meeting can be before school, after school, during your lunch or any time that is convenient for you. This meeting to discuss your potential participation should be around 10 to 15 minutes.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns that you may have regarding this email.

Sincerely,

Kathalyn Messano
Appendix Three: Consent Form

Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University Department: College of Professional Studies: Education

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. James Griffin, Principal Investigator
Kathalyn Messano, Student Researcher

Title of Project: Implementing Response to Intervention Model in the Middle School: A Case Study of One School’s Process

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your role in designing and implementing the RTI program at Bridgewater-Raritan Middle School.

Why is this research study being done?

The goal of the project is to investigate and describe how one middle school developed and implemented a Response to Intervention model to meet the needs of students identified as performing below grade level.

Middle schools across the country have been implementing Response to Intervention programs for a little over a decade. What the program looks like in each school can vary greatly. This leaves schools with minimal points of reference in designing or revising their own programs. Unfortunately, despite the potential of an RTI model to improve the achievement of struggling middle school students, there is limited evidence of its success because of the narrow amount of research available on RTI programs at the middle school level. More specifically there is a lack qualitative research related to RTI at the upper-grade levels.
What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer questions related to program design and implementation during a 60-minute interview during the month of September. Interview times and locations can be scheduled at your convenience. Participants will also be asked to voluntarily provide any non-confidential forms, meeting agendas, or program descriptions that they believe would be useful to understanding the program. A 10-minute follow-up meeting to assure the accuracy of the data that has been collected may also be requested and scheduled at the convenience of the participant.

In order to facilitate accuracy and the transcribing of the interviews, a digital data recorder to capture the interviews will be used only with permission from the participants and will be destroyed upon project completion.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed at a location of your choosing and time that is convenient for you. The main interview will take about one hour. A follow-up interview of 10 minutes, also at a time and location of your choosing may also be requested to assure the accuracy of data that has been collected.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are no risks or discomforts anticipated.

Will I benefit from being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. Researchers and middle school professionals might have the opportunity to review a detailed description of one school's process of designing and implementing a Response to Invention model to consider in designing, implementing and revising their own programs.

Who will see the information about me?

All references to names and identifiable locations will be changed or omitted in the final transcripts and in any documents or publications relating to the study.

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

Data will be collected and maintained on a single laptop password protected by the researcher. All digital recording and transcriptions will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study through deletion.
In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
There are no risks or discomforts anticipated.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Kathalyn Messano at Messano.k@husky.neu.edu or 973-885-1143, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Griffin, the Principal Investigator, at dgriffin@husky.neu.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
There is no payment for participation in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There are no costs for participating in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
Kathalyn Messano, the student researcher mainly responsible for this study, is a teacher in the English Department at Bridgewater-Raritan High School

**I agree to take part in this research.**

__________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part

__________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

__________________________________________
Date participant above and obtained consent

______________________________
Printed name of person above

Appendix Four: Interview Questions
Interview Questions

1. Can you describe the planning process for developing the RTI program at the middle school?

2. What were some of the challenges to implementing the program during the first year?

3. How has this program changed or evolved since the first year that it was implemented?

4. What do you believe have been the most significant successes of the program?

5. Where do you see the potential for change or growth with the current RTI program?
Appendix Five: Teacher Nomination Form

Response to Intervention Referral Form Grades 7/8

CONFIDENTIAL

Student’s Name: Date of Report:
Teacher’s Name: School:
Current Grade Level (circle one): 7  8

This student is being recommended for academic intervention in:

☐ Language Arts Literacy  ☐ Mathematics

☐ New referral
☐ Review Intervention Plan
☐ Release from Intervention

Reason(s) for request for assistance.

Describe student’s work ethic.

Checklist of observable behaviors. Provide any other specific and descriptive observed behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Behaviors:</th>
<th>Consistently</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completes homework assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality written assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear oral expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes in a collaborative group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows self-motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseveres on difficult tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates ability to grasp abstract concepts and complex ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demonstrates ability to complete independent reading

| Shows a favorable response to constructive criticism |
| Shows initiative to ask for and complete missed assignments |
| Demonstrates the ability to pace |
| Demonstrates the ability to prioritize assignments/tasks |

**Please indicate the types of interventions you have tried prior to this request for assistance:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Intervention</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spoke to student privately after class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained class rules and expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained my concerns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave student special work at his/her level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checked cumulative folder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held conference with parent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent home notices regarding school work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranged extra help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Set up organizational strategies for students

Referred student to guidance

Worked with student one-on-one

Other (please explain)

What are the student’s academic strengths?

Where do you see the breakdown of understanding?

Assessment Date (indicate N/A if not applicable). Please refer to the assessment benchmarks before completing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Math:</th>
<th>Current Average:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Diagnostics:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK RECAP:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP RECAP:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num &amp; Num Ops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometry &amp; Measurement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns &amp; Algebra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data, Probability, Discrete</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Arts:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Current Average:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK Language Arts Literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6/7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Reading Assessment:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words Their Way:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading MAP Score: (List Low Areas):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAL MAP Score: (List Low Areas):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QRI Levels: Passage:</td>
<td>Graded Word List:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Comments:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attendance**
Number of days absent to date this year: ____________
Number of days tardy to date this year: ____________

**Additional Information**
Please include any additional information that you feel will be important in addressing the special needs of this student. Please attach a sample of student work.
RTI Recommendation:

- Not Assigned Intervention  Assign
- Tier 2 Intervention
- Assign Tier 3 Intervention
- Continuation of Plan
- Revised Plan
- Released from Program

Teacher Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: __________________

Teacher Signature: ________________ ______________________ Date: __________________

Counselor Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________________

RTI Specialist Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________________

RTI Specialist Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________________

Administrator Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________________