

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AND THE IMPACT ON ELIGIBILITY FOR  
SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN TEXAS

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE  
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

BY  
CASSANDRA DARST, B.S., M.ED.

DENTON, TEXAS

MAY 2014

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love, support and contribution of many individuals. First and foremost, I will be forever grateful to my amazing grandmother Peggy Rambo, without whom this journey would never have begun. Thanks Mammy for inspiring me to greatness. I would never have made it through the writing process without the editing skills of my marvelous mother, Sylvia McBrayer and the incredible Tonya Vernon. You ladies deserve your very own PhD. Thanks to my father Keith McBrayer for always being the voice of reason. I am grateful for the guidance from members of my dissertation committee. Dr. Jane Pemberton provided direction, support, editing and encouragement. Your flexibility, insight and knowledge were the guiding force behind the study. Dr. Heather Haynes-Smith helped form the basis for the study and directed me through my first pilot study. Thank you for welcoming me to the world of pilot studies. Dr. Laura Trujillo-Jenks brought her vast knowledge of educational leadership and law to the committee. Your insight was most helpful. Dr. David Marshall provided statistical expertise, comic relief and patience with a struggling student. Your love of statistics and kindness with those that are not quite as brilliant will be forever appreciated.

My Husband, Mike, supported, encouraged, pushed, laughed and loved me through many years and degrees. Without his love, sense of humor and kindness I would not have been able to complete this task. Finally, to my children Michael, Meghan and

Logan, thank you for understanding when I had to close the door and lock you out so I could do my “school work”. You are all such a blessing and I thank God for you each day.

## ABSTRACT

CASSANDRA DARST

### RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AND THE IMPACT ON ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN TEXAS

MAY 2014

The purpose of this study was to examine trends in special education referrals brought about by Response to Intervention (RTI) and to explore how those trends compared with the self-reported data of special education directors and evaluation staff. The significant points reflected in the literature to support this research include legislative changes, RTI structures and responsibilities, and RTI and special education referral rates across various studies. A descriptive non-experimental design study using existing data and survey methods was used. A validated paper and pencil survey was utilized for this study, administered to a group of special education directors and special education evaluation staff within a Regional Education Service Center (ESC), as well as the special education director and special education evaluation staff of an independent school district (I.S.D.). A response rate of 96% was obtained from the survey administered at the ESC. A response rate of 100% was obtained from the survey administered at the school district. The Friedman Two-Way rank was used to measure trends in data from 2007 to 2011. A t-

test examined group differences on the RTI Process survey. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data findings.

Findings from the archival data demonstrated that during the period ranging from 2007 to 2011, trends at the state level, across regional services centers, and in one independent school district showed an increase in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services. However, there was an average decrease in the number of students being served by special education at the regional and state levels and an increase at the district level. The trends that evolved suggest a possible relationship between the RTI process and increasingly accurate referrals for special education services.

Findings from the survey administered at the Education Service Center (ESC) indicated the perceptions of special education directors and evaluation staff did not mirror the findings of the archival data. However, data gathered from the survey administered at the Independent School District (ISD) indicated the perceptions of the special education director and evaluation staff did mirror the findings of actual archival data. Implications and recommendations are discussed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	7
Research Questions.....	7
Significance of the Study .....	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
Assumptions of the Study .....	11
Summary of the Study .....	12
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	13
Legislative Changes .....	13
Response to Intervention Structures and Responsibilities .....	15
Response to Intervention and Special Education Referral Rates.....	17
Summary .....	23
III. METHODOLOGY .....	25
Research Design.....	25
Research Questions .....	27
Survey Instrumentation.....	28
Process .....	28
Pilot Study.....	28
Administration of the Survey.....	30
Data Analysis .....	31
Limitations .....	32

IV. RESULTS .....	33
Texas Education Agency (TEA) State Performance Plan (SPP) Totals .....	34
District State Performance Plan (SPP) Totals.....	37
Special Education Adhoc Reporting System (SPEARS) Data .....	39
Response to Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey - Form A.....	42
Demographic Characteristics of Special Education Directors and Evaluation Staff.....	42
Questions on the Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey Form A.....	47
RTI Process .....	47
Referral Process .....	48
Number of Referrals .....	49
Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey - Form B .....	50
Survey Questions on the Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey Form B.....	53
RTI Process .....	53
Referral Process .....	54
Number of Referrals .....	55
Survey Comparison.....	56
V. DISCUSSION .....	58
Summary .....	58
Discussion of Results.....	59
Conclusions.....	62
Limitations .....	65
Future Research .....	66
REFERENCES .....	67
APPENDICES	
A.IRB Approval.....	75
B. Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey – Form A .....	77
C. Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey – Form B .....	79

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Percentage of Students Found Eligible for Special Education Services across Regional Service Centers and State Totals .....	36
2. Percentage of Students Found Eligible for Special Education Services in a local ISD .....	38
3. Students Receiving Special Education Services across Regions .....	40
4. Students Receiving Special Education Services in Texas .....	41
5. Students Receiving Special Education Services across ISD.....	42
6. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents .....	43
7. Survey Questions and Percentages of Responses Form-A .....	45
8. Survey Questions and Percentages of Responses Form-B .....	51



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Cronbach's Alpha, first attempt.....	29
2. Cronbach's Alpha, follow-up attempt.....	30
3. Friedman analysis results of group differences .....	35
4. Estimated marginal means of measure 1 .....	37
5. ANOVA results.....	38
6. Percentages of responses Form-A.....	47
7. Percentage of responses Form-B .....	53
8. Survey comparisons .....	56

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Special education services within public school systems have undergone significant changes since the passing of Public Law (PL) 94-142 almost forty years ago. In 1975, PL 94-142 ensured a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities. This law had an extraordinary impact on the education system across the country. It generated massive changes, including access to services for students who had previously been denied an education in public schools and changes in the area of special education referrals.

Much debate has taken place over the years regarding how students are identified for special education services. Information that demonstrates the changing face of special education includes:

- The number of students identified as having a learning disability has grown more than 300 percent since 1976 (Cortiella, 1998).
- More than 10% of students in the United States are eligible for special education services, and the number of students classified as having a learning disability has doubled since 1980 (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).
- As of Fall 2008, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) supported early intervention, special education and related services for 6.94 million children. These

children, ranging in ages 0 to 21, were identified as having a disability or at risk of substantial developmental delay (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011).

- During 2010, appropriations for IDEIA were \$12.572 billion out of \$64.135 billion in discretionary funding for the U. S. Department of Education (ED) (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011).

With the intention of narrowing the achievement gap, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001. Through emphasis on accountability and the premise that every child deserved a high quality, research-based education, no child would be left behind regardless of disability, socioeconomic status, language differences, or other relevant factors. In order to align special education services with NCLB, the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Signed into law on December 3, 2004, IDEIA was designed to address various options, including the discrepancy model for special education identification.

One of the initial proponents of the discrepancy model was Barbara Bateman. In 1965, Bateman reintroduced Marion Monroe's concept of using the difference between achievement and potential as a means for identifying students who were

eligible for special education services as a student with a learning disability.

Bateman later defined learning disability as:

“Children who have learning disorders are those who manifest an educationally significant discrepancy between their estimated potential and actual level of performance related to basic disorders in the learning process, which may or may not be accompanied by demonstrable central nervous system dysfunction, and which are not secondary to generalized mental retardation, educational or cultural deprivation, severe emotional disturbance, or sensory loss”. (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001)

This definition provides clarification of the intelligence quotient (IQ) – achievement discrepancy model. This model examines a discrepancy between a student’s scores on achievement testing and IQ testing. If a significant discrepancy exists, then a student is deemed to have a learning disability. While not totally inaccurate, the discrepancy model does purport a “wait and see” system of identification, which, unfortunately, allows students to struggle through kindergarten, first, and second grades until they fall further and further behind their peers. Because it is difficult for some students to meet the discrepancy criteria until the third or fourth grade, academic intervention assistance is delayed rather than initiated early when there might have been a greater chance of success (Reschly, 2002). The use of the discrepancy model as the sole source of identifying a student in need of specially

designed instruction changed with the reauthorization of IDEIA. However, the reauthorization provides support for a new approach stating:

“In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation.” (“Building the legacy: IDEA 2004,” 2006).

This process came to be known as Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI includes the use of scientific, research-based interventions as the basis for identifying students with a specific learning disability. RTI can be described as a system of educational decision making that strives to improve learning success for all students and to produce reliable data that guides decision making for special education eligibility (VanDerHeyden, 2011)

The RTI process is divided into levels of support called tiers. The instructional intent of an RTI tier system is to promote student success in the least restrictive environment. The state of Texas describes an RTI model as one that meets the needs of all students through a continuum of services, usually provided in the general education setting. This array of services offers:

- high-quality instruction and scientific, researched-based, tiered intervention strategies aligned with individual student need
- frequent monitoring of student progress to guide results-based academic and behavioral decisions

- data-based school improvement
- the application of student response data to influence important educational decisions that involve placement, intervention, curriculum, and instructional goals and methodologies (Texas Education Agency, 2011) .

RTI emphasizes using both learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions. RTI is not a program; nor, is it a vehicle of direct access to special education services. RTI is a process that integrates early use of necessary interventions with methods of identifying students who have a learning disability (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009). It must be emphasized that the objective of RTI is not to minimize referrals for special education services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009). The purpose of any implementation of the RTI process is to provide students with the best possible education that fosters academic and behavioral success founded upon research-based instructional practices and implemented in the least restrictive environment.

The onset of the RTI process focused on increased accountability and required educators to provide high quality instruction to all students. In contrast to the previous practice of referring students who were struggling for special education services without documentation of academic interventions, students now received documented academic attention prior to a referral. Interventions through RTI are typically delivered in the general education classroom by general education teachers.

To be evaluated for a learning disability (LD), the state of Texas requires an evaluation process that includes a multidisciplinary team approach (Texas Education Agency, 2013a). The team must consider information from a variety of sources including curriculum, the student's grades by subject area, and repeated assessments over time. The multidisciplinary team should use the RTI process to evaluate data that demonstrates an individual student has received appropriate instruction. This can be done by comparing the student's progress to those of his/her peers and the mastery of specific instructional objectives (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

While RTI is one facet of the evaluation, the discrepancy component has not been entirely eliminated from the evaluation process. Texas schools are still permitted to use the discrepancy model as a portion of an LD evaluation. However, the evidence of a discrepancy cannot be the sole determinant for a specific learning disability (Texas Education Agency, 2013a).

In addition to state and local assessments, many schools are using formative assessment and progress monitoring to guide instruction. Previously educators often made instructional adjustments based on experience with other students and perceptions about what they thought would help the student be successful. The use of RTI data assists the educator in focusing attention on student learning rates, which can then be tied to the effectiveness of the interventions provided (Ogonosky, 2008). This increase in instructional accountability, change in evaluation

procedures, and implementation of RTI have significantly changed how students are identified for special education services.

There appears to be no current clear-cut system for structuring and implementing RTI (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007; Batsche et al., 2005; Werts, 2006). Furthermore, the actual role and impact of RTI in the evaluation process is somewhat unclear. However, if an RTI system is implemented effectively, it appears that fewer students should qualify for special education services than prior to RTI implementation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Since the introduction of the RTI process, research dedicated to the various aspects of the actual process has emerged (Batsche et al., 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009; Hoover & Love, 2011; Ogonosky, 2008). However, there is a limited amount of research related to the impact RTI has on special education referrals. The impact on special education referrals brought about by RTI is the guiding principle for this study. The purpose of the study is to examine the trends in special education referrals brought about by RTI and to explore how those trends compare with the self-reported data of special education directors and evaluation staff.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions in this study include:

1. Based on student referrals for special education, what are the trends at the state level, across regional services centers, and in one independent school district?



2. What are the trends in the number of students receiving special education services in Texas during the period of 2007 to 2011?
3. How does the self-reported RTI data collected on a survey of special education directors and special education evaluation staff compare to the data collected from the state sources?

### **Significance of the Study**

Since there is little existing research related to the trends in special education referrals and eligibility for special education services, this study can contribute to future research in the following manner:

- The study can provide a starting point from which to determine if there are trends in the referral process over time.
- Trends identified can provide a starting point from which new studies can be formulated.
- The understanding of existing trends can assist future researchers and practitioners when evaluating the identification process for special education services.

The information gathered from this study could assist future researchers and educators in analyzing data to determine trends in the referral process and possibly help improve the implementation of the RTI process based on identified trends.

## **Definition of Terms**

To establish a common foundation of knowledge, the following operational definitions are provided for this study:

Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD): A committee composed of a student's parent(s) and relevant school personnel. The ARD committee determines a child's eligibility to receive special education services and develops the individualized education program (IEP) of the student. The ARD committee is the IEP team defined in federal law (Region 18 Education Service Center & Texas Education Agency).

Highly Qualified Teachers: Texas teachers are required to be highly qualified if they function as the Teacher of Record by providing direct instruction to students in any core academic subject area, including English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages (languages other than English), civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography. Highly qualified teachers must:

- Hold at least a bachelor's degree
- Be fully certified to teach in Texas
- Demonstrate competency in their core academic subject area

(Texas Education Agency, 2013d)

Educational Service Center (ESC): Due to the large number of Independent School Districts and charter schools in Texas, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is divided into 20 regions, each region containing an Educational Service Center, or ESC.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established by the government to ensure that students with disabilities have instruction that meets their unique needs. IDEA is the federal law that requires public schools to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities (Logsdon, 2013).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) is the name given to the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. The reauthorized version permits the use of considering a student's response to scientific research-based interventions as one component of special education eligibility (Zirkel, 2009).

Response To Intervention (RTI): RTI can be described as a system of educational decision making that strives to improve learning success for all students and to produce reliable data that guides decision making for special education eligibility (VanDerHeyden, 2011).

Special Education: Special education is defined in § 300.39 of federal Regulations as:

(a) General.

(1) Special education means specially designed instruction, provided at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including--

(i) Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and

(ii) Instruction in physical education ("Sec. 300.39 Special education," n.d.)

Special Education Ad Hoc Reporting System (SPEARS): The Special Education Ad Hoc Reporting System (SPEARS) is a tool designed for accessing and analyzing data related to special education in the state of Texas. The data provided is collected from school districts and charter schools by means of the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), and is provided as a service of the Texas Education Agency (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).

State Performance Plan (SPP): This State Performance Plan (SPP) evaluates the State's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEIA and illustrates how the State will continuously improve upon this implementation.

Texas Education Agency (TEA): is the administrative unit for primary and secondary public education (Texas Education Agency, 2013b).

Texas Education Agency Login (TEAL): Texas Education Agency Login (TEAL) is a secure web site that provides access to reports and information contained by the Texas Education Agency.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

The following assumptions are made for this study:

- All existing data collected from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is accurate.
- All existing data collected from the Special Education Ad Hoc Reporting System (SPEARS) is accurate.

- Special education directors' responses to the survey questions are accurate and represent their individual perceptions of the RTI process based on their own experiences within the RTI process in their school districts.
- Special education evaluation staff members' responses to the survey questions are accurate and represent their individual perceptions of the RTI process based on their own experiences within the RTI process in their school districts.
- Special education directors are free to respond without administrative influence.
- Special education evaluation staff members are free to respond without administrative influence.

### **Summary of the Study**

With the increase in accountability and demands being placed on students and educators, it is imperative that the study of the RTI process and its impact on the educational system continue. Study of referral trends and the number of students qualifying for special education services can assist schools in a variety of ways. Schools that analyze referral trends and qualification for services can improve instruction for all students. They also can enhance intervention assistance provided to students and increase appropriate referrals for special education services.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of related literature for this study includes literature applicable to the changes in legislation. These changes fostered the requirement to consider how a student who is struggling responds to research based instructional intervention prior to the student's evaluation for special education services. The review also contains literature about the basic structure of RTI systems. A segment describing studies and subsequent information regarding RTI systems on special education referrals is included and provides a foundation for this study.

#### **Legislative Changes**

Congress passed PL 94-142 in 1975. The law had four guiding purposes:

- To assure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs.
- To assure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected.
- To assist states and local school districts to provide for the education of all children with disabilities.
- To assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2010).

To further strengthen the rights of students with disabilities, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments on June 4, 1997. This Act increased the academic expectations for the 5.8 million children with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2002). In a continued effort to improve the educational opportunities for students with disabilities, the Individuals with Disabilities Education act of 1997 was reauthorized in 2004 and became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). The new IDEIA resulted in significant changes in the way schools evaluate, refer, identify, discipline, and provide services for students with disabilities.

Prior to IDEIA, a student was identified as having a learning disability based on ability-achievement discrepancy and consideration of specific learning disability (SLD) exclusion factors. After reauthorization, the process changed and included the use of scientific research-based instructional practices for all students. The process also included documentation of how students who are struggling responded to interventions provided in the general education classroom setting. The relevance of the RTI system is dependent upon the students' responses to the interventions provided.

A research study conducted through the Special Education Leadership and Quality Teacher Initiative surveyed special education state department directors in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey had an 86% response rate and showed that over one-third of the states indicated that they plan to use RTI in some fashion as a replacement or supplement to the LD discrepancy model (Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, &

Saenz, 2008). The reauthorization of IDEIA permits the use of RTI but does not specifically require it to be used when identifying a specific learning disability (Zirkel, 2009). The choice of using either the ability-achievement discrepancy approach or RTI is left up to each individual state education agency, with interpretation at the local school district level.

### **Response to Intervention Structures and Responsibilities**

RTI is typically described as a multi-tiered system of scientific research-based interventions. However, there is no single paradigm that is accepted as the correct way to structure RTI (Werts, 2009). Yet, the one constant reflected in the research is the use of a multi-tiered system with the first tier being implemented in the general education classroom. The state of Texas developed a guidance document that outlines a multi-tiered service delivery model that includes layers of increasingly intense interventions based on student-specific needs (Texas Education Agency, 2008). While this document was designed and published by the Texas Education Agency, it is simply a suggested manual to provide guidance for individual districts, not a mandate. This leeway allows school districts to decide how they choose to implement an RTI process. Although this document provides guidance, it does not mandate or specify a particular type of implementation. The guidance document suggests that tier one intervention be implemented by the general education teacher and that each school determine the person(s) responsible for implementing tier two and tier three instruction (Texas Education Agency, 2008).



The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), in conjunction with the IDEA partnership and the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI), selected six states for review of their RTI frameworks. The review noted similarity in that each state had developed a multi-tier system to evaluate and support student progress by using an array of interventions. In contrast, there was much variation among the states in funding sources and responsibilities of the state and local education agencies (Burdette & Pontes, 2009).

Even within established systems, it is frequently unclear exactly what specific roles the educational diagnostician, general education teacher, and school psychologist should undertake (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2006). In order to ascertain more specificity about implementation strategies and to clarify vague concepts about RTI implementation, a survey was emailed to 119 special education administrators in North Carolina school districts. Of the 119 surveys emailed, forty-six administrators completed usable questionnaires. The response to who should collect instructional data reflected that 87.5% of special education administrators thought that school psychologists should collect data (Werts, 2009). The survey went on to ask questions related to the amount of time needed on instruction, considerations as to who should make decisions about RTI and the implementation of the process, and questions related to training. For each of the questions a variety of answers were provided. There appeared to be little consensus about the overall RTI implementation process.

In contrast to the historical practice of identifying a student who has a learning disability based on ability-achievement discrepancy, the RTI focus is on examining significant differences in performance compared to peers and evaluating failure to progress despite the use of high quality interventions (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc., 2006). The comparison of significant differences in relationship to peers is a process that can lend itself to a subjective application unless implemented with technical proficiency. To insure reliability when RTI is used, decision rules must be applied accurately and in the correct order, and interventions must be implemented with integrity (VanDerHeyden, 2011).

The RTI evaluation process is not a simple administering of one test that determines if a student has a learning disability. RTI is a sequenced decision making process where the number of students receiving interventions should decrease as the tiers increase (VanDerHeyden, 2011). However, without specific standards and established criteria, there can be variances that can contribute to a perception of unreliability as a characteristic of the RTI system.

### **Response to Intervention and Special Education Referral Rates**

The RTI Action Network conducted a review of field studies involving sixteen RTI programs . In order to be considered for the review, each of the programs was required to meet the following criteria:

- RTI experience was published in a peer-reviewed journal, edited review journal, or edited textbook.

- Program utilized instruction or intervention in at least two tiers of an RTI model for students experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties.
- Documentation included quantifiable measures of student academic/behavioral outcomes and/or systemic outcomes (e.g. special education referrals/identifications) and completed descriptions of how data was obtained and analyzed.

Each of the sixteen RTI programs reviewed could be categorized as either a problem-solving or standard-protocol model. The problem-solving model utilizes individually adapted interventions specifically designed to assist a student who is struggling. The interventions are either developed or selected by a team (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). The standard protocol model refers to the implementation of predetermined interventions that are initiated when existing interventions have not produced the desired results (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). The RTI Action Network concluded that the impact of all sixteen RTI programs on referral and placement rates stayed relatively consistent, despite some studies indicating decreases (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

A more in-depth review of the sixteen programs included in the Action Network study revealed only six assessed the impact of RTI on special education referral and/or placement rate. Five of the six studies focused on data for grades kindergarten through twelfth grade (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). While all five of the studies used an RTI process, each study yielded different results as to the impact on referral rates.

One of the sixteen field studies included in this RTI Action Network review was a problem-solving model that included consultation and collaboration (Bollman, Silbergitt, & Gibbons, 2007). The St. Croix River Education District Model (SCRED) was reviewed to ascertain the various effects of the SCRED model on the rate of identification of students for special education services. The initial study data was collected during the 1995 – 1996 school year. Data was gathered from five districts and related to the special education identification rate. When compared with the state of Minnesota, SCRED's data indicated that there was a decrease in special education placements (Bollman et al., 2007). The study revealed that from school years 1995 – 1996 through 2005 – 2006, special education rates decreased from 4.5% to 2.5% for SCRED schools (Bollman, Silbergitt, & Gibbons, 2007).

The RTI Action Network reviewed a problem-solving model combined with a standard protocol model known as the Idaho Results-Based Model (RBM). This model was designed to provide strategic, intensive interventions within the context of instruction, curriculum and environment (Callender, 2007). The purpose of the study was to identify the impact of the RBM upon reading performance and to determine whether the use of the RBM decreased the percentage of students placed in special education. The data collected throughout the state of Idaho from 1999 to 2004 indicated that state enrollment rose by 3%, and special education placement increased by 1% percent. In contrast, districts with at least one RBM school reflected a 3% decrease in special education placement rates (Callender, 2007).

Another study reviewed by the RTI Action Network, titled Field Studies of RTI Models: Flexible Service Delivery System (FSDS) Model, implemented a study to answer four questions. Of the four questions, one was related to the effect of the FSDS on eligibility for special education services. Data was collected from 1999 – 2003 and included students in FSDS model schools in grades K-8. At the conclusion of the study, the authors reported that referral rates for special education services remained fairly consistent, with an average decrease of 1% overall for participating schools or districts (Peterson, Prasse, Shinn, & Swerdlik, 2007).

A fourth study included the evaluation of the Minneapolis Problem-Solving Model (MPSM) and the effect it had on special education placements (Marston, Muyskens, Lau, & Canter, 2003). Based on data compared before and after the implementation of the MPSM, the number of students identified for special education services remained consistent during the study period (Marston, Muyskens, Lau, & Canter, 2003).

The final study of the five studies that had grade ranges extending past third grade was conducted to identify the effect of the System to Enhance Educational Performance (STEEP) on identification and evaluation for special education services. The study was conducted from April 2002 to April 2004 and involved five elementary schools using the STEEP model. The study reported that over half of the students who had been referred for evaluation qualified for special education services prior to STEEPS usage. However, after STEEP implementation, 65.5% of evaluations resulted in qualification for services,

leading the researchers to conclude that STEEP implementation allowed for more valid referrals and thus produced fewer false positives (VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007).

In addition to the articles reviewed by the RTI Action Network, other literature related to the RTI process and special education referral rates was reviewed. One study examined a tiered RTI system implemented in Iowa by the Heartland Educational Agency. The study utilized the Heartland Early Literacy Project in conjunction with a problem-solving model that utilized assessment and instruction at an individual student level. Heartland defined their problem-solving model as, “. . .a process that includes an objective definition of student behavior problems or academic difficulties, systematic analysis of the student’s problem and implementation of a planned systematic set of interventions” (Bender & Shores, 2007, p.10). In order for the project to be successful, additional support staff was required for each school involved. Students that advanced from one tier to the next without making sufficient progress were then referred for special education evaluation. The data reported for the years 1999 – 2004 showed a decrease in special education placement rates for students in kindergarten through third grade:

- Forty-one percent fewer kindergarteners placed in special education
- Thirty-four fewer first graders placed in special education
- Twenty-five fewer second graders placed in special education
- Nineteen percent fewer third graders placed in special education (Bender & Shores, 2007).

Hare (2008) compared the special education referral rates before and after the implementation of a pilot program in West Virginia. The West Virginia pilot study was initiated in eleven schools across nine counties throughout the state. Data for the study was collected from two of the pilot schools in the study. The students served were in grades K-3. The study included approximately 150 teachers, eleven principals, eleven project coordinators, and nine special education directors. Data collected from the two schools within the pilot study consisted of the total number of special education referrals for the year prior to the pilot study and continuing through the 2005 – 2006 school year. The data reflected that the RTI model did not impact a change in the number of referrals made from year to year. However, the longitudinal data showed that contrary to the anticipated reduction in numbers of special education referrals, there was actually an increase over time from 2005 – 2008 (Hare, 2008).

A qualitative study utilizing quantitative referral data, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups was conducted to determine the impact of RTI on special education identification (Parks, 2011). The purpose of the study was to aid administrators in determining the effect RTI had on special education identification and the teachers' perceptions of the RTI process and special education identification. The participants consisted of four campus principals, four elementary teacher focus groups, and one middle school teacher focus group. The interviews for each group lasted between sixty to ninety minutes. Upon conclusion of the study, principals and teachers indicated that the number of students declared eligible for special education services decreased since the

implementation of RTI (Parks, 2011). In contrast, quantitative data that was analyzed from three years prior to and three years after the implementation of RTI in elementary school did not reflect a significant decrease in special education eligibility (Parks, 2011). This result demonstrates that perceptions of administrators and other staff members may not necessarily match the actual data collected. The difference in perceptions and data lend itself to further study of this topic.

Each of the studies reviewed provided information related to RTI and special education referral rates. However, there was no consensus as to the impact of RTI on referral rates for special education services. This confirmed the researcher's decision to study the impact of RTI on special education referral rates in Texas and assisted in forming the foundation for this study.

### **Summary**

There are challenges regarding the use of RTI as a method of acknowledging students with a learning disability (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2006). Education systems nationwide use an array of structures and methods of RTI identification. Consequently, there is variation in the composition and number of students classified as having a learning disability compared to the previous discrepancy system and the use of IQ-achievement (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007).

This chapter reviewed the historical data related to the onset of the RTI process and the various RTI structures and responsibilities within those structures. The chapter also examines studies related to the use of an RTI system and its effect on special



education referral rates. The literature cited in this chapter provides a foundation for the present study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine trends in special education referrals brought about by Response to Intervention (RTI) and to explore how those trends compared with the self-reported data of special education directors and evaluation staff. To answer the research questions, the researcher conducted a descriptive non-experimental design study using both archival and survey data. This design was selected based on the availability of informative archival data in Texas and the ability to compare the archival data with empirical data gathered from a survey.

#### **Research Design**

Data utilized was gathered from four sources: Special Education Adhoc Reporting System (SPEARS), open records request, Texas Education Agency Login (TEAL), and survey data. The initial data was mined from SPEARS. SPEARS provides dynamic adhoc reporting on students with disabilities in the State of Texas. Individuals can only obtain the information contained in SPEARS with access to the Texas Education Agency Login (TEAL). This system is available to individuals employed by an independent school district (ISD), education services center (ESC) or shared service arrangement (SSA). To gain access to the TEAL system, an individual within an independent school system must apply either online or on paper and be approved by the superintendent of an independent school district (ISD). The data collected from the

SPEARS system addresses both state and regions of the state. All twenty educational service centers were examined for trends.

A second source of data was obtained through an open records request submitted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The request sought data on Indicator 11 of the State Performance Plan (SPP). The SPP evaluates the State's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEA and illustrates how Texas schools will continuously improve upon this implementation on a state level (Texas Education Agency, 2013c). Indicator 11 of the SPP measures the percentage of students with signed, written parental evaluation consent who were evaluated within the state established timeline. The Special Education Department of the TEA provides public reporting of the SPP on a statewide level, but individual regional data is not publicly reported. The open records request obtained data specific to each of the twenty regions in Texas over a period from 2007 to 2011. Once all data was obtained, the researcher compiled the information from each regional service center and ascertained the percentage of students found eligible for special education services. This percentage was based on the number of referrals per regional service center, and the number of Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee meetings held within ninety days for eligible students.

The third source of archival data was obtained through the researcher's access to the Texas Education Agency Login (TEAL) system. The information gathered was in the form of existing reports containing individual district's SPP Indicator 11 data. The information focused on referral rates and eligibility from 2007 to 2011. Beginning with

2007 each report referenced a specific year. Once all reports were obtained, the researcher compiled the data and determined the percentage of students who qualified for special education services. This percentage was based on the number of referrals and the number of ARD committee meetings conducted within ninety days for eligible students.

The final source of data was a survey. The survey was designed by the researcher and consisted of one prescreening question and twelve statements. The survey was validated and adjusted based on the results of a pilot study conducted by the researcher. Once validated the survey was administered via paper and pencil format by the researcher to the identified groups. The groups participating in the survey consisted of special education directors and evaluations staff from one regional ESC and a local ISD.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Based on student referrals for special education, what are trends at the state level, across regional services centers, and in one independent school district?
2. What are the trends in the number of students receiving special education services in Texas during the period of 2007 to 2011?
3. How does the self-reported RTI data collected on a survey of special education directors and special education evaluation staff compare to the data collected from the state sources?

## **Survey Instrumentation**

When conducting survey research, the initial step is to utilize the most appropriate survey tool . If an appropriate survey is not available, the researcher must design one. During the literature review for the project, a suitable survey for gathering the self-reported RTI data of special education directors and special education evaluation staff was not identified. Therefore, the researcher devised a survey tool compatible with the purpose of the study. When formulating a survey the researcher must consider four major areas: survey design, instrument development, data collection, data interpretation (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

## **Process**

The survey development process consists of four steps. The first step is the review of current literature to identify whether there is an existing survey to meet the needs of the research. The second step is the creation of test questions appropriate for the research. Step three involves the implementation of a pilot study to determine the validity of the survey instrument. The insurance of the survey instrument's validity and reliability comprises step four.

## **Pilot Study**

The pilot study was conducted in a masters' level special education research course offered at Texas Woman's University. The study was completed as part of an assignment from faculty advisor, Dr. Jane Pemberton and in collaboration with dissertation committee member, Dr. Heather Haynes-Smith. Dr. Haynes-Smith, the instructor for the

research course, allocated a portion of the class period for the study and focus group.

Twelve students, representing the disciplines of special education and educational administration, were present for the class.

The students were provided with directions and information related to the survey. Student participation was voluntary, and no incentives were offered for participating in either the survey or focus group. Upon completion of the survey, the students moved to a separate section of the class to assist the researcher with a focus group.

The focus group was informed that the session would be recorded using an iPad and an iPhone. The research project utilized an iPad that had a MP3 Recorder application and an iPhone with the Audio Memos application. The recording was used to provide the researcher with an accurate representation of the feedback collected during the focus group. None of the recordings were used as part of the data for the actual survey.

Upon completion of the focus group, the researcher utilized SPSS to conduct a Cronbach's Alpha to test for internal "reliability". The Cronbach's Alpha produced the following initial results (Figure1):

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.780	.718	10

*Figure 1. Cronbach's Alpha, first attempt*

After removing question one from the original survey and using it as a “Pre-Screening” question as suggested by the focus group, the Cronbach’s Alpha produced the following result (Figure 2):

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.813	.807	9

*Figure 2.* Cronbach's Alpha, follow-up attempt

Two versions of the survey, form A and form B, were developed and prepared for administration. Form A contained demographic data and was developed for administration at a regional ESC. Form B was designed for administration at one local ISD and did not contain demographic data to protect the anonymity of the ISD staff.

### **Administration of the Survey**

Initial permission was sought and obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas Woman’s University (TWU) to conduct the research survey. Additional permission was obtained from one Educational Service Center (ESC) and a local ISD to distribute and collect the paper and pencil survey. Both the ESC and local ISD will be presented with the survey results once the study is complete.

Form - A was administered at an ESC to a group of special education directors and special education evaluation staff. The survey was administered on February 20, 2014, at the Special Education Director’s meeting and at the Special Education Evaluation

Advisory meeting held on February 21, 2014. The researcher presented the survey, provided all directions, and gathered completed surveys within the time frame of the regularly scheduled meeting. Seventy-three people were registered for the Special Education Directors meeting and forty-three people were present. Of the forty-three attendees, all forty-three completed the survey. Of the one hundred registered for the Special Education Evaluation Advisory meeting, seventy people attended. Of those individuals, sixty-five completed the survey. This provided a return rate of 96% for the surveys administered at the ESC.

Form - B, the survey that does not contain demographic data, was presented by the researcher to the special education director and special education evaluation staff of an ISD located within the ESC. All data was returned to the researcher in an unmarked envelope in order to maintain the confidentiality of the staff. Seven surveys were administered and returned, resulting in a response rate of 100%.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using four methods:

- Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal "reliability" of the survey.
- Friedman Two-Way rank measured data from 2007 to 2011.
- A repeated measures ANOVA was completed to identify trends.
- A t-test was completed to look at group differences on the RTI Process survey.
- Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data findings.



### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study include general limitations associated with non-experimental design studies. Non-experimental design studies are conducted for comparison purposes, relying on preselected groups. The results obtained from this type of study make it impossible to establish an exact cause-effect relationship because the researcher does not manipulate the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

The focus of this study centered on the trends in special education referral rates and staff perceptions of the impact of RTI as compared to the data collected from the state sources. This study was limited to one state, one service center and one school district. The results of the data analyzed are presented in chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Response To Intervention on the referral rates of students eligible for special education services and to compare the perceptions of identified educators to the reported data gathered from state sources. The data was gathered from three existing sources and a survey was devised by the researcher. The review of the data at the state level from 2007 to 2011 focused on the actual number of students who received special education services within the state of Texas. Data was then examined to determine the percentage of students who were referred for services within each regional services center and the subsequent number of students found eligible for special education services. The same data was further identified at an individual school district level. The final source of information was based upon the results obtained from the survey instrument administered at a regional ESC and local ISD level.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. Based on student referrals for special education, what are trends at the state level, across regional services centers, and in one independent school district?
2. What are the trends in the number of students receiving special education services in Texas during the period of 2007 to 2011?

3. How does the self-reported RTI data collected on a survey of special education directors and special education evaluation staff compare to the data collected from the state sources?

### **Texas Education Agency (TEA) State Performance Plan (SPP) Totals**

A Friedman Two-Way rank test was conducted to identify if data reflected significant differences among groups throughout the twenty regions in Texas.

Information obtained following an open records request to the TEA provided the data used to answer the first research question of this study.

1. Based on student referrals for special education, what are trends at the state level, across regional services centers, and in one independent school district?

The data obtained was gathered and reported at the regional level and gathered from SPP indicator 11 data collection from the Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2007 to 2011. As detailed in Chapter III, the researcher compiled the data for each regional service center and calculated the percentage of students found eligible for special education services. This percentage was based on the number of referrals per regional service center, and the number of Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee meetings held within ninety days for students eligible for special education services. This data provided the number of students referred for special education services, including the number that were tested and found eligible for services. This information was

significant in identifying the percentage of students found eligible for special education services from years 2007 to 2011 (Table 1).

Upon completion of the analysis, the Friedman revealed a significant difference over time  $\chi^2(2) = 87.327, p = .000$  (Figure 3). A repeated measures ANOVA was completed to ascertain the trend shown in Figure 4. The chart reflects an increase in the number of students that were referred and found eligible for special education services over a specific period. There was a decrease in eligibility during year four and the trend stabilized in year five. Non-parametric confidences interval analysis (Marascuilo, 1977) found differences between 2007 and 2009, 2007 and 2010, and 2007 and 2011. No other differences rejected the null hypothesis.

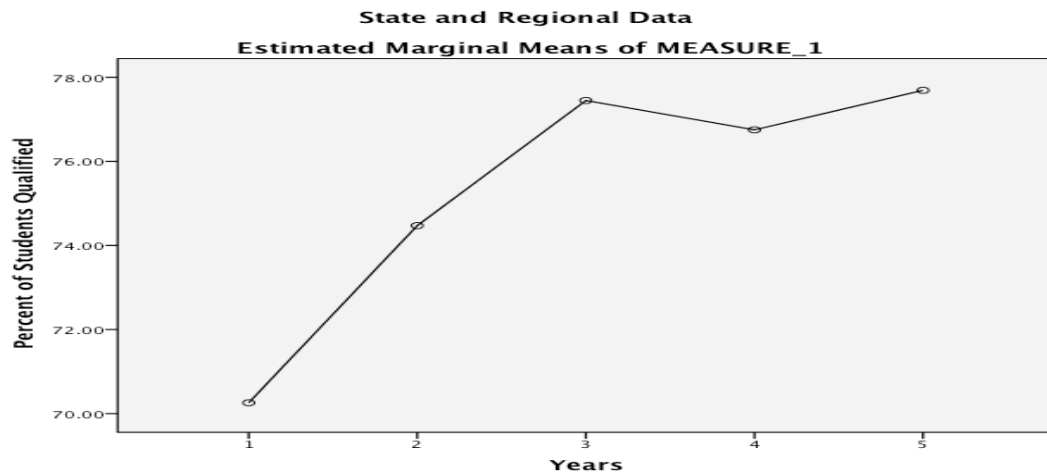
Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
N	21
Chi-Square	87.327
df	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Friedman Test	

*Figure 3.* Friedman analysis results of group differences

Table 1

*Percentage of Students Found Eligible for Special Education Services across Regional Service Centers and State Totals*

Region	% of Students found eligible for services	% of Students found eligible for services	% of Students found eligible for services	% of Students found eligible for services	% of Students found eligible for services	<i>Mean Increase</i>
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	
01	62.1	66.4	69.8	67.8	79.1	6.5
02	73.3	81.0	82.8	80.2	81.4	2.8
03	73.3	70.0	80.9	75.8	80.1	4.8
04	69.4	74.6	76.9	78.5	75.4	2.3
05	76.2	74.6	81.8	83.7	77.4	.6
06	64.0	74.9	82.6	72.5	79.2	6.1
07	74.3	79.1	79.8	79.0	81.9	1.8
08	74.7	75.6	79.9	83.4	82.3	2.5
09	73.1	78.6	79.9	60.4	78.0	3.4
10	65.7	72.1	71.9	74.8	72.8	2.6
11	72.9	75.9	74.5	74.9	77.5	1.6
12	58.8	69.5	68.9	74.4	71.9	5.5
13	72.8	79.1	79.7	80.5	80.9	2.8
14	79.0	83.4	81.3	78.5	77.7	-.6
15	63.3	67.6	72.7	72.3	66.2	1.3
16	67.6	70.0	72.3	75.0	72.5	1.8
17	76.1	78.8	79.5	85.9	81.0	1.8
18	72.8	71.4	77.2	78.4	82.4	4.2
19	64.4	68.2	75.9	76.8	75.1	4.1
20	71.3	78.6	80.7	82.2	81.0	3.3
Statewide Total	70.3	74.5	77.4	76.7	77.7	3.



*Figure 4.* Estimated marginal means of measure 1

Across the twenty regions in Texas, there was an average increase in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services in every region except Region 14. This region had an average increase of -.6% . The state as a whole had a mean increase of 3% in the number of students who were referred and found eligible. ESC 11 had a mean increase of 1.6% in the number of students who were referred and found eligible.

#### **District State Performance Plan (SPP) Totals**

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to test for differences over time among the data for the local ISD. This test was conducted on archival data obtained through the Texas Education Agency Login (TEAL) system. The information gathered was in the form of existing reports of an individual district's SPP Indicator 11 data. The information focused on referral rates and eligibility from 2007 to 2011. The percentage

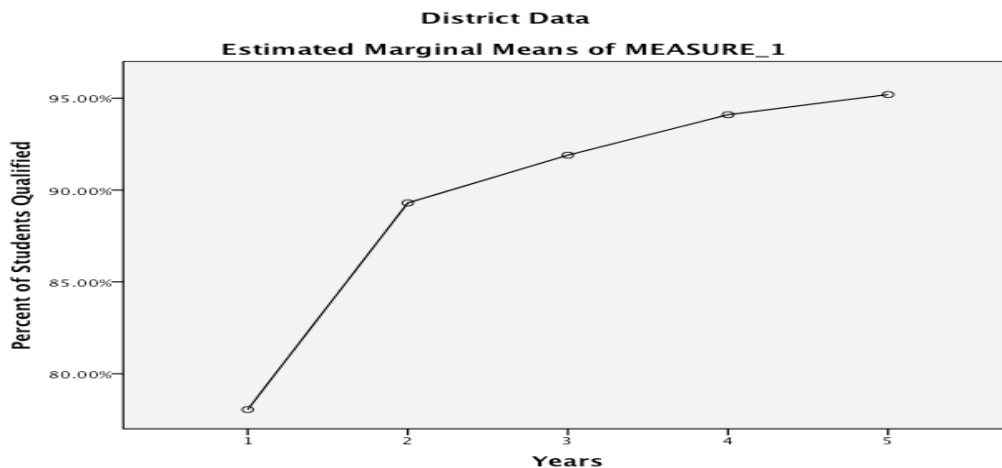
of students found eligible for special education services was based on the number of referrals and the number of ARD committee meetings conducted within ninety days for eligible students (Table 2). Data reported on SPP 11 showed a mean increase of 5% from 2007 to 2011 in the number of students that were referred and found eligible for special education services within the local school district.

Table 1

*Percentage of Students Found Eligible for Special Education Services in a Local ISD*

District	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	Mean Increase
	78.5	89.3	91.9	94.1	95.2	5

A repeated measures ANOVA was completed to determine the trend shown in figure 5. The chart reveals an increase in the number of students that were referred and found eligible for special education services from 2007 to 2011.



*Figure 5 ANOVA results*

## **Special Education Adhoc Reporting System (SPEARS) Data**

Data obtained from SPEARS was utilized to answer the following research question:

2. What are the trends in the number of students receiving special education services in Texas during the period of 2007 to 2011?

The SPEARS system is a tool provided by the TEA for analyzing data related to special education in the State of Texas. The data provided by the system is gathered from public school districts and charter schools as reported in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). The data gathered for this study revealed that during the period from school year 2007 to school year 2011, there was a decline in the number of students receiving special education services across each of the twenty regional service centers, as well as across the state. However, on the contrary, there was an increase in the number of students receiving services at the ISD included in this study. Across the twenty regions in Texas, there was an average decrease of 3.9% in the number of students being served by special education from the 2007 school year to the 2011 school year (Table 3). When looking at the state data as a whole there was an average decrease of 9% in the number of students being served by special education (Table 4). The data at the ISD data shows an average increase of 7 % in the number of students being served by special education (Table 5).



Table 3

*Students Receiving Special Education Services across Regions*

Region	07	08	09	10	11	Mean Decrease
1	35,114	33,652	32,206	31,685	31,482	2.7%
2	13,012	12,073	11,302	10,705	10,396	5.4%
3	6,664	6,270	5,954	5,503	5,290	5.7%
4	98,279	93,682	88,970	87,365	86,896	3.0%
5	10,236	9,517	8,853	8,528	8,019	5.9%
6	17,546	16,905	16,140	15,546	15,193	3.5%
7	19,754	18,599	17,522	16,746	15,980	5.2%
8	8,075	7,465	6,996	6,623	6,359	5.1%
9	5,238	5,122	4,929	4,731	4,578	3.3%
10	73,537	71,659	69,494	69,585	70,038	1.21%
11	51,409	49,555	48,406	47,430	47,506	1.9%
12	20,351	18,522	17,142	16,317	16,105	5.7%
13	36,901	35,194	34,256	34,987	35,810	.7%

(continued)

---

14	6,885	6,421	5,972	5,935	5,980	3.4%
15	6,497	5,707	5,248	5,011	5,002	6.4%
16	9,557	8,900	8,126	7,779	7,738	5.1%
17	10,562	10,092	9,678	8,868	8,745	4.6%
18	8,078	7,492	7,002	6,578	6,360	5.8%
19	16,741	16,386	15,765	15,435	15,736	1.5%
20	44,224	43,132	41,919	41,235	40,917	1.9%
Average						3.9%

---

Table 4

*Students Receiving Special Education Services in Texas*

---

Texas	07	08	09	10	11	Decrease
Total	498,660	476,345	455,880	446,592	444,130	<b>9%</b>

---

Table 5

*Students Receiving Special Education Services across ISD*

Texas	07	08	09	10	11	Increase
Total	243	255	247	259	304	7%

**Response to Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey - Form A**

The Response to Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey was the tool used to gather data for the following research question:

3. How does the self-reported RTI data collected on a survey of special education directors and special education evaluation staff compare to the data collected from the state sources?

The purpose of this survey was to examine the perceptions of special education directors and evaluation staff related to the RTI process in their individual school districts. The ultimate goal was to use the survey to determine if there was a relationship between the perceptions of special education directors and evaluation staff to the archival data.

**Demographic Characteristics of Special Education Directors and Evaluation Staff**

The survey was administered to 108 individuals. Of the 108, only one individual answered “no” to the pre-screening question, thereby eliminating that person from completing the question portion of the survey. The prescreening question is, “At least

one school in my district is using the RTI process.” The survey population was comprised of 95% females and 5% males. Of the population, 52% were special education evaluation staff, 28% special education directors and 19% reported as other. Ninety-two percent of the population reported being certified in special education, 8% were not certified. Ninety-one percent of the individuals surveyed had obtained a master’s degree, and 9% had a PhD. Thirty percent had been in the current position for four-to-seven years; however, 55% had been in the education profession for twenty plus years (Table 6).

Table 6

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Variable	Total Number	Percent of Total
Gender		
Male	5	5
Female	101	95
Current Position		
Special Education Director	29	28
Special Education Evaluation Staff	54	52
Other	20	19
Certified in Special Education		
Yes	97	92
No	9	8

---

Degree Held		
Masters	81	91
PhD	8	9
Number of Years in Current Position		
1-3	28	26
4-7	32	30
8-11	12	11
12-15	16	15
16-19	5	5
20+	13	12
Number of Years in Education		
1-3	1	.94
4-7	4	4
8-11	8	8
12-15	23	22
16-19	12	11
20+	58	55

---

Respondents were asked to answer one pre-screening question and twelve survey questions related to their perception of RTI within their individual school district. The survey used a Likert Scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with points ranging from 1-4 being assigned by the researcher. The questions appear in Table 7 with the percentages of answers listed by level of agreement. Figure 6 provides a graphic representation of the response percentages.

Table 7 Survey Questions and Percentages of Responses Form-A

Question	4 Strongly Agree	3 Agree	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
1. The primary purpose of the RTI process in my district is for detection of students in need of academic interventions.	38.4	46.1	15.3	0
2. In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students in need of any special education services	35.5	46.7	14.0	3.7
3. In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students with a learning disability only.	4.7	27.6	54.2	13.3
4. In my district, the data from the RTI process is a mandatory part of a learning disability (LD) evaluation.	30.0	54.3	12.6	2.9
5. If a parent requests verbally or in writing that a child be evaluated for special education services, my district does <b>not</b> proceed with the referral unless the child has been through the RTI process.	.95	11.4	62.8	24.7
6. If a student moves through tiers of interventions with some improvement but still shows deficits in achievement, my district refers the student for special education evaluation.	17.3	57.6	22.1	2.8
7. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a <b>decrease</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.	15.8	40.5	30.6	12.8

---

8. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen an <b>increase</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.	9.9	24.7	50.4	14.8
9. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen <b>no change</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.	3.0	16.1	58.5	22.2
10. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a <b>decrease</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.	5.8	35.9	49.5	8.7
11. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen an <b>increase</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.	6.8	32.3	54.9	5.8
12. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen <b>no change</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.	2.0	19.3	66.3	14.2

---

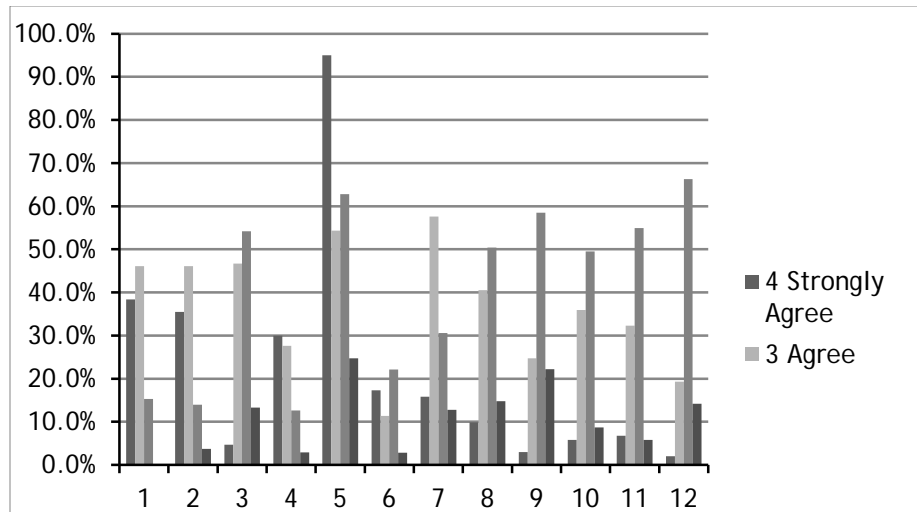


Figure 6 Percentages of responses Form-A

### Questions on the Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey Form A

RTI process, referral process, and number of referrals comprise the three survey question categories.

#### RTI Process

The first four statements on the survey related to the RTI process elicit perceptions regarding aspects of RTI. In response to the first statement that was, “*The primary purpose of the RTI process in my district is for detection of students in need of academic interventions,*” 104 people responded. Individuals who agreed that the process was used for detection of students in need of academic interventions numbered 48 or 46.1%. Only 16 people or 15.3% disagreed with this statement, and no one reported strongly disagreeing. The second statement read, “*In my district, the RTI process is*



*currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students in need of any special education services.*” The number of respondents who agreed with this statement totaled 46.7% of the 107 who responded, while 3.7% strongly disagreed with the statement. However, when asked the next question that specifically focused on LD and the RTI process, the numbers shifted somewhat. In response to the next section, *“In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students with a learning disability only,”* the agreement of 27.6% of respondents outweighed the 13.3% who strongly disagreed. The last statement in this section related to the RTI requirement for LD evaluation, *“In my district, the data from the RTI process is a mandatory part of a learning disability (LD) evaluation.”* Most of the respondents either agreed, 54.3% or strongly agreed 30% with this statement.

### **Referral Process**

The next two statements specifically addressed the referral process. The first of these two read, *“If a parent requests verbally or in writing that a child be evaluated for special education services, my district does **not** proceed with the referral unless the child has been through the RTI process.”* The majority of respondents, 62.8%, disagreed with the statement, and only .95% strongly agreed. The last statement in the section regarding referral process was, *“If a student moves through tiers of interventions with some improvement but still shows deficits in achievement, my district refers the student for special education evaluation.”* A majority of respondents, 57.6%, agreed with the statement, and only 2.8% strongly disagreed.

### Number of Referrals

The next area consisting of statements seven, eight, and nine addressed the number of referrals received since implementing a RTI process in the school district. Statement seven read, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a **decrease** in the number of **referrals** for special education services.*” Although 40.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement, 30.6% disagreed. However, when responding to the next statement, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a **increase** in the number of **referrals** for special education services,*” 50.4% disagreed with the statement and 24.7% agreed. Since these two questions were so closely linked in meaning, it is interesting that the numbers vary by such a large degree. The ninth statement, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen **no change** in the number of **referrals** for special education services,*” again related to referral numbers. A majority, specifically 58.5% the respondents agreed with this statement and 22.2% strongly disagreed.

The final three statements addressed not only referral numbers but also eligibility. When asked, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a **decrease** in the number of students that were **referred and found eligible** for special education services,*” 49.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. However, when asked, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen an **increase** in the number of students that were **referred and found eligible** for special education services,*” 54.9% of respondents disagreed. The response to the last statement,

*“Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen **no change** in the number of students that were **referred and found** eligible for special education services,”*  
66.3% of respondents disagreed.

### **Response to Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey - Form B**

Form B of the Response to Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey was administered to seven members of an ISD’s special education department. The purpose of the survey was to compare the responses obtained at a local level to the ones obtained at a regional service center level. The survey used a Likert Scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with points ranging from 1-4 being assigned by the researcher. The questions appear in Table 8 with the percentages of answers listed by level of agreement. Figure 6 provides a graphic representation of the response percentages. All surveys were returned; however, due to the need for confidentiality, Form B did not contain demographic information.

Table 8

*Survey Questions and Percentages of Responses Form-B*

<b>Question</b>	<b>4 Strongly Agree</b>	<b>3 Agree</b>	<b>2 Disagree</b>	<b>1 Strongly Disagree</b>
1. The primary purpose of the RTI process in my district is for detection of students in need of academic interventions.	71.4	28.5	0	0
2. In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students in need of any special education services.	28.5	71.4	0	0
3. In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students with a learning disability only.	0	14.2	57.1	28.5
4. In my district, the data from the RTI process is a mandatory part of a learning disability (LD) evaluation.	28.5	57.1	14.2	0.0
5. If a parent requests verbally or in writing that a child be evaluated for special education services, my district does <b>not</b> proceed with the referral unless the child has been through the RTI process.	.0	28.5	42.8	28.5
6. If a student moves through tiers of interventions with some improvement but still shows deficits in achievement, my district refers the student for special education evaluation.	14.2	71.4	14.2	0

---

7. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a <b>decrease</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.	28.5	14.2	42.8	14.2
8. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen an <b>increase</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.	0	28.5	42.8	14.2
9. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen <b>no change</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.	0	28.5	57.1	14.2
10. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a <b>decrease</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.	0	28.5	57.1	14.2
11. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen an <b>increase</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.	14.2	57.1	28.5	0
12. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen <b>no change</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.	0	14.2	28.5	14.2

---

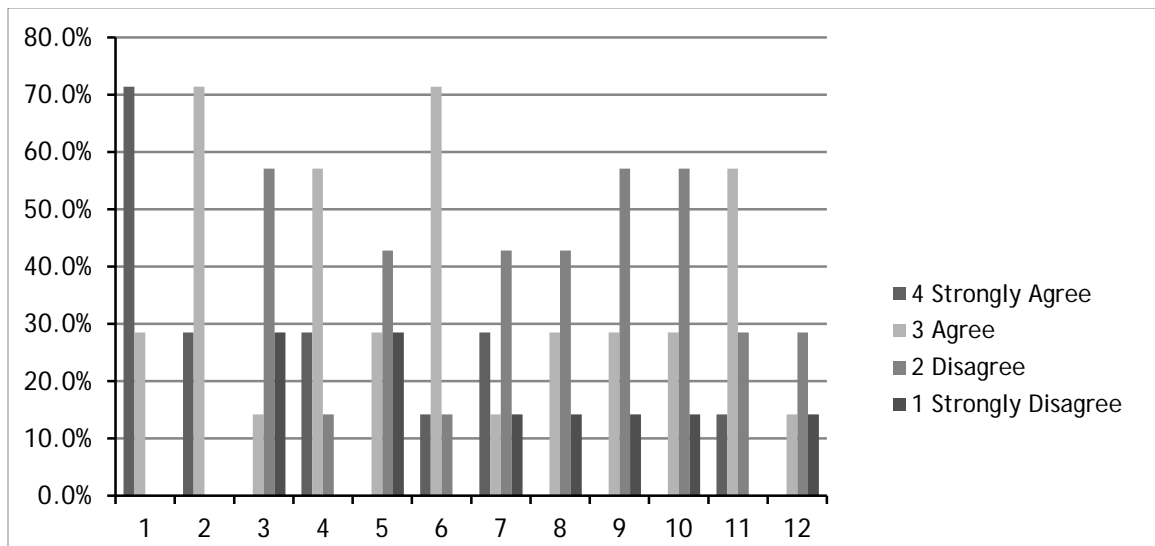


Figure 7. Percentage of responses Form-B

### Survey Questions on the Response to Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey Form B

RTI process, referral process, and number of referrals comprise the three survey statement categories.

#### RTI Process

The first four statements on the survey related to the RTI process to elicit perceptions held regarding aspects of RTI. In response to the first statement, *“The primary purpose of the RTI process in my district is for detection of students in need of academic intervention,”* 71.4% said that they strongly agreed. The remaining 28.5% merely agreed with the statement. The second statement read, *“In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students in need of any special education services.”* Seven individuals responded, and only 28.5% strongly

agreed. In contrast, 71.4% agreed and no respondents disagreed. However, when asked the next question that specifically focused on LD and the RTI process, the numbers shifted somewhat. The statement, *“In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students with a learning disability only,”* elicited agreement of only 14.2% and disagreement of 57.1%. It is significant that 28.5% strongly disagreed. The last statement in this section related to the RTI requirement for LD evaluation, *“In my district, the data from the RTI process is a mandatory part of a learning disability (LD) evaluation.”* A majority, 57.1% of the respondents, agreed; 28.5% strongly agreed with this statement.

### **Referral Process**

The next two statements specifically addressed the referral process. The first of these two read, *“If a parent requests verbally or in writing that a child be evaluated for special education services, my district does **not** proceed with the referral unless the child has been through the RTI process.”* None of the survey participants strongly agreed with the statement, and only 28.5% agreed. However, the majority of respondents 42.8%, disagreed and 28.5% strongly disagreed. The last statement in the section regarding the referral process was, *“If a student moves through tiers of interventions with some improvement but still shows deficits in achievement, my district refers the student for special education evaluation.”* A majority of respondents, 71.4%, agreed, and only 14.2% either strongly agreed or disagreed.

### Number of Referrals

The next area consisting of statements seven, eight, and nine addressed the number of referrals received since implementing a RTI process in the school district. Statement seven read, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a **decrease** in the number of **referrals** for special education services.*” Although 42.8% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, only 28.5% strongly agreed. However, when responding to the next section, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a **increase** in the number of **referrals** for special education services,*” 42.8% disagreed and 28.5% agreed. Since these two questions are so closely linked in meaning, it is interesting that the same number of the respondents disagreed that there had been a decrease in the number of referrals and disagreed that there had been an increase in the number of referrals. The ninth statement, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen **no change** in the number of **referrals** for special education service,*” again related referral numbers. A majority, specifically 57.1% of the respondents disagreed with this statement and 28.5% agreed.

The final three questions addressed not only referral numbers but also eligibility. When asked, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a **decrease** in the number of students that were **referred and found eligible** for special education services,*” 57.1% disagreed with the statement. However, when asked, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen an **increase** in the number of students that were **referred and found eligible** for special education services,*” 57.1% of



respondents agreed. The response to the last statement, “*Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen **no change** in the number of students that were referred and found eligible for special education services,*” resulted in 28.5% of responders who disagreed.

### Survey Comparison

When comparing the two surveys, while the scores reported by the district are somewhat higher, the chart indicates that the responses tend to track each other (Figure 7). The logical conclusion is that in spite of the differences in the responses of the two surveys, perceptions reported at the educational service center (ESC level) are similar to the ones reported at the district level. However differences were noticed on question nine of the survey. More than half of respondents on both surveys disagreed with the statement; however, more respondents from the regional ESC strongly disagreed with the statement while the respondents from local ISD agreed with the statement.

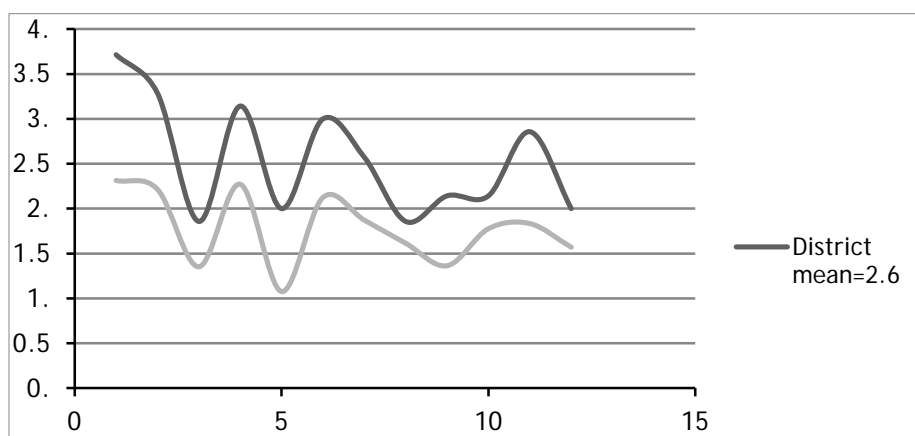


Figure 8. Survey comparisons

The overall mean difference of the two surveys was assessed with an independent t-Test. The results showed the district had a higher mean than the ESC [ $t(22)=3.5$ ,  $p=.002$ ].

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine trends in special education referrals that have been brought about by Response to Intervention (RTI) and to determine how those trends compare with the self-reported data of special education directors and evaluation staff. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the study in general and provide implications for future researchers and educators. The following sections are incorporated in this chapter: a) Summary of the Research Study, (b) Discussion of the Results, (c) Conclusions, (d) Limitations, and (e) Future Research

#### **Summary**

A descriptive non-experimental design study using existing data and survey methods was used. This design was selected based on the availability of archival data in Texas and the ability to compare the archival data gathered with empirical data. The archival data was gathered from the following three sources: SPEARS, TEA, SPP 11, information reported in TEAL, and the empirical data was collected from a survey. The archival data gathered from SPEARS provided the number of students receiving special education services across regions. The data obtained from an open records request to TEA provided the number of referrals per regional

service center and the number of Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee meetings held within ninety days for eligible students. This allowed the researcher to tabulate the percentage of students found eligible for special education services across regional service centers and the State of Texas. The data obtained from TEAL provided the number of referrals for an ISD and the number of Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee meetings held within ninety days for eligible students. This enabled the researcher to identify the percentage of students found eligible for special education services within the ISD. The survey data provided information related to the perceptions of special education directors and evaluation staff related to the RTI process in their respective school districts. The accumulated data made it possible for the researcher to compare the factual data gathered from state sources to the empirical data gathered on the survey.

### **Discussion of Results**

The first research question, cited below, focused on special education referral trends.

1. Based on student referrals for special education, what are trends at the state level, across regional services centers, and in one independent school district?

Through data reported on SPP 11, the State of Texas had a mean increase of 3% in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services. Across the twenty regions in Texas, there was an overall mean increase in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services with the exception being Region 14. This region had a -.6% increase. Within Region

11 ESC, there was a mean increase of 1.6% in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services. Finally, there was a mean increase of 5% in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services within the local school district.

Research question two focused on special education referral trends over time.

2. “What are the trends in the number of students receiving special education services in Texas during the period of 2007 to 2011?”

Across the twenty regions in Texas, there was an average decrease of 3.9% in the number of students being served by special education from the 2007 school year to the 2011 school year. When looking at the state data as a whole, there was a 9% decrease in the number of students being served by special education. However, the data at the ISD depicted a 7% increase in the number of students being served by special education.

Research question three, focused on survey data compared to archival data.

3. “How does the self-reported RTI data collected on a survey of special education directors and special education evaluation staff compare to the data collected from the state sources,”

When examining the survey, the researcher initially compared the data gathered from the regional ESC to the data gathered from one local ISD. The scores reported by the local ISD are somewhat higher than those reported by the regional ESC. There is a deviation noticed on question nine. More than half of respondents on both surveys disagreed with the statement; however, more respondents from the regional ESC strongly

disagreed with the statement while the respondents from local ISD agreed with the statement. Yet the chart as a whole indicated that the responses tend to track each other. This demonstrated that the perceptions reported at the educational service center (ESC) were similar to the ones reported at the district level.

Then, the researcher examined the responses on the ESC survey and ISD survey to compare the facts gathered on the archival data. There was one pre-screening question/statement and twelve survey questions/statements. For the purposes of this specific study, the researcher concentrated on the actual referrals and eligibility and outcomes compared to perceived referrals and eligibility results.

When comparing the archival data to the survey data, the researcher discovered the following results:

- The archival data depicted a mean increase of 1.6% in the number of students referred and found eligible within Region 11 ESC. In response to whether the survey participants had seen an **increase** in the number of students who were **referred and found eligible** for special education services, 54.9% of the ESC respondents disagreed.
- The archival data reflected a mean increase of 5% in the number of students referred and found eligible within an ISD. In response to whether the survey participants had seen an **increase** in the number of students who were **referred and found eligible** for special education services, 57.1 % of the ISD respondents agreed.

## **Conclusions**

The RTI process has had a significant impact on the way students are served and identified for special education services. As of March, 2012, the following fourteen states have mandated the use of RTI as part of the identification process for a specific learning disability (SLD): Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Delaware, New Mexico, and New York (Zirkel, 2013). The State of Texas developed a guidance document in 2008 to help school districts implement RTI systems. Several universities now offer certifications and classes specifically related to RTI; Lehigh University offers an Ed.S. Program in Response To Intervention (Lehigh University, 2014), The University of Southern Main offers a Certificate of Graduate Studies in Response To Intervention (University of Southern Main, 2014), The University of Nebraska – Lincoln offers a graduate certificate in the area of Response To Intervention: Reading (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2014), and The University of Texas at Austin has partnered with the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk (MCPER) to build capacity for Texas schools to implement RTI and assist students (University of Texas, 2014). Each of these programs is designed to assist with the implementation of the RTI process, which should ultimately lead to more appropriate referrals for special education services.

The purpose of an RTI process is to provide all students with the best possible education that supports academic success and can be implemented in the least restrictive environment. General education teachers are now expected to assist students who are

struggling prior to referring them for special education services. Therefore, the supposition is that with the implementation of a RTI process, the referral rates for special education should decline as the RTI process improves. In addition, the system should produce referrals that are more accurate and generate increased percentages of the students who are appropriate referrals for special education services and who qualify for those services. With these premises in mind, this study contains analysis and descriptive archival data obtained from various sources within the Texas Education Agency and identified the perception of special education directors and evaluation staff related to RTI in their school district. The collected information resulted in the following conclusions:

- Trends at the state level indicated a mean increase of 3% in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services.
- Trends across the twenty ESC's revealed a mean increase of in the number of students who were referred and determined eligible for special education services.
- Trends at ESC 11 reflected a mean increase of 1.6% in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services.



- Trends at the local ISD showed a mean increase of 5% in the number of students who were referred and found eligible for special education services.
- Trends at the state level depicted a mean decrease of 9% in the number of students who were receiving special education services.
- Trends across the twenty ESC's expressed a mean decrease of 3.9% in the number of students who were receiving special education services.
- Trends at the local ISD level indicated a mean increase of 7% in the number of students who were receiving special education services.
- Data collected on the RTI survey forms A and B reported similar perceptions of the RTI processes between the regional ESC and one local ISD. Differences were noticed on question nine of the survey. More than half of respondents on both surveys disagreed with the statement; however, more respondents from the regional ESC strongly disagreed with the statement while the respondents from local ISD agreed with the statement.
- Data collected on the RTI survey at the ESC was inconsistent with trends established in the archival data gathered from state sources.
- Data collected on the RTI survey at the ISD concurred with the trends established in archival data gathered from state sources.

The RTI process necessitates educators to provide high quality instruction to all students and documentation of intervention to students who struggled academically, prior to the student being referred for special education services. If this process is properly implemented, there should be a decrease in the number of students referred for special education services. However, with the students who are referred, there should be an increase in the number that qualifies for special education services. The trends that evolved during the research process suggest a relationship between the RTI process and increasingly accurate referrals for special education services. With continued appropriate implementation of the RTI process in Texas, students should receive the most appropriate instruction in the least restrictive environment.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include general limitations associated with non-experimental design studies. Non-experimental design studies are conducted for comparison purposes, relying on pre-selected groups. The results obtained from this type of study make it impossible to establish an exact cause-effect relationship because the researcher does not manipulate the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. However, for the purposes of this study there was no intent to manipulate the variables, therefore the limitations do not present a negative impact on the study. A second limitation was the date range of the archival data. Data for this study was based on a relatively brief period from 2007 to 2011. A final limitation was the

limited size of the survey population. The total sample size for this study involved only 114 participants and included one regional ESC and one ISD.

### **Future Research**

The findings of this study provide a basic frame of reference from which to make recommendations for future research. Additional research is suggested to determine if the trends in the referral process over time can be expanded beyond the five-year period of data collection presented in this study. If more information is obtained about existing, emerging, and changing trends, new studies and strategies can be formulated. The understanding of present and future trends can assist future researchers and practitioners when evaluating and improving the identification process for special education services. In addition, the details provided by the survey should be further researched to provide a more in-depth understanding of the RTI process across the regional ESC's. There is a need to continue to assess trends and general information integral to special education services, referrals, and eligibility factors.

All of these possibilities reinforce the need for additional studies in the area of RTI and the impact it has on special education referral rates. Schools that analyze referral trends and qualifications for services can use that information to improve decision-making. Educators can continue to enhance timely intervention assistance provided to students and increase appropriate referrals for special education services.

## REFERENCES

- Alreck, P. L., & Settle, R. B. (2004). *the survey research handbook* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Irwin.
- Batsche, G., Elliot, J., Graden, J., L., Grimes, J., Kovalski, J., F., Prasse, D., Tilly, D., W. (2005). *Response to Intervention Policy Considerations and Implementation*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.
- Bender, W. N., & Shores, C. (2007). *Response to intervention: a practical guide for every teacher*. [Arlington, VA] : Thousand Oaks, Calif: Council for Exceptional Children ; Corwin Press.
- Bollman, K. A., Silberglitt, B., & Gibbons, K. A. (2007). Field studies of rti effectiveness St.Croix River education district model (SCRED). *RTI Action Network*. Retrieved November 5, 2013, from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research/field-studies-rti-programs/fieldstudies-scred>
- Building the legacy: IDEA 2004. (2006). *ED.gov*. Retrieved December 1, 2013, from <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/,root,statute,I,B,614,b,6>,
- Burdette, P., & Pontes, E. (2009). *Response to intervention: Select state programs* (Brief Policy Analysis). National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

- Callender, W. A. (2007). Field studies of rti effectiveness Idaho results-based model (RBM). *RTI Action Network*. Retrieved November 5, 2013, from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research/field-studies-rti-programs/fieldstudies-rbm>
- Cortiella, C. (1998, 2013). Response-to-intervention: An emerging method for LD identification - evaluating for an LD. *GreatSchools*. Retrieved December 7, 2013, from <http://www.greatschools.org/special-education/LD-ADHD/883-emerging-method-for-ld-identification.gs?page=all>
- Fuchs, D., & Deshler, D. D. (2007). What we need to know about responsiveness to intervention (and shouldn't be afraid to ask). *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 22(2), 129–136.
- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (2009). Responsiveness to intervention: Multilevel assessment and instruction as early intervention and disability identification. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(3), 250–252. doi:10.1598/RT.63.3.10
- Hare, Christina, "The effects of response to intervention on referral rates for special education services" (2008). Theses, Dissertations and Capstones. Paper 624.
- Hallahan, D. P., & Mercer, C. D. (2001). Learning disabilities: Historical perspectives. *National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD)*. Retrieved January 25, 2014, from <http://nrclد.org/resources/ldsummit/hallahan3.html>

- Hoover, J. J., Baca, L., Wexler-Love, E., & Saenz, L. (2008). *National implementation of response to intervention (RTI), research summary*. NASDE. Retrieved from [http://www.sst13.org/Documents/ResponseToIntervention/GEN\\_NationalImplementationofRTI-ResearchSummary.pdf](http://www.sst13.org/Documents/ResponseToIntervention/GEN_NationalImplementationofRTI-ResearchSummary.pdf)
- Hoover, J. J., & Love, E. (2011). Supporting school-based response to intervention: A practitioner's model. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 43(3), 40–48.
- Hughs, C., & Dexter, D. (2011). Field studies of rti programs, revised. *RTI Action Network*. Retrieved December 8, 2013, from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research/field-studies-rti-programs>
- Institute of Education Sciences. (2011). *National Assessment of IDEA.pdf* (No. NCEE 2011-4026) (pp. 1–33). U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/search/?output=xml\\_no\\_dtd&client=ncee&site=ncee&q=national+assessment+of+IDEA](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/search/?output=xml_no_dtd&client=ncee&site=ncee&q=national+assessment+of+IDEA)
- Lehigh University. (2014). Response to intervention (RtI) specialist, Ed.S. *Lehigh University: College of Education*. Retrieved March 29, 2014, from <https://coe.lehigh.edu/content/rti>
- Logsdon, A. (2013). What is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act? *About.Com*. Retrieved December 19, 2013, from <http://learningdisabilities.about.com/od/publicschoolprograms/g/ideadefinition.htm>

- Marascuilo, L. A. (1977). *Nonparametric and distribution-free methods for the social sciences*. Monterey, Calif: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co.
- Marston, D., Muyskens, P., Lau, M., & Canter, A. (2003). Field studies of rti effectiveness Minneapolis problem-solving model (MPSM). *RTI Action Network*. Retrieved November 5, 2013, from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research/field-studies-rti-programs/fieldstudies-mpsm>
- Mastropieri, M., M., & Scruggs, T., E. (2005). Feasibility and consequences of response to intervention: Evidence as a model for the identification of Individuals with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 38(6), 525–531.
- Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2010, November 22). Thirty-five years of progress in educating children with disabilities through IDEA P. 10. *ED.gov U.S. Department of Education*. Retrieved January 24, 2014, from [http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/idea35/history/index\\_pg10.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/idea35/history/index_pg10.html)
- Ogonosky, A. (2008). *The response to intervention handbook: moving from theory to practice*. Austin, Tex.: Park Place Publications.
- Parks, N. (2011). The impact of response to intervention on special education identification. Retrieved from <http://eaglescholar.georgiasouthern.edu:8080/jspui/handle/10518/4779>

Peterson, D. W., Prasse, D. P., Shinn, M. R., & Swerdlik, M. . (2007). Field studies of rti effectiveness Illinois flexible service delivery system (FSDS) model. *RTI Action Network*. Retrieved November 5, 2013, from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research/field-studies-rti-programs/fieldstudies-fsds>

Reschly, D. J. (2002). Change dynamics in special education assessment: Historical and contemporary patterns. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 77(2), 117–136.

Region 18 Education Service Center, & Texas Education Agency. The legal framework for the child-centered special education process. *The legal framework for the child-centered special education process*. Retrieved January 4, 2014, from <http://framework.esc18.net/display/Webforms/ESC18-FW-Glossaries.aspx?DT=G&LID=en>

Sec. 300.39 Special education. (n.d.). *ED.gov U.S. Department of Education*. Retrieved February 1, 2014, from <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/,root,regs,300,A,300%252E39>,

Texas Education Agency - about TEA. (2013, August 14). Retrieved December 19, 2013, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3793>

Texas Education Agency - Evaluation of learning disability (ld) eligibility. (2013, January 30). Retrieved December 1, 2013, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147500368>



Texas Education Agency - about the state performance plan / Annual performance report. (2013, August 19). *Texas Education Agency*. Retrieved November 29, 2013, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147497591>

Texas Education Agency - Highly Qualified Teachers. (2013, November 22). Retrieved January 1, 2014, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=4650>

Texas Education Agency - response to intervention (RtI). (2011, April 29). Retrieved December 19, 2013, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147500224>

Texas Education Agency. (2008). Response to intervention guidance. *Curriculum Programs - Response to Intervention*. Retrieved March 28, 2011, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=5817>

Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). Special education ad hoc reporting system (SPEARS). *TEA Texas Education Agency*. Retrieved February 1, 2014, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147497589>

United States Department of Education. (2002, August). The individuals with disabilities education act amendments of 1997. *IDEA '97*. Retrieved February 1, 2014, from <http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/Policy/IDEA/index.html>

University of Nebraska-Lincoln. (2014). Response to intervention: Reading. Retrieved March 29, 2014, from [http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/prospective/programs/Cert\\_ReadingIntervention](http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/prospective/programs/Cert_ReadingIntervention)

- University of Southern Main. (2014). Certificate of Graduate Study in Response to Intervention: Academic | Educational Psychology | University of Southern Maine. Retrieved March 29, 2014, from <http://usm.maine.edu/educational-psychology/certificate-graduate-study-response-intervention-academic>
- VanDerHeyden, A. M. (2011). Technical adequacy of response to intervention decisions. *Exceptional Children*, 77(3), 335–350.
- VanDerHeyden, A. M., Witt, J. C., & Gilbertson, D. (2007). Field studies of rti effectiveness system to enhance educational performance (STEEP). *RTI Action Network*. Retrieved November 5, 2013, from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research/field-studies-rti-programs/fieldstudies-steep>
- Vaughn, S., & Fuchs, L. S. (2003). Redefining learning disabilities as inadequate response to instruction: The promise and potential problems. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 18(3), 137–146.
- Werts, M., G., Lambert, M., & Carpenter, E. (2009). What special education directors say about rti. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, Volume 32, 245–254.
- Zirkel, P., A. (2009). Legal eligibility of students with learning disabilities: Consider not only rti but also § 504. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, Volume 32, 51–53.

Zirkel, P., A. (2013). 2 The legal dimension of rti: Part II. state laws and guidelines.

*RTI Action Network*. Retrieved March 29, 2014, from

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/ld/the-legal-dimension-of-rti-part-ii-state-laws-and-guidelines>

## APPENDIX A

### IRB Approval



**Institutional Review Board**  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619  
940-898-3378 FAX 940-898-4416  
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

January 27, 2014

Ms. Cassandra Darst

Dear Ms. Darst:

*Re: Response to Intervention and the Impact on Eligibility for Special Education Services in Texas  
(Protocol #: 17595)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was determined to be exempt from further review.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. Because a signed consent form is not required for exempt studies, the filing of signatures of participants with the TWU IRB is not necessary.

Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rhonda Buckley, Chair  
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Dr. Jane Pemberton, Department of Teacher Education  
Graduate School

## APPENDIX B

### Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey – Form A

**The return of your completed survey constitutes your informed consent to act as a voluntary participant in this research.**

***Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey – Form A***  
*RTI is essentially the practice of providing high quality interventions and instructions to meet the needs of all students.*

**Introduction:**

Thank you for your voluntary participation in this brief survey. The purpose of this survey is to collect your ***perception*** related to RTI in your district. The survey has been designed so that it can be completed quickly and easily. The information gathered will be analyzed and presented as part of a doctoral dissertation. All information acquired will remain anonymous and used strictly for data analysis purposes.

**Directions:**

- Please carefully read each of the statements listed on the back of this page and answer each question to the best of your knowledge.
- Using the scale of 1-4, please indicate your level of agreement with each statement by selecting the appropriate number.

**Pre-Screening Question**

At least one school in my district uses an RTI process.

- o Yes - Please complete the survey on the back
- o No - Please complete the ***demographic information ONLY***





## APPENDIX C

### Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey – Form B

**The return of your completed survey constitutes your informed consent to act as a voluntary participant in this research.**

***Response To Intervention (RTI) Self-Reported Process Survey – Form B***  
*RTI is essentially the practice of providing high quality interventions and instructions to meet the needs of all students.*

**Introduction:**

Thank you for your voluntary participation in this brief survey. The purpose of this survey is to collect your ***perception*** related to RTI in your district. The survey has been designed so that it can be completed quickly and easily. The information gathered will be analyzed and presented as part of a doctoral dissertation. All information acquired will remain anonymous and used strictly for data analysis purposes.

**Directions:**

- Please carefully read each of the statements listed on the back of this page and answer each question to the best of your knowledge.
- Using the scale of 1-4, please indicate your level of agreement with each statement by selecting the appropriate number.

**Pre-Screening Question**

At least one school in my district uses an RTI process.

- o Yes - Please complete the survey on the back
- o No - Please complete the ***demographic information ONLY***

Using the scale of 1-4, please indicate your level of agreement with each statement by selecting the appropriate number.

Question	4 Strongly Agree	3 Agree	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
1. The primary purpose of the RTI process in my district is for detection of students in need of academic interventions.				
2. In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students in need of any special education services.				
3. In my district, the RTI process is currently used as a pre-referral process for identifying students with a learning disability only.				
4. In my district, the data from the RTI process is a mandatory part of a learning disability (LD) evaluation.				
5. If a parent requests verbally or in writing that a child be evaluated for special education services, my district does <b>not</b> proceed with the referral unless the child has been through the RTI process.				
6. If a student moves through tiers of interventions with some improvement but still shows deficits in achievement, my district refers the student for special education evaluation.				
7. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a <b>decrease</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.				
8. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen an <b>increase</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.				
9. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen <b>no change</b> in the number of <b>referrals</b> for special education services.				
10. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen a <b>decrease</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.				
11. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen an <b>increase</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.				
12. Since implementing the RTI process in my district, we have seen <b>no change</b> in the number of students that were <b>referred and found eligible</b> for special education services.				