RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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

DEPARTMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

BY

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DENTON, TEXAS

MAY 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and contribution of many individuals. First and foremost, I am grateful to my amazing children, Myles and Mason, for going many evenings without me at home because I attended classes after work and stayed out late into the evenings working in the library for hours. I know my absence was felt, yet you continued to support me. For my two older children, Mallory and Matthew, your support and encouragement are always an inspiration. My hope is to always make you proud and model that anything is possible with determination and perseverance.

Dr. Jane Pemberton provided me with the tenacity to finish after many years of prodding. Thank you for not giving up on me! Without you, I would not have finished. Dr. Keeley jumped in and helped with the statistics; without her help, I would not have made it through Chapter 4, no question! Dr. Myers, well, let's just say, has endured me almost as long as Dr. Pemberton, which is absolutely no fun! All the incredible professors need to be given an award beyond measure for their patience and endurance. Doug's knowledge of statistics got me through Chapters 4 and 5. I literally could not have finished without his expertise, assistance, and patience with me. To my best friend and confidant, Holly, for listening to me complain, cry, and doubt myself, but always with a smile, you encouraged me to keep working! I am blessed beyond measure to have each of you as part of my life. I cannot forget Scott. Other than my family and Dr.

Pemberton, he has stood by my side. He sat beside me the entire time while I worked all weekend when he would have rather been out having fun. He listened to me complain and remained in the background when he should have been number one!

ABSTRACT

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MAY 2020

The purpose of this study was to examine Response to Intervention (RtI) implementation in schools from the campus administrator's point of view, exploring components and critical factors that influence the process. The significance of the study is to provide an extension point to determine if there are trends in the RtI implementation process regarding the components in relation to school leadership's perception and experience. A web-based survey was administered to a large group of assistant principals and principals (N = 564) in 211 school campuses in grade levels K-12. Of the 564 administrators, 157 responses were obtained. The survey consisted of 20 Likert-type items that addressed the school administrator's knowledge and implementation of the RtI process.

The components surveyed were universal screening, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, and data-based decision making. Within each component, five questions were asked about the administrators' knowledge of the purpose, resources and support, time for implementation, training, and the component of linguistic and cultural responsiveness regarding the RtI process was asked across all the sections. The results of the t tests on the data compared elementary to secondary administrators' perceived

knowledge on four components of RtI, including the fifth component, linguistic/culturally responsive evaluated as a separate question. Three of the 20 questions with a confidence level of 95%, comparing the elementary and secondary administrators, showed no differences in knowledge. For the remaining 16 questions, the *t*-test results indicated a significant difference in the means for the responses between the elementary and secondary administrators. There was a higher correspondence of agreement among elementary administrator responses on all components regarding the questions as compared to the secondary administrators' responses.

The results can assist future researchers and practitioners when evaluating the RtI process in public school settings regarding training needed to support school leaders. The study also has the potential to guide further research needed for school administrators to be able to more effectively use the RtI process to identify students at-risk of mastering grade level standards. By using the RtI process more effectively and closing education gaps for students, there is potential for fewer special education referrals on campuses.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As curriculum standards continue to be closely monitored through state assessments that measure the growth of all students, schools are held accountable to ensure all students are achieving. Through the Response to Intervention (RtI) process, schools can systematically provide support for students who are not mastering standards at the age appropriate grade level. The RtI process is used to identify evidence-based interventions early and proactively for students who demonstrate a risk of developing deficiencies in academics and/or behavior (Dallas, 2017).

The RtI process is a multi-tiered system, which includes screening and early interventions for students at risk of academic failure using research-based educational practices and assessments (Regan, Berkeley, Hughes, & Brady, 2015). The RtI model is intended to focus a school's effort on early intervention and student support for students who are struggling to master grade level content according to district and state grade level expectations. The RtI process provides evidence of a student's response to scientific research-based interventions (Bineham, Shelby, Pazey, & Yates, 2014). Effective implementation of RtI requires collaboration and support from all levels of a school district, including teachers, campus level administrators, and central office administration.

General education teachers, school administrators, and other educators are responsible for providing evidence-based interventions and for documenting student progress within these interventions. The support of school administrators and other school stakeholders in the implementation and accountability of the RtI process is crucial in the effectiveness of the RtI process in schools. All involved in implementing the RtI framework with fidelity must consider the roles and responsibilities of school stakeholders, including the administration, core planning team, school staff, and community (Tyre, Feuerborn, Beisse, & McCready, 2012).

A meta-analysis of skills school leaders possesses conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) indicated that a capable leader in a school could affect school achievement. State and federal policies, such as the implementation framework of RtI, require a school administrator to use data to positively influence student success. School administrators need to be prepared to collect, analyze, use, and communicate data effectively to help teachers improve their practice and facilitate continuous improvement (Osborne-Lampkin & Cohen-Vogel, 2014). The leadership on campus can influence the effectiveness of RtI implementation (Vogal, Weiler, & Armenta, 2014).

Teachers often rely on the support of administrators to increase student achievement. Public school settings require a need for an increased administrative presence in the classroom, explicit procedural direction from the administration, and instructional staff to provide research-based interventions and assistance. Understanding and implementing the RtI process can create obstacles for school administrators due to

the multiple academic challenges that imped students' academic progress (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015).

The RtI system has multiple components with various factors that influence the effectiveness of the system in a public-school setting. The components include universal screening, progress monitoring, tiers of instruction, and data-based decision making. Linguistic and cultural responsiveness in districts are components that should be considered based on the student populations.

Universal screening is for identifying students who may experience poor academic outcomes with classroom (Tier 1) instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). Typically, screening data are collected for all students three times each academic year. This information can identify students who are not reaching benchmarks or who may be at risk for failing high-stakes assessments (Deno et al., 2009). By providing universal screening to all students, those who are in the most need of preventative interventions are identified.

Progress monitoring is another critical component in the RtI process. Progress monitoring of students should be administered before the intervention begins to establish a baseline, and then weekly or bi-weekly during the intervention to determine with fidelity if the intervention is closing academic gaps targeted for students (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Malone, 2017). Progress monitoring serves multiple purposes, including five functions designed to continually improve achievement: (a) within-year growth measurement for all students, (b) across-year growth comparisons for all students, (c) efficient screening to identify students academically at risk, (d) frequent progress monitoring of students at

risk, and (e) opportunities for teachers to respond to student progress (Deno et al., 2009). Progress monitoring is used as the part of the process that decisions are made to move students between tiers of instruction.

Tiered instruction is another critical component of the RtI process in a school setting. Students are assessed typically across three tiers, with an agreed-upon mastery at each tier of support, including the use of a valid and reliable measure of student performance, and graphing student progress (Crawford, 2014). The three levels encompass the RtI models. Tier 1 includes instructional strategies for all students, with the use of systematic screening and ongoing monitoring of performance to identify learners who may need more support. Students not making progress receive Tier 2 instruction which involves a more intense form of intervention in small groups, ranging between 8 and16 weeks of instruction (Artiles, 2014). Students receiving support in Tier 2 indicates the student's academic performance is consistently below his or her peers and requires more specialized remediation that is incorporated in the general education setting. If growth is not obtained after being monitored in Tier 2, students move into Tier 3 instruction. In Tier 3, the students' time for small group or one-on-one instruction is increased and monitored. If there continues to be a lack of progress, a determination is made to request a comprehensive evaluation to consider special education support. If the data supports the student's learning problems are not the result of a lack of instructional opportunities and other identified factors, a referral for special education services is requested (Johnson, Semmelroth, Mellard, & Hopper, 2012).

Data-based decision making is the component that determines how students move through the RtI process. Using data obtained from assessments, progress monitoring helps to answer questions about whether a student is making adequate progress in meeting his or her goals or if a student's instruction needs to be modified (Sharp, Sanders, Noltemeyer, Hoffman, & Boone, 2015). In a study for the National High School Center, Duffy and Scala (2012) investigated school conditions in Colorado's District 189, with school names modified to remove identifiable information, to determine what conditions contributed to or inhibited implementation of RtI and the role that district and state level leaders played in how the RtI framework functions in high schools was investigated. Duffy and Scala found that building efficient data systems that provide timely access to data can support decision making at all levels of the RtI process.

Educators use data to address intervention supports that students need as well as to determine how best to support school staff implementing RtI (Duffy & Scala, 2012). Educators must evaluate the extent to which an intervention has been executed and simultaneously evaluate the student's response to determine the proper level of support for a student. Data help educators to make decisions that support implementation throughout the entire process (Sanetti & Collier-Meek, 2015).

Typically, in RtI a team collaborates and uses data to evaluate and determine a student's response to intervention(s). A team's preparedness and knowledge of the purpose of the RtI process, as well as determining an understanding of who is responsible for implementing each tier, contributes to the success of the implementation (Regan et al., 2015).

Other components, such as linguistic and cultural responsiveness, are identified as essential in the RtI process. The percentage of public-school students in the United States who are English language learners (ELL) continues to increase. ELLs can participate in language assistance programs to help ensure that they attain English proficiency and meet the academic content and achievement standards that all students are expected to meet. Participation in these types of programs can improve students' English language proficiencies and their educational outcomes. The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES, 2019) reported the percentage of public-school students in the United States who were ELLs was higher in fall 2016 (9.6%, or 4.9-million students) than in fall 2000 (8.1%, or 3.8-million students). Most of the states were in the west and included Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington. California reported the highest percentage of ELLs among its public-school students (20.2%), followed by Texas (17.2%) and Nevada (15.9%).

Because the RtI process focuses on early interventions for learners who struggle to show promise for improving in academics for both ELLs and monolingual English-speaking peers, a combination of high quality, cultural, and linguistic responsive instruction contributes to meaningful education, successfully matching students' individual needs (Sanford, Brown, & Turner, 2012). Early intervention through the RtI process has the potential to exclude language as the barrier versus a possible learning gap.

Throughout the RtI process, data are used to determine progress. Due to a lack of progress made by a student, a decision could be determined to conduct a comprehensive

special education evaluation to assess if there is a disability affecting learning. Through the RtI process, expected performance levels and growth rates are operationalized through comparison to the individual student's peers or research-based criteria. However, there is no criterion provided in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and no universal criterion has been accepted in the research literature related to an exact length of time in which a referral should be initiated (Maki, Floyd, & Roberson, 2015). This is a decision in most districts is made at the campus level by the campus administration and members of the RtI committee. Identifying a disability through the RtI process has proven to have variability dependent on the state (Hauerwas, Brown & Scott, 2013).

Results from a study reviewing learning disability regulations and guidelines from the 50 United States and the District of Columbia showed considerable variability in the state policies and practices governing LD identification (Maki et al., 2015). Furthermore, in Texas, because there has been a decline in the percentage of students found eligible for special education from 2004-2016, the U.S. Department of Education investigated the Texas Education Agency regarding the statewide implementation of the IDEA (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019).

Since RtI has become an alternative means by which to determine the need for early intervention other than a discrepancy model, the process has begun to play an important role in special education assessment (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). Therefore, due to the importance of implementation of the RtI process, a school leader's role is crucial to ensure the needs of students not making academic gains set by state criteria are

being monitored through a process to identify students who have possible learning disabilities. A leader must take into consideration how much growth is made/not made in a reasonable time period to determine if additional testing is needed.

The implementation of RtI factors noted in the research, such as universal screening, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, data based decision making and cultural and linguistic responsiveness led by school administrators are critical features to determine the effectiveness of RtI process and the timing of when a special education comprehensive evaluation is made for each individual. Therefore, an effective RtI process has the potential to positively impact student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the RtI process in schools from the campus administrators' point of view, exploring components and critical factors that influence the process. The components consisted of the following:

1. Universal screening assessments
2. Progress monitoring to determine if the tiered instruction is resulting in student gains
3. Tiers of increasingly intense support
4. Data-driven placements of students in increasing tiers if supported by data
5. Linguistic and cultural responsiveness to meet the needs of diverse learners

The use of the Response to Intervention process is important to a school's success. A principal is ultimately responsible for student achievement on their campus. The RtI process is an integral part of identifying students' ability to achieve to the best of

their ability. In addition to collecting demographic information in the study and gathering information around the components, a general question was asked on the survey to gain information surrounding the ability to collect data in relation to the RtI process to determine if a comprehensive referral for special education was appropriate from an administrator's perspective after working through the RtI process.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study include:

1. What is the difference in the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools?
2. What is the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI for English language learners in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools?
3. What is the self-reported knowledge of the relationship between the RtI process and referrals to special education?
4. What is the relationship between the demographics of administrators' education experience and administrators' knowledge of the RtI components?

Significance of the Study

The study of the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the components of RtI is significant for the following:

1. The study can provide an extension point to determine if there are trends in the RtI implementation process regarding the components in relation to school leadership's perception and experience.
2. The understanding of existing trends can assist future researchers and practitioners when evaluating the implementation of the RtI process in public school settings in relation to the training needed to support school leaders.
3. The study has the potential to guide further research needed for school administrators to be able to use the RtI process to more proactively identify students at-risk of mastering grade level standards, which can potentially impact special education referrals.

Definition of Terms

To establish a common foundation of knowledge, the several terms needed operational definitions in this study.

Admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) c*ommittee*. An ARD committee in Texas makes an initial assessment about a student's eligibility for special education services and continues to make major decisions about that student's individualized educational program (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Federal regulations. Federal Law IDEA (2004) guided the collection of federal rules; i.e., regulations) for special education that ensures a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities who attend public school. IDEA required that each public school provide services to eligible students in the least restrictive

environment (LRE) and in accordance with each student's individualized education program (IEP; Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Multi-tiered system of support. The multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is a prevention framework that organizes building-level resources to address each individual student's academic and/or behaviors needs within intervention tiers that vary in intensity. MTSSS allows for the early identification of learning and behavior challenges and timely intervention for students who are at risk for poor learning outcomes. It also may be called a multi-level prevention system. The increasingly intense tiers represent a continuum of support. RtI is an example of MTSS (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2018a).

Progress monitoring. Students who are determined to be below a grade level benchmark/assessment are monitored on a frequent basis to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction or intervention to accelerate the rate of progress (Deno et al., 2009).

Response to Intervention. RtI represents a multi-tiered system intended to provide screening and early interventions for students at risk for academic failure using research-based educational resources and assessments (Regan et al., 2015).

Special education. "Specially designed instruction offered, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Such instruction is conducted in classrooms, homes, hospitals, and other settings, and instruction includes academic subjects and physical education" (IDEA, 2004).

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness. The STAAR forms a series of state-mandated standardized tests given to Texas public students in Grades 3 through 8

and those enrolled in five specific high school courses. The first STAAR administration was given in the Spring of 2012. The items on the subjects' assessments of the STAAR were based on the state's curriculum standards called the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). There are statutory requirements relating to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general state and district wide in STAAR testing (IDEA, 2004).

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions are made for this study:

- School administrators' responses to the survey questions were accurate.
- School administrators represented their honest perceptions of the RtI process based on their own experiences.
- School administrators were free to respond independently without district influence.

Summary

When school districts implement the framework throughout an educational system, the RtI framework can support the administrators and teachers (Duffy & Scala, 2012). Campuses that have administrators who understand and utilize the RtI process have the potential to raise student achievement at the campus level. By analyzing the implementation of each integral component of the RtI process, there is potential to support students as an academic concern is identified.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of related literature for this study includes changes in legislation that have influenced the RtI process and implementation in public schools. The changes have affected administrators' responsibility to identify and intervene to improve student achievement at the campus level prior to a special education referral. The literature review contains information about the components of the RtI process and studies conducted in schools regarding its implementation using components that include universal screening, progress monitoring, tiers of instruction, data-based decision making, linguistic and cultural responsiveness, and a focus around the school leadership's influence.

Legislative Influence

Prior to the passing of the 2004 IDEA, a typical step for students who were not making enough progress at an appropriate grade level commensurate with their age would be to consider initiating a special education comprehensive evaluation. At that time, most likely, a discrepancy model was used in public school systems to determine eligibility for special education services as a student with a learning disability. The discrepancy model included a discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability. As concerns grew in relation to this model, which included discrepancies in instruments used to assess and poor readability in discrepancy scores, the IDEA (2004) permitted an

alternative response entitled RtI (Bineham et al., 2014). The enactment of the federal IDEA (2004) allowed school districts to use RtI for the purpose of a systematic approach of supporting students and identifying who do not make adequate progress in school at their age appropriate grade level.

The RtI process promotes evidence-based practices in schools using research-based instruction. An umbrella term used in research, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), includes the RtI process, which is a tiered intervention system to systematically address academic concerns. The shift in thinking now focused on general education teachers being held responsible for providing multiple evidence or research-based interventions to students who struggle to demonstrate grade-level mastery. Documentation of student progress is a requirement within the interventions executed by the teacher (Preston, Wood, & Stecker, 2016). The change includes a prevention model, including research-based interventions for students who are not mastering content on grade level prior to a referral to special education. The IDEA-related regulations clarified the purpose initially at the state level and subsequently at the district level to include RtI and established the scope of state laws to consider RtI implementation prior to identification of a student with a learning disability included under special education (Zirkel, 2017). This was a shift from the prior method of identification in which students who were struggling to meet grade level expectations were typically identified by battery of tests normally conducted by a diagnostician outside the general education classroom.

The change in practice was a shift for teachers and school administrators. In a study in South Texas (Roberts & Guerra, 2017), a survey was sent to 456 principals in 37

school districts that were predominately Hispanic, and 84 principals responded. The 84 principals ranged in years of experience. Of the principals who responded, 31 had 1 to 4 years of experience, and 9 principals had more than 17 years of experience at various levels (elementary, middle school, and high school). The survey addressed principals' understanding regarding their legal, foundational, and contextual knowledge of special education and their perceived knowledge of curriculum content surrounding the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement and supervise special education programs. Results indicated the principals' greatest need was to gain knowledge to design curriculum for students with disabilities, as well as frequent recommendations for additional content in special education laws, Section 504, and RtI. Considering the multi-tiered approach in RtI to address a student's learning difficulties, the study results indicated the importance to improve the competency of principals' understanding in the RtI process to ensure every student is monitored in the classroom and is provided research-based instruction before being considered for special education services (Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

IDEA 2004 required students, especially students struggling with grade level content, to be provided appropriate classroom and intervention instruction and documentation to show a lack of progress before there is a consideration for special education (Allington, 2009). The primary purpose of RtI is to provide evidence-based instruction and to assess how students respond to instruction in order to identify those students who need more intensive academic support (Rumrill, Cook, & Wiley, 2011). Application of the RtI process varied according to implementation in schools; however,

the components of RtI were consistent across states. Texas was not a mandatory state regarding the RtI process, leaving individual districts to decide on the level of implementation of the RtI process (Zirkel, 2017).

Used effectively, the RtI process is effective in results associated with high achievement. A study researching effective practices in high performing districts serving students in special education identified eight unified districts in California chosen due to unusually strong academic performance for their special education population compared to similar districts in the state. In three of the eight districts, the continuous assessment and use of RtI were identified as components that lead to high student achievement (Huberman, Navo, & Parrish, 2012).

The components of the RtI process are key to the success of the system's ability to effectively meet the needs of students. All educators involved need to be aware of the process and the role in which they play for students to receive the maximum benefit. The administrator on campus is ultimately the person who can orchestrate the process to ensure each component is followed with fidelity.

Core Components of RtI

The Office of Special Education Programs identified five core characteristics of RtI: (a) providing high quality research-based instruction in general education, (b) conducting continuous progress monitoring, (c) screening for academic and behavior problems, (d) providing multiple tiers of progressively more intense instruction for screening for academic and behavior problems, and (e) proving multiple tiers of progressively more intense instruction (Zirkel, 2017). The National Center on Response

to Intervention (2018a) at the America Institute for Research identified the following major components of RtI: universal screening, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, and data-based decision making. All components are defined and have resources for implementation.

Campus leadership plays a significant role in the implementation of RtI. At every stage of the model, including using screening tools, obtaining baseline data, using progress monitoring, and measuring and evaluating student responses, educational decision is determined. Therefore, leadership affects the fidelity of the implementation of the RtI process (Maier et al., 2016). Administrators hold the decision-making power and determine the allocation of resources within the system; therefore, administrators should be involved as an active member of the core planning team (Tyre et al., 2012).

Universal Screening

One necessary component of the RtI process is universal screening. The purpose of universal screening is to identify students who are not achieving on grade level the content identified by the district/state. The screening of all students typically takes place in the fall, winter, and spring, and should be done on grade level, in relation to the current standards-based curriculum to identify low performers (Crawford, 2014). The data collected from universal screening can provide information for students who are not reaching benchmarks or who may be at risk for failing high-stakes assessments.

The first screening is typically given at the beginning of the year to identify students who are not mastering on-grade level content. Districts select the screening tools used. Once need is identified, students begin to receive additional time with targeted

instruction to address deficits in learning identified by the universal screening (Zirkel, 2017). Assessment processes exist to identify students at risk for academic difficulty and possibly a learning disability (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016).

Progress Monitoring

As students receive additional time in instruction around concepts not being mastered, curriculum-based assessments are administered to monitor performance. Students are typically assessed biweekly to measure their progress in the intervention (Sharp et al., 2015). The outcome of the monitoring determines if the student needs additional time with specialized instruction or has mastered the content.

In response to a strategic plan in the St. Paul Public Schools in Minnesota, an urban elementary school in a large Midwestern city of approximately 720 students, with 50% ELLs, in Kindergarten through Grade 6 developed its own student progress monitoring system for continuous monitoring of school improvement. Deno et al. (2009) focused on the progress monitoring system designed to continually improve reading achievement. Although teachers expressed having concerns over the extent to which the assessment measures accurately reflected ELL students' reading proficiency, the study revealed the measures used were predictive of performance on the state reading assessment for ELL students. The results of Deno et al. (2009), indicated that although students identified in the bottom 20% of testing made less growth, all students made growth through the progress monitoring of students who were identified as at risk. In addition, since the school collects data annually, there was a comparison of students across years. By the third year of the project, the school was removed from probationary

status and was no longer an Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) designed school. Under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) federal legislation (December 2015), Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) is used to identify schools that are not making progress toward meeting state academic content standards. The study concluded by acknowledging the school-wide model for progress monitoring served an integral component in RtI to provide the data necessary to identify students' needs within the RtI framework (Deno et al., 2009).

Tiered Instruction

Progress monitoring guides the teacher in the RtI process to identify the appropriate tier of instruction based on the level of mastery obtained by a student regarding curriculum-based instruction. The RtI model, based on tiered instruction, depends on the mastery level determined by universal screening and then progress monitoring of students who are not mastering grade-level content. Students move between tiers depending on the data. The RtI model typically consists of three main tiers. In Tier 1, high-quality instruction is provided to all students. Approximately 80%-90% of students are successful at Tier 1. A student in Tier 2 has been identified as having academic performance that is consistently below peers.

In Tier 2, students receive targeted specialized remediation integrated within the general education settings. Approximately 5% to 15% of students typically need more targeted, small group instruction. If a student has an insufficient response to the targeted instruction, the student transitions to Tier 3, which provides the most intense instruction for 1% to 5% of students. In Tier 3, a comprehensive diagnostic assessment may be administered to the student to determine if the student is eligible to receive special

education services. More time is allocated in Tier 3 for targeted instruction before consideration of a special education referral. Although the percentages of students within each tier fluctuate within a few points, and the *number* of tiers may vary according to the school district's approach, the tiered support with levels of intensity based on students' individual needs is the consistent model used in the RtI process.

Data-Based Decision Making

The assessment of screening and progress monitoring is an important component of the RtI process. Three critical of an effective assessment system are; (a) a model of assessment across tiers, (b) use of valid and reliable measures of students' performance, and (c) graphing student progress (Crawford, 2014). While collecting the data is a critical component, how the data are used will determine the next steps in the RtI process. Informed decision-making will guide decisions for individual students to decide what is necessary to improve academic performance. By using data, educators understand where and what the gaps in learning are to avoid failure and address appropriate referrals to special education.

Data are used during every phase of the RtI process to determine the next appropriate step for individual students. Teams on campus review the data for all students using benchmarks to determine responsiveness to support and identify students in need of targeted instruction (Freeman, Miller, & Newcomer, 2015).

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive

The RtI framework, using high-quality instruction that is culturally and linguistically responsive, provides an opportunity to focus on the individual needs of all

students (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2018b). Educators must determine if an ELL student who is not achieving at grade level is due to their limited proficiency in English or because of a disability (Klingner, Artiles, & Barleta, 2016). The RtI process gives a structured system in identifying and providing additional support for all students, which in turn allows the student time to show mastery. A team approach, such as RtI, allows documentation that students not making progress may not be from other factors like English proficiency or cultural differences (Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006).

In a 4-year longitudinal study, O'Connor, Bocian, Beach, Sanchez, and Flynn (2013) compared students who participated in a Tier 2 intervention RtI model focused on reading across Grades 1 through 4. The identification rates for learning disabilities (LD) were compared to special education placements of students into RtI (Grades 1-4) to a cohort 1 year older in the same schools (Grades 2-4) who did not participate in RtI. The historical control group had the same teachers and allowed the comparison of student outcomes and special education placements during the same grade levels before and after the implementation of Tier 2 interventions. (O'Connor et al., 2013).

Students in Cohort 1 received Tier 2 interventions as needed from Grade 1 through Grade 4 as their scores indicated risk. Students in Cohort 2 (2nd grade in Year 1; the comparison group) did not participate in RtI, expect for two students who were retained after the study began. The control group had the same teachers and allowed for the comparison of student outcomes and special education placements during the same grade levels before and after implementation of Tier 2 interventions within the RtI

framework. Across schools, 38% to 40% of students were ELL. The study investigated whether the percentage of special education placements for LD or timing of identification differed, if reading skills of students identified with LD differed, and if proportions of students who were ELL identified for LD differed. The results indicated that although twice as many students who were ELL were identified as LD during the years of access to RtI, the timing of identification was similar across cohorts (O'Connor et al., 2013). As other researchers noted, language proficiency influences reading comprehension, whether students are ELL or non-English speakers (Catts, Compton, Tomblin, & Bridges, 2012; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011).

Leadership

Leadership influence has been identified as a vital component for the success of RtI implementation and fidelity. Strong administrative support is needed to ensure commitment to the process, provide resources, and hire strong teachers to share the common goal of improving education, and cultivating a strong leadership team to build internal capacity over time (Allington, 2009).

Leadership can play a significant role in a schools' success, as evidenced by the research of 16 principals in Hong Kong who participated in an ongoing research project regarding the conceptualization of the RtI model (Poon-McBrayer, 2018). One principal was highlighted due to his deep understanding of the United States-based RtI and his strategies to mobilize school staff to understand and practice the model to achieve effective inclusive education in Hong Kong. The leadership practices on his campus

improved student outcomes in the school and affirmed direct links between effective school leadership and learning outcomes (Poon-McBrayer, 2018).

The style of leadership can either positively or negatively affect the, implementation of RtI on a school campus. In a study in Georgia, New York, and Ohio, (Maier et al., 2016) 112 participants, including 82 school psychologists and a remaining 30 participants of school professionals with various titles and roles associated with RtI implementation on their respective school campuses were surveyed regarding the effect leadership has on the RtI process. Leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant) were assessed through a leadership questionnaire. The transformational leadership approach had the most significant association with RtI implementation. Transformational leaders seek to encourage their followers to be effective and efficient in their work and do so by focusing on the intrinsic needs of people to be part of an organization that achieves some higher purpose. Transactional leaders focus on consequences. They provide rewards to employees for desired results and correct employee behaviors when they deviate from previously set expectations. Passive/avoidant leaders react to situations after problems are brought to their attention, do not deal with problems quickly, and provide no support or intervention until the situation becomes difficult to solve. Results indicated that school administrators with a transactional leadership style contributed to a positive association regarding RtI implementation. The passive/avoidant leadership styles had a negative association. As indicated in this study, administrators can have either a negative or positive effect on the

implementation of the RtI process due to the authority they hold at a campus level (Maier et al., 2016).

A qualitative research case study of a principal's leadership practices at an elementary school in an urban school district in California with 400 students, grades 3-5 revealed that in one school year the school went from the lowest performing school in the district, out of 24 to the eighth highest performing school. Several factors contributed to the academic achievement in the school, including but not limited to, meeting quarterly with teachers to analyze the progress of every student in the class and to discuss support specifically for every student by name to stay focused on instruction. Analysis of data collected suggested that principal leadership was the primary factor systematically contributing to student achievement over the course of the year (Ward, 2013).

An additional study examining the impact of leadership from a teachers' perspective involving a first–grade team, consisting of six females and one male, each responsible for teaching approximately 20 students in their own classrooms indicated the administration on the campus affected the RtI process. All seven teachers reported frustration from a lack of professional development and support from school leaders and limited educational resources. Teachers expressed a need for an increase in administrative presence in classrooms, explicit procedural direction from the administration, and more instructional staff to provide research-based interventions and assistance. From one principal's perspective in the study, the lack of effectiveness that impeded academic progress in the RtI process was due to a large number of English language learners and

migrant children, which ultimately is not about the actual RtI process itself (Meyer & Horenstein, 2015).

Another component of leadership is knowing when a student has exhausted support in the RtI process and due to lack of progress, needs to be recommended for special education evaluation. To investigate the impact of the RtI process regarding timely identification of students with specific learning disabilities, a study was conducted with data from 262 districts and 45 schools across the United States to examine when students may be referred for a comprehensive evaluation for services in special education (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). Districts were asked questions regarding the number of days a nonresponsive student remained in Tier 2 or beyond before being referred for a comprehensive evaluation. Results indicated an absence of clear policies or regulations existed in districts, hindering the connection of when a formal evaluation was made. In addition, the length of time a student spent in tiers varied greatly which had the potential to compromise due process for student evaluations. Ultimately, the inconsistent quality of communication across states, districts, and schools continued to hinder efforts to determine the effectiveness of RtI as a component in determining specific learning disability eligibility (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016).

Ultimately, each of the studies regarding leadership clearly indicates the importance of leadership on a campus in relation to the effectiveness of the RtI process. The ability of an administrator to mobilize and utilize the staff effectively to understand and implement the RtI process has proven to improve student achievement. An administrator's style of leadership, if more transformational or pro-active, can have a

positive influence on helping others be effective within the RtI implementation, and a leader understanding how to analyte progress of students and discus support in the process also contributes to an effective RtI process.

Summary

The RtI process is meant to represent a comprehensive process by an interactive test-teach-test process starting in the general education classroom to support students who are identified as at-risk, and ultimately ending with the students being better prepared to master content in the general education setting after interventions are applied (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017).

Knowing that educators need to implement the RtI process with fidelity, research should be conducted from an administrative lens to determine the influence leadership has on the effectiveness of the RtI process. In the current climate of accountability, schools need strong leaders who provide all students an opportunity to achieve in high functioning schools (Osborne-Lampkin & Cohen-Vogel, 2014). Because of the widespread use of RtI with its potential to improve the lives of students, the RtI process should be evaluated comprehensively, rigorously, and fairly (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). There needs to be further investigation at not only the elementary level but also the secondary level to determine the effectiveness at both levels within each component identified in the research. In addition, the level of expertise of the leader and the knowledge of the process in determining the when there is a need for a special education referral is of interest in order to better understand the effectiveness of the RtI process.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the knowledge an administrator has regarding the implementation of the identified components of the RtI process on a school campus, which has the potential to significantly impact student achievement on campus. The components of the RtI process identified through literature research were:

1. Universal Screening
2. Progress Monitoring
3. Tiered Instruction
4. Databased Decision Making
5. Linguistic and Cultural Responsiveness

The survey questions assessed the administrators' knowledge of each component: resource and support time for implementation, training/implementation, and linguistic/cultural accommodations for ELL students due to the high population of students served in the district being surveyed. To answer the research questions, the researcher conducted a descriptive non-experimental design study using survey data. This design was selected based on the ability to survey data gathered from administrators from multiple grade levels on various sized campuses.

Research Design

The data utilized for this study were a self-reported survey of school administrators from comprehensive neighborhood schools, elementary and secondary, that were selected by the principal investigator in one urban school district. The schools were chosen because they were comprehensive, neighborhood schools with no entrance exams. Schools in the District with entrance exams were not included in order to be able to compare a more normalized population. The survey was administered to 564 principals and assistant principals at 211 schools serving students in Grades K through 12. Permission was sought from the independent school district (ISD) and from the university committee to distribute and collect the data via an electronic survey. The Independent School District Review Board and the Texas Woman's University Institutional Review Board approved the study. All information acquired remained anonymous and was used strictly for data analysis purposes. The data were gathered from assistant principals and principals across a large, public urban district at both elementary and secondary schools that do not require any type of entrance criteria to attend.

The survey included two sections. The first section was divided into two parts. One part inquired about administrator demographics and included questions related to degree, certification, years of experience, and training. The second part inquired about campus demographics, including total number of students, percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged, percentage of English Language Learners (ELL), percentage of students in special education, and a question asking if the

administrator reported the RtI process as an effective measure for identifying students for a comprehensive special education evaluation. There were no questions related to race or sex to avoid the identification of any participant. Both parts one and two asked most of the information in approximate numbers or percentages so that the participant and school were not easily identifiable.

The third section of the survey consisted of 20 Likert-type items that addressed the perceived knowledge of the school administrator's understanding and implementation of the RtI process. The survey used a Likert-type scale (*1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Agree, and 4-Strongly Agree*) for question responses. Universal Screening, Progress Monitoring, Tiered Instruction, and Data-Based Decision Making were the four categories used to survey the administrator's knowledge of the RtI process. Within each of the categories, administrators were asked about his/her knowledge around the implementation of each category, knowledge of resources in each category, training in each category, time commitment in each category, and knowledge surrounding linguistic and cultural accommodations (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2018b).

To answer the research questions surrounding the components of the RtI process, independent sample *t* tests were conducted from a survey of school administrators to determine the difference between elementary and secondary principals' responses in relation to identified components of the RtI process. The design was selected based on the comparison of two specific levels of administrator's perceptions of the process. The third research question was a binary response between elementary and secondary responses regarding the effectiveness of the RtI process in relation to the principal's

perception of understanding if a special education referral was triggered once the RtI process was exhausted. The final question dealt with the experience of administrators in relation to the RtI process and was reported statistically to represented responses correspondingly

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the difference in the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools?
2. What is the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI for English language learners in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools?
3. What is the self-reported knowledge of the relationship between the RtI process and referrals to special education?
4. What is the self-reported knowledge of the relationship between the RtI process and referrals to special education?

Survey Instrumentation

Survey questions were constructed in line with the principles of effective RtI systems in schools. The questions on the survey were a subset of questions taken from surveys used in other studies (Maier et al., 2016; Regan et al., 2015). In the survey, teachers and administrators were surveyed regarding the effectiveness of educational practices, their knowledge about basic RtI concepts, and their perceived preparedness to

implement components of RtI within their district (Regan et al., 2015). In addition, components were identified in part from a qualitative study conducted on the status of RtI implementation, as well as the role leadership behaviors have been associated with successful implantation (Maier et al., 2016).

In addition to the research studies, the RtI Essential Components Worksheet and the RtI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2018b) were used as an outline to define and evaluate the implementation of the RtI model, as well as identify the essential components in the RtI process. RtI implementation components included: a universal screening system, progress monitoring, tiered system of supports, and data-based decision making. Additional components identified in the overarching factors associated with the entire RtI model were leadership and culturally and linguistically responsiveness. Due to the population of the district surveyed, the cultural and linguistical responsiveness was of interest. Therefore, a survey tool was designed compatible with the purpose of this study.

A web survey created on the Texas Woman's University Center for Research Design and Analysis (CRDA) using Psych Data, an online survey software tool. The format was chosen to increase the ease with which participants could access the survey. The researcher's committee members submitted the survey draft for critical review for content and clarity. The survey instrument was revised based on their recommendations. The survey was also sent to five principals from a surrounding district to offer recommendations/revisions for clarification of the questions related to the RtI

components. The few suggestions that were made were added to make the survey read with fluency and clarity.

The survey investigated the perceptions of public-school administrators regarding the Response to Intervention process on his/her campus. Principals and assistant principals' self-reported data were an appropriate source in this study because campus administrators are responsible for the implementation of the RtI process. The participants took the 10 -to-15-minute survey via a personal computer or another technology device capable of accessing the survey link via email. Email addresses from the District website of the principals and assistant principals were identified, and 211 schools in the Independent School District were selected for the survey.

Administration of the Survey

This study involved current administrators (N = 564)serving as the principal or an assistant principal in a comprehensive school without entrance criteria in the identified Independent School District. The schools chosen were identified using a web-based search on the District website. Initial permission was sought and obtained for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas Woman's University (TWU) to conduct the research survey. Additional permission was obtained for the Independent School District Review Board to distribute and collect the results of the survey. After the email addresses were compiled, an email was sent to each principal and assistant principal(s) of each campus identified from the 211 selected schools for participation.

There were 65 secondary schools (middle and high schools) and 146 elementary schools included in the survey. The email included a letter of introduction and a link for

the survey embedded in the email. Participation in the survey indicated consent as noted in the text (see Appendix A). The emails were sent by blind carbon copy to protect confidentiality. Assurances were submitted to the participants in the Independent School District (see Appendix B). The initial email was followed by three reminder emails to increase the response rate. The first reminder email was sent two days after the initial email. The second and third emails were sent two days apart, two days after the initial email. A final email with a thank you note from the researcher was sent before the survey closed (see Appendix C). Administrators accessed the survey through an embedded link to a webpage and were not required to provide an email address to participate in the survey. The email indicated that their participation was voluntary, and their responses were kept confidential.

A total of 211 schools were surveyed in the participating district. Of the 211 schools, 157 administrators completed the survey. There were 73 elementary administrators and 67 secondary administrators. There were 17 schools with a combination of grade levels. Each of the 17 schools were evaluated and placed in an elementary or secondary category depending on majority of the students' ages on campus. For example, a Pre-K – 4 campus was categorized as an elementary campus while a campus with 5-8 was categorized into a secondary campus. Therefore, after evaluating each of the 17 schools, 10 had a majority of elementary students (PreK-5) and were added to the elementary total equaling 83 elementary administrators, and 7 had a majority of secondary students (Grades 6-12) and were added to the secondary responses, equaling 74 secondary administrators for a total of 157 responses.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed and used to explore elementary and secondary educators' perceptions of the RtI process at the campus level from the administrator's point of view in a large urban independent school district. The data analysis began with an interpretation of demographic results. This analysis allowed an examination across campus administrators to include the following: route to certification, level of education, area of focus, additional certifications, total years of teaching experience, current assignment, total years as an assistant principal, total years as a principal, total years as an assistant or principal in the Independent School District, level of campus, number of days of professional development on RtI process in the past three years, Title 1 campus designation, percentage of economically disadvantaged students, number of students on campus, approximate number of ELL students on campus, approximate percentage of students receiving special education services on campus, and approximate number of students referred to special education in a typical school year on campus.

In addition, a question was asked in reference to the effectiveness of the RtI process for determining if a special education evaluation should be considered for students on campus. The outcome and demographic variables of the study were quantitative in nature. A *t* test was completed to examine the difference between elementary and secondary administrators using the Likert scale related to the five components of the RtI process as identified in the research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine survey responses from administrators of both elementary and secondary schools in relation to their perceived knowledge of the Response to Intervention (RtI) process across identified components including universal screening, progress monitoring, tiered instructions, and a focus on linguistic accommodations for ELL due to the ISD's population. The administrator population was defined as assistant principals and principals of the ISD's schools. In addition to the components, the demographic backgrounds of the principals were considered in relation to the RtI process. Finally, the survey contained a question about the principals' understanding of the RtI process in relation to special education referrals.

The survey was submitted to 564 administrators representing 211 schools. A total of 157 responses were obtained from both elementary and secondary administrators. This sample represented a return rate of 28% for the survey administered in the ISD. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the difference in the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools?

2. What is the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI for English language learners in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools?
3. What is the self-reported knowledge of the relationship between the RtI process and referrals to special education?
4. What is the relationship between the demographics of administrators' education experience and administrators' knowledge of the RtI components?

Participant and School Demographics

Responses were separated between elementary and secondary levels. Elementary participants totaled 83 and represented Kindergarten through Grade 5 school configuration. Secondary participants totaled 74 and represented school configurations of Grades 6 through 8 and Grades 9 through 12. The category choice of other represented a multitude of grade distributions. For the data analysis, those surveys in which the administrator chose the other option were placed in the secondary classification based on the performance of grade distribution. Many of the elementary school administrators who responded reported having 720 or fewer students on their campuses. The secondary school enrollments ranged from 750 to 2,000 students.

To provide a better understanding of the educational background of who responded to the survey, the administrators were asked to specify their routes to certification, highest levels of education, and current assignments. The data indicated as many principals earned university-based teacher certifications as those who earned

alternative certifications by frequency (*n*) and percentage (%), as seen in Table 1. Of the 157 respondents, 145 highest level of education was a master's degree, leaving 12 with a doctorate degree. Regarding principal versus assistant principal responses, there was an equal distribution of assistant principal ($n = 41$) and principal ($n = 42$) roles at the elementary level. However, the secondary administrator responses indicated a nonequal distribution within secondary administrators because 48 out of 74, or 64.8%, were assistant principals. All respondents indicated their campuses were identified as having Title I status.

Table 1

Participants' Certifications, Education, Current Assignments, and Title I Campus Status

	n (%) *	
Characteristic	Elementary	Secondary
Level of School	83 (52.9)	74 (41.1)
Certification Route		
University	38 (24.2)	35 (22.3)
Alternative Program	45 (28.7)	39 (24.8)
Degree Earned		
Masters	76 (48.4)	69 (43.9)
Doctorate	7 (4.5)	5 (3.2)
Current Assignment		
Assistant Principal	41 (26.1)	48 (30.6)
Principal	42 (26.7)	26 (16.6)
Title I Campus	83 (52.9)	74 (47.1)

Note. * Percentages in the table reflect the cell's percentage for the sample of 157 responses.

Table 2 contains student population information and shows the average percentages of students identified as ELL students and students receiving services in special education. The average number of referrals to special education made at a campus in a typical school year also appears in Table 2. Both ELL and students receiving special education services attended the administrators' elementary and secondary campuses. The mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) values for the percentages of students reported in special education in elementary were at least half of the average percentage of students in secondary special education, respectively. The mean number of students referred for special education at the elementary campus was 15.99 students per year, but the mean number of students referred for special education on the secondary campus was 40% fewer students (n = 6.5) per year.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for ELL and Special Education Related Student Populations at Participants' Schools

	M (*SD*)	
Student Population	Elementary	Secondary
ELL Student %	53.00 (49.05)	69.60 (115.53)
Special Education		
Enrolled Student %	13.20 (7.13)	26.39 (115.14)
Referred Student *n*	15.99 (26.50)	6.50 (8.17)

When examining administrative tenure data, the results depicted the majority of the respondents at all principals' levels reported having 10 or fewer years of tenure. In

addition, well over half of the administrators of both elementary and secondary campuses were in their first 5 years of experience in all categories. Table 3 provides the administrators' tenure information.

Table 3

Administrators' Tenures in Years

	Assistant Principal		Principal		Outside the current ISD	
Year Ranges	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary
0-5	64	51	69	61	54	46
6-10	14	18	7	10	18	20
11-15	2	3	7	2	5	6
16-20	3	1	0	0	3	1
> 20	0	1	0	1	2	1

The administrators were asked to provide how many hours of professional development on RtI they received in the past 3 school years. Of the 83 reporting elementary administrators, the normalized training hours over three years was 290.03. The normalized average was 3.50 hours of RtI training per elementary administrator per year. Of the 74 reporting secondary administrators, the normalized total training hours was 219.83 hours over three years. The normalized average was 2.97 hours of RtI training per secondary administrator per year. Table 4 presents the ranges reported for RtI training by school level.

Table 4
Hours of Professional Development for RtI by Campus Type

Hours *n*	Elementary *n*	Secondary *n*
0	5	2
< 1 (1-5 hours)	11	18
1 (6-8 hours)	26	26
2-3 (9-18 hours)	25	21
> 3 (> 18 hours)	16	7

RtI Components

In order to respond to the first and second question research questions, 16 independent samples *t* tests addressed the statistical hypotheses for differences between elementary and secondary administrators' responses regarding the four components of the RtI process. Those components were the following: (a) universal screening, (b) progress monitoring, (c) tiered instruction, and (d) data-based decision making. Within the components, key leadership moves were identified through research to detect the effectiveness of the RtI process from an administrator's lens. Within each of the four components, each survey participant responded to four questions about the key RtI components identified in the research. First, the response distributions for the four components' items are presented.

Universal Screening

The first component was universal screening. The distributions of the responses for elementary schools for these four items appear in Table 5. In Table 6, the distributions of the responses for secondary schools appear.

Table 5

Distribution of Responses to the Items About University Screening in Elementary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	2	7	56	18
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	2	15	53	13
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Universal Screening in the RtI process for teachers.	4	17	51	11
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	6	25	40	12

For the universal screening component's first and second items, both elementary and secondary respondents indicated being knowledgeable about the purpose and resources associated with RtI. However, the respondents' answers to items 3 and 4 about making time in scheduling/implementation and training indicated secondary administrators had lower levels of agreement. Figure 1 displays the bar charts for the items to compare visually the differences in participants' responses about universal

screening between elementary and secondary school administrators. The figure also contains a fifth item related to the linguistic and cultural accommodations involve in RtI for this component, but the linguistic and cultural accommodations variables are addressed in a separate research question.

Table 6

Distribution of Responses to the Items About Universal Screening in Secondary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	14	33	57	19
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	15	37	53	19
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Universal Screening in the RtI process for teachers.	4	31	33	4
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	6	38	24	4

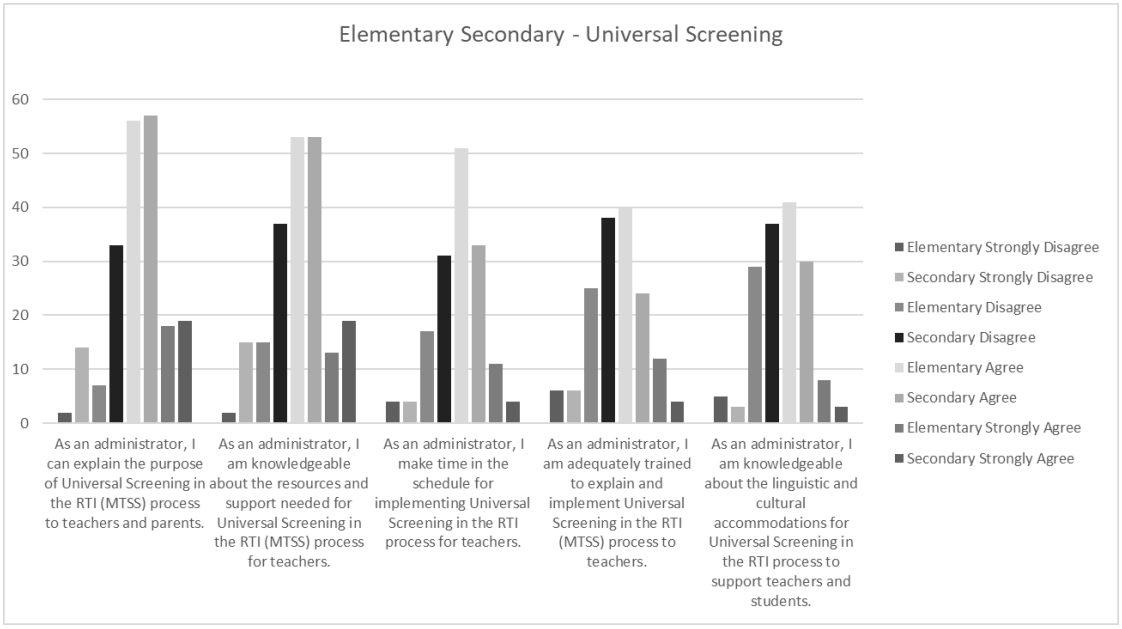

Figure 1. Bar charts comparing results for universal screening between elementary and secondary schools.

Progress Monitoring

The second component was progress monitoring. The distributions of the responses for elementary schools for these four items appear in Table 7. In Table 8, the distributions of the responses for secondary schools appear.

Table 7

Distribution of Responses to the Items About Progress Monitoring in Elementary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	4	6	58	15
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	3	16	55	9
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Progress Monitoring in the RtI process for teachers.	4	19	50	10
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	3	24	48	8

With respect to the data regarding progress monitoring, over 50% of both the elementary and secondary respondents' answers appeared in the agree and strongly agree categories related to being able to explain the purpose of progress monitoring and being knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for progress monitoring. In relation to both the training and implementation of progress monitoring, and allocating time in the schedule for implementing progress monitoring at the secondary level, percentages are lower than the elementary; 33% of the secondary respondents agree they have time to implement progress monitoring compared to 50 % of the elementary

respondents, 24% of the secondary respondents agree they were adequately trained compared to 48% of elementary respondents. Figure 2 displays the bar charts for the items to compare visually the differences in elementary and secondary school administrators' responses about progress monitoring. The figure also contains a fifth item related to the linguistic and cultural accommodations involved in this RtI component, but the linguistic and cultural accommodations variables are addressed in a separate research question.

Table 8

Distribution of Responses to the Items About Progress Monitoring in Secondary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	14	33	57	19
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	15	37	53	19
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Progress Monitoring in the RtI process for teachers.	4	31	33	4
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	6	38	24	4

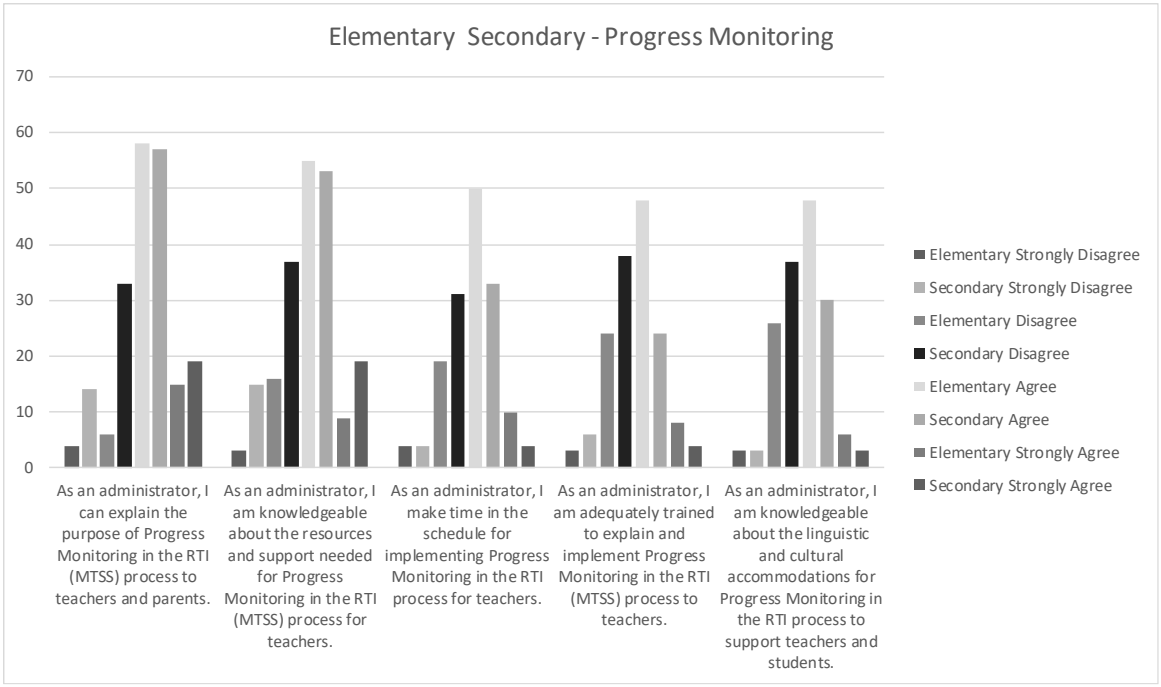

Figure 2. Bar charts comparing results for progress monitoring between elementary and secondary schools.

Tiered Instruction

The third component was tiered instruction. The distributions of the responses for elementary schools for these four items appear in Table 9. In Table 10, the distributions of the responses for secondary schools appear.

In respect to the data regarding tiered instruction, respondents noted the majority agree they can explain and have knowledge of applying tiered instruction for the RtI process. This is represented by over 60% of the responses in the agree or strongly agree category, questions 1 and 2. With respect to making time for implementation and being trained in tiered instruction, there is a significant level of agreement in elementary over secondary responses noted in questions 3 and 4. Figure 3 displays the bar charts for the items to compare visually the differences in the elementary and secondary school

administrators' responses about tiered instruction. The figure also contains a fifth item related to the linguistic and cultural accommodations involve in RtI for this component, but the linguistic and cultural accommodations variables are addressed in a separate research question.

Table 9

Distribution of Responses to the Items About Tiered Instruction in Elementary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	1	5	61	16
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	1	16	54	12
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Tiered Instruction in the RtI process for teachers.	1	15	55	12
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	2	21	48	12

Table 10

Distribution of Responses to the Items About Tiered Instruction in Secondary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	0	17	44	12
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	2	19	45	7
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Tiered Instruction in the RtI process for teachers.	3	31	33	6
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	6	34	27	6

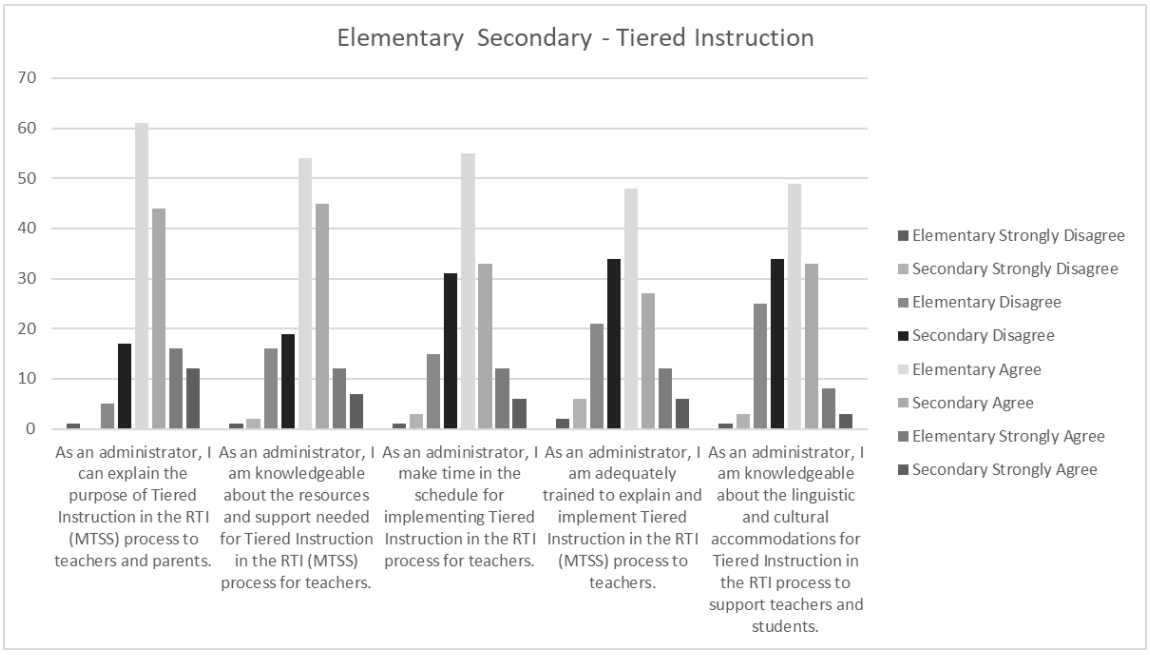

Figure 3. Bar charts comparing results for tiered instruction between elementary and secondary schools.

Data-Based Decisions

The second component was progress monitoring. The distributions of the responses for elementary schools for these four items appear in Table 11. In Table 12, the distributions of the responses for secondary schools appear.

Table 11

Distribution of Responses to the Items About Data-Based Decisions in Elementary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	1	6	61	15
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	1	13	52	17
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Data-Based Decisions in the RtI process for teachers.	3	27	45	8
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	1	24	44	14

A visible increase in the responses of agree and strongly agree occurred in items 1 and 2 for the ability to explain and be knowledgeable about data-based decisions in the RtI process among both elementary and secondary school administrators. The distribution of all administrators' responses for the data-based decisions' items 3, 4, and 5 appear to form a bell curve. Figure 4 displays the bar charts for the items to compare visually the differences in the elementary and secondary school administrators' responses about data-based decisions. The figure also contains a fifth item related to the linguistic and cultural

accommodations involve in RtI for this component, but the linguistic and cultural accommodations variables are addressed in a separate research question.

Table 12

Distribution of Responses to the Items About Data-Based Decisions in Secondary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	2	12	47	12
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	2	20	42	9
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Data-Based Decisions in the RtI process for teachers.	7	33	27	6
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	4	33	28	8

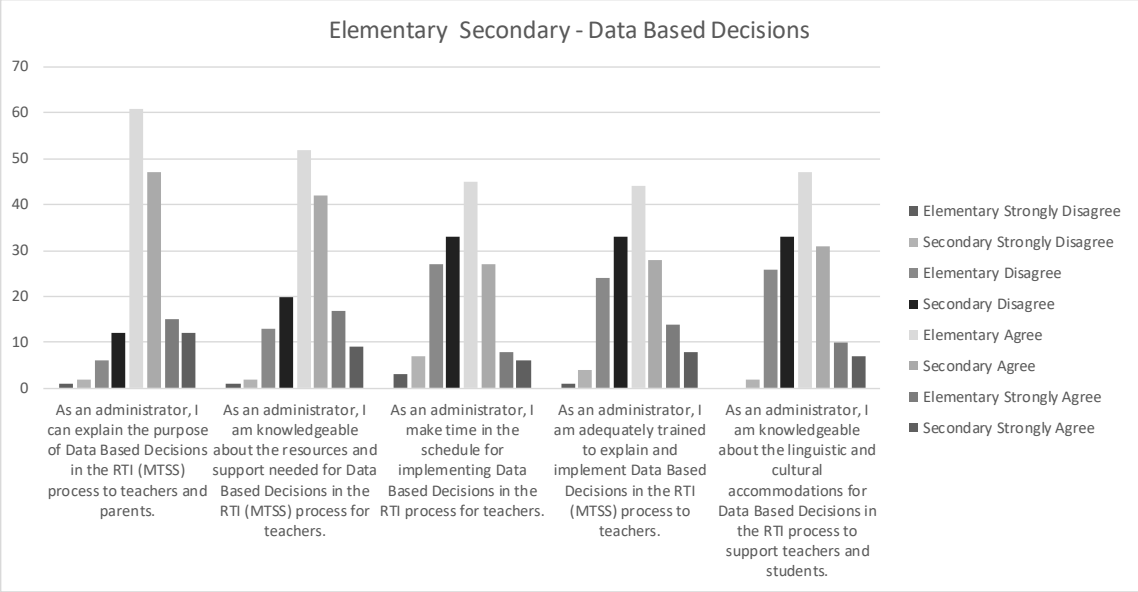

Figure 4. Bar charts comparing results for data-based decisions between elementary and secondary schools.

RtI Components *t* Test

The *t* test was conducted to compare each of the components between administrators of elementary and secondary schools. The research question answered was: What is the difference in the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools? The differences between the elementary and secondary administrators' responses regarding the implementation of the RtI components were tested according to a 95% confidence level, which required the obtained *p* to be less than .05, and the obtained *t* value had to be greater than 1.96. The degrees of freedom were 155 because two groups (elementary versus secondary) were tested against each other. There were 16 null hypotheses, one for each of the 16 items used to assess the administrators' RtI knowledge and application of the four components, tested and stated as no difference in responses

between elementary and secondary administrators. Tables 13 through 16 display the means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), mean differences (*M* Diff.), obtained *t* values, and probability (*p*) values for the items representing each of the four RtI components to which the administrators responded. The probability (*p*) values reported for the 13 statistically significant *t* tests, which required less than .05, were no higher than .021. These *p* values suggested the likelihood of making an error in rejecting the hypotheses of no difference for the 16 items was infinitesimal.

Only three of the 16 items representing the four of the RtI component areas (universal screening, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, and data-based decision making) failed to generate statistically significant differences between the elementary and secondary levels. Two of the four items for the progress monitoring component yielded no significant difference in the responses between elementary and secondary levels: (a) As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of progress monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents; (b) As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for progress monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers. Just one of the four items in the tiered instruction component did not yield a statistical difference between elementary and secondary administrators as follows: As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for tiered instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers. All four items generated statistical significance between the elementary and secondary administrators for the components of universal screening (Table 13) and data-based decisions (Table 16).

Table 13

The t *-Test Results for Universal Screening Between Elementary and Secondary Administrators*

Item	Elementary		Secondary				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M* Diff.	*t*	*p*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	3.12	32.52	2.76	39.16	0.36	4.61	< .00001*
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	2.96	35.67	2.69	39.51	0.21	3.85	.0002*
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Universal Screening in the RtI process for teachers.	2.86	41.73	2.52	45.98	0.34	4.24	.00004*
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	2.73	53.55	2.30	42.07	0.43	3.83	.0002*

Note. The degrees of freedom for all *t* tests was 155. * indicates statistical significance with $p < .05$.

Table 14

The t *-Test Results for Progress Monitoring Between Elementary and Secondary Administrators*

Item	Elementary		Secondary				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M* Diff.	*t*	*p*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	3.04	37.09	2.90	27.89	0.14	1.20	.232
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	2.87	35.06	2.75	29.98	0.12	1.08	.282
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Progress Monitoring in the RtI process for teachers.	2.82	41.61	2.54	35.59	0.28	2.85	.005*
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	2.76	38.26	2.42	41.95	0.34	2.94	.004*

Note. The degrees of freedom for all *t* tests was 155. * indicates statistical significance with $p < .05$.

Table 15

The t *-Test Results for Tiered Instruction Between Elementary and Secondary Administrators*

Item	Elementary		Secondary				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M* Diff.	*t*	*p*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	3.14	24.14	2.91	22.99	0.23	3.06	.003*
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	2.96	31.67	2.84	21.22	0.12	0.66	.510
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Tiered Instruction in the RtI process for teachers.	2.97	30.8	2.63	30.09	0.34	4.57	< .00001*
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	2.87	39.06	2.58	38.96	0.29	2.56	.011*

Note. The degrees of freedom for all *t* tests was 155. * indicates statistical significance with $p < .05$.

Table 16

The t *-Test Results for Data-Based Decisions Between Elementary and Secondary Administrators*

Item	Elementary		Secondary				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M* Diff.	*t*	*p*
1. As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.	3.12	24.52	2.91	30.99	0.21	2.34	.021*
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.	3.06	34.06	2.75	33.98	0.31	2.95	.004*
3. As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Data-Based Decisions in the RtI process for teachers.	2.73	39.55	2.41	43.85	0.32	2.88	.005*
4. As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.	2.89	40.36	2.52	41.86	0.37	3.51	.0006*

Note. The degrees of freedom for all *t* tests was 155. * indicates statistical significance with $p < .05$.

Linguistic Accommodations for English Language Learners

The data for linguistic and cultural accommodations were isolated separately in four specific questions for each of the four components due to the large percentage of ELL students in the ISD. The ISD served 155,119 students with 69,250, or 44.64%, of students identified as ELL. As Figure 5 indicates, for 30 elementary school administrators, 75% or more of their campuses' students were ELL. Secondary school

administrators reported having a smaller percentage of ELL students on campuses than elementary administrators reported.

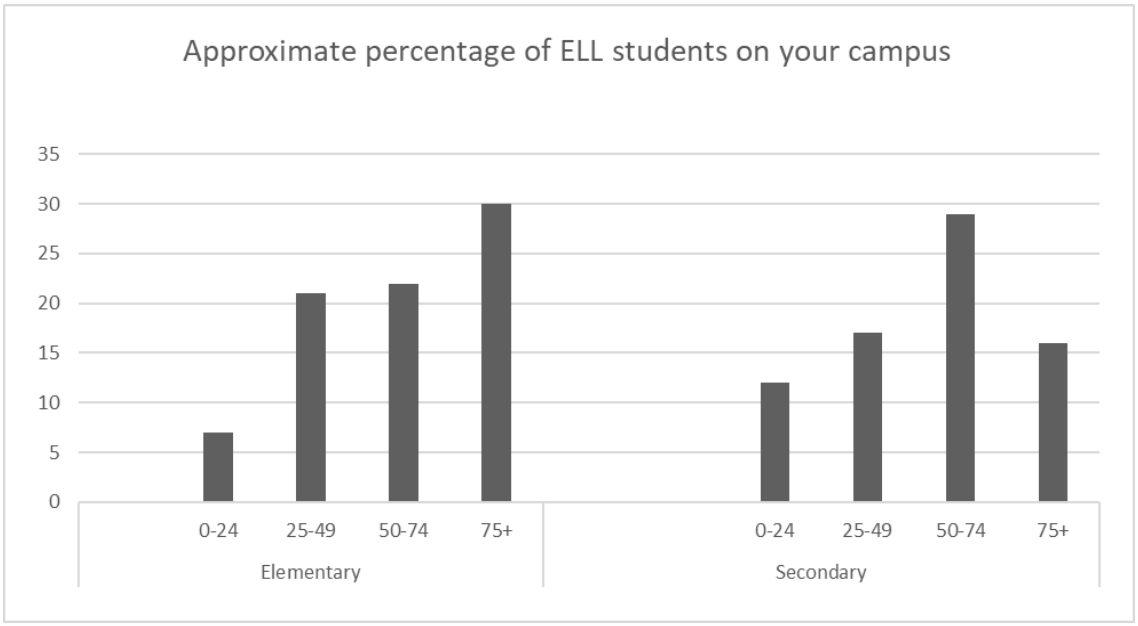

Figure 5. Side-by-side bar charts to compare percentages of ELL students reported in elementary and secondary schools needing linguistic accommodations.

Data obtained from the fifth question in the survey from each component pertained to linguistic accommodations for ELL students. The data were collected for the following research question: What is the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI for ELLs? These data were of interest specifically because of the high percentage of ELL students in the ISD and linguistic accommodations as an identified component in in the RtI process. Participants responded to four items inquiring about their knowledge about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for each of the four components of Universal Screening, Progress

Monitoring, Tiered Instruction, and Data-Based Decision Making in the RtI process to support teacher and students. The distributions of the responses for elementary schools for these four items appear in Table 17. In Table 18, the distributions of the responses for secondary schools appear. Figure 6 displays the bar charts for the items to compare visually the differences in the elementary and secondary school administrators' responses about knowledge of linguistic and cultural accommodations for RtI.

Table 17

Distribution of Responses to the Four Items About Knowledge of Linguistic and Cultural Accommodations for RtI in Elementary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS).	5	29	41	30
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS).	3	26	48	30
3. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS).	1	25	49	33
4. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS).	0	26	47	31

Table 18

Distribution of Responses to the Four Items About Knowledge of Linguistic and Cultural Accommodations for RtI in Secondary Schools

Item	Strongly Disagree *n*	Disagree *n*	Agree *n*	Strongly Agree *n*
1. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS).	3	37	30	3
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS).	3	37	30	3
3. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS).	3	34	33	3
4. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS).	2	33	31	7

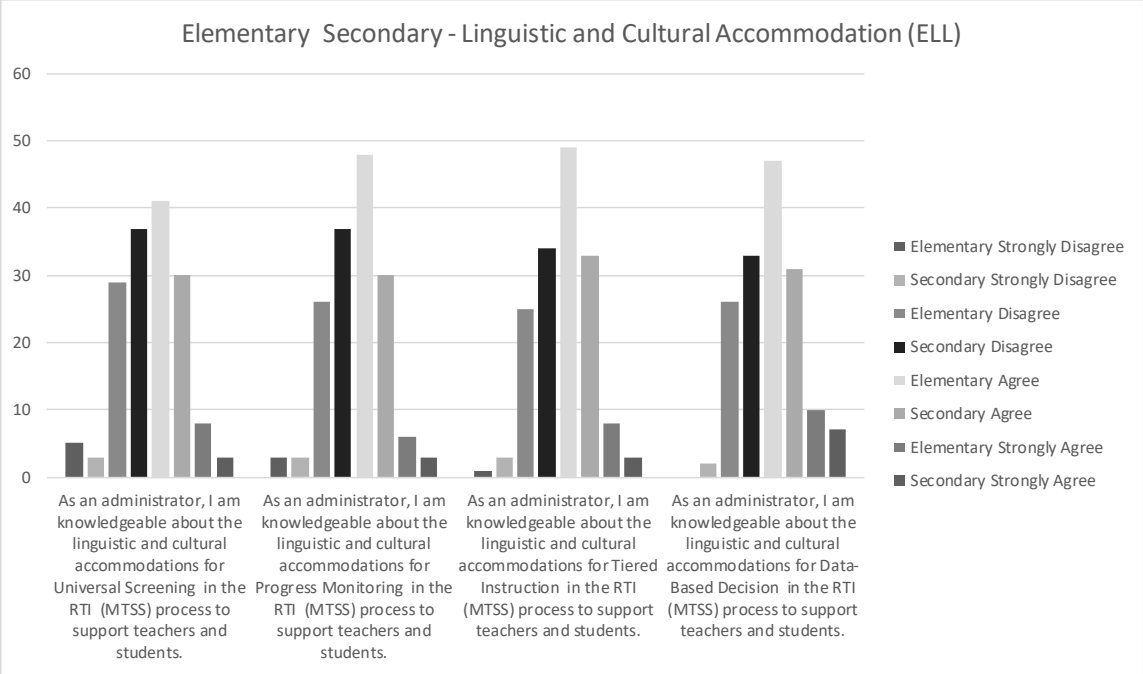

Figure 6. Bar charts comparing results for linguistic and cultural accommodations between elementary and secondary schools.

The data represented a large percentage of students who are ELLs on campus who would require linguistic and cultural accommodations, 58.0% in elementary and 69.6% in secondary. The number of students new to the country who enter the ISD at a high percentage could explain this observation The *t*-test results indicated a significant difference in the means for the responses between the elementary and secondary administrators for all four questions. Secondary respondents indicated disagreement at 37%, while 29% of elementary respondents indicated being knowledgeable about cultural and linguistic accommodations.

Table 19 displays the means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), mean differences (*M* Diff.), obtained *t* values, and probability (*p*) values for the four items representing knowledge about the linguistic and cultural accommodations needed within four RtI

components. The four *t*-test results between the elementary and secondary administrators indicated statistical significance between their means.

Table 19

The t *-Test Results for the Four Items About Knowledge of Linguistic and Cultural Accommodations for RtI Between Elementary and Secondary Administrators*

Item	Elementary		Secondary				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M* Diff.	*t*	*p*
1. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS).	2.65	45.5	2.42	29.95	0.23	2.15	.033*
2. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS).	2.71	35.94	2.46	30.08	0.25	2.74	.006*
3. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS).	2.80	32.74	2.58	30.96	0.22	2.45	.015*
4. As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Data-Based Decisions in the RtI (MTSS).	2.84	33.01	2.56	35.74	0.28	3.51	.0006*

Note. The degrees of freedom for all *t*- tests was 155. * indicates statistical significance with $p < .05$.

RtI and the Special Education Referral Process

Data were obtained to answer the third research question: What is the self-reported knowledge of the relationship between the Response to Intervention process and referrals to special education? The data were obtained from the question asked in the

demographic section of the survey related to knowledge surrounding the use of the RtI components and its effectiveness for recognizing when a special education evaluation would be prompted after utilizing the RtI process. Table 20 provides the frequencies for the dichotomous yes and no responses. The majority of the administrators at both elementary and secondary levels agreed that the RtI process was not effective for recognizing when a special education evaluation would be prompted.

Table 20

Frequencies for Responses to the Effectiveness of the RtI Process for Determining if Special Education Services Should be Considered for Students Elementary and Secondary Campuses

	n (%)		
RtI Process Effectiveness	Yes	No	Total
Elementary	39 (47.0/24.9) *	44 (53.0/28.0) *	83 (52.9) **
Secondary	33 (44.6/21.0) *	41(55.4/26.1) *	74 (47.1) **
Total	72 (45.9) **	85 (54.1) **	157 (100.0) **

Note. No significant differences in the distribution, $\chi^{2} = 0.09$, $df = 3$, $p = .763$.
*percentages represented by: (elementary or secondary independent/across the entire) population
** percentages represented across the entire population

The data in the demographic section showed the approximate number of students referred to special education in a typical school year. The mean average of the students referred was 15.99 students for the elementary level and 6.50 students for the secondary level. Agreement that the RtI process was effective for recognizing when a special education referral should be prompted occurred among 24.9% of the elementary administrators versus 21.0% among the secondary administrators for the sample of 157 administrators. Both levels' administrators had an agreement percentage representing 45.9% of the sample.

Specific comments from the survey indicated the administrators had a lack of understanding of the RtI *training* at both levels. Comments included the following: (a) "Training for all stakeholders was not held to communicate the need and process"; (b) "There is very little training for staff on the process and therefore it is seldomly used effectively"; (c) "The RtI process can be effective, but in high school it is hard to understand all the components." However, it was noted that comments were consistently more favorable from elementary administrators than from secondary administrators regarding the overall process. Specifically, multiple times the use of data and collaboration of teachers and administration were noted as positive. Additional comments were made as follows: (a) "RtI is effective as it involves teachers, administrators, parents and other professionals"; (b) "This process affords teachers and

administrators a way to track interventions"; (c) "It allows the school to gather information from all stakeholders to make good decisions."

RtI Process and Administration Experience

Data obtained from the demographics and components of the RtI system effectiveness were examined to answer the fourth research question: What is the relationship between the demographics of administrators' educational experience and administrator's knowledge of the RtI components? In the educational experience of elementary administrators who responded, 91.6% held master's degrees while 8.4% held doctoral degrees. The data showed the level of education held secondary administrators to be similar, with 93.2% having master's degrees and 6.8% having doctoral degrees. The degree majors were similar between elementary and secondary as degrees in education (89.3% and 74.0%, respectively). Related to additional certifications, 21.4% of elementary and 17.8% of secondary administrators held certifications in ESL and Bilingual Education. There were higher levels of ESL Certifications in elementary versus secondary schools, which supported the increased rates of RtI compliance of elementary over secondary. Bilingual certifications were higher in elementary than secondary, attributing to the detection and resolution of determining the need for special services by breaking down the communication barriers, as seen in Figure 7.

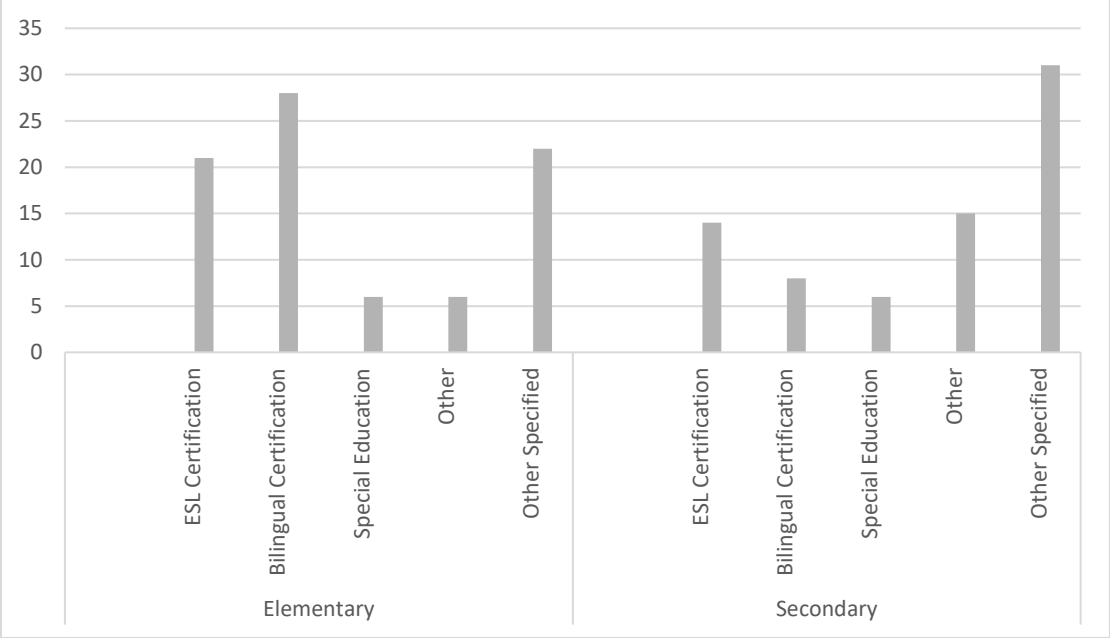

Figure 7. Comparison of the percentages of additional certifications reported between elementary and secondary administrators.

For the teaching experience of the respondents, there was a similarity between elementary and secondary administrators because many teachers reported having between 6 and 15 years of experience. Considering total years of experience, the data reflect similar patterns across elementary and secondary administrators with one exception. Among elementary principals, there were more administrators with 20 plus years of experience than between 6 and 20 years. No distinct conclusions about differences from elementary to secondary administrators could be drawn, as seen in Figure 8.

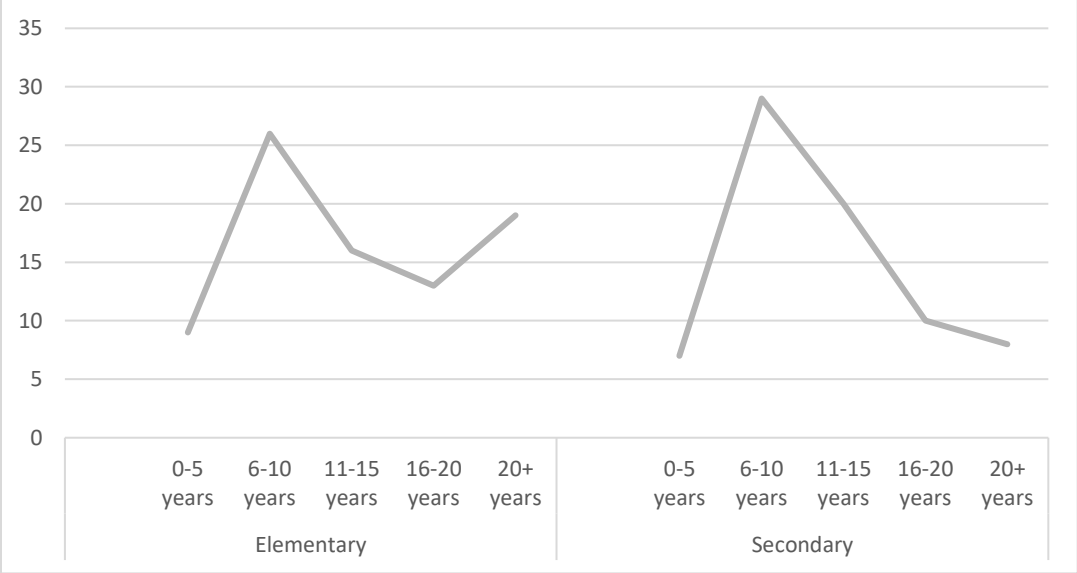

Figure 8. Comparison of the percentages of total years of experience reported by elementary and secondary administrators.

Considering total years in an administrative position in Dallas ISD as a principal or assistant principal, the administrators in the sample demonstrated similar patterns between their elementary and secondary schools. There were more elementary administrators with fewer than five years of experience in the sample. However, there were twice as many elementary schools in the district's population of elementary administrators, as seen in Figure 9.

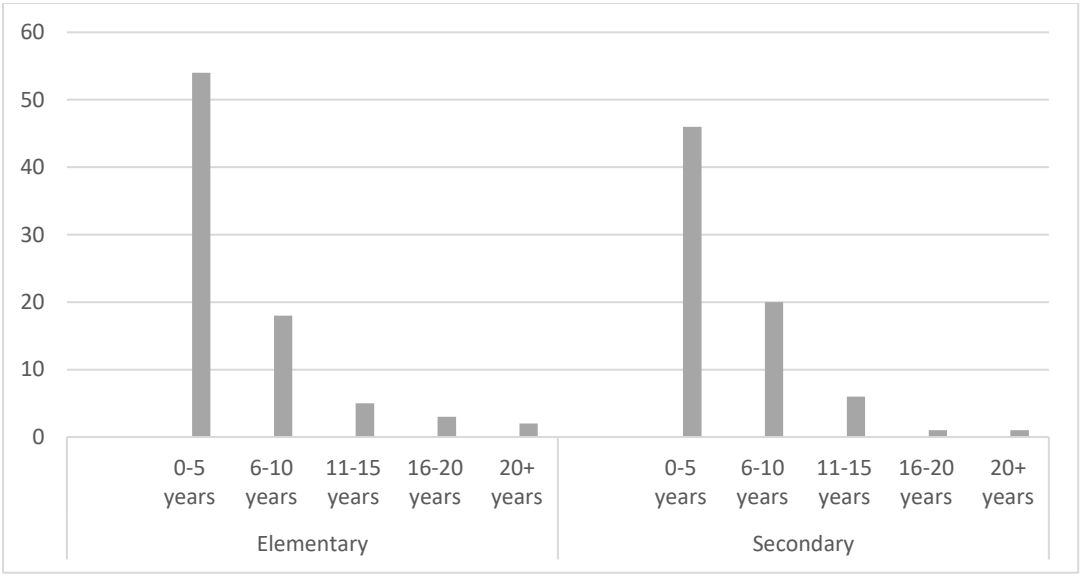

Figure 9. Comparison of the percentages of reported total years in an administrative position in the ISD reported by elementary and secondary administrators.

Figure 10 shows the administrators' reported days of professional development on RtI and MTSS. While there were distribution similarities between the elementary and secondary administrators, the data showed that over the past 3 years, 95% of the respondents have received between 1 and 18 hours of professional development for RtI and MTSS. Across elementary and secondary administrators, only 23 respondents noted having 3 days or more of RtI professional development. The administrators reported an average of 27.66 hours of professional development for elementary and 24.66 hours for secondary respondents over 3 years. These values become 9.22 hours a year for elementary training and 8.22 hours for secondary training per year. When that range is averaged over a period of 3 years, the average hours per year is low, between 0.3 and 6.0 hours per person per year. This range represents administrators receiving less than 1 day or 8 hours of training per person for effectively addressing RtI and MTSS. This level of

professional development per year might explain the low RtI and MTSS identification and adoption rates.

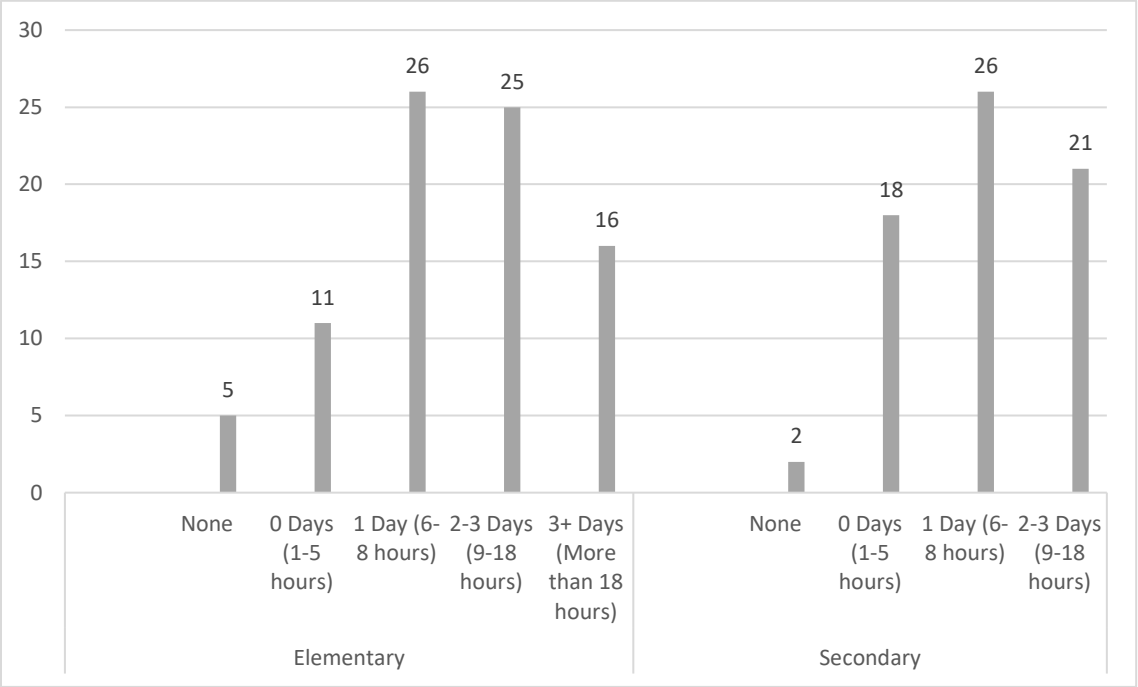

Figure 10. Comparison of the frequency in days of professional development for RtI (MTSS) in the past 3 years reported by elementary and secondary administrators.

Conclusions

Because the RtI process has become a means by which to determine the need for early interventions, it has also played an important role in special education referrals. IDEA (2004) identified the use of RtI as an optional means of special education assessment. The RtI implementation has been broadly implemented by the evidence of the use of some type of multi-tiered prevention model in all 50 states. Based on the significance of the impact of RtI in public schools and the intent of the process to provide data, and a tiered approach to meeting all students' academic needs, school administrators

in a public-school system were surveyed about their RtI experiences and knowledge. The collected information led to the following conclusions:

- The results of the statistical analysis reflected statistically significant differences in RtI knowledge and application between elementary and secondary. The elementary respondents understood the four components better than the secondary respondents.
- Seventeen items showed statistically significant differences between elementary and secondary respondents across all four components of RtI as well as for linguistic accommodations for ELL students. Three items did not show a statistically significant difference between elementary and secondary administrators. Thus, elementary administrators were more knowledgeable and able to apply the four components of (a) universal screening, (b) progress monitoring, (c) tiered instruction, and (d) data-based decision making than the secondary administrators.
- The mean referral rate reported for the elementary schools was 15.99 students per year, and the mean referral rate for the secondary schools was 6.50 students per year. Therefore, the elementary campuses represented more than twice the referral rate of the secondary campuses. This difference in referral rates was significantly supported by the higher number of *strongly agree* responses provided by the elementary respondents regarding their knowledge of the process.

- The average percentage of students in elementary schools' special education programs was 13.2% versus 26.4% at the secondary level, supporting the 2:1 student referral ratio already reported between elementary and secondary.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived knowledge and effectiveness of the RtI process from both elementary and secondary assistant principals' and principals' reporting. Identified components including universal screening, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, and a focus on linguistic accommodations for ELLs were examined. A question was included to examine the effectiveness of the RtI process in relation to the special education referral process from an administrator's perspective. Also, the administrator's educational experience was considered in relation to the RtI process. The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the study in general and provide implications for future researchers and educators.

The accumulated data obtained from the principals and assistant principals made it possible for the researcher to compare responses from elementary administrators and secondary administrators regarding their knowledge surrounding the major components of the RtI process. In addition, the researcher was able to gather data regarding the administrators' knowledge of the process in relationship to meeting the needs of students prior to a special education referral and examine the experience of training and certification of an administrator in relation to the RtI process. The survey data proved information related to the perceptions of principals and their respective campuses.

Discussion of Results

Research Question 1 Discussion

The first research question cited below focused on a comparison of elementary and secondary campus administrators' knowledge of four identified components in the RtI process. The major components of the RtI process (universal screening, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, and data-based decision making) were utilized to respond to the research question as follows: What is the difference in the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of Response to Intervention in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools?

The data were analyzed by each component. The elementary and secondary principal responses responded to five questions in each of the four categories. By conducting the *t* tests for the respondents' data, it was concluded that there were differences at a 95% confidence level or better for 13 of the 16 questions about the four RtI components between the elementary and secondary administrators. Of the three questions that lacked statistical significance, two involved the administrators' knowledge around the purpose, resources, and support of the component of progress monitoring, and the resources involved in the component of tiered instruction.

The essential components of the RtI process are universal screening, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, and data-based monitoring. We also know from previous stated research that campus leadership plays a significant role in the implementation of the RtI process (Allington, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Maier et al., 2016; Ward, 2013). From the data about the perceived knowledge of the administrators, the elementary

participants indicated they were better trained in the RtI process than the secondary administrators. This finding is demonstrated by the level of agreement of elementary as compared to the level of agreement by secondary on all but three of the 16 questions across all components.

Research Question 2 Discussion

The second research question was focused on a comparison of elementary and secondary campus administrators' perceived knowledge of the RtI process regarding linguistic accommodations for ELL students. The linguistic and cultural portion was imbedded into the survey question below intentionally due to the high population of ELL students in the District being surveyed and the consideration of the linguistic accommodations in the RtI process in each component of the RtI process at the national level. The question was stated as follows: What is the self-reported knowledge of school administrators regarding the implementation of RtI for English language learners in elementary versus secondary (middle and high) schools? All four of the statements revealed statistically significant differences between the elementary and secondary administrators, with elementary administrators reporting more knowledge.

The NCES (2019) has reported an increase in ELL students in Texas. In response, multiple research studies have supported the need for linguistic supports in the RtI process in order to meet the needs of ELL students (Deno et al., 2009; Roberts & Guerra, 2017). The RtI process is a way to determine if an ELL student is having difficulty due to learning difficulty and not due to cultural differences (Klingner et al., 2006; Ortiz et al., 2006).

Through the research conducted, the elementary administrators indicated they were more knowledgeable regarding all the components of the RtI components in relation to linguistic accommodations than the secondary administrators. In every component, the elementary administrators agreed with the statements by over 10% compared to their secondary counterparts as having more knowledge regarding linguistic accommodations. In conclusion, there were statistically significant differences in RtI knowledge and processes between the elementary and secondary respondents. As noted in the demographic section, the data indicated elementary administrators have more educational backgrounds in ESL certifications and bilingual education. This could be a positive contributor to understanding the needs of ELL students' linguistic accommodations as compared to their secondary counterparts.

Research Question 3 Discussion

To address the effectiveness of the RtI process' ability to close the learning gap a student may be having, the question was posed to the administrators in the survey as follows: What is the self-reported knowledge of the relationship between the Response to Intervention process and referrals to special education?

The research findings support the importance of the leadership on campus regarding the implementation of the components of the RtI process and the significant influence the administrator had regarding the success of the decision-making power (Maier et al., 2016; Tyre et al., 2012). School administrators must be able to navigate the multiple tiered levels of instruction while providing resources that are research-based interventions at each tier and be prepared to collect, monitor, analyze, use and

communicate data effectively (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015; Osborne-Lampkin & Cohen-Vogel, 2014).

Due to a decline in the percentage of students found eligible for special education since 2004, the U.S. Department of Education enacted an investigation by the Texas Education Agency regarding the statewide implementation of IDEA (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019). This investigation put more emphasis on Texas school administrators to ensure the RtI process was in place, and administrators worked with fidelity on their campuses to ensure that students make progress toward performing on-grade level within state standards. A system needs to be in place to screen students for understanding of learning, to intervene when necessary, to monitor, and to make decisions based on performance and progress data. The data might guide administrators toward better decisions about the next steps for supporting referrals for special education.

Based on the survey data, the administrators indicated there were fewer referrals at the secondary level than the elementary level. This observation seems reasonable since most students have been in school since they were 5 years old and typically could have been identified during any of several elementary school grades for a learning disability. As far as the administrators indicating if the RtI process was effective in identifying if a special education referral was needed for individual students, the elementary administrators had more favorable responses. Most of the responses were encouraging around the team approach to understanding the needs of the students. Both elementary and secondary principals noted the lack of training as an obstacle to the RtI process being better used to identify students with learning disabilities.

Research Question 4 Discussion

The final research question focused on administrators' experience and knowledge of the RtI process, which was taken from the demographic data from the survey. It was stated as follows: What is the relationship between the demographics of administrators' education experience and administrators' knowledge of the RtI components?

When looking at the overall demographic data, both elementary and secondary administrators reported high percentages of students of economic disadvantage and ELL statuses. Elementary administrators reported higher numbers of economic disadvantage and ELL populations than secondary administrators. The elementary administrators had a higher percentage of ESL and Bilingual certifications, which might clarify the reasoning behind the increase of perceived knowledge around linguistic accommodations in the RtI process. Both elementary and secondary administrators reported lacking training in the RtI process, which might contribute to the implementation gap seen in the data between the first two questions in each component and the last three questions, especially at the secondary level.

The results of the data reflect inconsistent perceptions about training and how to make time to schedule the RtI process. As noted in the results, administrators at both elementary and secondary levels reported being more knowledgeable in the first two questions in each component regarding the purpose of the components and the resources and support needed. However, the percentage of the responses at the secondary level in the agree category declined once the third through fifth questions were asked regarding the implementation of time in the schedule, training, and linguistic accommodations.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the RtI process through the administrators' lens to determine the effectiveness of the RtI process on campus. The research found that due to the limited amount of professional development stated by all respondents, it is reasonable to conclude that the RtI process could be better implemented through education and training. However, the training appears to be needed not in the knowledge level or understanding of resources, but in helping administrators understand how to fit the process into the schedule, how to implement and explain it to teachers, and how to support linguistic and cultural accommodations to support teachers and students. Time is often an issue related to understanding and implementing best practices associated with the RtI process. Administrators could consider creating time into the master schedule prior to the start of school to train core teams regarding the RtI process as well as a time throughout the year to address the RtI process within the day to meet the needs of the students in an organized manner. Each campus is unique so the campus could build the schedule based on the needs of the campus and culture/population of the community of learners.

In addition, the addition of an ESL or Bilingual certification of an administrator can positively contribute to the linguistic accommodations in the RtI process as well as more administrators certified in special education. If additional training/certification occurs, the impact could positively impact a better understanding of the administrators' knowledge of when a special education referral should be generated. This could have the potential to have a positive impact across the state averages.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include general limitations associated with *t*-test and non-experimental design studies. Nonexperimental 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 relationships between the variables. For the purposes of the study, there was no intent to manipulate the variables. Therefore, the limitation does not present a negative impact on the study.

The survey was created from a tool used from the National Center on Response to Intervention's (2018b) RtI Essential Components Integrity Rubric that had been designed as an audit or management tool for those responsible for evaluating the RtI implementation effort. Therefore, the self-rating is projected on comprehensive knowledge of the RtI process. The respondents were chosen due to the position held and knowledge related to the RtI process. They might have found it difficult to complete the tool used as a survey if they had limited knowledge of the RtI process.

The study was comprised of public-school administrators form the state of Texas. Since the implementation of IDEA (2004) did not include a specific operational model for each state, the external validity may be a concern since there may be variability in the RtI definition and practices as well as implementation time varying in districts across states. Samples of administrator perceptions of the RtI process from other states may be needed prior to making any conclusions about RtI across the country. Lastly, although the

study was conducted in a large district, practitioners' perceptions from only one school district were limited.

Another limitation was the date range of the survey. It was based on a relatively brief period of two weeks due to ISD restrictions on when the survey could be distributed. Additionally, the findings of this study illustrate perceptions of administrators from one school district. Thus, a generalization of findings is imperfect due to the limited size of the survey population. The total sample size for this study involved 157 participants out of total assistant principals and principals. Nonetheless, the results provided rich detail of an administrator's knowledge in relation to understanding the components of the RtI process and the perceived value of the process to guide decisions at the campus leadership level regarding the need for a comprehensive special education referral.

As an employee of the District, my association with the administrators may have been a possible limitation regarding the response rate. My position as an administrator may have influenced more participation with the administrators in the District. However, due to the strict guidelines of the IRB, there was no possible identification of the school leaders in the study, regardless of the perception of the administrators who participated.

Future Research

The findings of this study provide a logical starting point from which to make recommendations for future research. Additional research is suggested to determine the trends of campus administrators regarding the RtI process. Additional research is needed to inform ISDs to provide the training they need to intervene with students struggling to

master content on grade level set by the Texas Education Agency. From the research, new studies and strategies can be formed to increase student achievement.

In addition, the details proven by the survey should be further researched to provide a more in-depth understanding of the RtI process across school districts. There is a need to continue to assess trends and general information integral to the effectiveness of the RtI process regarding special education referrals and the knowledge of the administration at the campus level. The data suggest administrators need additional training to be better equipped to implement each RtI component of making time in the schedule and understanding how to meet the linguistic accommodations for ELL students. All the possibilities reinforce the need for additional studies in the areas of RtI and its effectiveness of ensuring students receive appropriate attention at all levels of the process.

If additional training/certification occurs, the impact could positively impact a better understanding of the administrators' knowledge of when a special education referral should be generated. This could have the potential to have a positive impact across the state averages.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Document

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

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 on your campus. 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.

Melody Paschall, the researcher, can be contacted via email (mpaschall@twu.edu) or by phone (972-322-6255). Jane Pemberton, Ph.D., a TWU faculty member associated with this study, can be contacted via email (jpemberton@twu.edu) or by phone (940-898-2246).

If you have any concerns about your participation based on the description of this survey study or you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas Woman's University at 940-898-3375 or via email irb@twu.edu.

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 a 4-point scale with strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each statement by selecting the appropriate category.

Pre-Screening Question

My campus in my district uses a RtI process.

- Yes - Please complete the survey
- No - Do not complete the reaming questions

THE RETURN OF YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE CONSTITUTES YOUR INFORMED CONSENT TO ACT AS A PARTICIPANT IN THIS RESEARCH.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' REPORTING OF FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSE to INTERVENTION

This survey focuses on school administrators' (principals and assistant principals) perceptions of factors that enhance or hinder Response to Intervention (RtI) practices, and to what extent Response to Intervention Practices are being implemented on their campus.

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SURVEY

*1)
Route to Teacher Certification

(•) University Based ( ) Alternative Certification

*2)
Highest Level of Education:

( ) Master's Degree (•) Doctoral Degree

*3)
Area of focus

( ) Educational Leadership/Administration] ( ) Curriculum and Instruction] ( ) Special Education] ( )
Other (please specify)

*4)
Additional Certifications

( ) ESL Certification ( ) Bilingual Certification ( ) Special Education ( ) (•) Other (please specify)

*5)

Total years of teaching experience:

( ) 0-5 years ( ) 6-10 years ( ) 11-15 years ( ) 16-20 years ( ) 201years +

*6)
Indicate your current assignment:

( ) Principal ( ) Assistant Principal

*7)
Total years in an administrative position as an assistant principal:

( ) 0-5 years ( ) 6-10 years ( ) 11-15 years ( ) 16-20 years ( ) 20+ years

*8)
Total years in an administrative position as a principal:

( ) 0-5 years (•) 6-10 years ( ) 11-15 years ( ) 16-20 years ( ) 21 + years

*9)
Total years as a principal and/or assistance principal in Dallas ISD:

( ) 0- 5 years ( ) 6-10 years ( ) 11-15 years ( ) 15-20 years (•) 20 + years

*10)
Level of Campus

○ K-5 [○ 6-8 ○ 9-12]○ Other (please specify)

*11)
Number of days of professional development on Response to Intervention/ Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) you received in the past 3 school years?

○ none ○ 0 Days (1-5 hours) ○ 1 Day (6-8 hours) ○ 2-3 Days(9-18 hours)]○ 3+ Days (More than 18 hours)

*12)
Are you a Title 1 campus?

○ Yes ○ No

*13)
If yes, approximate percentage of economically disadvantaged students on your campus:

*14)
Total Number of Students in your building:

○ Less than 300 students ○ 300- 500 students ○ 501-750 students ○ 751- 1000 students ○ 1001-1500 students ◉ 1501-2000 students ○ 2000 + students

*15)

Approximate percentage of ELL students on your campus:

*16)
Approximate percentage of students in special education on your campus:

*17)
Approximate number of students referred to special education in a typical school year on your campus:

*18)
Is the RtI process an effective way of determining if special education services should be considered for students on your campus? Why or why not?

*19)
As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.

○ Strongly Disagree] ○ Disagree ◉ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

***20)**

As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.

○ Strongly Disagree] ○ Disagree ◉ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

***21)**

As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Universal Screening in the RtI process for teachers.

○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

***22)**

As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Universal Screening in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.

○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Agree ◉ Strongly Agree

***23)**

As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Universal Screening in the RtI process to support teachers and students.

○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Agree Strongly Agree

***24)**

As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.

○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree] ◉ Agree] ○ Strongly Agree

***25)**

As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers

○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Agree] ○ Strongly Agree

***26)**

As an administrator, I make time in the schedule for implementing Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.

○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ◉ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

***27)**

As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.

○ Strongly disagree ○ Disagree ○ Agree] ◉ Strongly Agree

***28)**

As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Progress Monitoring in the RtI (MTSS) process to support teachers and students.

○ Strongly disagree ○ Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

*30)
As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Tiered Instruction at each level in the RtI (MTSS) process at various levels of instruction.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree [Strongly Agree

*31)
As an administrator, I make adequate time in the schedule for implementing Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

*32)
As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Tiered Instruction in the RtI (MTSS) process to support teachers and students.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

*34)

As an administrator, I can explain the purpose of Data Based Decision Making in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers and parents.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree] Strongly Agree

*35)
As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the resources and support needed for Data Based Decision Making in the RtI (MTSS) process for teachers.

Strongly Disagree [Disagree Agree] Strongly Agree

*36)
As an administrator, I have adequate time in the day for implementing Data Based Decision Making in the RtI (MTSS) process.

Strongly Disagree Disagree [Value=2] Agree [Value=3] Strongly Agree

*37)
As an administrator, I am adequately trained to explain and implement Data Based Decision Making in the RtI (MTSS) process to teachers.

Strongly Disagree] Disagree] Agree Strongly Agree

*38)
As an administrator, I am knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural accommodations for Data Based Decision Making in the RtI (MTSS) process to support teachers and students.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

APPENDIX B

Partner Agreement

Research Review Board
Research Proposal Confidential Data
Form C

DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Access to Confidential Data
Dallas ISD Staff/Non-Dallas ISD Partner Agreement

Main Project Contact

Person or Student: Melody Cogswell-Paschall

Title of Project: RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Address: 560 Allen Road

City: Coppell State: TX Zip Code: 75019

Work Number: 972-5713897 Cell Number: 972-322-6255

Home Number: 972-322-6255 Fax Number:

Email: melodypas@yahoo.com

Justification: Educational Research and Evaluation

I understand that any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is illegal as provided in the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. 1232 g, seq. and in the implementing federal regulations found in 34 CFR Part 99. FERPA is specifically incorporated into the Texas Public Information Act (formerly known as the Open Records Act). It is listed as an exception to records that are subject to disclosures to the public.

In addition, I understand that any data, datasets or output reports that I, or any authorized representative, may generate are confidential and the data are to be protected. I will not distribute to any unauthorized person any data or reports that I have access to or may generate using confidential data.

I hereby agree that failure to abide by the requirements of this client agreement may lead to the immediate revocation of any contract or research project that I may be performing for Dallas ISD. I understand that any intentional, knowing, or negligent release of confidential student information to unauthorized persons may also subject me to a legal cause of action for violation of an individual's civil rights in addition to state or federal criminal penalties.

Melody Paschall 1-9-19

Main Project Contact Person's/Student's Signature Date

Jane Templeton, PhD 1/9/19

Project Director's/Supervising Professor's Signature Date

June 28, 2018 Page 2 of 2

DISD Partner Agreement

APPENDIX C

Email Reminder Letter to the Independent School District Administrators

Dear School Administrators

A few days ago, you received an email inviting you to participate in an online survey as part of my dissertation. I am conducting online survey research for my dissertation to study the perceptions of RtI and school leadership. As an administrator in the District, you are invited to participate in this research.

If you have already completed the survey, please accept my sincere thanks. If you have not yet completed a survey and would still like to participate, please complete the online survey by clicking on the link at the bottom of this page. The survey should take approximately 10-20 minutes to complete. The findings will help with understanding the skills and services that help with the Response to Intervention process.

The survey has been designed so that you can complete it easily. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you begin the survey, you can stop anytime without question or penalty. Only completed surveys will be used for the study.

The link to the survey is attached in this email.

If you have any questions about the research study, you may contact me or my advisor, Dr. Jane Pemberton, at:

Melody Paschall
mpaschall@twu.edu
[redacted]

Jane Pemberton, PhD
jpemberton@twu.edu