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Lisa Lillian DeVeaux

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**The Treatise Committee for Lisa Lillian DeVeaux Certifies that this is the approved
version of the following treatise:**

Principal Leadership: Implementing RtI in Urban High Schools

Committee:

Ruben D. Olivarez, Supervisor

Martha N. Ovando, Co-Supervisor

Mark Anthony Gooden

Edwin R. Sharpe, Jr.

Principal Leadership: Implementing RtI in Urban High Schools

by

Lisa Lillian DeVeaux

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Principal Leadership: Implementing RtI in Urban High Schools

Lisa Lillian DeVeaux, Ed.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: Ruben D. Olivarez

Co-Supervisor: Martha N. Ovando

The reauthorized 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) allowed Response to Intervention (RTI) to be employed as an instructional method (IDEA, 2004). Although few researchers have examined the leadership efforts to implement RtI at the high school level (Windram, Bollman & Johnson, 2012), additional research is needed to identify the leadership practices to effectively introduce RtI. Therefore, this study identified campus level leadership practices applied during RtI implementation at the high school level. Three questions guided the study: What leadership practices do high school principals employ to implement RtI? What challenges do high school principals face during the implementation process and how they address them? To what extent do principals' RtI implementation actions reflect the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework related to implementation?

A purposeful sampling method was used to select three high school principals and assistant principals who have been at the same school for a minimum of two consecutive years within the same urban district. In addition two teachers from each campus who shared the same criteria were invited to participate. Face-to-face interviews and document analysis were the primary data collection protocols.

Findings suggest that high school principals in this context utilize data, establish accountability systems, engage stakeholders, set expectations and build teacher capacity in order to introduce and implement RtI. The study also found that high school principals encounter two challenges, namely, limited resources and resistance to

change. However, they overcome these by requesting central office assistance, aligning materials for central office, hiring retired teachers, creating a school wide Intervention Team, requiring active teacher involvement in Intervention Team, using technology to access RtI information, inviting teachers to model RtI practices, enlisting influential teachers to champion efforts, placing teachers on growth plans and following district policy.

Further, a comparative analysis of the identified leadership practices and the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007) suggests that the surfaced leadership practices mirror the responsibilities of the framework to some extent. This study provides insight and information for practicing high school leaders who attempt to engage in RtI implementation. Finally, given the scope of the present study, suggestions for further inquiry are offered.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	7
Purpose of the Study.....	10
Research Questions	10
Methodology.....	11
Definition of Terms	12
Leadership Practices	12
Response to Intervention	12
Second Order Change.....	13
Delimitations	13
Limitations.....	13
Assumptions	14
Significance of the Study.....	14
Summary.....	15
Chapter 2	17
Literature Review	17
Response to Intervention	18
RtI Implementation in Elementary Schools	20
RtI Implementation in Middle Schools	21
RtI Implementation in High Schools	22
Leading RtI Implementaiton.....	26
Elementary School Principal Leadership Practices	30
Middle School Principal Leadership Practices	30
High School Principal Leadership Practices	31
Seven Leadership Responsibilities Correlated with Second Order Change.....	33

Table 1: Balanced Leadership Framework	33
Conclusion	35
Chapter 3	38
Research Questions	38
Research Method and Design	39
Description of Sample	39
Data Collection Protocols	41
Interviews	41
Documents	42
Data Collection Process	43
Data Analysis	45
Reliability and Validity	45
Summary	48
Chapter 4 Findings	49
Study Context	50
School District Profile	50
District Vision	50
District Mission	50
Student Achievement Goals	51
Table 2: XISD: 2016-2017 Ethnicity (Student/Teachers)	
Demographic	52
High School Profiles	54
High School A	54
Table 3: School A: 2016-2017 High School A Ethnicity	
Student/Teachers) Demographic	55
High School B	56
Table 4: School B: 2016-2017 High School A Ethnicity	
(Student/Teachers) Demographic	57
High School C	58

Table 5: School C: 2016-2017 High School A Ethnicity (Student/Teachers) Demographic	59
Participant Profiles	60
Table 6: High School A Participants	60
Table 7: High School B Participants	61
Table 8: High School C Participants	61
Data Analysis Methods.....	61
Findings	63
Question 1: What leadership practices do high school principals employ to implement RtI?	63
Utilizing Data	63
Establishing Accountability.....	65
Engaging Stakeholders	67
Setting Expectations	69
Building Capacity	71
Question 2: What challenges do high school principals face during the implementation process and how do they address them?.....	74
Limited Resources	74
Resistance to Change.....	77
Exhibit 1: Challenges and Strategies	79
Question 3: To what extent do high school principals' RtI leadership practices reflect the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework?	80
Ideals and Beliefs	81
Optimizer	82
Flexibility	83
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment	85
Intellectual Stimulation	86
Change Agent	88
Monitors/Evaluates	89
Exhibit 2: Seven Responsibilities Compared to Emerging Themes and Principal Practices	91

Chapter 5 Summary, Implications and Further Research	95
Statement of the Problem	95
Purpose of the Study	96
Research Questions	96
Methodology	96
Summary of Findings	97
High School Principal Leadership Practices	98
Utilizing Data	98
Establishing Accountability	99
Engaging Stakeholders	100
Setting Expectations	101
Building Capacity	102
Challenges and Strategies	103
Emerging Leadership Practices and the Balanced Leadership Framework	105
Ideals and Beliefs	105
Optimizer	106
Flexibility	106
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment	106
Intellectual Stimulation	107
Change Agent	107
Monitors/Evaluates	108
Implications for Practice and Further Research	108
Recommendations for Practice	109
Recommendations for Research	109
Conclusion	111
References	112
Vita	119

Chapter 1

Introduction

Response to Intervention (RTI) has been recognized as an alternative method for providing systematic research-based instruction and intervention for students experiencing academic failure prior to referral for special education screening (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). A meta-analysis of RTI research found increased reading scores and reduced referral for special education assessment among the research subjects all of whom were elementary students (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). Similarly, in their summary of nine RTI studies Newman-Gonchar, Clarke, and Gersten (2009), found increased performance levels in mathematics. The unit of analysis for the studies was elementary students in first through fifth grade.

Extant RTI research has evidenced the effectiveness of this multi-tiered model to improve reading and mathematics outcomes at the elementary level. However, research on RTI implementation at the high school level is limited. In an effort to provide practitioners with information on effective RTI implementation at the high school level, the High School Tiered Intervention Initiative (HSTII) was established. Comprised of members from the National High School Center, National Center in Response to Intervention and Center on Instruction, the HSTII team formed to add to the body of knowledge about RTI implementation at the high school level by collecting information from practitioners who have undertaken the process. In their study of eight high schools, the HSTII team found staff capacity, scheduling, resources and fidelity common

implementation challenges (National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention & Center on Instruction, 2010). Although these findings identify leverage points to consider during the implementation process, they also expose that limited research has addressed the high school level principal leadership and support for sound decision-making on selecting effective RtI implementation practices.

This chapter provides an introduction to understanding the importance of studying high school principals' leadership practices for implementing the RtI process using the Balanced Leadership theoretical framework. The problem to be investigated, the purpose, questions, methodology, significance, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions are also presented.

Background

Examination of RtI implementation efforts of one high school and found whole school involvement in the process, assessment, personnel assigned to coordinate interventions and scheduling interventions to supplement core instruction key to effective implementation (Fisher & Frey, 2011). In an effort add to the body of research on the impact of two supplemental reading programs for 9th grade students reading 1 to 5 grade levels below, Somers, Corrin, Sepanik, Salinger, Levin and Zmach (2010) assessed implementation fidelity to ensure program impact findings were not compromised. They report that assessing the fidelity to the RtI implementation process is essential to ensure resulting decisions are based on accurate information. While in some cases RtI requires specific personnel assigned to oversee and support implementation, the principal plays a critical role in the decision-making process by assessing fidelity to implementation or developing the progress monitoring system.

The school principal must remain abreast of current implementation trends in order to set the tone for RtI implementation (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2012). In their study of principals' perceptions of the importance of RtI practices within secondary schools and the implementation of those practices within their respective schools, Sansosti, Noltemeyer and Goss (2010) point out that although a variety of administrators could have responded to the survey, the principal was selected because of his role in orchestrating change and improving student achievement. Findings from their study indicate principals perceived RtI as important, but difficult to implement as a result of limited research-based interventions for high schools and data collection systems. Further, principals identified scheduling and creating time for teachers to participate in problem-solving meetings as challenges to RtI implementation at the high school level. Despite these obstacles, secondary school principals have the unique potential to overcome these challenges and effectively lead the change processes needed to implement and institutionalize RTI (Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss, 2010). Identifying effective practices to support RtI implementation is essential to ensure students benefit from the tiered approach. Waters and Cameron (2007) assert that the most well-documented and well-defined research-based practices can be met with resistance when those responsible for implementation are required to develop new knowledge and procedures. The identified processes may be a departure from current practices and will constitute second order change

In a meta-analysis of school level leadership and its effect on student achievement, Waters and Cameron (2007), identified 21 leadership responsibilities with statistically

significant correlation to student achievement and 66 behaviors for fulfilling these responsibilities. The 21 responsibilities are noted and defined as follows:

- Culture: fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.
- Order: establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines
- Discipline: protects teachers from issues and influences that would distract from their teaching time or focus
- Resources: provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs
- Involvement in curriculum, instruction and assessment: is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Focus: establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention
- Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment: is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction and assessment practices
- Visibility: has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students
- Contingent rewards: recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments
- Communication: establishes strong lines of communication with teachers and among students
- Outreach: is an advocate and spokesperson for the school with all stakeholders
- Input: involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies

- Affirmation: recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures
- Relationships: demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff
- Change agent: is willing to and actively challenges the status quo
- Optimizer: inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
- Ideals and beliefs: communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
- Monitors/evaluates: monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.
- Flexibility: adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
- Situational awareness: is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and use this information to address current and potential problems
- Intellectual stimulation: ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture (p. 4-9)

Equally important, Waters and Cameron (2007) found 11 of the 21 responsibilities correlated at a level of statistical significance with second order change. Seven were positively correlated and four negatively correlated with second order change. The 11

responsibilities correlated with second order change are as follows:

- Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Flexibility
- Change agent
- Ideals and beliefs
- Monitors/evaluates
- Intellectual stimulation
- Optimize
- Culture
- Communication
- Input
- Order (p.12)

On the other hand, Waters and Cameron (2007) also described the 4 responsibilities negatively correlated with second-order change as “unintended negative consequences” of second-order change (p. 13). The 4 responsibilities included culture, communication, input and order.

The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) theory of change includes the following four phases: Demand, Implement, Manage Personal Transitions and Monitor and Evaluate. The phases have been aligned to the following seven leadership responsibilities positively correlated with second order change:

Ideals/Beliefs, Optimize, Flexibility, Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and

Assessment, Intellectual Stimulation, Change Agent and Monitor and Evaluate

(McREL, 2003). Given that the three tiers of the RTI process involve: 1) screening for at-risk students; 2) monitoring of responsiveness to instruction; and 3) determination of the course of action, implementing the process may require added responsibilities and the development of new instructional practices (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The seven leadership responsibilities positively correlated with second order change have the potential to serve as guidepost to assist principals with evaluating practices and identifying next steps to enhance RtI implementation (Waters & Cameron, 2007). These include: Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, Flexibility, Change agent, Ideals and beliefs, Monitors/evaluates, Intellectual stimulation and Optimize.

Furthermore, The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) assert 80-85% of students should benefit from the core curriculum delivered at Tier 1, the remaining 15% require targeted support at Tier 2. This targeted support should result in 5% of the remaining students moving to Tier 3 for intensive intervention. In theory, as students progress across tiers the number requiring support decreases. Thus, students deemed non-responsive at tier 3 are referred for evaluation to determine special education eligibility (NASDSE & CASE, 2006).

Problem Statement

Over the next forty years, the United States is estimated to become increasingly diverse. According to U.S. Census data projections, the Asian population will increase by 79% and the Hispanic population will double (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). A comparative review of American High School transcripts from 1990 to 2009, showed an increase in the

percentage of White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander graduates completing at least a standard curriculum. The increase was greater for White and Asian/Pacific Islander graduates than for Black and Hispanic graduates (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009). Further, the 2013 Nation's Report revealed 12th grade Black and Hispanic students performed significantly below the White and Asian/Pacific Islander peers in reading and mathematics. Specifically, 7% of Black students scored at or above the proficient level in mathematics as compared to the 47% and 33% passing rate achieved by their Asian and White peers respectively. Hispanic students showed a similar trend in mathematics with 12% passing. Black and Hispanic students showed a significant increase in passing rates in Reading. However, proficiency levels of their White and Asian peers are two to three times higher. Failing to ensure our educational system is prepared to meet the instructional needs of students and to close the achievement gap is a matter of equity and access with moral and legal implications.

The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) allowed practitioners to use Response to Intervention (RtI) as an alternative method to identify children with learning disabilities. The responsiveness to treatment approach is an extension of the pre-referral evaluation and problem-solving model (Deno, 2003). Conceptualized as a multi-tiered model which is generally characterized by three tiers, 1) screening for at-risk students; 2) monitoring of responsiveness to instruction; and 3) determination of the course of action (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Providing quality and tiered instruction has the potential to improve outcomes for high school students who have traditionally underperformed.

The tiered instructional support structure inherent in RtI holds promise for ensuring students receive effective instruction and targeted intervention prior to being referred to special education. Equally important, is the potential appropriate tiered instruction holds for reducing academic performance gaps between students from diverse background and their white peers. In a study of one high school's RtI implementation Fisher and Frey (2011) found student performance on state assessments increased for African American and Hispanic students. Additionally, although the achievement gap between African American and White students remained, the gap decreased.

While the effectiveness of the RtI intervention as an instructional model is showing trends of improved student outcomes, several researchers have directed their attention to the leadership practices of principals implementing RtI, but they primarily focus on elementary and middle school settings (Roberts, 2014; Fuch & Deshler, 2007; Mellard, Prewitt & Deshler, 2012). Although few researchers have examined the leadership practice efforts to implement RtI at the high school level (Windram, Bollman & Johnson, 2012), further evidence of the effectiveness of this intervention is necessary. Therefore, additional studies exploring campus level leadership practices applied during RtI implementation process at the high school level, particularly due to the fact that some high schools have only introduced this alternative instructional method in recent years (NHSII, 2010 & EHA Regulation, 2014).

Research at the high school level illustrates what principals do to implement RtI to some extent. However, concerns about the low performance of African American (AA) and Hispanic (H) students continue to exist. For instance, it is reported that 84% of (AA)

and 76% of (H) failed to meet the proficient level in reading (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013). Similarly, it was found that 93% of (AA) and 78% (H) of 12th grade students scored below the proficient level in mathematics nationally as compared to 53% and 67% below proficient performance levels of their Asian and White peers respectively (Nationally Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013). Furthermore, research reports that the role of the principal is critical in the implementation of changes like RtI (Fullan, 2007; Hord, Rutherford, Huling & Hall, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

In an effort to understand leadership practices of principals in urban high schools that utilize RtI, this qualitative study explored the leadership practices of high school principals regarding response to intervention (RtI), the challenges they face during the implementation process and how they address them in three high schools with similar characteristics in an urban school district. Specifically, using qualitative methods, such as face-to face interviews and document analysis, the researcher explored to what extent principals' practices related to RtI implementation are aligned the seven responsibilities positively correlated with implementing second-order change outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What leadership practices do high school principals employ to implement RtI?
2. What challenges do high school principals face during the implementation process and how do they address them?

3. To what extent do principals' RtI implementation leadership practices reflect the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework related to implementation?

These questions guided the methods used in the study as well as data collected.

Methodology

This multiple case study was conducted within the parameters of interpretivist descriptive qualitative research as it intends to study human behavior in context. This method is the most suitable approach to provide opportunities for data analysis through a variety of venues with the intent of taking a snapshot of high school principals' described leadership practices and challenges they face. According to Glense (2006), qualitative methods are..."used to understand some social phenomena from the perspective of those involved, to contextualize in their particular social-cultural-political milieu and to sometimes change or transform social conditions" (p. 4).

Concurring with Glesne's statement, open-ended interview questions were used when conducting the study at the participating campuses. This approach facilitated a naturalistic environment. The collected data yielded a higher level of reliability when conducting qualitative research (Guba, 1978).

This study used face-to-face interviews and document analysis to explore how principals' leadership practices reflect the responsibilities identified in the Balanced Leadership Framework associated with leading change (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Initial Coding were used in the first cycle to analyze the collected data. This included reviews of Campus Improvement Plans, analysis of current documentation of RtI implementation,

district policy and individual interviews. This data was compared and contrasted to discover consistencies and inconsistencies. The triangulation of data enhanced the reliability of this study as expected within the guidelines of interpretivist qualitative methodology. The second cycle of data was analyzed using Axial Coding to reduce the number of initial codes and reorganize the collected data.

Definition of Terms

The following general terms are embedded in the context of this study.

Definitions are intended to facilitate accuracy, clarity, and understanding of the concepts, theories, and methods discussed in this research.

Leadership Practices. A set of activities that school leader executes regularly to guide a group and improve performance. The actions a leader takes to implement responsibilities (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Response to Intervention (RtI). The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) allowed practitioners to use Response to Intervention (RtI) as an alternative method to identify children with learning disabilities. The responsiveness to treatment approach is an extension of the pre-referral evaluation and problem-solving model (Deno, 2003). Conceptualized as a multi-tiered model, which is generally characterized by three tiers: 1) screening for at-risk students; 2) monitoring of responsiveness to instruction; and 3) determining the course of action (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). RtI requires school wide implementation of scientifically based instructional interventions and promotes intervention at the onset of non-responsiveness to general

education instruction.

Second-order change. Waters and Cameron (2005) describe change as second-order when it is perceived as “A break with the past. Outside of existing paradigms. Conflicted with prevailing values and norms. Requiring new knowledge & skills to implement” (p. 28).

Delimitations

This study focuses only on three high schools, which implemented RtI in a large urban school district. The study mainly identified leadership practices of the principals leading the high schools included in the study. Other participants were the assistant principals and teachers who were engaged in the RtI implementation. The selected schools are engaged in implementing RtI. The study highlighted the identified leadership practices, but did not evaluate the practices nor did it include other school personnel involved in the RtI process.

Limitations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the phenomena deeply rather than broadly. Studies of this nature are inherently case dependent and heavily influenced by the context of the participants (Patton, 2002). Therefore, this study provided a snapshot of multiple case units with limited stakeholder data. Participants volunteered for the interviews. Consequently, their perceptions may or may not be congruent with perceptions of other stakeholders. Retrospection of each participant during the interview may weaken the data. There could be other information brought forth that

participants were not be able to recall or they withhold at the time of the interview. Quality of recordkeeping for the documentation used for this study may vary from campus to campus, which could also constitute another limitation. However, triangulations of data sources were employed to ensure high level of reliability.

A potential bias may exist because the researcher has worked closely with many school administrators and served as principal at a school implementing RtI practices as part of the Reading 1st initiative in the past. Possibility of data overload and time demands may also constitute limitations for this study.

Assumptions

The researcher of this study enters the field with the assumption that principals, in all three high schools included, have a system for implementing RtI. In addition, it is assumed that at each campus there is a record keeping structure for monitoring student progress and the principal leads the change efforts.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may contribute to the knowledge base on the leadership practices of high school principals regarding RtI implementation in urban high schools. Specifically, it might provide insights concerning how high school principals' leadership guides RtI implementation, obstacles they encounter and how they address them. The study will also add to exiting literature related to the RtI implementation process, and the utility of the seven leadership responsibilities positively correlated with implementing second-order change as guidepost to foster implementation.

Summary

This first chapter provides an introduction to understanding the importance of studying high school principals' leadership practices for implementing the RtI process using the Balanced Leadership theoretical framework. The problem to be investigated, the purpose, questions, methodology, significance, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions that will be reviewed. The next chapter of this study provides relevant literature on RtI implementation with a focus on principals' leadership practices associated with leading change.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to this study's purpose which is to identify the principals' leadership practices in implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) in urban high schools. The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) allowed RtI as an alternative method to identify students with disabilities. In a meta-analysis of RtI research Burns, Appleton & Stehouwer (2005) found that RTI initiatives led to reduced referrals for placements in special education and a higher rate of students scoring proficiently on state tests at the elementary level.

Although it appears that RtI implementation improves academic performance for elementary school students, effective methods for assessing fidelity of implementation is an RtI objective that continues to be a barrier (Burns, 2010). For instance, Fuch, Fuch & Compton (2010) cited scheduling as an impediment to RtI implementation in middle schools. In addition to scheduling time for tiered interventions, Prewett, Mellard, Deshler, Allen, Alexander & Stern, (2012) found that addressing basic skill deficiencies while supporting content knowledge acquisition becomes a challenge for middle and high school implementation of RtI.

While studies have found fidelity and structural considerations such as scheduling barriers to RtI implementation, few have examined how principals in high school have implemented RtI. Therefore, focus will be placed on those principal leadership practices

believed to influence school improvement efforts in three high schools of similar characteristics in an urban school district.

This review begins by examining literature pertinent to the Response to Intervention tiered framework. Additionally, literature on RtI research in elementary, middle and high schools is presented. The chapter continues with a review of RtI literature that discusses leadership practices for RtI implementation. The final review relates to the seven leadership responsibilities associated with implementing change to examine their utility as guideposts for high school principals to consider during the RtI implementation process.

Response To Intervention

The 2004 Reauthorization of (IDEA) allowed educational decision makers to move beyond Intelligence Quotient (IQ) testing to identify students with Learning Disabilities (LD) to responsiveness to intervention approach (RtI). RtI is the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring the student's progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals and applying student response data to important educational decisions (NASDSE & CASE, 2006).

Characterized as a multi-tiered model, Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) provide the following description of each tier: Tier I-Primary Prevention is comprised of universal core instructional program, universal screening of all students using Curriculum Based Measures (CBM) and short-term progress monitoring of students falling below expected

performance levels. Tier 2-Secondary Prevention includes small group tutoring in reading and math for 15 to 20 week sessions with a dual discrepancy evaluation determining responsiveness. Tier 3-Tertiary Prevention provides individualized programming, progress monitoring and multi-disciplinary evaluation, precedes referral to special education and identifies the specific disability.

Results of an RtI adoption survey reveal respondent districts with sufficient data to determine the impact of RtI, 76% indicated RtI has led to an improvement in Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) vs. 24% that indicated it has not and 87% indicated RtI has reduced the number of special education referrals (Spectrum K12, NASDE, CASE & AASA, 2010). The findings from this survey suggest that employing the standard protocol approach associated with identifying learning disabilities (LD) within a tiered RtI framework can reduce the numbers of students referred for special education evaluation and improve performance levels for all students. However, research at the secondary level is limited and it is difficult to generalize the findings to support sound decision-making for implementation of intervention supports for students.

In an effort to guide the process to implement the RtI framework for all students, a North Texas school district created administrative procedures. The regulation provides a framework for implementing RtI to address academic and behavioral concerns and outlines the following: minimum program requirements, role of the Student Support Team, documentation of intervention plans, referral for specialized services and staff knowledge and skills (EHAA Regulation, 2016). Moreover, the guidelines define the

principal's responsibilities in the implementation process as ensuring "data meetings" are being conducted and equipping staff with the knowledge and skills to ensure the following:

- High quality instruction is delivered to all students, intervening when necessary, using classroom best practices and scientific, research-based interventions that are delivered as designed.
- Data drives the decisions made for students. Procedures are consistently followed to screen students and monitor response to intervention.
- Staff receives professional development (EHAA Regulation, 2016, p. 7).

RtI Implementation in Elementary Schools

In an effort to assist schools planning to adopt their recommendations Fuch and Fuch (2007) provided a model of an RtI system at first grade in reading and mathematics. Hall (2008) developed a guide to assist elementary and middle school principals with implementing RtI to improve reading outcomes. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2008) developed blueprints for RtI implementation at the school level. However, the resources noted in the blueprint to support screening and progress monitoring targeted elementary schools.

Research examining the effects of implementation of a systematic response to intervention (RtI) model on the identification and evaluation of children for special education at five elementary schools reported a reduction in evaluations conducted and the evaluated students were more likely to qualify for services when data from the RtI

model, System to Enhance Educational Performance (STEEP) were included in the team decision-making process. However, in some instances school teams' failure to utilize the data in the decision-making process highlights the need for building data use capacity as part of the implementation process (VanDerHeyden, Witt & Gilbertson, 2007).

In a mixed methods study exploring the pilot implementation of a Response to Intervention framework in first grade classrooms in three urban schools, researchers found increased performance in reading and reduced referrals to special education among participants (Stahl, Keane & Simic, 2012).

RtI Implementation in Middle Schools

At the middle school level, Marino & Beecher (2010) examined how using educational video games as an intervention can support acquisition of science content knowledge among secondary students with learning disabilities (LD) or at risk of academic failure within the RtI framework. However, gains in test performance among LD students were not statistically significant. Vaughn, Cirino et al. (2010) tested a standard protocol RtI model with sixth grade students experiencing reading difficulties in seven urban middle schools. Although the effect size on the targeted skills were modest, students receiving the Tier II intervention showed greater gains than students in a comparison group. Dufrene et al. (2010) studied the effects of using peer tutors to administer Tier II intervention at the sixth grade level. The accuracy and fluency of the students receiving the intervention increased slightly.

In an examination of one middle school implementing response to intervention Burns (2008) found data-based decision-making that included state accountability tests, flexible, small-group instruction to address skills and content and collaborative problem analysis as essential components for improving student outcomes. In response to failure rate data among current 8th grade students on the 11th grade math test, a school district comprised of 726 students implemented RtI which on average resulted in twice the growth among those failing to meet grade level proficiency (Canter, Klotz & Cowan, 2008).

In an interview, Dupont (2012) cited student data dating back to kindergarten as an advantage for RtI implementation at the middle school level. Fuch & Vaughn (2012) expressed optimism with the extension of Tier 2 interventions in math and reading to middle schools. However, the researchers noted the “dearth” of research at the high school level.

RTI Implementation in High Schools

According to previous research, conceptualizing and introducing RtI at the middle and high school level provides opportunities to support all students with academic difficulties given the limited time remaining for schooling (Fuch, Fuch & Compton, 2010). Although RtI expansion to the high school level is recent, King, Lemons & Hill, (2012) assert that the reduced emphasis on identifying students for special education eligibility provides secondary administrators with the opportunity to set goals for RtI that

align to the schools mission. On the other hand, Duffy (2007) cites the following concerns with RtI at the high school level:

- Identifying screening and progress monitoring tools for high school students across subjects
- Identifying high school intervention models that work across content areas
- Implementation problems specific to high schools
- Changing roles for general and special education teachers
- Universal instruction across content areas
- Structural supports for professional collaboration
- On-going professional development
- Parent communication for community building and support (p.7)

Others have focused on the administration of RtI at the high school level. For example, King, Lemons & Hill (2012) provide the following recommendations for administrators related to RtI in secondary schools based on existing research at the high school level:

- Recognize that RtI at the secondary level is different from elementary models
- Establish a vision for your RtI framework and provide the necessary resources
- Use RtI to emphasize the importance of intensive secondary literacy instruction
- Stay informed (p. 14)

Further, in a review of RtI implementation at eight high schools funded by the U.S. Department of Education (2006), the National Center on Response to Intervention and the Center on Instruction (2010) found the components and guiding principles of RtI are the same at the elementary and secondary level. However, contextual factors such as focus, instructional organization, and culture varied greatly which prevented any in-depth synthesis.

In a case study of a small high school implementing RtI over two years, the following themes emerged: Theme 1: Focus on Quality Core Instruction; Theme 2: Use Course Competencies to Monitor Progress; Theme 3: Schedule Interventions to Supplement not Supplant Core Instruction; Theme 4: Dedicate Resources to Support Intervention Efforts and; Theme 5: Adopt a School wide Approach to RtI to Maximize Intervention Impact (Fisher & Frey, 2011). Other researchers studied the impact of two supplemental reading programs on ninth grade students reading 2 to 5 grade levels below (Somers, Corrin, Sepanik, Salinger, Levin & Zmach, 2010). Students participating in the intervention increased performance in reading comprehension, but continued to read 2 grade levels below after one year of implementation. Future research should aim to verify and extend these preliminary results as well as examine the unique factors associated with successful implementation of RtI in secondary settings (Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss, 2010).

In another case study of a high school implementing RtI, Fisher and Frey (2011) identified the following elements essential to RtI implementation (a) whole school involvement in the RtI effort, (b) assessments, (c) professional development, (d) personnel who were assigned the task of coordinating interventions efforts, and (e) scheduling interventions to support, not supplant, core instruction. Although an RtI framework was used and the high school's staff figured out how to implement this framework, it was a difficult process. Difficulties included identifying appropriate progress monitoring tools and scheduling interventions (Fisher & Frey, 2011).

In a study of eight high schools implementing RtI (National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention & Center on Instruction, 2010) researchers found leadership, intervention providers, professional development, coaching and evaluation as factors that support implementation. However, staff, faculty capacity, scheduling, resources and fidelity were implementation challenges that needed attention from the school leadership to enact changes associated with RtI interventions (National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention & Center on Instruction, 2010).

Although RtI enables schools to meet the learning needs of most students, implementation guidance for secondary schools is limited (Feuerborn, Sarin, & Tyre, 2011). RtI research at the elementary level has been on-going, however, there is little

evidence of how RtI can be implemented in high schools (Duffy, 2007).

Leading RtI Implementation

Successful RtI implementation will require engaged administrators who set expectations for adoption of changes to implement of RtI, provide the necessary resources, and support the use of procedures that ensure fidelity of implementation (Fuch & Deshler, 2007 p. 131). Successful adoption also requires that principals focus first on the instructional supports provided to all students by general education teachers (Crocket & Gillespie, 2007). To facilitate RtI implementation, school administrators must create a plan for professional development that addresses content specific to RtI and considers barriers to staff preparedness (Feuerborn, Sarin, & Tyre, 2011). Others suggest that successful implementation of RtI will require principals who provide more than professional development opportunities. Instead, the principal must demonstrate his or her own active involvement in the change process by participating in team meetings, allocating resources to identify and obtain research-based interventions at all levels of instruction, adopting data-based progress monitoring practices within the building, and reorganizing staff time to permit problem-solving meetings (Lau, Sieler, Muyskens, Canter, VanKeuren & Marston, 2005).

The National High School Center's (2011) review of one high school's RtI implementation revealed challenges and highlighted the role of the leader in establishing a vision and following the plan. Barriers to RtI implementation at the secondary level are teacher resistance, secondary school culture and organization and student learning

heterogeneity (Epler, 2015).

One of the most persistent tendencies of those who do not appreciate the complexities of change like in the case of RtI is to consider change an event, rather than a process (Hord, Rutherford, Huling & Hall, 2004). To effectively set a course for change focused on improving student learning, leaders must possess the capacity to stay consistently focused on the core elements of learning, curriculum, teaching, and assessment; and make all other dimensions of schooling work in service of those elements (Murphy, Elliot, Goldring & Porter, 2006).

RtI requires the adoption of new skills to effectively operationalize the model (Fuch & Fuch, 2005). Developing new instructional practices often is a departure from the status quo (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Change is accomplished by individuals; therefore individuals must be the focus of attention in implementing a new innovation. Specifically, school leaders must ensure that the proposed change creates a value-added schema in the mind of the user to hasten commitment to adaptation (Hord, Rutherford, Huling & Hall, 2004). Although RtI differs from previous attempts at educational reform, its success depends to a certain extent on the support it receives from school leaders (Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss, 2010). Leading education experts and researchers assert that education reform efforts not only rely on the support of principals, but also their actions (Boscardin, 2005). Research has also suggested that even when supported by legislation, most educational change efforts result in limited implementation success because school leaders are not knowledgeable about nor fully supportive of the change

(Fullan, 2007). In order to create a sustainable RtI model in secondary schools, leaders must engage in research-based leadership practices and principles of change (Epler, 2015).

Principals are a major catalyst for change within school buildings and the success of change like it is in the case in RtI depends, in part, on the processes such leaders put in place within their respective schools (Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss, 2010). Waters & Cameron (2007) found a set of leadership responsibilities that are positively correlated with second order change: Ideals/Beliefs, Optimize, Flexibility, Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Intellectual Stimulation, Change Agent and Monitor and Evaluate. The responsibilities are associated with the following four phases of the change process: create demand, implementation, manage personal transitions and monitor and evaluate. Understanding these leverage points may assist with the RtI implementation process. One principal in the National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention and Center on Instruction (2010) study reported reliance on observational data and formative assessment data to measure fidelity of implementation in lieu of rigorous tools to monitor and evaluate fidelity.

According to Waters and Cameron (2007), once leaders have created a demand for change, implementing appropriate research-based practices effectively is the next step in the process. Additionally, the researchers argue that principals must maintain a relentless focus on quality, fidelity, consistency and intensity of implementation as they lead changes.

McREL's theory of change includes the following four phases: Demand, Implement, Manage Personal Transitions and Monitor and Evaluate. The phases have been aligned to the following seven leadership responsibilities positively correlated with second order change: Ideals/Beliefs, Optimize, Flexibility, Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Intellectual Stimulation, Change Agent and Monitor and Evaluate. Given that the three tiers of the RtI process involve: 1) screening for at-risk students; 2) monitoring of responsiveness to instruction; and 3) determination of the course of action (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), implementing the process may require added responsibilities and the development of new instructional practices at all levels, including high schools.

In summary, previous research at schools implementing RtI focused on providing models to assist elementary schools with implementation (Fuch & Fuch, 2007, Hall, 2008 & The National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2008), examining the effects of implementation on identifying children for special education eligibility (VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007), the use of video games to support science content knowledge acquisition at the middle school level (Marino & Beecher, 2010), testing standard protocol RtI models, providing descriptive analysis of RtI models in 20 high school (NHSC, 2010) and the utility of the Content Literacy Continuum as a framework for implementing RtI in secondary schools (Ehren, Deshler & Graner, 2010). However, those studies limited their scope to the efficacy of RtI approaches and did not fully address leadership practices.

Elementary School Principal Leadership Practices

As previously discussed, although RtI has been implemented at the elementary school level for decades, providing guidance for leading implementation efforts has not been the primary focus. However, some researchers have identified a knowledge base that principals may employ to enhance implementation efforts. For instance, Rocca and Murduca (2009) concluded that principals may benefit from understanding the change process and recommend employing an instrument to assess teacher readiness to adopt a new innovation such as RtI. Research on the principals' role in the RtI implementation process found, the level of direct principal involvement was a determining factor for implementation effectiveness (Culot, 2011). In an investigation of how a school principal navigates RtI at the elementary school level, Roberts (2014) found four key elements: the principal establishes clarity regarding the initiative by setting clear expectations and a school wide vision, the principal distributes leadership during the implementation of RtI, the principal establishes frequent opportunities for review of data, and the principal provides the organizational structure to support RtI. Similarly, in a study of RtI implementation in two rural elementary schools Robinson, Bursuck and Sinclair (2011) found strong support from school principal essential to creating support for RtI implementation. Specifically, leading team meetings, conducting classroom observations, monitoring implementation and membership on the problem-solving team.

Middle School Principal Leadership Practices

Although research focusing on middle school RtI implementation is relatively

new, research examining the principal's role during the implementation process is emerging. For instance, a study designed to provide implementation guidance to middle school practitioners based on interviews with 42 middle school administrators and staff from across the country, suggest RtI implementation requires principals to create an environment that fosters a willingness among team members to consider the innovation (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2011). In an investigation to understand RtI implementation in middle schools, Mellard, Prewett and Deshler (2012) found the principal played a key role in creating time for the staff to make sense of the new responsibilities, creating a vision of the model in their school and allocating time in meetings to discuss RtI. In a study of eight suburban principals and their role in managing, implementing and evaluating RtI at the elementary and middle school level, Culot (2011) found the use of team meeting time supported collegiality and engagement of teachers and staff. These can have the potential to serve to inform high school principal efforts to implement RtI. However, the main focus on high school leadership has recently emerged due to the recent implementation in some school districts.

High School Principal Leadership Practices

Previous studies from elementary and middle schools suggest that high school principals may consider those leadership practices to enhance and strengthen RtI implementation efforts to some extent. Recent research in secondary schools offers considerations for administrators charged with initiating RtI efforts (King, Lemons & Hill, 2012). However, emerging research suggests that given the context of high schools,

and the various needs of adolescent students at this level principals must play additional roles. For instance, in a study of three high school principals Spiegel (2009) found principal as participant, principal as data manager, principal as recruiter, and principal as resource provider to be four principal leadership characteristics that influences successful RtI implementation. In a review of RtI in three high schools, the National High School Center, (2011) emphasized the important role school leaders play in deepening RtI implementation. Furthermore, Epler (2015) asserts that successful implementation of RtI at the secondary level requires administrators who are prepared to learn new ways of leading and interacting with staff. Findings from research addressing RtI implementation at a mid-sized, mid-western high school, Windram, Bollman and Johnson (2012) recommended school administrators possess three key skills to effectively implement RtI. These skills include:

- Thinking outside the box.
- Performing as an instructional leader.
- Engaging as data-driven decision makers.

Researchers assert that principals play an important role in fostering innovation related to RtI (King, Lemons & Hill, 2012). Though few researchers have focused on leadership for RtI at the high school level and found principal-led structures, skills and characteristics that influenced RtI implementation (Spiegel, 2009; NHSC, 2011; Windram, Bollman & Johnson, 2012 & Epler, 2015), additional inquiry is needed to further identify leadership practices principals employ to facilitate the implementation

process. Findings from further inquiry may provide guidance to introduce change in order to support improved academic performance and thereby increased graduation rates for students in the final four years of schooling.

Seven Leadership Responsibilities Correlated with Implementing Change

Research-based guidance for principals leading change efforts designed to improve student achievement outcomes such as RtI, highlight 21 leadership responsibilities found in the Balanced Leadership Framework that positively correlated with student achievement (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Researchers also found 66 behaviors school leaders employ while implementing change endeavors. Eleven of the identified responsibilities appear to be correlated with second order change. However, only 7 of those were found to be “positively” correlated to leading second order change (Waters & Cameron, 2007), as it can be observed on Table 1.

Table 1: Balanced Leadership Framework

21 Leadership Responsibilities Correlated with Student Achievement
66 Behaviors for fulfilling the Responsibilites
11 of the Responsibilites Correlated with Second Order Change
7 of the Responsibilites Positively Correlated with Second Order Change

Adapted from Waters and Cameron, (2007).

The practices principals employ to facilitate the change process have been aligned to the seven responsibilities positively correlated with leading second order change. The practices are described as follows:

Responsibilities (the extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<i>Ideals/beliefs: communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling</i>	<p>Holds strong professional beliefs about schooling, teaching and learning</p> <p>Shares beliefs about schools, teaching and learning with staff</p> <p>Demonstrates behaviors that are consistent with beliefs</p>
<i>Optimize: inspires and leads new and challenging innovations</i>	<p>Inspires teachers to accomplish things that might seem beyond their grasp</p> <p>Portrays a positive attitude about the ability of the staff to accomplish substantial things</p> <p>Is a driving force behind major initiatives</p>
<i>Flexibility: Adapts his or her behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent</i>	<p>Is comfortable with major changes in how things are done</p> <p>Encourages people to express opinions contrary to those with authority</p> <p>Adapts leadership style to the needs of specific situations</p> <p>Can be directive or non-directive as the situation warrants</p>
<i>Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment: is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices</i>	<p>Is knowledgeable about instructional practices</p> <p>Is knowledgeable about assessment practices</p> <p>Provides conceptual guidance for teachers effective classroom practice</p>

<p><i>Intellectual stimulation: by ensuring faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes discussions of these a regular aspect of the schools culture</i></p>	<p>Keeps informed about current research and theory regarding effective schooling</p> <p>Continually exposes the staff to cutting-edge ideas about how to be effective</p> <p>Systematically engages staff in discussions about current research and theory</p> <p>Continually involves the staff in reading articles and books about effective practice</p>
<p><i>Change agent: is willing to and actively challenges the status quo</i></p>	<p>Consciously challenges the status quo</p> <p>Is comfortable leading change initiatives with uncertain outcomes</p> <p>Systematically considers new and better ways of doing things</p>
<p><i>Monitors/evaluates: monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning</i></p>	<p>Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment</p>

(Water & Cameron, 2007 p. 31)

The evolution of leadership research to address change offers relevant frameworks. However, not all focused on principal leadership practices within the implementation of RtI at the high school level.

Conclusion

This chapter included an examination of the literature pertinent to the Response to Intervention tiered framework (Fuch & Fuch, 2007). Additionally, literature on RtI research in elementary, middle and high schools was presented (Fuch & Fuch, 2007; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007; Hall, 2008; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2008; Burns, 2008; Canter, Klotz & Cowan, 2008; Marino & Beecher, 2010; Vaughn, Cirino et al. 2010; Dufrene et al., 2010; Dupont;

2012; Stahl, Keane, & Simic, 2012). The chapter continues with a review of RtI literature that discusses leadership practices for RtI implementation at the elementary, middle and high school levels (Spiegel, 2009; Robinson, Bursuck & Sinclair, 2011; Culot, 2011; National High School Center, 2011; Mellard, Prewett & Deshler, 2012; Windram, Bollman & Johnson, 2012; Roberts, 2014 & Epler, 2015). Finally, the Balanced Leadership Framework, seven leadership responsibilities (Waters & Cameron, 2005) were described. These were analyzed to examine their utility as guideposts for high school principals to consider during a change process such as RtI implementation.

It appears from the previous research examined that through implementation of changes such as RtI, urban schools may address some of the challenges faced in the quest for educational excellence. Determining whether a student has been afforded adequate opportunity to learn is seminal in the instructional intervention decision-making process (Garcia & Ortiz, 2008).

Reportedly, utilizing the tiered instructional approach associated with RtI has increased student performance levels in general and reduced special education referrals (Spectrum K12, NASDE, CASE AASA, 2010 & Fisher & Frey, 2011). However, research related to principal leadership practices associated with implementing RtI at the high school level is limited (Duffy, 2007; Spiegel, 2009; Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss, 2010; National High School Center, 2011; Windram, Bollman & Johnson, 2012 and Epler, 2015). As Sansosti, Noltemeyer and Goss (2010) suggest, “future research should aim to explore the gap between the high school principals perceived importance of RtI components and implementation, analyze secondary schools implementing RtI, explore

variables that predict high levels of RtI implementation in high schools and the application of techniques for implementing evidence-based interventions” (p. 293).

It appears that particular research attention is needed to identify the processes and supports needed at administrative levels in order for RtI to be successful (Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss, 2010). Conceptualizing RtI at the high school provides new avenues for improving outcomes for students (Fuch, Fuch & Compton, 2010). Given their leadership role, secondary school principals have the unique potential to effectively lead and manage the change processes needed to implement and institutionalize interventions such as RtI (Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss, 2010).

Chapter 3

Introduction

This qualitative study focused on high school principals regarding Response to Intervention (RtI) process implementation in three high schools with similar characteristics in an urban school district. Using qualitative methods, the researcher determined how principals' RtI implementation practices are aligned with the schools' action plans and the responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework related to implementation (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

This chapter outlines the design of the research for this study. Beginning with a discussion of qualitative research and the suitability for use in this study. Followed by a description of the participants, data collection instruments and procedures. Concluding with the data analysis procedures, and then the validity and reliability.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What leadership practices do high school principals employ to implement RtI?
2. What challenges do high school principals face during the implementation process and how they address them?
3. To what extent do principals' RtI implementation leadership practices reflect the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework related to implementation?

Research Method and Design

This multiple case study was conducted within the parameters of interpretivist descriptive qualitative research as it intended to study human behavior in context. Yin (2003) asserts multiple case studies enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases and offer robust analytical conclusions. According to Ritchie and Lewis “case studies draw in multiple perspectives rooted in a specific context critical to understand the researched phenomena.” (p. 76). Accordingly, the researcher chose this method as the most suitable approach to provide opportunities for data collection through a variety of venues with the intent of illuminating the practices of high school principals relative to RtI. According to Glense (2006), qualitative methods are...”used to understand some social phenomena from the perspective of those involved, to contextualize in their particular social-cultural-political milieu and to sometimes change or transform social conditions” (p. 4).

Concurring with Glesne’s statement, the researcher used open-ended interview questions when conducting the study at the participating campuses. This approach facilitated a naturalistic environment. The collected data yielded a higher level of reliability when conducting qualitative research (Guba, 1978).

Description of Sample

In accordance with the aim of the study, a purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2002) was used to select three high school principals. Focusing on these three principals provides an opportunity to capture data the first year of RtI implementation (2015-2016)

as required and the year following implementation (2016-2017) at the respective schools. Moreover, in qualitative research it is important to include individuals who are familiar with the phenomenon of the study, which in this case are the leadership practices of principals. Purposeful sampling strategies facilitated a constructive framework to determine whom to interview. Given the nature of this study, critical case sample strategy was used. According to Patton (1990), critical case sampling includes individuals of critical significance to the phenomenon of interest. Miles and Huberman (1994) clarified: “qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people nested in their context and studied in-depth unlike quantitative researchers who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance” (p. 27). Therefore, principals and RtI coordinators within the same high school campus were invited to participate in a study. Additionally, two teachers from each of the campuses were asked to participate. The selection criteria for RtI coordinators and teachers included: being a member of the campus for at least two consecutive years and having experience with RtI implementation at the campus.

The total selected sample included 12 participants. However, during the identification of participants, it was discovered that two schools did not have an exclusive campus RtI coordinators. After further review, it was revealed that the campus RtI coordination was an additional duty assigned to the assistant principal. The duties included overseeing data reviews and the development of interventions for students with a data based need. Although the assistant principals from two campuses were not designated as the RtI coordinator, they were included in the study because the duties

related to campus RtI efforts were similar. Thus, the actual total was 11.

Data Collection Protocols

According to Patton (2002), qualitative methods are “ways of finding out what people do, know, think, and feel by observing, interviewing, and analyzing documents” (p. 145). Thus, this study used face-to-face interviews and document analysis to explore the leadership practices principals employ to implement RtI, the challenges they face during the process and how principals’ leadership practices concerning RtI implementation align with the seven leadership responsibilities (Ideals/Beliefs, Optimize, Flexibility, Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Intellectual Stimulation, Change Agent and Monitor and Evaluate) identified in the Balanced Leadership Framework related to implementing change (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Interviews

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2007) interviews are “structured and flexible, interactive in nature and utilizing probes to achieve depth” (p. 4). Qualitative research involves forming and asking questions that results in powerful stories that inform and inspire (Willis, 2007). According to Glense and Peshkin (1992), interviewing is analogous to baseball in that researchers “toss questions which you want your respondents to hit and hit well in every corner of your data park” (p. 118). Patton (1990) suggests that regardless of the quality of the interview, “it all comes to naught if the interviewer fails to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed” (p. 347). To

allow the findings to emerge from the data and to ensure as much neutrality as possible, open-ended interview questions were developed to explore how principals' leadership practices related to RtI implementation relate to the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Thus, achieving an accurate representation of the respondents' perspectives related to RtI. Additionally, the challenges principals face during the implementation process and how they address them will be explored. Data analysis will focus on understanding both the relationship between principals' leadership practices and RtI implementation.

Documents

A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Given that many case studies occur at the program level, Merriam & Tisdell (2015), suggest that it is “important to seek out the paper trail for what it can reveal about the things that have taken place before the study began” (p. 164). According to Ritche and Lewis (2009) documentary analysis) involves the study of existing documents, either to understand their substantive context to illuminate deeper meaning which may be revealed by their style and coverage” (p. 35).

Accordingly, the researcher examined pertinent documentation (agendas, meeting minutes and forms) related to decision-making structures guiding RtI implementation and other written documents providing evidence of RtI implementation activities. These documents may reveal information on the schools' expectations for RtI, campus

improvement goals, and strategies used to implement RtI.

Data Collection Process

Prior to the data collection process, appropriate approval were obtained including Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and school district research approval protocol. In addition, the researcher piloted the interview guide with three former high school principals. This process allowed for adjustments to the interview guide and process for use in the subsequent interviews if it is determined that particular questions or the method of inquiry does not elicit sufficiently rich data (Glaser, 1979; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

This study was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the principals, RtI coordinators and teachers were contacted via email and phone calls to invite them to participate in the study. An initial contact meeting was requested and a formal letter of introduction, a copy of the dissertation abstract, a copy of the interview protocols, and any other pertinent information was provided. This is an important stage in establishing rapport with the participants of the study and ensuring a smooth interactive process. This took place in December to January 2017. The second stage entailed conducting participant interviews, document collection and analysis, and transcribing interviews from January to March 2017. The last step in this process was synthesizing the findings.

One semi-structured, tape-recorded interview (between 60-90 minutes each) was conducted with each of the three high school principals, each of the three assistant principals and two teachers from two of the high schools and one teacher from the third

high school at their respective campuses. In the course of the interview process, conversation-style probing questions were used to further explore topics spontaneously (Patton, 1990). In an effort to achieve a more accurate representation of each participant's perspective, informal member checking was utilized throughout the interview process. The researcher asked for examples, paraphrase understanding of the participant's responses and ask for clarification when needed. According to Patton (1990), this approach enables the researcher to verify important information from participant's responses.

Following the flexible analytic guidelines of interpretivist theory (Merriam, 2003; Patton, 1990, 2002; Willis, 2007), the researcher recorded all interviews, listen to them several times, and transcribed them immediately after each interview taking into consideration reactions from the participants while certain topics are discussed. After the first interview was completed and transcribed, the researcher followed the data processing steps outlined by (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2009; & Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The researcher requested access to pertinent documentation (agendas, meeting minutes and forms) used to guide decision-making and evidence of RtI implementation from campus principals, RtI coordinators and teachers. Analyzing documents enabled the researcher to understand their context (Ritchie and Lewis, 2007).

Data Analysis

The researcher used open-coding (initial coding) to begin analyzing the collected data to develop working categories. In initial coding, the ultimate goal is to achieve saturation “when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions, interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p.136).

The researcher proceeded to Axial Coding. Charmaz (2006) explained that this method “relates categories to subcategories and specifies the properties and dimensions of a category” (p. 60). As Saldana (2009) stated, axial coding integrates and synthesizes the categories derived from coding to create a connection to major elements of the study (p. 163). Employing one of several options of data triangulation in data analysis, the researcher examined the district policy related to schools as an important document to explore the procedures outlined in policy for RtI implementation. Additionally, the theoretical work of Waters & Cameron (2007) was used to analyze the relationship between administrators’ practices related to RtI implementation and the seven leadership responsibilities related to implementing change.

Reliability and Validity

The matter of trustworthiness of qualitative research is explicitly addressed in the writings of Lincoln and Guba (1985) providing naturalistic criteria of equal standards as the traditional criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

Credibility is critically important to the analysis of interview data since truthfulness is assumed in the interviewees' answers though truthfulness cannot be assured. Patton (1990) explained that generally about half of what interviewees report is probably incorrect to some extent. Thus, interview data needs to be substantiated with other methodological approaches. This leads the researcher to the importance of triangulating data to obtain a higher level of credibility; which in this study was achieved through documentation analysis. Following Patton's (2002) suggestion, as an additional methodological modification, the researcher used member checking taking this dialogue-based data generation process one step further by checking for understanding and clarification with the participants (member- checking strategy) at multiple stages during the interview process (Carspecken, 1996). Standard member checking is the process of seeking a one-time "review by inquiring participants" (Patton, 2002, p. 56) as a supplemental verification of the validity of the findings to be sure the interpretations are accurate.

The researcher of this study aimed to avoid a simple "question and answer" approach, which would succeed in "getting the headline, but miss the story" (Weiss, 1994, p.13). The contextual moment in which spoken or unspoken word occurs can greatly illuminate the otherwise superficial meaning of the words themselves. The researcher will record this action with diligently taken field notes. These notes will not be "words and phrases abstracted out of context," but instead they are a textual record of the interaction between the spoken words and the human emotion with which they are

delivered (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.140).

The researcher attempted to achieve overall “data adequacy” (Morse, 1995, p. 147). The sample size in qualitative studies is frequently small. Generalization is not the goal in most qualitative research; therefore, transferability is hoped- for in this study. Data adequacy was achieved when the data gathered yields only outliers but no new themes. However, participant comments that appear to be outliers will not be completely ignored.

To enhance data analysis, the researcher employed the use of “analytic memos” (Saldana, 2009, p. 32). This process will involve making frequent notes of any analytic or methodological thought or research concern as those thoughts occur, and then later review those thoughts and incorporate them into the analysis process. Additionally, the researcher maintained detailed field notes to capture any environmental, emotional, and general observational considerations that might affect the conclusions. These notes were used in the findings-confirmation process. The use of multiple data sources and multiple analysis methods helped to illuminate any inconsistencies in the preliminary findings, as well as reinforce any conclusions (Patton, 2002).

As the final step, the researcher reviewed the coding and findings to reduce potential bias and ensured that the data *speaks* to the findings. To ensure reliability and validity, the researcher coded and analyzed all data personally. No software coding program was used, considering Carspecken’s (1996) caution that they can “risk obscuring the effects of temporal context horizons and the existence of interactive rhythms and

syntax” of the research moment (p. 149).

Summary

This chapter outlines the methodology for this study. Beginning with a discussion of qualitative research and the suitability for use in this study. Followed by a description of the participants, data collection instruments and procedures. Concluding with a discussion of the data analysis procedures, and then the validity and reliability. This study, discussed and reach conclusions regarding the extent to which high school principals’ employ the seven responsibilities related to implementing change outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007) during RtI implementation activities in urban school settings.

The following chapter presents the findings of the study based on an analysis of the data collected from interviews, school documents and district policy.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study and an analysis of the data collected from face to face interviews, school documents, district and schools websites. The research procedures and findings are also presented.

The purpose of the study was to explore the leadership practices of high school principals regarding response to intervention (RtI), the challenges they face during the implementation process and how they address them in three high schools with similar characteristics in an urban school district. Additionally, using qualitative methods, such as face-to face interviews and document analysis, the researcher explored to what extent principals' practices related to RtI implementation are aligned with the RtI process and seven responsibilities positively correlated with implementing second-order change outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework as advanced by Waters & Cameron, (2007). The following research questions guided the research process and determined the methods used in the study:

1. What leadership practices do high school principals employ to implement RtI?
2. What challenges do high school principals face during the implementation process and how do they address them?
3. To what extent do principals' RtI implementation leadership practices reflect the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework Waters & Cameron, 2007) related to implementation?

A description of the school district where the investigation was conducted is

provided followed by an introduction of each of the three schools that participated in the study. This will acquaint the reader with the setting of the participants and the context of the study. Next, a brief overview of the data collection and data analysis process is presented. Subsequently, each of the three research questions is addressed.

Study Context

The present study was completed in a school district located in the North Texas region and three high schools participated. For the purpose of confidentiality, this study refers to the school district as XISD. XISD sits in the heart of a large, diverse and dynamic region with a metropolitan population of 6.5 million people in the 12 counties, XISD covers 384 square miles and is comprised of 15 cities.

School District Profile

This section offers a profile of the district and specific demographic information. Exploration of the school district documents and website provided the vision, mission and student achievement goals.

District Vision

A vision forecast the desired future state of the organization. As reflected in X Independent School District's documents, the vision states "XISD seeks to be a premier urban school district" (Retrieved from XISD, January 13, 2017).

District Mission

A mission statement guides the actions and describes the intended contributions of an organization. To that end, X Independent School District's documents reveal XISD is committed to "educating all students for success" (Retrieved from XISD, January 13,

2017).

Student Achievement Goals

XISD's student achievement goals are available to the public through its website. The six student achievement goals are the guiding force that helps position students for success in XISD. The stated goals are: 1). All students will exhibit satisfactory or above performance on state assessments, students below satisfactory performance will demonstrate more than one year of academic growth. Students who achieve at high levels are more prepared for college and career success and are positioned for a better future; 2). XISD schools will be the primary choice for families in the district. Parents want more choice for their children, and students benefit when engaged in schools that connect with their personal interests; 3). The achievement gap by race, ethnicity and socio-economic status will be no greater than 10 percentage points on all academic measures. To accomplish its mission *Educating All Students for Success*, XISD is addressing barriers that might prevent or inhibit student improvement; 4). Ninety-five percent of students will graduate. Ninety percent of the graduates will qualify for community college, college, military, or industry certification. When students are connected to their school environment, they are more likely to graduate; 5). Ninety-five percent of students entering kindergarten will be school-ready based on a multidimensional assessment. Early childhood education is a key priority for XISD; and 6). All students will participate in at least one extracurricular or co-curricular activity each year. Extracurricular involvement creates well-rounded students and adds value to the educational environment by supporting student growth and development and teaching the value of collaboration,

competition, diversity and responsibility.

XISD is focused on creating a better future for students, whether that includes moving on to college or into a career. The expectations are high for XISD students and the goal is for each of them to meet or exceed state performance standards or outpace their peers in performance growth (Retrieved from XISD, January 13, 2017).

The current enrollment in XISD is approximately 156,665 students. The district’s ethnicity (teachers & students) and demographic are represented in Table 2.

Table 2 <i>XISD: 2016-2017 Ethnicity (Students/Teachers) Demographics</i>				
Ethnicity/Race	Students		Teachers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Black/African American	35,403	22.6	3,675	35.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	451	0.3	*	*
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2,125	1.4	*	*
Hispanic	110,351	70.4	2,795	27.0
White	7,385	4.7	3,280	31.7
Multiple	854	0.5	231	2.2
Other * (teacher only)	-	-	367	3.5
Not reported (students only)	4	0.0	-	-
Data compiled from School A Profile, Demographic Study, and AEIS * data not available				

This school district had experienced implementation of RtI. However, for the most part, implementation has occurred at the elementary and middle school levels. High school level implementation began in the 2015-16 school year after guidelines were developed.

The district created a department to support campuses with implementation efforts. The A review of the departmental website revealed RtI described in this way:

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a three-tier model of educational program delivery that

establishes a relationship between data, student need, and instructional intervention and support. This relationship fosters collaboration between campus administrators, teachers, and other staff, which create the best outcomes for all students. The underlying premise is that schools should not wait until students fail classes or fall so far behind that they qualify for special education services to provide them with the help they need. Instead, schools should provide early, systematic, and appropriately intensive academic and behavioral intervention to all students as soon as they demonstrate the need.

Resources to support RtI implementation included: district policy outlining the RtI framework, data use training, an August 2016 newsletter and guidelines for identifying student at-risk of requiring support within the RtI framework. The identification criteria were:

- Unsatisfactory performance on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) 3-8 Reading, 3-8 Mathematics, English I, English II, or Algebra exams
- Below 70 on the six weeks report card in any 3-8 grade RLA or Mathematics course
- Below 70 on the six weeks report card in English I, English II, or Algebra I course
- Tier III performance on the Istations Indicators of Progress (ISIP) Universal Screener
- Below Basic performance on Reading Inventory (9th - 10th)
- Tier III (A & B) performance on the ESTAR or MSTAR Universal Screener (BOY & MOY)
- Below 20% proficiency in ALEKS Initial Knowledge Check assessment
- 3 or more Level I disciplinary infractions that have been documented in the Student Discipline System (SDS)
- 2 or more Level II disciplinary infractions that have been documented in the

Student Discipline System (SDS)

- 3 or more unexcused absences within the current six weeks period
- 6 or more tardies within the current six weeks period

While grades, attendance and discipline records served as criteria to identify students requiring support. Indicators reflecting academic intervention needs primarily rely on state assessment data at the high school level.

High School Profiles

The high schools were named School A, School B and School C to protect confidentiality. This section describes the participating high schools and specific demographic information. A review of district and campus websites revealed the mission, vision and goals for each school.

High School A

High school A has a contemporary design and is surrounded by green space serving grades 9-12. The school is located in an ethnically diverse neighborhood consisting almost exclusively of apartment complexes within the Northwest region of XISD.

The Principal of School A had been leading the campus for two years. He previously taught and served as an administrator in middle schools within and outside of XISD district. Under the principals' leadership, High School A has improved its level of academic achievement. According to State Accountability system, the campus has met standard ratings. A review of End of Course exam data revealed that student performance in Algebra I and Biology declined. However, increases occurred English I, English II and

U.S. History. Additionally, Distinction Designations were awarded for academic achievement in science and social studies for the 2015-16 school year.

This high school initiated RtI implementation in August of 2016 by utilizing computer-based interventions to support students reading below grade level. Since that time, efforts have moved beyond technology and actively directed toward data use and grouping students in performance bands “tiering” to support the RtI initiative.

The current enrollment in School A is approximately 1,147 students. The campus’s ethnicity (teachers & students) and demographics are represented in Table 3.

Table 3				
<i>School A: 2016-2017 Ethnicity (Students/Teachers) Demographics</i>				
Ethnicity/Race	Students		Teachers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Black/African American	216	19.0	28	30.1
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	0.2	*	*
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	243	21.4	*	*
Hispanic	647	57.0	11	11.8
White	24	2	44	47.3
Multiple	3	0.3	4	4.3
Other * (teacher only)	-	-	6	6.5
Not reported (students only)	0	0.0	-	-
Data compiled from School A Profile, Demographic Study, and AEIS * data not available				

A review of the 2016-17 Report Card shows Economically Disadvantaged students constitute 90% of the population, English Language Learners comprise 62% and 82% are categorized as At-risk. The distribution of students served in Special Education (Sp. Ed.) is 8% and 5% are served in Talented and Gifted (TAG).

District documents and websites revealed the school’s mission, objectives, and

statistical information. With regard to mission, district documents note that School A “provides a safe and secure learning environment in which students gain the academic and career readiness skills to become successful. We empower students to learn by providing a rigorous curriculum, promoting collaboration and allowing students to be stakeholders in their own education.”

Accordingly, the campus mission and goals are two fold: 1). Inspire teaching and learning through the design and implementation of a high quality and aligned; 2). Ensure dynamic leadership and seamless instructional support systems that promote academic achievement.

High School B

High School B is a welcoming and well-maintained high school serving grades 9-12. It is located in a neighborhood in which the average home price is \$500,000 and within the North region of XISD.

The principal of School B has been leading the campus for six years. She previously taught and served as a high school assistant principal outside of XISD and an elementary principal within XISD. Prior to her administrative role, she taught first grade for 9 years. Under her leadership, School B has raised its level of academic achievement. According to State Accountability system, the campus has a met standard rating. A review of End of Course exam data revealed that student performance in English I, English II and Algebra I declined. However, increases occurred in Biology and U.S. History. Additionally, distinction designations were awarded for academic achievement in mathematics, science and social studies for the 2015-16 school year. Furthermore, the

campus received a Distinction Designations in the Top 25 Closing Performance Gaps.

This high school introduced RtI implementation in August of 2014 by initially requiring teachers to provide targeted instructional intervention to students who failed the prior year’s state assessment exam one day a week. Since that time, efforts have been directed toward developing teacher capacity to engage students in their classrooms in authentic ways to create opportunities to pull small groups of students together for targeted small group instruction, tiering practices and enlisting teachers to actively engage in the campus developed Intervention Team to support the RtI initiative.

The current enrollment in School B is approximately 2,209 students. The campus’s ethnicity (teachers & students) and demographics are represented in Table 4.

Table 4				
<i>School B: 2016-2017 Ethnicity (Students/Teachers) Demographics</i>				
Ethnicity/Race	Students		Teachers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Black/African American	229	10.4	29	21.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	0.1	*	*
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	37	1.7	*	*
Hispanic	1,713	77.5	20	14.9
White	195	8.8	72	53.7
Multiple	28	1.3	8	6.0
Other * (teacher only)	-	-	5	3.7
Not reported (students only)	0	0.0	-	-
Data compiled from School A Profile, Demographic Study, and AEIS * data not available				

A review of the 2016-17 Report Card shows Economically Disadvantaged students constitute 80% of the population, English Language Learners comprise 24% and 59% are categorized as At-Risk. The distribution of students served in Special Education

is 6% and 11% are served in Talented and Gifted.

The district documents and websites revealed the school's mission, and statistical information. With regard to mission, district documents note that School B is dedicated to "inspire high standards in scholarship, character, leadership, and service.

Accordingly, the campus mission and goals are three fold: 1). Promote a positive culture and climate: 2). Improve student achievement through effective data driven planning, instruction and intervention: 3). Improve instruction through effective feedback and professional development.

High School C

This campus is also well maintained and welcoming. The area surrounding the school is rural in nature. School C is located in an area with variety of livestock in the immediate surroundings within the Southeast region of XISD.

The principal took this role within the last two years after being an elementary and middle school principal within XISD. Under her leadership, the school has achieved a "Met Standard" rating school according to the State Accountability System.

According to State Accountability system, the campus has a met standard rating. A review of End of Course exam data revealed that student performance in English I, English II and U.S. History declined. However, increases occurred in Algebra I and Biology. Distinction Designations were not awarded for the 2015-16 school year.

This high school initiated RtI implementation in January of 2017 after building teacher capacity to identify student instructional needs utilizing historical state test results and campus common assessment data. Since that time, efforts have been directed toward

developing teacher’s ability to provide “tiered” instruction.

The current enrollment in School C is approximately 1,147 students. The campus’s ethnicity (teachers & students) and demographics are represented in Table 5.

Table 5				
<i>School C: 2016-2017 Ethnicity (Students/Teachers) Demographics</i>				
Ethnicity/Race	Students		Teachers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Black/African American	306	19.3	52	50.0
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	0.1	*	*
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.1	*	*
Hispanic	1,242	78.3	15	14.4
White	29	1.8	32	30.8
Multiple	6	0.4	0	0.0
Other * (teacher only)	-	-	5	4.8
Not reported (students only)	0	0.0	-	-
Data compiled from School A Profile, Demographic Study, and AEIS * data not available				

A review of the 2016-17 Report Card shows Economically Disadvantaged students constitute 85% of the population, English Language Learners comprise 40% and 76% are categorized as At-Risk. The distribution of students served in Special Education is 11% and 6% are served in Talented and Gifted.

The district documents and websites revealed the school’s mission, and statistical information. With regard to mission, district documents note that School C “graduates students empowered to proudly transform their community. We support our students with a rigorous, high-achieving, and nurturing environment that equips them to pursue their passions, preparing them for college, career-ready jobs, and the military.”

Accordingly, the campus mission and goals are three fold: 1). Utilizes a

collaborative environment to ensure that teachers plan and deliver quality instruction through the use of materials, resources, meetings, professional development, classroom reduction: 2). Ensure that teachers and students have a strong support system to aid in the instructional practices: 3). Instructional data and school involvement is openly communicated and encouraged with students, parents, faculty, and community. The following presents a profile of participants represented in the study.

Participant Profiles

The study included high school principals, assistant principals and teachers from three high schools within XISD. Study participants have been members of the campus for at least two consecutive years and have experience with RtI implementation at the campus. A total of 11 participants; 3 principals, 1 RtI Coordinator, 2 assistant principals and 5 teachers were interviewed for this study. From the 11 participants, 7 had a M.Ed., 2 had a M.S., and 2 had a B.A. The profile of participants is represented in Tables 6-8.

High School A

Table 6			
<i>High School A Participants</i>			
Position	Degrees	Certificates	Years
Principal	B.A. M.Ed	Special Education K-12 School Administration	9
Assistant Principal	B.A. M.Ed	Mathematics 4-8 School Administration	15
Teacher	M.S.	Special Education 6-12	6

High School B

Table 7			
<i>High School B Participants</i>			
Position	Degrees	Certificates	Years
Principal	B.A. M.Ed	Elementary 1-6 School Administration	20
RtI Coordinator	M.S. M.Ed	Biology 9-12 School Administration	7
Teacher 1	B.A.	English 9-12	3
Teacher 2	B.A. M.Ed.	Mathematics 9-12 School Administration	29

High School C

Table 8			
<i>High School C Participants</i>			
Position	Degrees	Certificates	Years
Principal	B.A. M.Ed	Elementary K-4 School Administration	22
Assistant Principal	M.S. M.Ed	Social Studies 9-12 School Administration	15
Teacher 1	B.A.	Social Studies 9-12	6
Teacher 2	B.A. M.S.	History Social Studies 9-12	3

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis for this study began as soon as the researcher entered the field. Several preliminary themes emerged as interviews and documentation gathering occurred. These themes were recorded in a journal during the course of the fieldwork. As the fieldwork progressed, these thematic ideas were transforming into different insights; which served as initial codes in later stages of data analysis. Collected data for this study

consisted of interview transcripts from three principals, one assistant principal designated to serve as the campus RtI Coordinator, two assistant principals serving in the same capacity as their peer without the RtI Coordinator designation and five teachers and documents gathered from participating sites and schools and district's websites. Formal data analysis started with a descriptive approach of interviews and observations.

Following Patton's (1990) statement "the discipline and rigor of qualitative analysis depends on presenting solid descriptive data, what is often called 'thick description,' in such a way that others reading the results can understand" (p. 375).

Two coding systems were used to analyze the data. The first system used was open coding. It was used to organize data initially into general categories that allowed the researcher to become more aware of the need for more structured strategies in order to make a direct connection to the research questions; which led to utilizing a second strategy. Following Strauss' and Corbin's (1990) approach to data analysis, the researcher used axial coding, and the constant comparative method, each of which are discussed in detail in Chapter Three. These processes generated the theme categories reported in this chapter, addressing the three research questions that guided this study.

Chapter IV

Findings

Following are the finding from the three research questions guiding this study.

Question 1: What leadership practices do principals employ to implement RtI?

Principal implementation leadership practices emerged from the data.

According to participants, the leadership practices employed to lead RtI implementation were clustered in five major themes: 1) utilizing data, 2) establishing accountability systems, 3) engaging stakeholders, 4) setting expectations and 5) building capacity.

Utilizing Data

Identifying and employing various sources of information to assess student performance levels emerged as a leadership practice. Examples of data include: EOC state exam results, campus-developed common assessments, reading lexile levels, grades and attendance reports. These data were utilized to design instructional interventions, monitor progress toward achievement goals, develop the master schedule, inform classroom observations and determine implementation fidelity. Participants frequently referenced the use of data related to student achievement such as state End of Course results and campus common assessment data throughout the interview process.

Data use is a critical leadership practice principals employed to facilitate the RtI implementation process. Given that RtI is based on a tiered approach to instruction, data use is fundamental to assess student needs and responsiveness to intended outcomes. In School A, the principal described his data use structure: “Tiering student data...is the big

piece and then drilling down to try to figure out the skills that students actually are weak in.” Additionally, this principal shared how he focuses on data with his leadership team: “We’ll have some conversations about their student’s data whether it’s by teacher or...content area so we can look at which category they’re all struggling with and then look at what’s going on in that particular class.”

In School B the principal said: “We started small with any kiddo who had failed the previous year’s EOC. Then that kid was going to get instruction in that EOC and those EOC standards. Whether they are sitting in an English II classroom and they need to retake the English I, the writing responses are still the same... The literary elements are still the same. Here’s where the kids were low. Here’s how it leads into your curriculum.” The principal further described the process taken in year 2: “So the first thing started with a data analysis of really where we are.”

At School C, the principal noted: “Department X...uses the common assessment data and based on that they have...reteach plans and so the kids who are struggling are either pulled in small groups or they come after school.” She further described her work with assistant principal: “When we do our common assessments we’ll talk about the data and what we see...and talking through...where they are.” Finally, the principal described how data was used in the scheduling process: “So at the end of the school year when we get out results back over the summer...the assistant principals looked at the data, tiered the kids, worked with the counselors to determine how many classes we need for each...and then which kids go in each to make sure they’re in the class that they need. Similarly, Schools A and B leveraged the master schedule to support student needs.

Specifically, all campuses placed courses in the schedule and utilized computer-based programs such as, “System 44” and “Read 180” to support students reading significantly below grade level.

While principals used data in a variety of ways to ensure RtI implementation fidelity, it also appears that to strengthen implementation, principals develop structures to ensure data use becomes an on-going practice.

Establishing Accountability Systems

Ensuring the responsibilities associated with implementing RtI are executed as designed, surfaced as a practice principals employed to facilitate the process. Interviews with an RtI Coordinator, assistant principals and teachers confirmed that establishing systems to promote accountability were leadership practices principals employed to implement RtI. However, there were commonalities and distinct differences in the leadership approaches across campuses.

A common practice employed by all principals was delegating oversight to create a co-accountability structure. Specifically, principals assigned an assistant principal to supervise a particular content area or department. The responsibilities principals assigned included monitoring common assessment data to determine student progress and engaging teachers in data conversation based on assessment results. As an assistant principal reported: “Although, School B has the same content area or departmental oversight structure as the other campuses, the principal assigned oversight for RtI to one of the four assistant principals.”

In an effort to strengthen accountability for RtI implementation, the principals

from School B and School C utilized technology. The principal from School B charged the assistant principal serving as the RtI Coordinator with developing a tool to collect intervention data. As a result, the assistant principal created a Google form for teachers to document their progress with individual students that can be viewed by multiple stakeholders. The use of the Google form was confirmed by a teacher who stated, “Every week we go into an on-line Google form, and we put in what was our SE growth. What was our SE that we were weak on? How did we grow this week? What did we do with the students? What made them successful? What are their weaknesses?” Similarly, the principal in School C reported leveraging the technology skills of an assistant principal to establish a data collection system to support monitoring. One system for collecting intervention data was described by an assistant principal, “For Early College, we have a Google form for any kid below a 75 that get’s filled out and everyone knows the interventions needed.”

Principals monitored RtI implementation and the processes for accountability purposes. However, the areas of focus differed. For instance, some monitor progress toward departmental goals, while others focus on implementation fidelity. A common leadership practice was holding weekly meeting with assistant principals. One principal met with his assistant principals to discuss the tiered list of students each of them is required to maintain at the content or teacher level that includes planned next steps for improving performance. Another principal focused meeting discussions on delivering interventions with fidelity. To monitor intervention implementation, she required teachers to share days they would be “doing” their RtI. An assistant principal confirmed this

practice: “So last year,...they had RtI days on the campus. So this is an RtI day, which means you are going to teach this concept. The principal from School C met with assistant principals every other week to discuss the goals for their content and monitor progress toward the goals. An assistant principal described the process, “We have our Instructional Leadership Team meeting with our instructional coaches and assistant principals and that’s where...we talk about data ...classroom instruction...goal-setting and things like RtI.”

According to Principal B establishing accountability systems is a way to ensure that RtI is implemented effectively, As Principal B shared, “What gets inspected, gets done.” The principal from School A noted that, “It’s [RtI] something that you have to give attention to everyday to keep it going in the direction that it’s going in.” Staying the course during RtI implementation will require a team effort.

Engaging Stakeholders

Creating a willingness among staff members to actively participate emerged as a leadership practice principals employed to foster implementing interventions. Principals and teachers agreed that certain actions promoted everyone’s engagement in RtI implementation. For instance, a teacher from School C cited consistency in leadership to foster participation in campus initiatives: “So I think consistency is really important to get everybody on board.” Another teacher from the campus described the impact of the principal’s communicated commitment: “Students being supported first, then the administration supporting us as we support students. It’s really been an awakening in the last few years and I’m really excited to be here.” The assistant principal from the same

school shared his thoughts on the impact the principal's approach to professional development had on engaging teachers for RtI: "One thing I like is that we use teachers. I think the buy-in from the staff is great when it's teachers."

Expanding leadership to carry-out RtI efforts emerged as a leadership practice utilized by the principal in School B. The principal indicated one practice applied to create "buy-in": "Utilize a team of teachers who does not include teacher leaders to make implementation much more broad based with colleagues rather than top down." Similarly, a teacher from School A recounted the principal's approach to engage the team in decision-making about RtI implementation: "He told us [leadership team] what he wanted to do and why. Then I went to my team and told them about the plan [RtI] and asked for their thoughts on the how to make it happen." Relatedly, the principal from School A explained his rationale for engaging departments in solution identification during data reviews: "So that they can, to the extent that they can, own whatever solutions that we create." Likewise, in order to address the needs of Tier 2 students, the principal from School B established teams of teacher volunteers to visit high schools with similar characteristics that were outperforming their campus to identify practices they could employ during the school day in order to enhance "buy-in". In her words, "Tier 2 needed in-class support and ensuring teachers are bought in to not doing the process, but why the process is critical to students is essential." The emphasis on in-class support to provide targeted Tier 2 intervention was described by a teacher: "So once a week last year, we would pull kids to the front and while the other kids worked on a review...we talk to the kids in the front." Additionally, the teacher described a colleagues efforts with

targeted instruction: “ One teacher did an excellent job to where all the kids wanted to come to the front because they enjoyed the individualized attention and worked on something they were weak on.”

Celebrating teacher behaviors that were congruent with defined expectations and instructional approaches aligned with RtI was a practice employed to reinforce implementation efforts in all schools. Highlighting teachers who were effectively implementing small group instruction was a practice employed in School B. According to the principal: “We celebrated it, put it in the newsletter and made it part of feedback conferences. Efforts to implement the targeted instruction approach outlined in RtI requires clearly defined parameters.

Setting Expectations

Explaining and sharing the rationale for RtI and creating a mental model of the standard operating procedures emerged as leadership practice used for this effort. Participants identified communicating, setting the vision and creating structures as leadership practices employed to define envisioned behaviors.

Leading RtI by setting the vision for implementation was achieved in different ways. In School A the principal described his role with ensuring the administrative team members were on the same page with RtI: “Giving the big picture and making sure everyone knows where we are trying to go, then filling in the blanks with the pieces that need to be put in place to help us get there.” His approach included ensuring the team examines the data from the various reading platform utilized at the campus to assess the relationship between language acquisition levels and student performance. The principal

indicated: “Now, my leaders are looking at student data that way versus me just looking at it and trying to figure out how to get students where they need to be.” Principal B recounted the conversation she had to clearly define expectations for RtI implementation: “We’re going to have an intervention program, it’s going to start in September and we are going to do systematic measures of progress as we go along.” This account was echoed by a teacher who said: “In a meeting with Principal B...in the auditorium...she gave us an overview of what the process would look like.” Concurring with this statement, a teacher said: “At the beginning of the year, we were given the information. This is what we are supposed to be doing.” As it relates to progress monitoring, a teacher remembered the conversation this way: “In the fall we knew data collection was going to be important, so on one of our staff development days *All in Learning* was here.” Identifying systems to assist teachers with assessing and monitoring student acquisition of intended learning is essential to RtI implementation.

Creating structures to monitor student progress was a leadership practice utilized to reinforce expectations for RtI implementation. At School B, the monitoring system consisted of giving assessments to determine student mastery of content standards. The principal explained her approach with the departments failing to make progress on prior local and state assessments “It’s going to be a 10 question assessment and we are going to give this.” In addition to the 10 question assessments, the principal implemented an intervention team process in which teachers from the same grade level were responsible for monitoring a group of 3-5 students listed on a district generated RtI roster. A teacher explained the intervention team process: “This year, they started a new process where

each teacher selects ten students from all of their classes, from their grade level and they work with those students to ensure that they are passing, ...attending tutoring, and feel confident in themselves.” Requiring all teachers to participate in the intervention team process allowed the campus to utilize the existing grade level configuration to initiate a cross-curricular approach to support the identified needs of students within campus RtI efforts. Additionally, the intervention team process was accomplished during a monthly meeting held before the beginning of the school day. The process utilized at the initial meeting was described by a teacher: “So we went and attended our first monthly meeting by grade level...we went around tables and found ten of our students that we could work with and then we would write our name next to their name. Then Ms. X, the RtI Coordinator gave us a tutoring guide and tutoring sign-in sheets.”

Building Capacity

Ensuring teachers possess effective instructional design and instructional delivery expertise surfaced as a leadership practice principals applied to enhance the fidelity of RtI implementation. Providing professional development to build capacity for implementing RtI was a practice shared by each principal. Although the approaches varied by campus, the purpose of capacity building was to enhance RtI efforts at all schools. In school A, the principal provided a professional development session to build teacher capacity to look at historical performance data using district data systems. Likewise, the principal of School B engaged teachers in district data systems training to support RtI implementation. The RtI Coordinator noted an example: “It started out first by introducing everybody to “Schoolnet” and what the tools were.” In her second year at the campus, the need to

enhance student engagement was identified. To address the need and set stage for providing small group instruction to targeted groups of students, the principal provided teachers with Kagan strategies training to ensure “Kids could work authentically independently so teachers could work in small groups instruction and everyone else could be authentically engaged.” The principal’s practice was confirmed by a teacher’s account: “She provided us with Kagan training on how to incorporate collaborative learning within the classroom.” Furthermore, the principal described her next steps: “We probably spent about three hours of training before school started my third year on the RtI process. I brought in a consultant from Region X and we really focused on it was the response to intervention and then backward design.” A teacher said, “Right now, I feel like it’s [RtI] a slow process just because we are trying to introduce it here on campus, but I think that next year you’ll start to see the second part of the RtI process.”

The practice of developing teacher capacity to utilize data before formally introducing RtI was highlighted by an assistant principal who said: “So you want to get good at analyzing data then you do PD on that and now that you’ve analyzed data, ‘How are you going to get that information for student mastery? So I think that’s why we had that PD with RtI a couple of weeks ago because you look at data...and there’s still deficiencies.’” As part of the efforts to build capacity for RtI, the principal leveraged the work of a teacher who effectively utilized the tiering structure related to RtI to model the approach for colleagues during the most recent district-wide professional development day. The assistant principal described the principal’s approach: “She’ll ask us, ‘When you do pop-ins, who does a good job goal-setting intervention?’ So that’s when I brought up

that teacher. Then she'll go and talk to the teacher...and then see the things their doing and then decide to like do a PD on it." A similar approach was taken in School A. The principal said, "If you have a good pocket in the building, try to leverage that to help others around the campus grow." Although the approaches varied the purpose was to support RtI efforts all schools.

Another approach to build teacher capacity that emerged from the data related to establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Principals utilized PLCs to enhance teacher knowledge and skills in order to bolster RtI implementation. In School A, the principal cited PLCs as the "bedrock" of involving the faculty and staff. Principals structured PLCs within the school day to permit teachers from the same subject area to have common planning time which fostered dialogue related to meeting student needs. This approach was confirmed by an assistant principal who said,

"One requirement that he [principal] made was making sure all teachers from the same content are off at the same time so that we can have intentional conversations about how we address the needs of our students. Whether it be what we are currently working on or re-teaching opportunities all of that is factored in so I would say the master schedule was developed to ensure our teachers had that time."

As is the case with School A, the PLC structure facilitated conversations and instructional approaches to addresses student needs among teachers in School B. One teacher described her experience within her departmental PLC:

"On Friday mornings we're together, but the Algebra I bunch is sitting together

because we're breaking down those SEs and looking at 'What does it really say?' "What does it really mean?" Taking from people...we've got this strategy. Then we step out of our group and go to the Algebra II group and say, 'Look at what we've done.' They are going to say, 'Well, you could do this.' We're building our book on-line for the SEs students aren't strong in."

Question 2: What challenges do high school principals face during the implementation process and how do they address them?

The data revealed two specific challenges principals faced during the implementation of the RtI initiative. These were similar in some instances and different in others. Principals shared their approaches to address these challenges and reflected on missed opportunities. The surfaced challenges could be classified in two major themes: limited resources and resistance to change.

Limited Resources

The difficulty of implementing the RtI initiative with scarce resources was highlighted as a real challenge. Identifying resources such as other personnel to deliver and monitor interventions; time to provide additional instruction and support to students emerged as problems. In addition, data revealed that another challenge referred to assuring fidelity of implementation was lack of information related to high schools. One principal described resource availability in this way: "I will say that I do think we need more resources to actually do it [RtI]. You know I'm piece milling stuff and that's one of the reason's why it [RtI] is ugly because we don't have all the resources." The principal clarified the meaning of resources to implement RtI: "When I say resources piece, I'm

talking about manpower. So I have a lot of platforms, but I feel like students learn best from someone sitting in front of them and helping them grow in their areas of weakness versus putting them in front of a computer.” He further added: “So for us, it’s figuring out what we can do on campus to make the interventions accessible for students despite where our teachers and campus are developmentally.”

To address shortage of resources the principal indicated, “We just try to, you know, pull in what we can and who we can pull in to help us.” One approach the principal utilized to address the need for manpower to support 350 students who were required to retake at least one state exam to graduate was contacting central office staff for assistance. Once the requested assistance from central office is provided, principals make sure that their services address the campus needs as the principal explained, “Structuring it so that when they do come it’s like this is what I need you to do. This is the lesson, these are the weaknesses and here’s a post-test to try and see if the kid actually moved.” The assistant principal from this campus reported: “The principal hires a retired teacher to provide interventions to Algebra I students.” Likewise, another principal described RtI: “It’s a monster. I see that a lot of it we are doing on our own from scratch. There are no real resources to help us with that [RtI].” The same principal explained her approach to address the resource challenge: “So it’s a lot of manpower and trying to be strategic and creative, but figuring it out from the ground up.” To that point, the RtI Coordinator from School B noted: “So, I know it’s not what I know RtI to be, that specific intervention for a student, but it was me trying to figure out ‘What can we do with the resources we have, in the time we have?’ to hopefully help as many student as

possible stay on track.” This comment was in response to the campus’ approach to addressing the 1,200 students identified on a district generated RtI roster. The RtI Coordinator described principal sanctioned approach to the implementation process:

“We already had things in place like double blocking for Algebra I and double blocking for English I and English II. So for our freshman, we took a more behavioral route because we kept hearing about discipline and with academics we gave you more time with the teacher so we took the route with social emotional learning. You know, how to deescalate with students because we have a pretty large group of new teachers teaching freshman. With seniors and junior we were looking specifically at the EOC kids and attendance because they have to have all of those to graduate. So basically, kids were assigned to teachers to track. It wasn’t a method of giving them support on the academic side, it was a method of giving them support on...these are your options for EOC tutoring, these are the dates and talking to their English and math teachers. It’s almost like being an advocate. Let’s spread an entire staff over 1,200 kids and be a point person that is talking to them on a regular basis about these things and these resources.”

To address lack of resources, participants go beyond schools and extend their search of information through technology. For instance, a teacher from this campus described access to information about RtI in this way: “You go out on the Internet and you look and there’s not a lot out there.” She further described campus efforts to address this challenge: “Like I said, going out on the Internet...we did a lot of research this summer and there’s nothing out there at the high school level...nothing that we can steal.

...We are beg, borrowing and stealing ideas from everywhere.”

The absence of resources may hinder the adoption of new practices and implementation efforts. However, both principals and teachers appear to be resourceful as they look for strategies to overcome them somehow.

Resistance to Change

Requiring the use of new research-based instructional approaches may be perceived as a call for abandoning previous instructional strategies emerged as another challenge principal faced. According to participants, unwillingness and opposition from staff members affect the implementation of RtI. Given that RtI requires new skills and instructional approaches, participants may not be willing to embrace flexibility to modify their strategies. For instance, a teacher described an account of resistance on campus:

“We have one teacher on our team who at the beginning of the year struggled with putting students in groups. He said, ‘No! No! I need them in rows. I don’t want them to talk. I want them to work.’”

The practices principals employed to address resistance varied across schools. In one school, the principal described resistance this way: Dealing with the pushback from particular staff members having a hard time with it [data use]. He explained his approach to address this type of resistance: “Use pockets of teachers in the school that effectively implement improvement efforts as models for others to emulate.” Similarly, when faced with teachers who had difficulty shifting their “mindset” to foster RtI implementation, the principal in School B described her approach to increase compliance: “If the department chair was really respected, talking with them about bringing the department together.”

Although “mindset” was a barrier to implementation, the principal described another obstacle in this way: “I think the biggest overall challenge was those teachers who were in it for their curriculum rather than what students needed to be academically successful.” One teacher from the campus said, “If you ignore the data, the kids won’t grow. If you ignore their learning styles, they’re not going to grow. If you’re stuck in a particular way of teaching, they’re not going to grow. Another teacher said, “There’s a lot of closed minded teachers.”

Another way of resisting change appears to be non-compliance with RtI implementation expectation. To address such a challenge progressive intervention methods emerged as a challenge. Specifically, the principal described her conversations with teachers: “You have six students who need intervention. What are you doing with them? I need to see it in your lesson plans.” The principal described the next steps taken when conversations did not produce the desired results: “We had to put several teachers on growth plans because they weren’t doing the interventions in their classrooms for their course then asking them to develop individual plans using policy as a guide.” The RtI Coordinator confirmed the principal’s approach to achieve compliance during her account of the recommended next steps she was given: ‘Send them a memo, send them a reminder and the next thing it goes to full documentation that they are not participating in school wide efforts to support students.’”

To support the efforts of leaders planning RtI implementation, one principal recommends, “Maintain your fortitude and keep pushing people to that place where student needs can be met at a high level and hopefully the teachers will see the value in

doing what they are doing and not see it as extra work.”

As noted in the interviews with teachers, an RtI Coordinator and the assistant principals functioning in a similar role as their peer formally assigned to serve as the campus RtI Coordinator, principals utilize a variety of leadership practices to implement RtI as well as address the challenges they encountered.

The challenges principals faced during the RtI implementation process and how they addressed them is noted in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1	
<i>Challenges and the Strategies</i>	
Challenge	Strategies
Limited Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request central office assistance • Align materials for central office to campus needs • Hire retired teachers • Create a school wide Intervention Team structure • Require active teacher participation in Intervention Team • Use technology to access RtI information
Resistance to Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite teachers to model RtI practices • Enlist influential and difficult teacher leaders to champion efforts • Hold direct conversations • Place teachers on growth plans, if needed • Follow district policy

The final research question examined the extent to which the practices principals employed during RtI implementation align with the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007) related to implementation.

The utility of this framework to support principals during the RtI implementation process will be explored.

Question 3: To what extent do high school principals' RtI implementation leadership practices reflect the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework related to implementation?

Identifying a framework to support principals during the RtI implementation process may enhance efforts in urban high schools. The seven leadership responsibilities identified in the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007) found to have a statistically significant correlation to student achievement and leading second order change are noted and defined below:

Ideals and beliefs: communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling

- Optimizer: inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
- Flexibility: adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
- Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment: is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction and assessment practices
- Intellectual stimulation: ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture
- Change agent: is willing to and actively challenges the status quo
- Monitors/evaluates: monitors the effectiveness of school practices and

their impact on student learning (p. 4-9)

To explore to what extent high schools principals leadership practices relate to the seven leadership responsibilities identified in the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007), the attributes associated with each one have been compared to the emerging High School principal leadership practices. This comparison is described below:

Ideals and Beliefs

This first responsibility is characterized by “the extent to which the principal communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling” (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 31). Principals act in accordance with a philosophical base supporting teaching and learning that guides actions through words, deeds and artifacts. Two of the emerging high school leadership practices to implement RtI mirror these responsibilities: Building Capacity and Engaging Stakeholders. Principals expressed their beliefs about schooling and students in a variety of ways. One principal described her rationale for providing training on implementing small group instruction with a strong student philosophy: “Kids could work authentically independently so teachers could work in small groups instruction and everyone else could be authentically engaged.” It was evident from the teacher’s perspective that principals communicated commitment to teaching and learning as the teacher described: “Students being supported first, then the administration supporting us [teachers] as we support students.”

Through sharing their beliefs, high school principals seem to be in a better position to enlist stakeholders. For instance, a principal communicated her belief in the

importance of leadership continuity ‘Look, I know there have been a lot of changes here. There hasn’t been much consistency. That’s going to end.’ A teacher cited the importance of consistency in leadership to foster participation in campus initiatives: “So I think consistency is really important to get everybody on board.”

Principal’s ideals and beliefs were expressed in the approaches employed to engage stakeholders such as: providing professional development designed to support all students, communicating commitment to teaching and learning and providing consistency in leadership. Artifacts showcasing ideals and beliefs were found in campus improvement plans related to student achievement goals that went beyond state and district defined improvement targets.

Optimizer

This second responsibility is marked “by the extent to which the principal inspires and leads new and challenging innovations” (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 31). A principal who acts as optimizer, motivates teachers to attempt practices outside of their comfort zone. According to the leadership practices a high school principal meets such responsibilities by engaging stakeholders. A principal enabled two means to assume the role of optimizer. First, to inspire team members to engage in the RtI process by implementing small group instruction based on data, the principal expressed confidence in teachers’ abilities to employ the new instructional strategies. For instance, the principal said: “I was like just try it for 3 weeks. Pulling kids, small group, give the other kids some other things to do, see if it’s working. Just 15 minutes, twice a week on that particular standard.” Second, the principal utilized staff communication sources to

recognize teachers utilizing the expected instructional configuration. According to the principal: “We celebrated it, put it in the newsletter and made it part of feedback conferences.

It appears that principal efforts to inspire teachers to use of new instructional approaches were realized: For example, a teacher described the method: “So once a week last year, we would pull kids to the front and while the other kids worked on a review...we would talk to the kids in front. One teacher did an excellent job to where all the kids wanted to come to the front because they enjoyed the individualized attention and worked on something they were weak on.”

The principal’s approaches to lead RtI efforts and inspire teachers to engage in the process included: expressing confidence in teacher’s abilities to deliver new instructional techniques and celebrating teacher behavior aligned to expected instructional methods. Fostering engagement in the process is a key lever to ensure techniques to promote effective teaching and learning are delivered as a designed.

Flexibility

This third responsibility is distinguished “by the extent to which the principal adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent” (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 31). Principals demonstrate the facility to adjust leadership approaches to the needs of the situation. To fulfill this responsibility, it appears from the data that principals engage stakeholders and established accountability systems. Principals utilize multiple leadership practices to demonstrate the ability to meet the demands of the situation. For example, expanding

leadership for RtI implementation efforts to generate commitment to the process was a leadership practice implemented in one school. The principal indicated that one practice applied to create “buy-in” was to: “Utilize a team of teachers who does not include teacher leaders to make implementation much more broad based with colleagues rather than top down.” The principal further described her approach to influence engagement: “If the department chair was really respected, talking with them about bringing the department together.”

Seemingly, principals exercise flexibility in leadership approaches to enroll and enlist teacher engagement in RtI efforts. For instance, in one school, the principal attempts to use teachers in the school that effectively implement improvement efforts as models for others to emulate: “If you’ve got a good pocket in the building try and leverage that to help others around the campus grow.”

Apparently, principals adjust leadership approaches to establish accountability and mandate compliance with expectations. In this case, the principal employed increasingly progressive intervention methods to address non-compliance with RtI implementation expectations. Specifically, the conversations with teachers were: “You have six students who need intervention. What are you doing with them? I need to see it in your lesson plans.” The principal described the next steps taken when conversations did not produce the desired results: “We had to put several teachers on growth plans because they weren’t doing the interventions in their classrooms for their course then asking them to develop individual plans using policy as a guide.”

Principals adapted leadership behaviors to the needs of the situation as evidenced

by: utilizing teams of teachers to broaden the base, enlisting teacher leaders to champion the cause, providing models of effective practice and applying progressive disciplinary measures. Possessing the skills to select the appropriate response to produce the desired outcome is an essential leadership quality to facilitate RtI implementation.

Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

This fourth responsibility is represented “by the extent to which the principal is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices” (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 32). Being knowledgeable relates to all aspects of instruction. According to the data, this is evident as high school principals “utilize data” to focus attention on student learning in various ways. For instance, one principal described his, “conversations” related to ensuring student progress on content standards: “This is what we are going to do for the students at the middle and this is what we are going to do for the students at the bottom. What are we going to do for our advanced students?”

Using state assessment data as a guide, another principal said: “Whether they are sitting in an English II classroom and they need to retake the English I, the writing responses are still the same... The literary elements are still the same. Here’s where the kids were low. Here’s how it leads into your curriculum.” Another principal said of her process with teachers, “They use common assessment data and based on that they have to develop a reteach plan for my review.” This statement was confirmed by a teacher who reported: “I have to plan my instruction, I have to plan how to remediate and I have to track the data.”

One principal, who focused on ensuring literacy level data is considered,

described his discussion: “Let’s look at the language level. We’re not talking about TEKS. Let’s look at what kind of progress they’re making with their particular language piece and let’s try to make sure we are moving the needle with that and focus on that part, then we get to the big rocks.” Further to ensure instructional interventions delivered by external providers are aligned to student needs, the principal said the key is: “Structuring it...this is what I need you to do. This is the lesson, these are the weaknesses and here’s a post-test to try and see if the kid actually moved.”

Principal demonstrated curriculum, instruction and assessment prowess in a variety of ways such as: reviewing language levels, reviewing content standards and structuring intervention to support student needs. Principal’s knowledge of the facets of teaching and learning is essential to ensuring instruction and assessments are aligned to content standards.

Intellectual Stimulation

This fifth responsibility is identified “by the extent to which the principal ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current research and practices and make discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture” (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 32). Principals assured teachers remained abreast of contemporary ideas to strengthen instructional techniques to facilitate RtI implementation. One of the surfaced high school leadership practices reflects the Building Capacity responsibility. Principals utilized numerous avenues to ensure teachers translated theory into practice. For example, acknowledging the role data plays within the RtI process, principals provided professional development sessions to build teacher capacity to utilize district data

systems. A principal shared his process for developing teacher capacity to review student data: “I showed them “My Data Portal” data and was like you can go back and look at historical data on this kid.” The RtI Coordinator from another campus provided an example of the principal’s approach: “It started out first by introducing everybody to “Schoolnet” and what the tools were.”

To build teacher capacity to provide small group instruction within Tier 2 of RtI, a principal explained: “We had to provide professional development for student engagement pieces of teaching and small groups. So we did Kagan structures to where teachers had a toolkit of this is how kids can work authentically on group practice and this is how kids can work authentically independently. Kids could work doing this so teachers could work in small group instruction and everyone else be authentically engaged.” The principal’s practice was confirmed by a teacher who said: “She provided us with Kagan training on how to incorporate collaborative learning within the classroom.” Additionally, the principal shared efforts to develop teacher knowledge: “We probably spent about three hours of training before school started my third year on the RtI process. I brought in a consultant from Region X and we really focused on it was the response to intervention and then backward design.”

It appears that principal’s focus on developing teacher knowledge and skills is enabling RtI efforts. A teacher said, “Right now, I feel like it’s [RtI] a slow process just because we’re trying to introduce it here on campus, but I think that next year you’ll start to see the second part of the RtI process.” At another school, the principal identified teachers who utilized practices to support tiered instruction to serve as models for

colleagues. The assistant principal described the principal's approach to identify best practices: "She'll ask us, 'When you do pop-ins who does a good job goal-setting intervention?' Then she'll go and talk to the teacher...and then see the things they're doing and then decide to like do a PD on it."

Principals prompted intellectual stimulation for team members by providing professional development that included: the RtI process, engagement strategies that created opportunities for small group instruction within Tier 2, data tools and data analysis methods. Principals viewed these professional development efforts as necessary components to operationalize the theoretical framework known as RtI.

Change Agent

This sixth responsibility is delineated "by the extent to which the principal is willing to and actively challenges the status quo" (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 32). Acting as a change agent, principals confront current operating procedures and instructional approaches. To do so, it appears from the data that principals utilize data and establish accountability systems. Principals exercise the change agent role utilizing multiple methods. For example, the principal from School A shared that he created a different culture where teachers know "I have to tier my kids because I know I have to be able to speak to my students and offer up what ever prescription." Another principal recounted efforts to create a clear understanding of the campus intervention process for teachers: "We're going to have an intervention program, it's going to start in September and we are going to do systematic measures of progress as we go along."

Further, a change in culture also required shared responsibility for student

academic results with consequences for not meeting expectations for the new approaches. To address non-compliance with the outlined expectations the principal said: “We had to put several teachers on growth plans because they weren’t doing the interventions in their classrooms for their course.” Another principal shared his approach: “These are the pieces that we want to get accomplished I think was a big part of what I had to do as a leader because again there had been leadership here before and it [RtI] hadn’t necessarily happened and that makes for it to be even harder as you pushing this to people cause they’re like “Why?” and “Why is it important? Because again, you had that stigma that these kids aren’t going to be able to because of the language level.”

As the aforementioned quote indicates, principals were willing to challenge the status quo to implement essential RtI components. Principals applied the change agent responsibility by creating data use cultures, building structures to foster data use, communicating expectations and addressing non-compliance with expectations for the express purpose of identifying student needs to provide targeted support.

Monitors/Evaluates

This seventh responsibility is defined “by the extent to which the principal monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning” (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 32). Principal’s provided oversight for the instructional program and assessed the acquisition of knowledge and skills by establishing accountability systems and utilizing data. Determining the efficacy of RtI efforts and the impact on student learning was a highly leveraged leadership practice. For instance, principal’s created co-accountability systems by delegating oversight to for RtI efforts by

assigning assistant principals to a specific content areas. The responsibilities included monitoring data from content standards based common assessment to determine student progress and engaging teachers in conversation based on assessment results.

The structures principals employed to monitor appear to impact efforts at the teacher and student level. A common structure utilized by all principals to monitor progress toward departmental goals was a weekly meeting with assistant principals. At one school, the principal meets with his assistant principals to discuss the tiered list of students each of them is required to maintain at the content or teacher level that includes planned next steps for improving performance. The principal said:

So I meet with the leadership team and they have to provide a list me with artifacts where they show me a tiered list of the kids as well as a list of deficiencies. We'll have conversation about the data whether by teacher or content area so we can look at each category they're all struggling and then look at what's going on in that particular classroom."

One principal focused meeting discussions on delivering interventions with fidelity. To monitor implementation, the principal reported: "So we asked teacher to let us know when they would be "doing" their RtI." Another principal meets with assistant principals every other week to discuss the goals for their content and monitor progress toward the goals: "I meet with my assistant principals who are overseeing the contents and we talk about what's going on in their content. When we do common assessments we talk about what we see. So mine is mainly overseeing their work and talking through where they are and tracking the data." While at another school, the monitoring system

consisted of giving assessments to determine student mastery of content standards. The principal explained: “So math and English were the content areas that failed to grow the most so really looking at the assessments. ‘It’s going to be a 10 question assessment. We’re going to give this.’”

Creating structures to monitor student progress was a leadership practice principals utilized to establish accountability systems to support RtI implementation. These included: assigning assistant principals to specific content areas, conducting weekly meetings with assistant principals, focusing meeting discussion on implementation fidelity, observing RtI classroom practices, requiring common assessments in targeted content areas and reviewing common assessment results. A common belief among principals about the importance of establishing accountability systems to ensure students receive quality instruction was expressed this way: “What gets inspected, gets done.” This sentiment undergirds the role accountability systems played in promoting compliance with expectations related to instructional approaches and intervention practices.

Exhibit 2 provides a comparative analysis between the Balanced Leadership framework and the emerging practice to implement RtI.

Exhibit 2	
Seven Responsibilities Compared to Emerging Themes and Principal Practices	
Responsibilities (the extent to which the principal...)	Leadership Practices

<p><i>Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teaching and learning</i> • <i>Shares with faculty and staff</i> • <i>Actions consistent with beliefs</i> 	<p>✓ ✓ ✓</p>	<p><i>Building Capacity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures all students are authentically engaged in learning • Provides student engagement strategy training to enable small group instruction <p><i>Engaging Stakeholders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates commitment to students • Communicates importance of leadership consistency
<p><i>Optimizer: Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Inspires teachers to accomplish things seeming beyond their grasp</i> • <i>Portrays a positive attitude about the ability of the staff</i> • <i>Is a driving force behind major initiatives</i> 	<p>– ✓ ✓</p>	<p><i>Engaging Stakeholders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights teachers who were effectively implementing small group instruction • Encourages teachers to try new approaches
<p><i>Flexibility: is willing to and actively challenges the status quo</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is comfortable with major changes in how things are done</i> • <i>Encourages people to express opinions contrary to authority</i> • <i>Adapts leadership style to needs of situations</i> • <i>Can be directive or non-directive as the situation warrants</i> 	<p>✓ – ✓ ✓</p>	<p><i>Engaging Stakeholders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlist teachers leaders to broaden base and minimize top down approach • Provides models for teachers to emulate <p><i>Establishing Accountability Systems</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employs progressive discipline measures to support compliance.

<p><i>Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment:</i> <i>is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is knowledgeable about instructional practices</i> • <i>Is knowledgeable about assessment practices</i> • <i>Provides conceptual guidance for teachers effective classroom practice</i> 	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Utilizing Data</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures instruction and interventions are aligned to content standards • Reviews language levels to determine instructional needs
<p><i>Intellectual stimulation:</i> <i>by ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes discussions of these a regular aspect of the schools culture</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Keeps informed about current research and theory regarding effective schooling</i> • <i>Continually exposes the staff to cutting-edge ideas about how to be effective</i> • <i>Systematically engages staff in discussions about current research and theory</i> • <i>Continually involves the staff in reading articles and books about effective practice</i> 	<p style="text-align: center;">-</p> <p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Building Capacity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides training to foster effective data use and “Backwards Design” principles • Provides models of effective instructional practice

<p><i>Change agent: is willing to and actively challenges the status quo</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Consciously challenges the status quo</i> • <i>Is comfortable leading change initiatives with uncertain outcomes</i> • <i>Systematically considers new and better ways of doing things</i> 	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>–</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Utilizing Data</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitors intervention implementation • Creates transparent data collection processes using technology <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Establishing Accountability Systems</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places teachers on growth plan to strengthen desired instructional approaches • Requires teachers to share RtI days
<p><i>Monitors/evaluates: monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment</i> 	<p>✓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Establishing Accountability Systems</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts weekly meetings with assistant principals to monitor goal attainment • Develops systems to document intervention implementation using technology <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Utilizing Data</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assesses implementation fidelity • Conducts classroom observations

In summary, findings of the comparative analysis of the emerging leadership practices to the Balance Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007) suggest that all the surfaced leadership practices mirror the seven responsibilities to some extent. Thus, parallel several of the attributes.

Chapter 5 Summary, Implications and Further Research

Introduction

Reportedly, utilizing the tiered instructional approach associated with RtI has increased student performance levels in general and reduced special education referrals (Spectrum K12, NASDE, CASE AASA, 2010 & Fisher & Frey, 2011). However, research related to principal leadership practices associated with implementing RtI at the high school level is limited (Duffy, 2007; Spiegel, 2009; Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss, 2010; National High School Center, 2011; Windram, Bollman & Johnson, 2012 and Epler, 2015). Therefore, this study examined the leadership practices of high school principals as they introduced and implemented RtI.

This chapter includes a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, and a discussion of findings. It concludes with implications for practice and further research related to leadership.

Statement of the Problem

While RtI has been acknowledged as a promising avenue to improve student achievement (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005; Gonchar, Clarke & Gersten, 2009) at both elementary and middle schools, research addressing RtI implementation at the high school level is scarce. Few researchers have examined the leadership practice efforts to implement RtI at the high school level (Windram, Bollman & Johnson, 2012), but further examination of how this intervention is actually carried out is necessary. Therefore, research exploring campus level leadership practices applied during RtI implementation at the high school level, particularly due to the fact that some high schools have only

introduced this alternative instructional approach in recent years (NHSII, 2010 & EHA Regulation, 2014), is needed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership practices of high school principals regarding RtI implementation, the challenges they face during the change process and the how they address them. An effort was also made to determine to what extent the emerging leadership practices related to RtI implementation reflect the seven responsibilities positively correlated with implementing second order change outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What leadership practices do high school principals employ to implement RtI?
2. What challenges do high school principals face during the implementation process and how do they address them?
3. To what extent do principals' RtI implementation leadership practices reflect the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework related to implementation?

Methodology

A qualitative case study method was used to collect and report data. The research was conducted at three urban high schools with enrollments over 1,000 in Texas. The research took place during December and March 2017. After identifying the participants, individual interviews were completed as the main data-gathering tool (Patton, 1990). A

total of eleven interviews were conducted for this study with 3 principals, 1 assistant principal designated as the RtI Coordinator, 2 assistant principal and 5 teachers in the same school district. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and these data were analyzed.

The researcher used open-coding (initial coding) to begin analyzing the collected data to develop working categories. In initial coding, the ultimate goal is to achieve saturation “when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions, interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p.136).

This study reflects the nature of case study methodology, which allows for a naturalistic, interpretivist approach to the phenomenon. The framework used in this study to analyze the data is the Balanced Leadership framework from Waters and Cameron (2007). These analyses are limited to the data derived from this particular study sample and therefore are not intended to be widely generalized. Transferability of these findings is left to the consumer of the research.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study focused on examining three areas, identifying the leadership practices high school principals employed to implement RtI, the challenges they faced during the implementation process and how they addressed them and the extent the principals’ RtI implementation leadership practices reflect the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework related to

implementation.

High School Principals Leadership Practices

A total of 5 leadership practices emerged from the study. These are discussed including connection to the extant literature. These practices are: utilizing data, establishing accountability systems, engaging stakeholders, setting expectations and building capacity.

Utilizing Data

Findings suggest that high school principals utilize specific, campus related data in order to implement RtI. Forms of data tend to include student academic achievement, attendance, grades, campus developed common assessments, lexile reading levels and discipline referrals. This is congruent with Burns' (2008) and Canter, Klotz & Cowan's (2008) assertion that data-based decision-making including state accountability test and failure rates are essential components used to implement RtI. Similarly, the use of historical data to identify student needs is a leadership practice employed by principals. Concurring with this practice, Dupont (2012) cited the availability of historical data as an advantage to RtI implementation at the secondary level. In order to determine student mastery of content standards and develop plans based on the results, principals utilize assessments. Supporting this approach Fisher & Fry (2011) also identified the use of assessments as essential to RtI implementation.

Further, use of data informs the development of the master schedule to provide reading and math intervention courses, identification of students who required extensive intervention, targeted small group instruction and determination of professional

development needs. These practices support Windram, Bollman and Johnson's (2012) recommendation that school administrators possess the skill to engage as data driven-decision makers to effectively implement RtI. The principal's approach to support reading deficits, aligns with King, Lemons & Hill (2012) recommendation that administrators use RtI to emphasize the importance of intensive secondary literacy instruction. This echoes Fisher & Fry's (2011) notion that scheduling data-based interventions to support, not supplant core instruction was as a key element in implementing RtI.

Establishing Accountability Systems

According to the findings, high school principals create accountability systems in order to implement RtI. The systems include delegating oversight to generate a co-accountability structure, utilizing technology to reinforce accountability, developing data collection systems and monitoring progress toward departmental goals.

Delegating oversight to others was a practice used to further monitor content areas, student progress on common assessment data and engage teachers in conversations based on the results. Empowering others to lead is consistent with Roberts' (2014) finding that the principal distributes leaderships during the implementation of RtI. Similarly, this approach supports Lau, Sieler, Muyskens, Canter, VanKeuren & Martson, (2005) assertion that one component of successful RtI is principals who demonstrate his or her own active involvement by adopting data-based progress monitoring systems within the building. In addition, monitoring is one way high school principals determine progress toward department goals and fidelity to RtI implementation. The specific

practices include: conducting weekly meetings with leadership team members such as assistant principal and campus based instructional coaches as well as observing intervention delivery. As Robinson, Bursuck and Sinclair (2011) assert leading team meetings and conducting classroom observations are essential to creating support for RtI. Further, findings suggest that establishing intervention teams to monitor student progress is another practice high school principals employed. This is consistent with Fisher & Fry's (2011) notion that personnel who are assigned the task of coordinating interventions is essential to RtI implementation. Similarly, Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss' (2010) assert that principals are a major catalyst for change within school buildings and the success for changes like it is in the case of RtI, depends, in part, on the processes leaders place within their respective schools. Moreover, this is congruent with the National High School Center's (2011) finding that emphasize the important role school leaders play in deepening RtI implementation.

Findings also suggest that observing intervention delivery allows principals to provide feedback to reinforce or refine instructional strategies. This concurs with the notion that coaching and evaluation were factors that supported implementation of RtI (National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention and Center on Instruction, 2010)

Engaging Stakeholders

It appears from the findings that principals intentionally involve stakeholders in the process. Principals invite team members to participate in operationalizing the new instructional approaches, expand leadership for the effort and celebrate behaviors

congruent with defined expectations. This concurs with the National Center on Response to Intervention's (2011) assertion that RtI requires principals to create an environment that fosters a willingness among team members to consider the innovation. Similarly, Robinson, Bursuck and Sinclair (2011) found strong support from the principal essential to creating support for RtI.

Setting Expectations

Findings suggest that establishing expectations for RtI implementation early on, as high school principals introduce the innovation is another important leadership practice. Explaining expectations requires communicating, setting the vision, and creating structures to monitor intended operating procedures. This finding supports Roberts (2014) assertion that the principal establishes clarity regarding the initiative by setting clear expectations and a school wide vision. Likewise, Mellard, Prewett and Deshler (2012) affirm that principals played a key role in creating a vision of the RtI model in their school. Further, King, Lemons & Hill (2012) recommend administrators establish a vision for your RtI framework and provide the necessary resources. The importance of explaining expectations was also illuminated by Fuch & Deshler (2007) who assert that RtI implementation will require engaged administrators who set expectations for adoption of changes to implement RtI.

It appears from the findings that high school principals also create structures to follow up progress toward meeting expectations for RtI implementation. For instance, one structure focuses on assessments to corroborate student mastery of content standards. This is in concert with a previous observation that establishing frequent opportunities to

review data and providing organizational support for RtI are two key elements to navigating implementation as expected (Roberts, 2014).

Building Capacity

According to the findings, high school principals provide on-going professional development to build teacher capacity for implementing RtI. The professional enhancement opportunities focus on review of historical data, district data systems use, organizing students by skill level, engagement strategies to promote small group instruction and the RtI process. As others assert, professional development is a factor that supports implementation (The National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention & Center on Instruction, 2010). Similarly, Fisher & Frey (2011) conclude that professional development is one of the elements essential to RtI implementation.

The importance of developing skills to use data was highlighted by VanDerHeyden, Witt & Gilbertson as critical to reduce school teams' failure in the use of the data in the decision-making process. This reinforces the need for building data use capacity as part of the implementation process.

Further, establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) appears to be an approach high school principals also employ to build teacher capacity and strengthen RtI implementation. Through PLCs, high school principals involve the faculty and staff in decision-making and problem solving by provide time within the school day for teachers from the same subject to plan and dialogue about instructional approaches to address student needs. This concurs with Lau, Sieler, Muyskens, Canter, VanKeuren & Martson's

(2005) finding that successful RtI implementation requires principals who signal their participation by reorganizing staff time to permit problem-solving meetings. As Burns' (2008) also reports, collaborative problem analysis is an essential component for improving student outcomes.

Challenges and Strategies

According to the findings, high school principals encounter difficulties during RtI implementation efforts. These appear to relate to limited resources and resistance to change.

First, high school principals experience difficulties with limited resources to facilitate RtI implementations. These include identifying other personnel to deliver and monitor interventions and time to provide additional instruction and support to students. Another challenge revealed relates to assuring fidelity of implementation was lack of information related to high schools.

To overcome these, increasing the human resources available to provide intervention appears to be a strategy high school principals employ to implement RtI. This approach is supported by The National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention and Center on Instruction's (2010) report citing the availability of intervention providers is a factor that supports RtI implementation. Similarly, involving the faculty as an Intervention Team is another strategy principals utilize to increase the personnel available to provide interventions. This approach concurs with Fisher & Fry's (2011) assertion that schools should "adopt a school wide approach to RtI to maximize implementation impact."

Structuring curriculum and assessment materials is also an approach high school principals apply to capitalize on the time dedicated to delivering interventions to support RtI implementation efforts. To successfully implement RtI, Fuch & Deshler (2007) suggest that administrators must support the use of procedures that ensure fidelity of implementation.

Another strategy high school principals employ to increase the time dedicated to instruction, intervention and progress monitoring was leveraging the master schedule such as: providing two blocks of English and mathematics courses per year instead of the traditional one block. This approach concurs with Burns' (2008) finding that Tier II intervention in secondary schools are delivered in specialty courses using 50 minutes [traditional] or 90 minutes [block] instructional schedules.

Second, findings suggest that principals face reluctance from staff members charged with adopting new approaches to implement RtI. These include unwillingness to modify instructional strategies and non-compliance with RtI implementation expectations.

To address resistance and enhance RtI efforts, high school principals appear to identify teacher leaders to model practices. Supporting this strategy, Spiegel (2009) found principal as recruiter a leadership characteristic that influences successful RtI implementation.

Another approach high school principals utilize to address resistance is celebrating observed instructional practices that are congruent with campus expectations. Concurring with this approach, Sansosti, Noltemeyer & Goss (2010) assert that the

success of RtI depends to a certain extent on the support it receives from school leaders at the campus level.

Further, employing progressive disciplinary measure for failure to comply with expected instructional practices is another high school principal strategy. These include holding direct conversations with teachers and placing teachers on growth plans if needed. This approach confirms Culot's (2011) conclusion that the level of direct principal involvement is a determining factor for RtI implementation effectiveness. By adjusting their leadership practices to the needs of the situation, principals ensure campus defined expectations are carried out as designed.

Emerging Leadership Practices and the Balanced Leadership Framework

According to the comparison of the emerging practices to the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007), the findings suggest that certain emerging practices mirror the responsibilities related to the framework to some extent.

Ideals and Beliefs

Principals share their teaching and learning philosophies through *Building Capacity and Engaging Stakeholders* to facilitate RtI implementation. Specific practices may include: providing training on implementing small group instruction, communicating commitment to teaching and learning, providing consistency in leadership and developing campus improvement goals that exceeded state and district defined targets. This concurs with Sergiovanni, Starratt & Cho's (2004) assertion that supervisor's ability to transmit their educational vision in concrete terms is an important skill.

Optimizer

By motivating staff members to actively engage in the RtI initiative required principals to enact leadership practices related to *Engaging Stakeholders* in creative ways such as: expanding leadership for the effort, expressing confidence in teacher's ability to employ the new strategies and celebrating teacher efforts to implement instructional and data use methods in the campus newsletter. These are congruent with Fullan's (2001) assertion that school effectiveness is accomplished when effective teachers work in environments that energize and reward accomplishments. Further, King, Lemons & Hill (2012) encourage school leaders implementing RtI to "Foster a pioneering attitude in their classroom teachers." (p. 18)

Flexibility

By adapting leadership practices to the needs of the specific instructional situations, high school principals enhance RtI efforts. They accomplish this by *Engaging Stakeholders and Setting Expectations* leadership practices and in a variety of ways such as: expanding leadership to generate commitment to the process, enlisting teacher leaders to champion the initiative, inviting teachers that effectively employ improvement efforts to serve as models for others to emulate and progressive intervention methods to address non-compliance with RtI implementation expectations. This concurs with Fullan's (2001) finding that focusing on pressure and support is required to facilitate reform efforts.

Knowledge of the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

To support RtI implementation efforts, high school principals rely on their expertise of course requirements, lesson delivery methods and evaluation practices. The

demonstration of their knowledge base relates to instruction only illustrated how high school principals *Utilize Data*. For instance, principals review common assessment results to determine alignment to content standards and identified areas requiring instructional support. This supports Sergiovanni, Starratt & Cho's (2004) assertion that supervisors utilize data to realign curriculum and instructional configurations to meet student needs. Similarly, Windram, Bollman & Johnson (2012) contend that performing as an instructional leader is a key skill administrator's must possess to effectively implement RtI.

Intellectual Stimulation

By ensuring teachers remain abreast of current research and instructional techniques required to implement RtI, principals foster higher levels of fidelity. The practices utilized relate to the *Building Capacity* leadership practice. This practice involves establishing PLCs and providing professional development related to data use, small group instruction and targeted intervention. Concurring with the importance of developing teacher's skill base, Fisher & Frey (2011) cite professional development as an essential element to RtI implementation. Relating to professional learning communities, Fullan (2001) asserts that collaborative communities provide lateral accountability as teachers monitor each other's practices. Similarly, Burns & Yseldyke (2005) argue that successful school improvement requires stakeholder to become collaborative school communities.

Change Agent

By intentionally shifting the campus direction toward the research-based

approaches and the guiding principles that comprise RtI, high school principals act as change agents. To this end, they promote *Building Capacity* as a way to enhance teacher's knowledge and skills. This requires expanding the instructional repertoires of teachers that encourage data use to inform interventions and student engagement strategies to foster small group instruction. This echoes the notion that, to support individual change, receiving on-going, job-embedded professional learning is essential for teachers (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005).

Monitors and Evaluates

Providing oversight for the RtI initiative and determining the effectiveness of implementation process prompts high school principals to *Utilize Data and Establish Accountability Systems*. These practices involve designing data collection systems, targeting individual student needs, monitoring progress toward content standards mastery and evaluating instructional approaches. As Fuch & Deshler (2007) assert, successful RtI implementation requires engaged administrators who support the use of procedures that ensure fidelity to implementation. Further, Lau, Sieler, Muyskens, Canter, VanKeuren & Martson, (2005) argue that one component of successful RtI is principals who demonstrate his or her own active involvement by adopting data-based progress practices. Concurring with this approach, Burns & Ysseldyke (2005) contend that "Use of data at the student, teacher and school level is needed to promote change" (p. 14).

Implications for Practice and further Research

This study was undertaken to provide insights into the leadership practices of high school principals regarding RtI, the challenges they face during the implementation

process and the how they address them in three high urban high schools. Attention was focused only to understanding the leadership practices of principal in urban high schools and how these mirrored the seven responsibilities positively correlated with implementing second order change outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Only high school principals were included, an RtI Coordinator, assistant principals and teachers. Data was primarily collected through interviews. Though the leadership practices identified in this study reflected some of the seven responsibilities outlined in the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007), the absence of relatedness of other practices highlights the notion that frameworks are limited by the study context. However, given the nature and findings, recommendations for practice and further research can be generated.

Recommendations for Practice

High school principals interested in RtI may need to:

- Clearly define the purpose of RtI and align to school improvement goals.
- Develop a system to provide on-going professional development to support planned RtI efforts.
- Continue to rely on the PLC structure to operationalize RtI practices, but ensure teachers have common planning.
- Design protocols and include guiding questions to focus dialogue toward RtI.

Recommendations for Research

Given the scope of this study, there is a need for further research. For instance,

others may:

- Explore the approaches principal utilize to acquire knowledge about RtI.
- Determine teachers' perceptions about concerns related to RtI.
- Expand the sample to include parents' perceptions about how RtI supports student achievement.
- Conduct a comparative analysis of RtI implementation and student achievement.

Conclusion

RtI has proven to reduce special education referral rates and increase student performance levels in elementary and middle schools. However, recommendations to support implementation efforts at the high school level have recently emerged. Although researchers advise high school principals to proceed with caution, as some interventions have not been validated, the need to attempt well-considered innovative approaches to meet the instructional needs of students in the final four years of schooling is justified. Particularly since special education identification is not the focus of RtI at the high school level.

Utilizing data to both identify students requiring instructional intervention and determine the responsiveness to instruction is key to successfully implement RtI at all school levels. To enable the process, developing teacher data use skills is essential. Teachers must possess the expertise to review existing data sources to determine and meet student needs. To do so, principals must build teacher capacity by providing professional development related to available data systems and instructional approaches that facilitate delivering targeted small group instruction.

Building high school principal leadership capacity must be a priority. When high school principals are equipped with the skills to introduce and implement innovative instructional approaches such as RtI, they will be in a better position to meet the needs of increasingly diverse school communities and ensure all students experience equal access to a quality education, which may increase student achievement levels and improve graduation rates.

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Vita

Lisa DeVeaux attended high school in El Paso, TX. In 1982 she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education from Wiley College in Marshall, TX. In 1999 she earned a Masters degree in Educational Administration from Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX. In 2008 she was accepted into the Cooperative Superintendency Program. She earned her Doctor of Education in Educational Administration from The University of Texas at Austin in 2017. During this time, she was employed with the Dallas Independent School District as a Science Teacher, Office of Drug Abuse Prevention Program Specialist and Director, Middle School Dean of Instruction, Elementary and High School Principal and Executive Director of the Northeast Learning Community.

Currently, Lisa is pursuing her passion for ensuring equity and access to a quality education for all students by serving as a founding partner of School House Excellence, a consulting and professional development company dedicated to assisting educational institutions with enhancing implementation effectiveness utilizing research-based design principles.

Email address: ldeveaux@windstream.net

This dissertation was typed by the author.