TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM AND RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION EFFECTIVENESS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

Liberty University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

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March 2010

Teacher Perceptions of Student Support Team and Response to Intervention Effectiveness

by Lynn Russell Bailey

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Abstract

Lynn Russell Bailey. TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM AND RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION EFFECTIVENESS. (Under the direction of Dr. Deanna Keith) School of Education, March, 2010.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher perceptions of Student Support Team (SST) and Response to Intervention (RTI) effectiveness. While an effective, research-based framework is certainly paramount to the success of either endeavor, the teachers involved in the process and their perceptions directly impact the effectiveness. Teacher perceptions of their familiarity with SST and RTI, adequacy of training, qualifications to implement, the effectiveness of SST and RTI, eligibility requirements for special education, weaknesses of the frameworks, and reasons for non-referral are examined in the study. The sample population for the survey consisted of teachers (n=342) from around the state of Georgia. Results of the study indicate that just as teachers learned to utilize SST almost three decades ago to help avoid the over-identification of minority students as disabled, once again they have embraced a new framework called RTI to meet the challenge of appropriately offering intensive interventions and progress monitoring to students in need. Based on statistical analysis of this perception survey data utilizing both t-tests and ANOVA, recommendations are made to help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of SST and RTI procedures.

Keywords: Student Support Team, Response to Intervention, Pyramid of Intervention, special education eligibility

Dedication

It is with a humble and contrite heart that I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, first and foremost for choosing me for salvation and bestowing His matchless gift of grace and mercy on me through His redeeming power as He died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. While I was a sinner, Christ died for me. All praise and glory and worship belong to Him! Who am I that I should boast in anything?

I thank God also for making me a vessel of His goodness to educators and students in Georgia public schools. I pray that I would honor Him in all that I do and say. I pray that my efforts to apply myself to this research will train me to be more able to search out His Scriptures for wisdom and know His heart more intimately.

My philosophy of student support is summarized by the greatest teacher of all, Jesus Christ, "…if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Mathew 5:41). May Georgia teachers continue to go that second mile on behalf of students in need.

Acknowledgments

My successful completion of coursework and my subsequent research and writing would not have been possible without the support of my loving husband, Mike and my precious daughter, Kayla. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for sharing in this experience with me, for their patience and graciousness to allow me to read and study and work and mostly for their words of encouragement and prayers when times got tough. I look forward to the next chapter in our lives as we reap the benefits of this endeavor. I love you both so much and I thank my God for you upon every remembrance.

I would also like to thank my daddy and mama for their continual support and their frequent encouragement for me to complete this task – "how you comin' on that paper?" I love you both with all my heart. God blessed me first with the best parents possible.

Finally, let me thank Dr. Deanna Keith, my committee chairperson, for her tireless efforts on my behalf. I am thankful that God brought her into my life for such a time as this. Thank you also to Dr. Talada and Dr. Bonner who graciously agreed to serve on my committee. It has been a delight to work with you both and I pray God's richest blessings on you all as you go forth in your educational endeavors.

Lynn Bailey…

You have just successfully completed your doctoral dissertation defense…

What will you do next?

"I'm going to Disney World!"

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Chapter One: Introduction

Educators have never had difficulty identifying struggling learners in their classrooms. The general education curriculum has never seemed more challenging. All learners need varying degrees of intervention to aid their success. The use of the discrepancy model for the identification of learning disabilities was "institutionalized in 1977 when it was used to operationalize Learning Disability (LD) in the initial federal regulations for the Education for All Handicapped Children Act" (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005, p. 9). For many years the *discrepancy* model was the primary mode of identifying students who may need the most intensive interventions for an actual Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Students could qualify for special education "only if an assessment revealed a discrepancy between their aptitude and achievement" (Richards et al., 2007, p. 55) or if the learner demonstrated average or higher intelligence with an achievement gap of two standard deviations below the norm on a standardized achievement measure in one or more academic areas. In hindsight, there were two major criticisms of this method of SLD determination. First and most cruelly, the "wait to fail" model often takes years of documentation before the gap is wide enough for the learner to actually qualify for specialized intervention services. Secondly, the discrepancy model fails to "enhance services for students, particularly the provision of early intervention to struggling students" in the general education classroom (Richards et al, 2007, p. 56). By focusing on proving the deficits in learners, teachers unintentionally fail to focus on the interventions they need. Teachers inadvertently strive to produce failure as the end

product and self-fulfilling prophecy of the achievement gap that they so carefully document.

The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework addresses the criticisms of the deficit model by providing for the actual research-based interventions as part of the overall evaluation. Teachers were no longer forced to "prove failure" but instead they were encouraged to utilize scientifically-based teaching methods to promote academic success for all learners. If the student suffers with a true learning disability, students' deficits can be documented while they are enjoying the benefit of sound teaching practices in general education. Student progress does not inadvertently become a roadblock to the help they may truly need. If the gap between the learner's achievement and the achievement of the norm group is not closing, in spite of intensive, research-based teaching practices, the student may still be deemed eligible for specialized instructional services through special education. However, according to Burns and Ysseldyke (2005), although "positive outcomes for children were found, [they were] only [found] after extensive training and careful implementation" (p. 17).

Research Problem

Student Support Team (SST) and Response to Intervention (RTI) documentation are effective means of increasing student achievement and identifying learners who require additional specialized services. The goal of the research was to identify teacher perceptions of the SST process, meetings, and recommendations. This information will help determine how perceptions affect the teacher's participation in the process. Are the Student Support Team (SST) process and the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework

perceived by educators as an effective means of increasing student achievement and identifying learners who require additional specialized services?

Problem Statement

When general education students struggle academically or behaviorally, the classroom teacher is called upon to either manage the problem within the context of her classroom, seek the help of other professionals to problem solve and intervene through ideas gained through collaboration, or in the most serious cases seek additional specialized services for the learner. Teachers' perceptions of those choices might impact their decision for the learner. Realistically, teachers will at least consider how much trouble a process is as they choose their means of increasing student achievement and/or identifying learners who require additional specialized services.

Research Questions

This study was based on the belief that teacher perceptions of Student Support Team (SST) and Response to Intervention (RTI) may likely serve as influences in whether or not the teacher will choose to utilize them. Insight into teachers' perceptions was sought in the following areas:

RQ_1: What are teachers' perceptions of their familiarity with SST and RTI frameworks?

RQ_2: How adequate do teachers perceive their level of training to be and do they feel qualified to implement SST and RTI?

RQ_3: What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of SST and RTI?

RQ_4: What are teachers' perceptions of SST and RTI as they relate to eligibility for special education?

RQ_5: What do teachers perceive as the weaknesses of the frameworks?

RQ_6: What factors influences a teacher to decide not to refer students to SST for RTI data collection?

Null Hypotheses

Research questions 1-4 were addressed in the 21 statement, Likert survey as teachers selected their responses to statements about SST and RTI. Teachers selected one of five values ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. The researcher was curious to see if there would be a significant difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI related to any of the demographic information collected.

NH_1: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks in a school with a full time facilitator than in a school with a part time facilitator as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_2: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teachers' area of certification (i.e. general or special education) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_3: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teachers' level of education (i.e. B.S., M.Ed., Ed.S. or Ed.D.) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_4: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's years of experience (i.e. 0-5, 6-12, 13-19, 20+) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

Background of the Study

Response to Intervention (RTI) documentation is utilized by the Student Support Team (SST) to provide parents, teachers, and specialists with the data needed to create evidence-based instructional and behavioral strategies matched to student needs. The information gathered during this process is used to make educational decisions regarding the students' education plan and placement. The fundamental theory behind pre-referral or problem solving teams such as Student Support Team is to "intervene before problems reach a level of severity that demands evaluation for special education – hence the term pre-referral" (Bahr and Kavaleski, 2006, p. 2).

According to the Georgia Department of Education online SST Manual (2001), the Student Support Team consists of parents, teachers, and specialists who are charged with the duty of developing ideas which aid struggling students in achieving adequate yearly academic progress, increasing parental awareness and involvement, and providing intensive interventions when deficiencies in learning or behavior are noted" (p. 5). It is essential to determine the perceptions of the primary interventionists in this highly involved process to help determine the best ways to meet their needs and encourage their participation and perseverance.

For many teachers, the SST process is off-putting and has a negative connotation. Traditionally, the practice of referring a student to SST has been viewed as lengthy and

labor intensive for teachers. Teachers may be tempted to focus their energies on proving failure instead of providing sound interventions to the struggling learner. Historically, many teachers have used SST as a means of protecting themselves from future disparagement from colleagues or administrators as students passed feebly from grade to grade. Most often SST has been viewed as a means to secure eligibility for special education thus removing strugglers from general education classrooms. Ironically, "although these teams are clearly identified with the support of teachers in general education, the impetus for these teams has historically and pervasively been linked with special education" (Bahr and Kavaleski, 2006, p. 2).

For the student, being in SST has served as an alert to the next teacher that something may be going on because they have performed inadequately in the past. Students received minor adjustments and modifications to assignments in hopes of improving their grades. These minor modifications were often bandages hiding significant problems or covering the fact that real interventions were not being used. The goal for many students was simply higher grades instead of mastery learning of troublesome concepts.

The process has changed in Georgia. The state has moved away from looking at the fish (the student) and now looks at the fishbowl (the classroom practices). As teachers examine their pedagogy and shift their focus to progress monitoring a students' response to interventions (RTI), one cannot help but wonder what their perceptions were of the new process and how those perceptions may impact the teacher's willingness or eagerness to do the hard work of SST and RTI for struggling learners.

Student Support Team

Rankin and Aksamit (1994) stated, “Currently a majority of states require or recommend the use of pre-referral systems, placing the responsibility for establishing and implementing the process at the local school level” (p. 230). For teachers in Georgia, three extensive research-based initiatives have collided to form the framework used to address the needs of struggling learners: pyramid of intervention, student support team, and response to intervention. This review of literature seeks to describe the current research available regarding the fundamentals of the programs and systems associated with early intervention for struggling students in Georgia. This review will describe the processes; discuss the validity of the processes; and link the three major educational initiatives: tiered intervention, problem-solving teams, and response to intervention. Given the breadth and scope and the impact of each initiative on the teacher’s instructional planning and time allocation, the goal was to set the stage for a study of how actual working practitioners perceive these matters and their effectiveness for student achievement.

Response to Intervention

The Response to Intervention framework addresses the criticisms of the deficit model by providing for the research-based interventions as part of the overall evaluation. If the achievement gap is not closing, in spite of research-based instructional practices, the student may still be deemed eligible for specialized instructional services through special education. However, according to Burns and Ysseldyke, although “positive outcomes for children were found, [it was] only after extensive training and careful implementation” (2005, p. 17).

Professional Significance of the Study

The data from Lee-Tarver's (2006) study revealed several trends:

- schools routinely assign teachers to participate on SSTs; the survey revealed the need for training prior to that appointment
- teachers may be placed on SSTs on a pragmatic rotation basis instead of basing the decision on the actual qualifications or giftedness of the teachers
- teacher training institutions should provide more comprehensive training and experience in the area of student services to future teachers
- SST has been viewed as a "conduit for special education services" in the past
- teachers refer to SST for intervention assistance for students at risk
- parents are viewed as generally unaware of the benefit of SST and their involvement is often limited by the scheduling of meetings during the day when they are unavailable for participation due to work obligations
- Administrators should try to find creative ways to compensate and recognize teachers who participate in SST for the role they play in student achievement (p. 531).

Three years have passed since Lee-Tarver's original study and Response to Intervention has been in effect in the state of Georgia. SST plays "more pivotal role as federal and state regulations change and require more of our educational systems" (Lee-Tarver, 2006, p. 532). Teachers and specialists who compose the SST must be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Their perceptions and opinions can help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures. Any framework is only as effective as those who provide it. Understanding the intervention providers' perceptions

will affect student achievement by guiding counties and districts in the effective use of resources.

Overview of the Methodology

Design of the Study

This was a quantitative study replicating previous research by Dr. Aleada Lee-Tarver (2006) from Alabama State University and Drs. Joan Rankin (Erickson) and Donna Aksamit (1994) from the University of Nebraska which utilized a paper questionnaire survey to gather data about teacher perceptions of SST and RTI blended with two multiple-response questions regarding the perceived weaknesses and teacher considerations of each framework in Georgia. Dr. Lee-Tarver graciously granted permission to replicate her study and add the RTI statements. Two multiple-response statements have been developed and added to the end of the study to determine the teacher's perception of the greatest weaknesses and teacher considerations of the current SST and RTI frameworks in Georgia. The list of responses was derived from the conclusions section of Dr. Rankin (Erickson) and Dr. Aksamit's research. Dr. Rankin was also contacted and graciously allowed the researcher to use her findings in the new study.

The items replicated from the previous studies include teacher perceptions of statements regarding training and qualifications, attitude toward participation, and the relationship between SST and special education. Additional statements regarding the understanding and effectiveness of RTI were added to the original survey. There were 21 Likert statements. The final two multiple-response statements asked for the teacher's

opinion of the greatest weaknesses and teacher considerations of the current SST and RTI frameworks in Georgia.

Selection of Participants & Settings

Upon university level IRB review and approval, the investigator randomly selected several counties with public elementary schools from five geographic areas around the state and made contact with county and building level administrators for permission to solicit survey participation. All certificated staff in the designated schools were invited to participate in the perception survey.

Materials/Equipment

The perception survey has been designed to measure the attitudes of general education teachers regarding the SST process and RTI frameworks. The survey consists of 21 Likert scale perception statements and two multiple-response perception questions. Many of the original survey items from Dr. Lee-Tarver's study have been input with new statements regarding RTI and the two multiple-response questions. Survey questions fall into one of five general categories of inquiry:

- Nine statements of perceptions of effectiveness of SST and RTI regarding improved achievement
- Four statements of perceptions of the adequacy of training prior to implementation of SST and RTI
- Four statements of perceptions of the relationship between SST, RTI, and SPED eligibility
- Three statements of perceptions of general familiarity of teachers with SST procedures and the RTI framework

- Two multiple-response questions regarding perceived weaknesses and teacher considerations of current SST procedures and the RTI framework.

To help minimize ordering bias, the investigator will randomize the questions. The survey were printed and copied on paper for the respondents.

Data Gathering Methods

The researcher determined a designee at each elementary school that distributed and collected the paper responses. A max response count and cutoff date for the survey was pre-determined and printed on the individual surveys. A cover letter designed to provide informed consent, explain the purpose of the survey, and guarantee anonymity was also attached.

Demographic information such as respondents' area of certification, years of experience, highest degree attained, and whether the school has a full or part time SST facilitator was added to the survey. For statistical analysis, the raw data was collected and downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet format for disaggregation of each perception statement. The Excel data was imported to SPSS version 17 for statistical analysis. Two-tailed t-tests were utilized to determine any statistical difference in the means of responses from teachers with full time and part time SST facilitation in their schools and the two groups based on certification. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized to analyze any variance in the responses of teachers based on years of experience and level of education.

Instrumentation

Lee-Tarver's original questionnaire consisted of "demographic information and thirty-one questions concerning teacher participation and perception of the function and effectiveness of Student Support Teams" (2006, p. 527). This new investigation eliminated a few of the original SST statements and replaced them with teacher perception statements regarding Response to Intervention (RTI). The survey item response format was a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 to 4 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The survey contained 21 statements plus two multiple-response questions.

Sampling Procedures

Only certified general education teaching staff were invited to participate. Informed consent for participation and a written guarantee of anonymity in the perception survey were the first undertaking of the questionnaire. This was followed by the collection of demographic information from each participant. The SST/RTI perception statements and the two multiple answer questions followed. Of particular interest in the demographics section was the participant's level of education, years of experience, area of certification, and whether the participant's school had a full time or part time SST facilitator.

The certified teachers completed the Likert scale questionnaire and submitted their responses to the building level designee at a pre-determined location by a pre-determined deadline. The building level designee mailed the surveys to the researcher in a postage paid envelope for analysis. Data was saved on a password protected, external memory drive and on the investigator's computer, and the originals and hard copies were stored separately in a locked file cabinet for security.

An independent variable was the presence of either a full time or a part time SST facilitator. T tests were used to statistically analyze the significance of this factor.

Reliability Assessment Procedures

In the original study, the SST perception questions' "reliability analysis resulted in an alpha value of .89, demonstrating strong internal reliability of the questionnaire" (Lee-Tarver, 2006, p. 527). In consultation with Dr. Lee-Tarver, the investigator requested instruction and guidance as to how to replicate the analysis she conducted previously on the newly added statements regarding Response to Intervention (RTI) to insure smooth flow and procedural reliability. The analysis will be discussed in the statement validity section of Chapter 3.

In order to add additional statements to the pre-existing survey, the researcher worked to preserve the reliability of the original instrument while analyzing the new statements for validity. Perception statements should serve as a quantitative measure of teacher perceptions of SST and RTI effectiveness. The new survey items were linked to the research found in the literature review section.

Definition of Terms

Because school districts and counties in Georgia have been given great latitude in what they label their tiers of intervention, the survey will use the following terms for consistency across the state:

- ***General education*:** Students are afforded an education based on the Georgia Performance Standards without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for accommodations.

- ***Response to Intervention (RTI)*** is defined by providing for research-based interventions over time while progress monitoring the students response to those interventions. The state of Georgia recommends both duration and increased intensity of interventions to help ascertain whether a student needs further evaluation by a psychologist and/or an individualized education plan.
- ***Student Support Team (SST)*** is a collaboration of experts and interventionists to systematically problem solve and provide research-based interventions on behalf of struggling learners. The team may be known by a variety of names or acronyms, but their common function is to document interventions and the data collected for the purpose of monitoring students' achievement or lack thereof.
- ***Tiered intervention*****:** Struggling students are provided research-based interventions with graduating levels of intensity based on data collected over time. Students' failure to respond appropriately to academic and/or behavioral interventions would call for changing or increasing the intensity of research-based interventions on their behalf.

Summary

The state of Georgia recorded a steep decline in the number of students found eligible for many special education services in the first year of RTI implementation. According to a county email memo,

> There were almost 10,000 fewer students labeled as disabled from December, 2007 to December, 2008 (-5%) [in Georgia]. The biggest changes with significant numbers and percentages were in Speech

> Language Pathology (-16%), Severe Developmental Delay (+15%), Autism (+11%), Emotional Behavioral Disorders (-9%) and Mildly Intellectually Impaired (-8%) (P. Mellor, email communication, February 6, 2009).

While these numbers were interesting and promising, the concern for many in student services as personnel guard against over-identification of students with disabilities is that students are unintentionally under identified due to the perceived weaknesses or inconveniences associated with the SST process or RTI framework. Teachers often avoid the things that they perceive to be time or energy wasters in regards to instructional practices or duties and responsibilities. Students who struggle due to disabilities must be appropriately identified and interventions must be attempted to aid them. It is both a teacher's legal and ethical duty to identify struggling students, provide research-based interventions, study the responses of students to those interventions, and use the data created to best meet the needs of the learner so that they can be as successful as possible in school.

Teachers and specialists who compose the SST and conduct RTI should be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Their perceptions and opinions can help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Problem solving teams have been around for some time now. A cursory review of the literature reveals collaborative problem solving models as early as the seventies. Teams of teachers meeting to discuss academic and behavioral concerns are a proven method for assisting students who struggle. For many states, the Student Support Team (SST) serves as a neutral ground for parents, teachers, and administrators to meet to discuss student concerns and make plans for improvement. The notion of teaming together to blend the expertise of everyone involved is neither new nor unique to Georgia. Problem solving teams go by many names and acronyms but all seem to have the common objective of allowing the adults in students' lives to come together for the purpose of brainstorming solutions to the concerns that have been noted.

Through the years, the Student Support Team (SST) process has served a dual, if not contradictory role, in the lives of teachers and students. The original intent of problem solving teams was to aid in the reduction of the over-representation of minorities in special education. In other words, more heads were better than one when making the all important decision of whether or not a student had a disability or needed an individualized education plan (IEP). However, through the years, teachers simply turned SST into the means by which one must endure to get a child into special education. Teachers simply used SST to 'prove' deficits in learning. Given that the Discrepancy model for proving a specific learning disability (SLD) required such proof, which is what SST provided in great detail and across sometimes an entire academic year. Proving failure is easy; it is another thing indeed to actually intervene on behalf of a student for

the purpose of achievement; thus, the shift to a more proactive support framework, Response to Intervention (RTI).

Special education "pre-referral services…are most often provided in the form of pre-referral intervention teams" (Slonski-Fowler & Truscott, 2004, p. 2). As early as the 90's, a majority of states required or recommended the use of pre-referral systems, placing the responsibility for establishing and implementing the process at the local school level (Rankin & Aksamit, 1994, p. 230). Recent studies found that 69% of states mandate some form of pre-referral and 86% require or recommend pre-referral *teams*" (Truscott, Cohen, Sams, Sanborn, & Frank, 2005, p. 137). For teachers in Georgia, three extensive research-based initiatives have collided to form the framework used to address the needs of struggling learners. This review of literature seeks to describe the current research available regarding the fundamentals of the programs and systems associated with early intervention for struggling students in Georgia. This review will describe the processes; discuss the validity of the processes; and link the three major educational initiatives: tiered intervention, problem-solving teams, and response to intervention. Given the breadth and scope of each and the impact of each initiative on the teacher's instructional planning and time allocation, the goal is to set the stage for a study of how actual working practitioners perceive these matters and their effectiveness for student achievement.

Theoretical Framework

Collaborative Problem Solving

Collaborative problem solving is the construct on which the Student Support Team is based. Collaborative problem solving is defined as "a systematic approach with

which a problem is conceptualized and identified, factors that contribute to the problem are analyzed, interventions are designed, and strategies are implemented and evaluated" (Burns, Vanderwood, & Ruby, 2005, p.92). According to Burns et al, the underlying assumptions of a collaborative problem solving approach are the beliefs that all children can learn; working together is more beneficial than working alone, and that the emphasis must be on problem solving not problem finding or labeling.

The Student Support Team is charged with advising the teacher regarding instructional methods and research based interventions to try with the struggling learner. RTI seeks to eliminate the classroom and/or teaching practices as the root cause or perpetuator of the academic or behavioral struggles.

Learning Theory

Several theories of learning serve as foundational elements for why states and districts have elected to utilize a problem solving model for Response to Intervention (RTI). Gagne's Conditions of Learning theory ascribes the notion that "different instruction is required for different learning outcomes" (Kearsley, 2010). Student Support Team advocates also borrow from Bruner's Constructivist Theory in that they believe that "instruction must be concerned with the experiences and contexts that make the student willing and able to learn (readiness), must be structured so that it can be easily grasped by the student (spiral organization), and finally should be designed to facilitate extrapolation and or fill in the gaps (going beyond the information given)" (Kearsley, 2010).

Just as Howard Gardner states in regards to Multiple Intelligences, Response to Intervention (RTI) advocates think "individuals should be encouraged to use their preferred intelligences in learning and instructional activities should appeal to different forms of intelligence" (Kearsley, 2010). The differentiation of classroom learning activities to support learning for all abilities is paramount to early intervention efforts.

As students rise through the pyramid of interventions to increasingly intensive levels of intervention, some principles serve as foundational to "why" one would wish to repair the factors causing poor academic achievement. Van Lehn's Repair theory asserts that the "bugs that cause errors in procedural tasks are systematic and can be identified" (Kearsley, 2010). This serves as the theoretical framework for school personnel's desire to repair academic glitches. Repair theory asserts that "once the bugs associated with a particular task are known; they can be used to improve student performance and the examples used to teach the procedure" (Kearsley, 2010).

At the same time, the Student Support Team often includes recommendations for the teacher for behavior modification methods to try with a struggling student. Behavior problems may be overt and disruptive or may include the symptoms associated with attention deficit disorders. Once again, RTI seeks to eliminate the classroom learning environment and/or teaching practices as the root cause of the behavioral struggles.

Often, behavior management techniques promote Operant Conditioning as theorized by B.F. Skinner to reduce unwanted behaviors and train students to consistently produce appropriate behaviors that make the learning environment safer and better for everyone in the class. Skinner believed that "behavior that is positively reinforced will reoccur and that intermittent reinforcement is particularly effective". He also believed

that direct instruction could be more beneficial when "information is presented in small amounts so that responses can be reinforced (shaping)" (Kearsley, 2010). Tier 3 interventions are often based on these theoretical ideas.

Finally, because this study revolves around the educator's perception of student support and their role in the provision of research based interventions, it was appropriate to address the less quantifiable aspects of the art of teaching. A teacher's personal philosophical worldview and ideology are critical to improving student achievement. Strong teachers embrace a theoretical framework that pushes them to constantly strive to improve their methods and eagerly seek to collaborate with fellow practitioners who excel at certain dimensions of classroom teaching or behavior management. According to Guthrie, "the most effective instructional practices of the teacher are, therefore, influenced by the theoretical framework" and she believes that theory drives practice and that "the effectiveness of the teaching style is verified in the student outcome -- improved student achievement" (2008, p. 29). She goes on to define what constitutes good teaching as a combination of innate ability, measureable skills, acquired practices, and learning the tenets of sound learning theory. Finally, she includes the teacher's mindset and the actual student as factors which contribute to "the mastery of the art of teaching resulting in improved student achievement" (2008, p. 29). The practitioner's mindset and perspective can make or break the intervention process for a struggling student before it is ever begun.

Previous Research

Pyramid of Interventions

Tiered levels of "coordinated and systematic intervention and assessment activities" (Brown-Chidsey, 2007, p. 42) are the first step in moving toward valid early identification of students with true disabilities. Research and experience remind us that "…the earlier the intervention, the better the outcomes for students identified as being at risk for academic problems" (Brown-Chidsey, 2007, p. 42). According to Speece, Case, and Molloy, it is "only by systematically strengthening the quality of instruction and measuring a child's response to that instruction that inferences can be made about the possibility that child deficits or disability contribute to learning difficulties" (2003, p. 137). The tiers represent graphically the increase in the intensity of services available to students who are resistant to interventions.

The results of a brief, universal screening aid the teacher in the placement of students on the pyramid. The screening must be designed to accurately classify who is at risk and who is not at risk. Jenkins, Hudson, and Johnson (2007) conducted a comprehensive comparison study of previous research to establish cross-validation of results and to look for criterion validity and classification accuracy of the individual screening measures in the area of reading which tends to be the area most commonly identified for intervention by teachers. Criterion validity "examines relations between performance on a screening measure and an established measure of reading" (Jenkins et al., 2007, p. 583). This gives information as to the potential of screens. Classification accuracy is the "feature of a screening measure to accurately classify students as at risk or not at risk for poor outcomes" (Jenkins et al, 2007, p. 583). They also recommend the need and value of combining multiple measures as opposed to single-measure screeners.

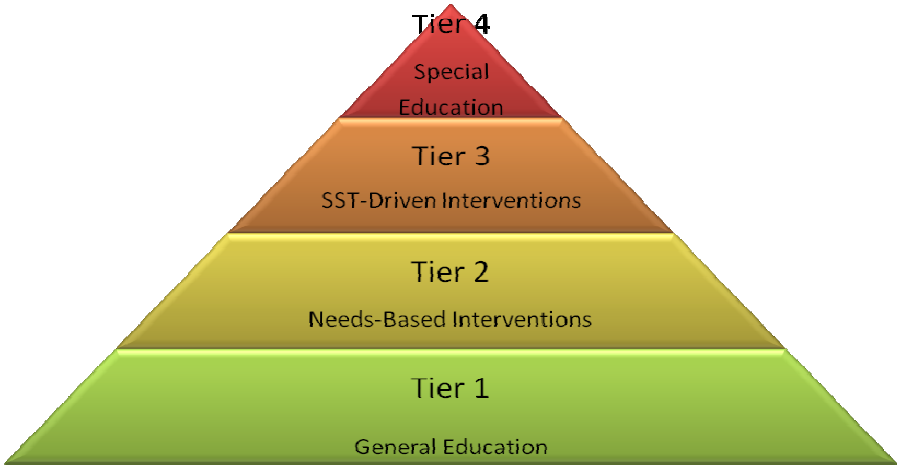
The concern for educators is the lack of resources (i.e. time, expense, and personnel) needed to do this.

Students are already tested frequently in the general education classroom. Teachers need more time to teach those who struggle, not more time devoted to assessment. Screening and other forms of assessment do not directly improve achievement, instruction does. The implication is clear, excessive screening can take valuable time away from instruction. The core curriculum in general education must be effective and the evidence ought to show that most students are learning. When screening evidence detects a problem with the core curriculum, schools must address the problems associated with the general education instruction or content. Once known instructional concerns have been resolved, students who are not learning and not making progress can be reliably identified for more intensive interventions.

The Georgia Pyramid of Intervention (Figure 1) is a visual representation of the stages of intervention that schools should attempt for struggling learners in general education. The pyramid illustrates the layers of instructional efforts that should be provided to students according to their individual needs. It is a conceptual framework developed by the Georgia Department of Education that provides intensifying support for all students to achieve in school. Each school district is responsible to design and implement a pyramid that contains the supports available within their schools. The state of Georgia's pyramid has four distinctive levels of intervention; however, districts and schools are at liberty to break or blend the tiers into more discreet levels as warranted. The visual size of each tier is proportional to the percentage of students served at each

level. Fewer students need the more intensive interventions provided at the top of the pyramid.

Figure 1



For most students, the Tier 1 general, standards-based curriculum taught with research-based instructional methods is adequate for academic progress. Cheney et al. remind us that in order to "capitalize on the positive effects of early intervention, schools must accurately and efficiently identify their at-risk students and provide them with services in early elementary grades" (2008, p. 109). Pugach and Johnson further caution that simply moving students through the tiers alone will not have an effect on improvement, "changes will also be needed in curriculum and school structure" for the leveled tiers to be effective (1989, p. 223).

For several students, Tier 2 needs-based interventions may be necessary to bolster their academic or behavioral progress. This "double dose" of instruction may be provided in a smaller group setting by a specialist trained to remediate and accelerate learning. Federal and state funding is available to provide this resource for students. School guidance providers may provide instruction through class lessons, small group, or

individualized counseling for students in behavioral distress. English language learners (ELL) may qualify for classes to work on vocabulary and expressive or written English practice. Many schools provide resourceful, extra opportunities for needs-based interventions with after school tutoring programs and/or mentors for students who need support at Tier 2. With the arrival of the RTI framework, it is not uncommon to find speech-language pathologists, behavior interventionists, and school psychologists observing in classrooms for the purpose of making collaborative recommendations to the general education teacher to improve learning for struggling students at this lower level of intervention. The sharing of their expertise in the area of concern is of great value to the general education teacher. This is long overdue and will reap great rewards for struggling learners who may be able to achieve without moving up the tiers to SST or special education. According to Carney and Stiefel, the movement of students through the tiers is based on the belief that "timely provision of instructional interventions can alter 'educational trajectories' and dramatically reduce the numbers of children requiring long term (i.e. special education) remediation services" (2008, p.62).

SST-driven instruction at Tier 3 begins with a multi-disciplinary team that uses a problem-solving process to study the educational needs of individuals who are experiencing academic and/or behavioral difficulties. The goal of the Student Support Team is to include all adults in students' academic lives who may be able to aid in the interventions including administrators, counselors, teachers, and specialists.

Most importantly the parent or guardians are needed to help provide insight and expertise. The SST provides individualized support for students at Tier 3 of the Pyramid of Interventions, documents previous and recommends future research-based

interventions, conducts progress monitoring, scrutinizes assessment data, and collects Response to Intervention feedback to determine if the interventions have been successful or need to be reconfigured. The Student Support Team works most effectively when all stakeholders are involved in the process and decisions are driven by the results of the most up-to-date information.

The Student Support Team can aid with academic, behavioral, speech, hearing, vision, and/or motor concerns. Students may remain at Tier 3 if interventions are effective or they may move back down the pyramid if the educational or behavioral gaps fill over time. The Student Support Team at Tier 3 may also consider or recommend additional evaluations by school psychologists, behavior interventionists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, or school-level counselors. The Student Support Team typically has access to basic screening instruments and curriculum based measures available to assess ability, achievement, attention, and/or behavior problems which can be administered and scored by certified teachers or administrators.

Early intervention is the hallmark of most problem solving teams. Universal screenings often help identify students who are at-risk for academic failure. Most teams require an up to date hearing and vision screening at the onset of any SST case. Student Support Team facilitators often have the ability to call in county level or building level experts or make referrals to interventionists or specialists available within a district to seek needed assistance for a struggling student or weary teacher in need of innovative ideas.

Finally, if RTI data shows failure to respond to sound interventions, a student may be referred to special education for further evaluation for possible speech therapy,

specific learning disabilities, or emotional or behavior disorder identification. At the core of successful identification of students with disabilities is the "notion that outcome evaluation of evidence-based, multi-tiered interventions should comprise part of the overall assessment process" (Carney & Stiefel, 2008, p. 61).

Student Support Team (SST)

Just as there was considerable research on the topic of the effectiveness and types of Response to Intervention (RTI), there are many studies devoted to the effectiveness of problem solving teams that validate its use as a research-based intervention for struggling learners (McNamara & Hollinger, 2003; Slonski-Fowler & Truscott, 2004; Rankin & Aksamit, 1994; Burns et al, 2005). The collegial nature of problem solving teams "reduces the isolation that typically characterizes the work of many classroom teachers" (Pugach & Johnson, 1989, p. 222).

According to the Georgia Response to Intervention Manual, the Student Support Team (SST) is defined as a "multi-disciplinary team which utilizes a problem-solving process to investigate the educational needs of students who are experiencing academic and/or behavioral difficulties" (2008, p. 15) in the general education classroom. Student Support Team is required in every Georgia public school and uses a data-driven process to plan individualized supports and interventions and the method of assessing their effectiveness.

Some studies note the lack of evidence of improvement for students and increased number of referrals to special education resulting from the problem-solving model (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 94). The Fuchs research goes on to reveal that the "personalized nature of assessment and intervention is both a potential weakness as well as a strength"

because it "presupposes considerable expertise among practitioners in assessment and intervention" (2006, p. 95). Research by Kovaleski (1999, p. 182) suggests that the problem solving team model is occasionally an ineffective system due to variables such as poor organizational procedures, insufficient leadership, inadequate interpersonal communication skills, and/or inadequate meeting logistics. The ingenuity of the team or lack thereof may influence the quality of the interventions proposed. Slonski-Fowler and Truscott (2004, p. 4) further describe "the length of the process, the documentation required by the team, and the lack of programs for students who are not referred to special education" as other factors that serve to frustrate teachers and undermine the process. They add that SST can quickly become a venue to "collect information to convince the school psychologist that referred students need special services" if the team leader allows it instead of working to intervene effectively for students at the lower tiers.

Another weakness of the problem-solving model is that interventions may or may not be evidence-based. A team may brainstorm a few new ideas to try or simply tweak old ones. The absence of expertise and the time to meet and really analyze problems are hindrances. Teachers may be disinclined or incapable to perform truly different teaching methods from those already in place. Interventions are ineffective when implemented with poor fidelity. Evaluative procedures must be in place to measure the skills of the interventionist. Fidelity problems occur when no one checks on the teacher's efficacy in using the strategy or program. Teachers naturally tend to blame the student rather than seriously consider instructional issues. By turning a blind eye to fidelity and professionalism, students' needs are not served.

Some schools enjoy the luxury of a standard program or protocol for use with students who struggle in a particular area. However, for schools that do not have a research-based standard protocol, the problem-solving model (known as the Student Support Team in Georgia) is frequently implemented. Effective problem solving teams rely heavily on the capability of the general education teacher as interventionist, the expertise of specialists, and the validity and strength of the research-based intervention proposals for struggling learners. Good problem solving teams are highly organized and follow rules that are pre-determined long before the first meetings occur. Interventionists require training and professional development on specific methodologies to be implemented. According to Hilton, "beyond the initial training for implementation, teachers need ongoing in-service – along with supportive policies and leadership – if they are to be successful" (2007, p. 17). Teacher mentoring, classroom observations, professional development, and monitoring for the fidelity of the execution of intervention strategies are vital to SST success. Training, step-by-step procedures, and monitoring improve fidelity of implementation.

The majority of research conducted on Instructional Support Team (IST) focuses on the efforts of states in the Northeast or Midwest. The IST framework in Pennsylvania is well documented and was first implemented to serve "as a bridge between special and regular education programs" (Kovaleski et al, 1996, p. 44) when Pennsylvania experienced an "unprecedented increase in the numbers of students being identified as eligible for special education services by over-identification of students as having LD" (Kovaleski & Glew, 2006, p.17). When the IST concept was first developed, the state of Pennsylvania's Department of Education placed great emphasis on "…on-site training

and support services which allow district personnel to participate without the schools incurring additional costs" " (Kovaleski et al, 1996, p. 45). This emphasis would indicate that professional development was considered key to the program's effectiveness. The problem-solving model's implementation is thoroughly documented for replication in other states by Kovaleski and Glew (2006). The IST framework is very close in design to the Georgia Student Support Team (SST). The research from Pennsylvania suggests that IST implementation has significantly reduced special education placements, retentions in grade, and that problem solving teams are "…a cost–effective, efficient, transportable, and durable way to help teachers ensure that special needs students can succeed in the regular classroom" (Kovaleski et al, 1996, p. 47).

The state of Georgia first implemented the Student Support Team (SST) in 1984 as a commitment by the state to the federal district court to address possible disproportionate representation of minorities in special education as a result of Marshall vs. Georgia. The Georgia State Board Rule 160-4-2-.32 defines and requires all Georgia Public schools to form Student Support Teams for the purpose of assisting general education students who struggle academically or behaviorally. The SST was originally "designed to provide support to the student and teacher through a collaborative approach and is based on the premise that 'two heads are better than one' when developing plans for students who are having difficulty in school" (Georgia DOE Online SST Manual, 2001, p. 5).

The SST Process consists of six stages that focus on learner needs and increased parental communication:

1. Gathering of Information

2. Assessment and Evaluation of Data

3. Development of Educational Plan

4. Implementation of Educational Plan

5. Evaluation of Progress

6. Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation

The team consists of at least three members and they may be an administrator, counselor, general education teacher, special education teacher, school social worker, parent, ESOL teacher, school psychologist or others, as appropriate. Members of the SST are generally chosen because of their specific knowledge of the student in question; however some schools opt to form a permanent SST who deals with students regardless of their personal involvement. Districts have the freedom to design their SSTs according to their resources and needs. Teams may be formed at the request of administration, parents, teachers, or students. There are no time restrictions for SST and the proposed interventions may be attempted for as long as necessary to determine their effectiveness.

The SST may be formed without parental consent; however parental notification and invitations to meet with the SST are both beneficial and required by law. Parents must give consent for any screenings, assessments or evaluations in which a student is singled out from their peers such as ability, achievement, or attention. Universal screenings such as hearing and vision may be administered to grade levels by trained school personnel without express written consent.

The SST may request evaluation for special education services if certain conditions are met. The general teacher must attempt “reasonable classroom interventions of sufficient duration without success and the documentation reveals that

the cause of the problem is suspected to be a disability that cannot be resolved without special education services" (Georgia DOE Online SST Manual, 2001, p. 10).

SST records are protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). FERPA is a federal law that applies to schools, educational agencies, or institutions that receive federal education funds. The law addresses requirements to protect the privacy of parents and students.

A primary concern of the SST is "that learning has occurred as a result of the quality of the service" (Kovaleski et al, 1999, p. 180). In his research on the effectiveness of high versus low implementation of Instructional Support Teams (IST), Kovaleski cites that when an interventionist has been charged with the duty of intervening on behalf of a struggling learner, it is vitally important to "implement a program with high integrity in order to maximize program effectiveness" (1999, p. 180). In other words, they must intervene in the way the author or the developer intended and researched.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

According to the Georgia Response to Intervention Manual, RTI is defined as

> 'a practice of academic and behavioral interventions designed to provide early, effective assistance to underperforming students. Research-based interventions are implemented and frequent progress monitoring is conducted to assess student response and progress. When students do not make progress, increasingly more intense interventions are introduced." (2008, p. 13).

Although no one specific framework exists for RTI implementation, the common agreement is that true RTI provides for two specific things: research based instructional practices (which include interventions for those who struggle) and progress monitoring to verify the learner's response to instruction or interventions. Research based instructional strategies are the core of classroom teaching and RTI process" seeks to ensure that student difficulties do not stem from instructional deficiencies (Carney & Stiefel, 2008, p. 61). The evidence-based interventions utilized are based on progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is a scientifically based instructional practice that is used to assess students' academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a method that utilizes ongoing assessment data to help determine if struggling students are benefiting from research-based interventions. The procedures aid in reducing over-identification of disabilities due to subjectivity and variability and maintains "emphasis on high-quality, evidence-based practice to provide an alternative to special education" placement (Mastropieri, et.al., 2005, p. 529). SST serves as the decision making body for instructional planning. The SST helps determine the allocation of instructional resources based on student assessment data.

RTI is probably most identified with instructional planning for reading or math achievement concerns; however, its efficacy with behavioral interventions is also well documented in research. Interventions for students with behavioral or attention concerns may be school-based, classroom-based, or individually administered. RTI data collection practices can aid with the quantitative statistical analysis of whether an "…intervention

reduces students' at-risk status and helps prevent the development of emotional and behavioral disabilities" (Cheney et al, 2008, p. 108). Research suggests that school-wide interventions and positive behavior support systems sustain students' emotional, behavioral, and social needs by providing them with consistent access to positive caring adults, multiple opportunities for success, plenty of positive feedback from teachers, greater acceptance in the school environment, and constant reinforcement of positive social behaviors. Simultaneously, RTI is useful for identifying non-responders who need more intensive interventions and may be eligible for special education support. When the reduction or prevention of behavior problems is the goal, RTI data can help determine how students are truly responding to the behavior intervention.

Valid screening measures are integral to the success of RTI and SST instructional planning. For example, to determine which reading interventions are needed for struggling readers, educators need to know variables such as "…measures of expressive and receptive vocabulary, sentence imitation, story recall, working memory, and attention which may have predictive value, especially in forecasting reading problems" (Jenkins et al, 2007, p. 598). Research also identifies the need for and value of combining multiple measures as opposed to single-measure screeners.

Relationship between SST, RTI, and SPED

In the past, SST has been viewed as a "conduit for special education services" whereas now teachers refer to SST for "intervention assistance for students at risk" (Lee-Tarver, 2006, p. 531). Hartman and Faye (1996) studied the instructional support model for cost effectiveness compared to the previous framework used to identify learning disabilities and found it to be worth the resources.

There is no definitive rule for when an SST should refer a student for evaluation for special services. "Students are different and the progress a student makes under an effective SST plan is unique. However, a special education referral should be considered at any time that the SST, the classroom teacher, or students' parents have reason to believe that the student may have a disability" (Georgia DOE Online SST Manual, 2001, p. 58). According to McNamara and Hollinger, the interventions provided to the student are to be "of such a unique and extraordinary nature and intensity" (2003, p. 181) that the failure to respond to those interventions clearly indicates a serious problem.

Although special education teachers are not specifically prohibited from participation in SST, educators must carefully consider individual situations in which a "specialist" might be requested to attend a certain SST meeting for a particular student. One research model, the Early Learning Success Initiative, utilized a support team to "work with classroom teachers to determine students' instructional ends and to design intervention and monitoring plans" (Sornson, 2007, p. 42). "Specialists may include special education teachers, administrators, school psychologists, or any other individuals with specialized training who can provide recommendations or insight about the student" (Georgia DOE Online SST Manual, 2001, p. 58). Nevertheless, SST is distinctly different from special education and parents need to clearly understand that their child is not participating in special education classes without an evaluation or individualized education plan (IEP). Confusion on this issue may undermine the success of the SST by causing misgivings and distrust.

Federal policy states that schools must verify a disability through "a process that determines if a child responds to scientific, research-based interventions as part of

evaluation procedures" (Carney & Stiefel, 2008, p.73). For this reason, Georgia utilizes the Student Support Team to prescribe interventions and collect the RTI.

McNamara & Hollinger (2003, p. 192) warn problem solving teams like SST that "absent a commitment to effective intervention-planning, the time-consuming and half-hearted process of sifting through a series of inadequate and inappropriate interventions" can hardly be perceived as an efficient use of resources or time. According to these researchers, interventionists must instead implement "progressively more sophisticated interventions until an effective approach has been identified."

When an evaluation for special education is complete and a student is found eligible for service, the documentation from SST becomes a framework for IEP goal writing. A student with an IEP no longer requires the Student Support Team for educational planning and collaboration and the SST is immediately dismissed. If a student is not found eligible for service from special education, the SST may continue to collaborate and intervene for as long as deemed necessary.

RTI / SPED Eligibility

Students who fail to respond to intensive, research-based interventions are eligible for further evaluation by a school psychologist for possible eligibility for specialized services at Tier 4. The principle behind RTI is that "students are identified as LD when their response to validated intervention is dramatically inferior to that of peers" (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007, p. 14). Earlier intervention and a stronger focus on prevention through research-based instructional practices are positive benefits of the RTI framework which impacts students who will qualify for services and for the ones who do not. Speece et al.

(2003, p. 148), notes that although the task can seem daunting, the benefits of RTI in regards to the identification of students with true disabilities are many:

- less reliance on teacher referral or bias thus reducing false negative identification of disabilities
- a shift in focus to academic behavior rather than processing weaknesses
- a shift in focus to growth in performance
- the elimination of the IQ-achievement discrepancy model for identification of learning disabilities
- fewer false-positive identification of disabilities
- the potential improvement of general education for all children

The research from the Fuchs and Fuchs goes on to challenge those in special education to meet the needs of "students who prove unresponsive to RTI's preventative intervention who deserve a revitalized special education tier to address their serious disability" (2007, p. 18). Special education is after all the fourth and most intensive tier of intervention for students who struggle.

RTI is often touted for its ability to reduce the number of special education referrals due to the early intervention for struggling students and the progress monitoring which allows for constant evaluation of instructional practices. However, McNamara and Hollinger offer a word of warning that "reductions in evaluation rates may be an inadequate or inappropriate goal for reform initiatives, especially if they reflect a loss of access to services needed by children who have disabilities or who are at educational risk" (2003, p. 183).

Teacher Training / Professional Development

Teachers hold the primary responsibility for student achievement in the SST process and RTI framework. Because the role is vital to students' successful interventions, professional development is needed on a thorough and consistent basis. For schools which routinely assign teachers to participate on SSTs, the research repeatedly reveals the need for training prior to that appointment. Studies also identify that teachers may be placed on SSTs on a pragmatic rotation basis instead of basing the decision on the actual qualifications or giftedness of the teachers. Pre-service teacher training institutions are also called upon to provide more comprehensive training and experience in the area of student services to future teachers.

The teacher's role in SST and RTI is critical to its success. They are charged with "implementing team recommendations and controlling the instructional environment" (Slonski-Fowler & Truscott, 2004, p.3). Professional development must not only address the SST and RTI processes but should also include best practices for instructional effectiveness as well.

Hauerwas and Goessling also make the case for utilizing para-educators in the RTI intervention process. They feel that it is "important to include teacher assistants in all school-wide training, with additional follow-up just for them" (2008, p. 8). They are not to be the only interventionist, but "rather should be viewed as an integral part of the intervention team" (2008, p. 11).

Speece et al. reminds us in her study that "close examination is needed of research-based interventions that can be realistically and reliably implemented by general education teachers" (2003, p. 155). Improved student achievement as a result of the SST problem-solving model relies on certain critical research to practice elements: "research-

based general education interventions, the professional development necessary to ensure faithful implementation, and knowledge of the relationship to child outcomes" (Speece et al, 2003, p. 155).

Resource Commitment / Time

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a time intensive endeavor to provide early intervention to struggling learners in the general education classroom and has come to the forefront of education reform efforts in recent years with both federal legislation and state initiatives promoting the use of RTI. Administrators, specialists, teachers, and school psychologists are learning how to best manage the data-driven documentation process for RTI and early intervention. "Schools may want to consider extended year or extended day contracts, a lighter teaching load or fewer administrative duties, SDU credits, and/or stipends" (Georgia DOE Online SST Manual, 2001, p. 11).

Behavioral interventions are especially challenging even for teachers who thrive meeting instructional challenges. The data collection is often anecdotal and requires vast amounts of a teacher's most precious and elusive commodity: time. The demands of data driven functional assessment are sometimes considered to be so complex that they are found to be "…unrealistic to expect special education teachers, not to mention general education teachers to assume the role of managing multiple students" (Maag & Larson, 2004, p. 35). Often the severity of the students' behavior plays a central role in a teacher's determination of whether the SST effort is worth it to "officially" alter positively the behaviors of the students who need assessment. Behavioral interventions often require costly human resources such as 1:1 collaboration between specialists and teachers which may include classroom observations, data collection at prescribed

intervals, and thoughtful reflection and recounting of triggers and responses. Documenting the frequency and duration of behavior problems for RTI is time consuming and repeatedly diverts the teacher's attention away from other students' educational needs.

As experts discuss the criteria for academic and behavioral interventions, "they would be wise to consider questions regarding the efficacy, reliability, validity, and utility of RTI prior to wide-scale adoption" (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005, p. 530). Misidentification, under-, or over-identification must be avoided as this directly impacts those most in need of our aid.

Roles of Stakeholders (Administration, Parents, Teachers)

Many states, districts, counties, and schools have been strongly encouraged to implement Response to Intervention practices in an effort to correct past wrongs committed such as failing to offer appropriate early intervention and the mis- or over-identification of students with disabilities. Teachers and interventionists can be perplexed by recent changes in procedures. Administrators are often poorly trained to implement RTI procedures and documentation and struggle to propose a framework that is both effective and user-friendly. When those who supervise the changes know little about the service delivery model, information becomes murky and procedures are tainted thus invalidating the results which affect student eligibility decisions. School personnel must be "strategic in systematically applying and evaluating locally the utility of specific practices" (Glover & DiPerna, 2007, p. 537).

"The effectiveness of SST and RTI are "greatly reduced when administrators and/or teachers see the process as being simply a paperwork requirement with which they

must comply" (Georgia DOE Online SST Manual, 2001, p. 11). Previous research admonishes administrators to find creative ways to compensate and recognize teachers who participate in SST for the role they play in student achievement. Kovaleski reminds us that "schools that demonstrate high levels of implementation were observed to have in place not only the basic features, but also such aspects as strong principal leadership…" (1999, p. 182). The structure and organization of any initiative affects how others perceive it. Proactive preparation for RTI "will lead to its smooth implementation and the ultimate sustainability of RTI as an effective force for students who are at risk for failure" (Hilton, 2007, p. 16). Superintendents and building level administrators need extensive training and a working knowledge of RTI in order to support those who are charged with implementing the framework.

In the past, parents have been judged as generally unaware of the benefit of SST and their involvement is often limited by the scheduling of meetings during the day when they are unavailable for participation due to work obligations. Anything that schools can do to work with parents to include them in decision making at all tiers will be beneficial to the student. Parents almost always desire what's best for their children and often feel inadequate to the task when achievement or behavior problems are noted. When parents feel welcome and are asked for their input, the defenses come down and the "team" is better informed of how to help the learner. The meeting facilitator plays a vital role in making the SST inviting and friendly to visiting parents. The overuse of educational jargon, acronyms, and stating only the "negative" comments about the learner must be avoided in order to improve communication with parents. When relations break down between home and school, the learner suffers. Parental consent for screenings and further

evaluations are sometimes needed in order to move the process forward for a child in need. Repairing the damage created when the parent withdraws from the process is difficult. Once again, a proactive attempt to keep the SST appealing and welcoming is the best route. School officials must always be vigilant in efforts to be completely honest and straightforward about concerns noted, but it can be done in a way that does not cause offense.

Teachers and specialists who compose problem-solving teams must be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Highly effective implementation of problem-solving teams is characterized by the "involvement of a support teacher to establish and fine-tune strategies that are selected by the support team" (Kovaleski et al, 1999, p. 182).

Pugach and Johnson (1989, p. 220) describe consultation with special educators as "another method of solving problems informally, before time-consuming formal referrals are made." SST would certainly profit from an organizational framework that provides for consultation with special educators throughout the process so that classroom teachers might provide immediate assistance to struggling students. Slonski-Fowler and Truscott (2004, p.2) describe the ultimate goals of the problem solving team as "provid[ing] effective general education support for students who are difficult to teach, prevent[ing] erroneous special education placements, reduc[ing] the over-identification of students for special education, and mak[ing] service provision more efficient by the elimination of the special education determination process."

Teacher buy-in is crucial to the effective implementation of the pyramid of intervention, SST, and RTI frameworks. Hilton states that the "implementation of

change by a teacher is most likely to occur when the change fits in with the teacher's beliefs or teaching style, the approach helped the most difficult-to-teach students, and when teachers receive supportive training" (2007, p. 18). Districts and schools must make the case to teachers that POI, SST, and RTI all meet those objectives and are worthy endeavors for increasing student achievement.

RTI / Special Populations

Today students who are new to the United States and in the midst of English language acquisition present especially challenging problems for school officials in determining SLD. English Language Learner (ELL) education is grossly underfunded given the growing numbers of foreign students entering American schools. Many schools offer minimal service to ELL students which in turn provide modest information for the general education teacher who is struggling to discern and distinguish limited English proficiency from an actual learning disability. The symptoms are "shared and difficult to disentangle" (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008, p. 13). Data-driven, curriculum based assessments, and research based instruction helps build a meaningful, comprehensive representation of the learner that can be assessed for a learning disability. RTI is especially promising for those students because of the emphasis on how learners are progressing compared to their peer group. Research warns us that "…tests and other evaluation materials must not be racially or culturally biased" and "tests and other evaluation materials should be administered in the child's native language or other mode of communication" (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008, p. 11). Great caution must be exercised as test data is interpreted and analysis of all data, including discrepant pieces, must be

considered when determining eligibility and constructing the individualized education plan (IEP).

This unique group of students is already present in American schools with more on the way. It is safe to assume that some of them will arrive with little or no educational background, little or no English proficiency, and possible learning disabilities. Our task is to disentangle these factors to provide free, appropriate, public education to all learners on the class roll. To increase the rate and level of learning for English Language Learner (ELL) students, general and ELL teachers must work closely to set realistic goals and provide on-going instruction and assessment which helps identify the learner's true needs. Further research is needed to examine practical steps that districts can take to address the diverse language needs of the area. When formal testing needs to be offered in the native language, finding the qualified personnel to administer and interpret assessments is especially challenging. General education teachers with little or no training in ELL are called upon to begin to provide measurable, research-based interventions for struggling ELL students. These concerns must be addressed for RTI to be valid in the planning of effective instruction and the reliable identification of disabilities.

Effectiveness of SST/RTI

The SST process is known for the volume of documentation that is collected over time to adequately represent the success or failure of interventions attempted. Documentation must be teacher friendly and efficient while meeting the legal requirements and providing information for future teachers. The emphasis of the tiered interventions must be research-based teacher practices which help the SST avoid the

misdiagnosis of disability for students who may simply be instructional casualties. In order to truly identify a disability, poor instruction must be eliminated as an explanation or cause.

"Many indicators can show success of the SST process, from teacher satisfaction to pre- and post-test student performance. One inferential measure of effectiveness is the placement rate for initial referrals to special education. An eighty percent placement rate is considered extremely good and indicates a highly successful process" (Georgia DOE Online SST Manual, 2001, p. 11).

The most important factor in the degree of success experienced by an SST is the attitude with which school personnel view the process. SST is most effective when it is looked upon as a team process for supporting the teacher and student.

According to the Georgia DOE Learning Support SST web page, benefits of an effective SST process often include the following:

- higher graduation rate
- better test scores
- fewer students retained in grade
- better attendance (by both teachers and students)
- less teacher turnover
- better discipline
- ready-made needs assessment data on teacher training needs
- more parent involvement
- more successful inclusion of special education students in regular classes

Teacher Perceptions of SST and RTI Effectiveness

It is unclear why teacher perceptions of the SST process have not been researched significantly to date. Schools and teachers across the nation implement pre-referral interventions and collaborate in teams to serve the needs of struggling learners. Common sense tells us that the teacher has a great impact on the process of intervening in the lives of struggling students. The study by Lee-Tarver (2006) on which this research proposal was based was the only study found to date which measures actual teacher perceptions of SST as opposed to many that measure the effectiveness of the team or the interventions. The perception-related studies located tend to focus on building the teacher's capacity to utilize RTI (Richards et al, 2007); sustaining a problem-solving team model (Grimes et al, 2006); the long-term results of the problem-solving team or IST (Carney & Stiefel, 2008); the general lack of administrative visibility or support on problem-solving teams (Rafoth & Foriska, 2006); and the importance of implementing supports and interventions with great integrity and fidelity in order to "maximize program effectiveness" (Kovaleski et al, 1999, p.180). All of these factors certainly influence teacher perceptions, but the teacher's actual perceptions of SST and RTI effectiveness have not been a main concern in recent literature.

Slonski-Fowler and Truscott (2004) conducted extensive research in the area of teacher perception of the pre-referral process. In their study, they found three consistent themes which could impact a teacher's willingness to undertake the RTI process and subsequent referral documentation. An analysis of the teachers in the study revealed perceptions that their input was devalued or ignored by the team, the intervention strategies were limited and lacked clarity, and there was little accountability for implementation or outcomes. They concluded that "elementary teachers' perceptions of

the pre-referral process are especially critical because most substantive learning problems and difficult behaviors are first observed in the early grades and educating difficult-to-teach and special education students is increasingly the responsibility of general education teachers" (p. 3).

Teacher attitude or receptiveness toward RTI has been shown to influence results (Elium & Samson, 2008). Teachers are often identified as most concerned about the increase in quantity of the workload and job description changes. They are also concerned about inadequate support and assistance from their administration and district with implementation and they wonder to what degree RTI will improve services for students. Rankin and Aksamit (1994, p. 253) offer an excellent reminder to those who facilitate SST,

> If problem-solving teams are to become viable options for schools as a means of better serving students in general education and reducing the number of students referred to special education, individuals responsible for the development and implementation of the process must assess and be sensitive to the attitudes and beliefs of various participants in the process, knowledge, and skill level of team members and teachers must be aware of the available and needed resources as factors that impact the success or failure of this process.

With these identified concerns in mind, it was important to focus at least some consideration on probably the single most influential group involved in a problem-

solving team approach designed to increase student achievement, the practitioners who implement the interventions: teachers. What they perceive matters and they deserve a voice in the educational research world in regards to the effectiveness of SST and RTI implementation.

Conclusion

Lee-Tarver (2006, p. 531) notes that "as pressure for academic success increases, more and more students will be referred to SSTs". This implies that the SST is vital for designing instructional plans and strategies that assist teachers and learners. Many schools use SST not only in the identification of students with disabilities who need more intensive interventions, but also to help disabled students step down from special education classes back into general education for less intensive interventions. SST will play "…a more pivotal role in the future as federal and state regulations change and require more of our educational systems" (Lee-Tarver, 2006, p. 532).

Teacher perceptions of SST and RTI are critical to their successful implementation for improved student achievement. When teachers evaluate the personal Cost: Benefit ratio in regards to planning for and delivering intensive interventions, meeting with parents and specialists, and completing the documentation and paperwork with the numerous other duties and responsibilities they have, are SST and RTI worth it? When evaluating for professional development, are teachers only being trained to implement research-based instructional practices which benefit the greatest number to the exclusion of practices which target specific populations? Are teachers choosing not to refer students to SST for realistic, self-protection motives which have nothing to do with the individual needs of specific students? Do teachers believe that schools can

effectively streamline the process so that it is less daunting while still fairly evaluating the student and not risking violating students' personal rights to free and appropriate public education?

Research reminds us repeatedly that early intervention is paramount to student achievement. The decision to strategically intervene for struggling learners begins and ends with the general education teacher's willingness to "do the hard work". Understanding their perception of the process will benefit administrators and professional development providers as they strive to prepare teachers and impart the benefits of these initiatives to faculties far and wide. One by one, struggling learners who need intensive interventions, benefit from the SST and RTI process by receiving the help they deserve in a systematic fashion. The frameworks are only as effective as those who provide them. Understanding intervention providers' perceptions will affect student achievement by guiding counties and districts in the effective use of resources.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design, the methodology, the data collection, and the data analysis procedures used in this study. The chapter is divided into eight sections including an introduction, the design of the study, the instrumentation, a description of the demographics, discussion of the data collection and analysis, assurances of content validity and reliability, and an analysis.

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate teacher perceptions of the Student Support Team model and Response to Intervention frameworks in Georgia. The survey items include teacher perceptions of statements regarding training and qualifications; attitude toward participation; the relationship between SST and special education; and the understanding and effectiveness of RTI. Basic demographic information was collected about each participant as well as their opinions of any perceived weaknesses of the frameworks and reasons a teacher might choose not to refer a struggling student to SST for RTI.

Design of the Study

This was a quantitative study replicating previous research by Dr. Aleada Lee-Tarver from Alabama State University and Drs. Joan Rankin (Erickson) and Donna Aksamit from the University of Nebraska which utilized a paper questionnaire survey to gather data about teacher perceptions of SST and RTI blended with two multiple-response questions regarding the perceived weaknesses and teacher considerations regarding each framework in Georgia. The researcher worked with Dr. Lee-Tarver to

add new RTI statements to the original SST perception statements from the original questionnaire. Dr. Lee-Tarver graciously granted permission to replicate her study and add the RTI statements. Two multiple-response statements have been developed and added to the end of the study to determine the teacher's perception of the greatest weaknesses and personal considerations with regard to the current SST and RTI frameworks in Georgia. The list of responses was derived from the conclusions section of Dr. Rankin (Erickson) and Dr. Aksamit's research. Dr. Rankin (Erickson) was also contacted and graciously allowed the researcher to use her findings in the new study.

There were four demographic questions and 21 five-point Likert scale perception statements. The final two multiple-response statements asked for the teacher's opinion of the greatest drawbacks of the procedures and insight into teacher decision making about making referrals to the Student Support Team (See Appendix A). The research instrument was named the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

Instrumentation

Lee-Tarver's original questionnaire consisted of "demographic information and thirty-one questions concerning teacher participation and perception of the function and effectiveness of Student Support Teams" (2006, p. 527). This new investigation eliminated a few of the original SST statements and replaced them with teacher perception statements regarding Response to Intervention (RTI). The survey item response format was a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The Bailey Tarver SST/RTI survey contained 21 statements plus two multiple-response questions.

Survey Instrument

Surveys in general do not provide all the information needed on the topic, because there were far more questions than most respondents want to answer. Although a longer survey produces more information, the more risks the researcher takes. The twenty one statement perception survey with two multiple-responses was chosen purposefully to encourage a higher response rate, avoid measurement error caused by respondent's rushing to finish a long task, and circumvent negative attribution or refusal to participate in yet another long or useless survey.

Because respondents can become tempted to stop discriminating between questions and simply answer all of them on the high or low end of the scale, the researcher has taken care to keep the survey short and succinct. Likert scales were chosen to combat this tendency by reversing the scale values, making low responses favorable and high responses unfavorable. A five point Likert scale was chosen to force respondents to have an opinion on each statement and the researcher does not give them the option of a neutral midpoint or non-answer.

Survey Definitions

Because the survey was short, the construction was simple and straightforward. Teacher perceptions of SST and RTI were the focus of the survey statements. The statements were research derived and the Likert scale provides a way to quantify the teachers' responses. The content validity describes whether the survey construct was good. A valid survey should measure what they say they measure. The important aspects of the topic were being measured in a very limited way. The content validity was established through the researcher's personal experience with Georgia SST and RTI and the reliability of the research that has preceded this study.

The researcher provided simple definitions of terms on the cover page of the survey to limit the negative effect of educational jargon or specialized terminology between school districts within the state. The survey cover page includes the following statement,

> Because school districts and counties in Georgia have been given great latitude in what they label their tiers of intervention, this survey uses the following terms for consistency across the state:
> ✓ **General education**: Students were afforded an education based on the Georgia Performance Standards without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for accommodations.
> ✓ **Special education**: Students were afforded an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for academic or behavioral modifications due to the presence of a diagnosed disability that negatively impacts their education.
> ✓ **Tiered intervention**: Struggling students were provided research-based interventions with graduating levels of intensity based on data collected over time. A student's failure to respond appropriately to academic and/or behavioral interventions would call for changing or increasing the intensity of research-based interventions on their behalf.
> ✓ **Student Support Team (SST)** is a collaboration of experts and interventionists to systematically problem solve and provide research-based interventions on behalf of struggling learners. The team may be known by a variety of names or acronyms, but their common function is to document interventions and the data collected for the purpose of monitoring a student's achievement or lack thereof.
> ✓ **Response to Intervention (RTI)** is defined by providing for research-based interventions over time while progress monitoring the students response to those interventions. The state of Georgia recommends both duration and increased intensity of interventions to help

> ascertain whether a student needs further evaluation by a psychologist and/or an individualized education plan.

The researcher took special care to avoid ambiguous phrasing, unfamiliar language, complex phrasing, inflammatory language which might create a negative emotional response, leading phrases, loaded questions, or overestimation of respondent understanding.

Complete anonymity of survey respondents allowed for candid responses. Respondents need not fear being identified as trouble makers or non-team players. The surveys were completely confidential with limited demographic questions posed. The survey itself was distributed and collected at each location by an administrator or designee. They were given the materials needed to assure anonymity of the respondents and were only charged with the responsibility of reminding the school staff to complete and return the surveys by the appointed deadline.

Sampling Procedures

Only certified general education teaching staff were invited to participate. Informed consent for participation and a written guarantee of anonymity in the perception survey was the first undertaking of the questionnaire; followed by the SST/RTI perception statements; the two multiple-response questions; and finally the collection of demographic information from each participant. Of particular interest was the participant's level of certification, years of experience, area of certification, and whether the participant's school has a full time or part time SST facilitator.

The certified teachers completed the Likert scale questionnaire and submitted their responses to the building level designee at a pre-determined location by a pre-

determined deadline. The building level designee mailed the surveys to the researcher in a postage paid envelope for analysis. Data was saved on a password protected, external memory drive and on the investigator's computer, and the originals and hard copies were stored separately in a locked file cabinet for security.

Independent variables included both the presence of either a full time or a part time SST facilitator and the respondent's area of certification (general or special education). T tests were used to statistically analyze the significance of these factors.

Variables

The independent variables in this study were the presence of either a full time or a part time SST facilitator for each school surveyed and the area of certification of the respondent (general or special education). Many schools have a facilitator who shares the responsibility of student support among other duties and some schools utilize grade level representatives to oversee the process. These factors may produce different perceptions than teachers in schools who have a designated person to share the load and handle questions and concerns. The respondent's area of certification could influence their perceptions.

Population

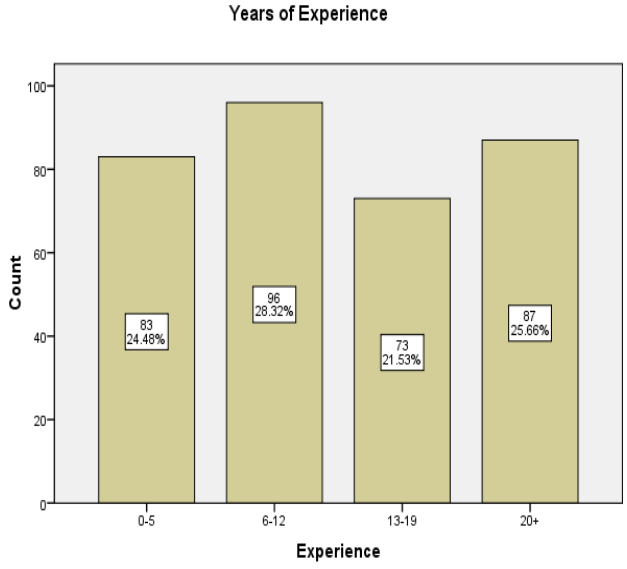
The sample of teachers in this survey study represent the over 50,000 elementary teachers around the state of Georgia. Both general and special educators were invited to participate in this study. The following sections analyze breakdowns of the demographic information of the 342 respondents from seventeen Georgia elementary schools.

Years of Experience

The sample of schools had a very even breakdown of teachers with varying years of experience. It would appear that teachers were remaining in the classroom to offer their rich knowledge that comes through years of classroom experience. It can sometimes appear that the best and most talented teachers with the most years of experience leave the classroom to move into leadership or administrative duties. However, according to this sampling of Georgia teachers, it would appear that the schools and their teachers were well represented across the "years of experience" demographic.

As displayed in Figure 2, twenty-eight percent of the samples respondents had 6-12 years of experience (n=96) with the next largest group having twenty or more years of experience (n=87). Twenty four percent of the respondents had 0-5 years of experience (n=83) and the smallest group in the sample had 13-19 years of experience (n=73).

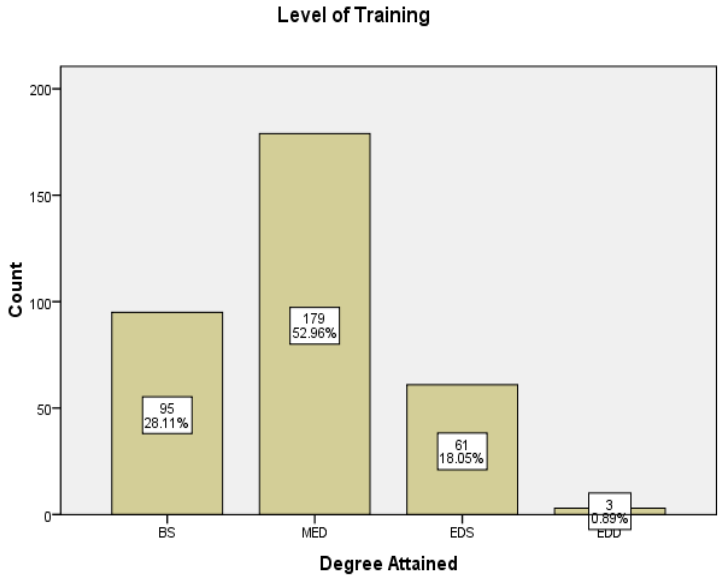
Figure 2



Level of Training

Although most of the teachers within the sample have done graduate work to earn advanced education degrees, the sample was clearly dominated by the group who has earned their Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree. As displayed in Figure 3, fifty-two percent of the respondents have attained the M.Ed. graduate degree (n=179). Twenty-eight percent of the teachers retain their original Bachelor of Science (B.S.) undergraduate degree (n=95). Only eighteen percent of the respondents aspired to work on a six year Education Specialist (Ed.S.) graduate degree (n=61). Less than 1% of the respondents within the sample have their doctorate (Ed.D.) graduate degree (n=3).

Figure 3



Area of Certification

Although the number of general educators was obviously disproportionately higher in any school around the state when compared to special educators, the number of respondents with special education certification was unusually low within this sample. Many of the respondents who identified themselves as certified in special education may

have struggled to rate the statements on the survey because they were generally not involved in the Student Support Team or RTI data collection. One could assume that special educators felt ill-equipped to judge the survey statements because these processes were typically at tier three on the pyramid of intervention in most districts whereas special education is tier four. Many of the surveys completed by those with special education certification were frequently marked "no opinion" and/or included hand written notes to the researcher that they could not reasonably answer certain items.

Figure 4 displays that within this sample of Georgia elementary teachers, 89% of the respondents were general educators (n=274). Almost 11% of the respondents were certified in special education (n=33).

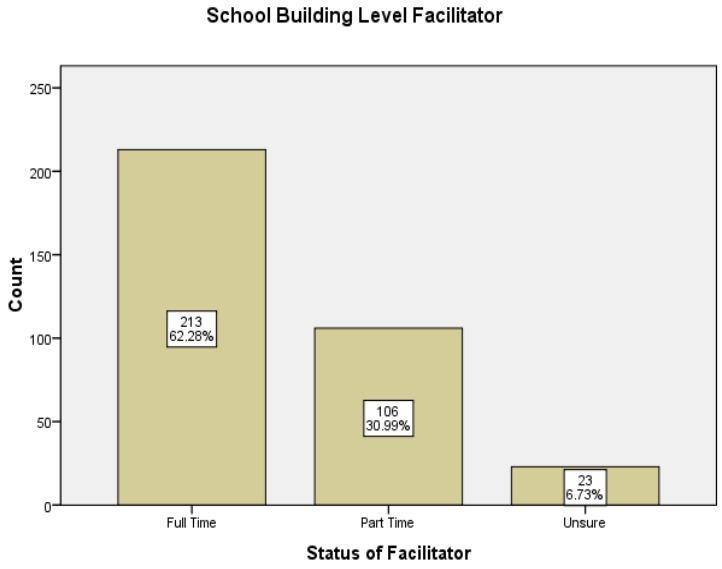
Figure 4

School Level Facilitator

Some Georgia elementary schools have a designated Student Support Specialist or RTI Specialist to facilitate SST and RTI full time and some schools designate an

administrator or other personnel to facilitate SST and RTI part time among their numerous other duties. Most of the respondents in this study work in schools that have a full time SST and/or RTI facilitator on staff. Figure 5 demonstrates that 62% of the survey respondents report having a full time facilitator (n=213) available to assist with SST and RTI. Almost 31% of the respondents have a person who facilitates SST and RTI in a part time capacity (n=106) and shares those responsibilities among various other jobs at the school. The researcher found it interesting that almost 7% of the respondents were unsure (n=23). That number was probably actually a little higher than reported in that the researcher did not correct what appeared to be errors on the respondent's surveys and input the data exactly as it was returned. There were several surveys that marked a response for this item that seemed out of sync with the rest of the school's responses.

Figure 5



Data Collection Procedures

Upon university level IRB review and approval, the investigator randomly selected several counties with public elementary schools from five geographic areas around the state and made contact with county and building level administrators for permission to solicit survey participation. Using a map of the state of Georgia with all 159 counties displayed, the researcher used a highlighter to drop onto the paper near the top, bottom, both sides, and in the middle. The county that was marked and all counties that touched its borders were contacted and asked to participate in the research.

Survey Participants

The superintendents in the clusters of school districts were emailed inviting them to participate in a survey study and asking for the name of the district level IRB contact person. Many of the counties responded to the first inquiry by either forwarding the email to the appropriate person within the district or replying to the researcher with the person's contact information. Several of the school districts replied that they were not interested in participating in the study and several failed to reply at all. A follow up email was sent to the district level IRB person in the interested counties requesting permission to survey within their county. Documents such as a draft of the survey instrument and/or the college IRB approval were provided when requested. If the county required a special request to research packet to be completed, the researcher submitted those as directed by local guidelines. Most counties granted permission via email. Three of the counties sent actual letters granting permission. The emails and scanned copies of the letters granting permission to research were submitted to the college IRB via email as required by Liberty University.

Research Setting

Counties were randomly selected from a map of Georgia by regions (north, south, east, west, and central), were contacted, and were asked to allow the survey administration in at least one elementary school located within the county.

Of the randomly selected counties invited to participate, nine districts agreed to participate. For reasons unknown to the researcher, one district agreed to participate, but neither the building level contact nor administrator would correspond with the researcher with the logistical information needed to mail the surveys to them even after repeated attempts to get the needed information. For this reason, the district did not receive any surveys or participate in the research. From the eight remaining districts, seventeen elementary schools were surveyed. Many of the school districts were very specific that they could not be identified by name in the research and they would withhold permission without a guarantee of anonymity. Therefore, none of the names of the participating districts were identified due to the guarantee of anonymity by the researcher to many districts.

All certified general and special education teachers were invited to participate. Some Georgia elementary schools have a designated Student Support Specialist to facilitate SST full time and some schools designate an administrator to facilitate SST part time among their numerous other duties. This information was collected in the demographics portion of the perception survey.

Survey Materials

The perception survey (See Appendix A) was designed to measure the attitudes of general and special education teachers regarding the SST process and RTI frameworks. The survey consisted of 21 Likert scale perception statements and two multiple-response

perception questions. Many of the original survey items from Dr. Lee-Tarver's study have been input with new statements regarding RTI and the two multiple-response questions. Survey questions fall into one of five general categories of inquiry:

- Nine statements of perceptions of effectiveness of SST and RTI regarding improved achievement
- Four statements of perceptions of the adequacy of training prior to implementation of SST and RTI
- Four statements of perceptions of the relationship between SST, RTI, and SPED eligibility
- Four statements of perceptions of general familiarity of teachers with SST procedures and the RTI framework
- Two multiple-response questions regarding perceived strengths and weakness of current SST procedures and the RTI framework

To help minimize ordering bias, the investigator randomized the questions. The survey was printed and copied on paper for the respondents.

Research Methods

The researcher asked the district level IRB contact both for school suggestions within the district that might be willing to participate in the study and for a building level contact name for each school suggested. Many times, the district level IRB contact either provided an administrator's name or the building level SST or RTI facilitator's name. Given this information, the researcher solicited help at the elementary school level and confirmed a contact person at each elementary school to distribute and collect the paper

responses (See Appendix B). Both emails and phone calls were utilized to request help with survey distribution and collection at each school. Once the list of building level contact persons was established, an email was sent asking the contact person for a school-specific mailing address and the number of certificated personnel (minus counselors, media specialists, paraprofessionals, and administrators) on campus so that the surveys could be prepared and shipped to the school. Surveys were printed and packaged by the researcher. They were shipped by the postal service via priority mail to each elementary school to the attention of the building level contact person. An email was sent on the day of shipment so that the building level contact would know to expect it.

Inside the package, the building level contact found a cover letter (See Appendix C), the number of surveys requested (plus three extra), a postage-paid return envelope, and a small token of appreciation for their help. The small token of appreciation was a writing instrument with a personal thank you note. The building level contact's name and the cutoff date for the survey was pre-determined and printed on each individual survey. A cover letter designed to provide informed consent, explain the purpose of the survey, and guarantee anonymity was also attached. The researcher's email address and phone contact information were included in case the building level contact person needed assistance or had questions.

Each building level contact person received written instructions to distribute the printed surveys to all certificated teachers in the building and they were reminded that the survey was designed for special and general educators who deal directly with struggling learners who may need SST or RTI documentation. For clarity, a list of personnel who were not to receive the survey was explicitly stated (i.e. counselors, media specialists,

paraprofessionals, and administrators). The contact persons were told to distribute the surveys as-is to affected personnel on Monday, November 2, 2009 and collect them on or before Friday, November 6, 2009. They were also instructed that if a faculty meeting was already scheduled for that week, they were welcome to distribute and collect at that setting.

To assure anonymity, the building level contact was asked to pull apart the two stapled sheets so that the researcher could not match the consent forms (which had their names on it) to the surveys. All surveys were returned in the correct condition apart from the consent forms. They were also asked to please return at least 75% of the completed surveys. The surveys were to be placed inside the postage paid envelope and returned to the researcher within three days of completion of the survey.

Survey Return Rate

The researcher sought to establish a good rapport with the building level contact at each survey site. Ultimately a good completion and return rate of the surveys was as a direct result of the building level representative's persuasive abilities among the faculty and her resolve to return the surveys as arranged. In the cover letter (Appendix C), the building level contact was given directions about the distribution and collection of the surveys to faculty within their building. They were also provided with a small token of appreciation, the researcher's contact information in the event of a concern or problem, the requested number of pre-printed surveys, and a self-addressed, postage-paid return envelope. Table 1 outlines how many surveys were sent by and returned to the researcher.

Table 1 Survey Return Rate

School	Sent	Return	Percentage

A	30	27	90%
B	25	22	88%
C	47	27	57%
D	50	9	18%
E	31	10	32%
F	35	15	43%
G	32	13	41%
H	30	17	57%
I	52	34	65%
J	47	27	57%
K	57	42	74%
L	40	18	45%
M	38	14	37%
N	27	18	67%
O	40	8	20%
P	37	21	57%
Q	30	20	66%
TOTAL	648	342	53%

The 53% return rate was impressive given the unexpected plunge of teacher morale statewide as a result of the economic woes Georgia schools and teachers faced in the fall of 2009. Georgia schools and teachers had to deal with unprecedented budget cuts due to the failing national and state economies which included furlough days, salary cuts, and larger class sizes. Asking teachers to add another task to their already busy days was risky and the researcher was concerned that the return rate might not be adequate if weary teachers simply refused to participate. It was with much indebtedness to the hard-working, persevering teachers around Georgia, that the following analysis of survey results was even possible.

Demographic information such as respondents' years of experience, area of certification, highest degree attained, and whether the school has a full or part time SST

facilitator was collected for comparisons. The survey data was first input into an Excel spreadsheet and then exported to SPSS 17 for statistical analysis of each perception statement. T-tests were utilized to determine any statistical difference in the means of responses from teachers with full time and part time SST facilitation in their schools and teachers certified for special or general education. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the difference in means for statements from teachers according to years of experience and highest degree attained.

Data Analysis

The items on the survey were grouped in one of four sections to probe the research questions outlined in this study. The five point Likert scale allowed for teachers to mark their responses anywhere from Strongly Agree (SA) or Agree (A) to Disagree (D) or Strongly Disagree (SD). There was also a response of No Opinion (NO) available. The researcher input the data exactly as recorded by the respondent. When an item was left blank, a response of No Opinion (NO) was calculated. There were 342 participants (n=342) in the perception survey.

Variability

For statistical analysis purposes, the circled responses for survey items 1-21 were assigned a number value. As the researcher recorded the responses from each survey in a spreadsheet, the conversion was made. The numerical values ranged from SD (1), D (2), NO (3), A (4), to SA (5). By using these numbers, the calculated means provided a snapshot of the perceptions of the group represented. A smaller mean represents more *disagreement* while a larger mean represents more *agreement* with the statement. The means closer to three mean a more neutral stance of *no opinion*. There was an exclusive

range of five for survey items 1-21. The calculated mean for each item reflects the average of the number values assigned. The standard deviation (SD) is the average amount of variability or how much the individual's score differs from the mean. A larger standard deviation (SD) reflects that the responses are more spread out and perceptions among teachers vary to a larger degree.

Content Validity and Reliability

Since the survey was an amalgamation of two previous pieces of Student Support Team (SST) research with brand new survey statements regarding Response to Intervention (RTI), it was wise to validate the survey prior to sending it out to the randomly selected schools. The primary advantage of this approach was to identify any unanticipated problems prior to the actual administration, both maximizing the effectiveness and the validity of the actual research findings. According to Page (2002), "pretested survey statements have a much better chance of holding up under subsequent statistical analysis and were less likely to require the kind of extensive rewording which would make them invalid."

Local field testing at two elementary schools was utilized to establish internal consistency and the reliability of the instrument was validated through Cronbach's Alpha testing. Permission from the building level administrator was sought prior to the pre-test. Results were studied for typographical errors, item analysis, and to insure the survey was clear and concise to the affected audience. A team of educators (n=13) who have experience implementing RTI through SST were selected to both proofread the survey and answer the survey statements. The team consisted of veteran elementary teachers. Editing and written comments gave important insight to the researcher about the ability

of the instrument to measure what it was intended to measure. The terminology used in the consent, cover letter, and survey was both common and understandable to the targeted participants. The feedback and editing suggestions were synthesized and some helpful changes were made.

In the original study, the SST perception questions' "reliability analysis resulted in an alpha value of .89, demonstrating strong internal reliability of the questionnaire" (Lee-Tarver, 2006, p. 527). In consultation with Dr. Lee-Tarver, the investigator requested instruction and guidance as to how to replicate the analysis she conducted previously on the newly added statements regarding Response to Intervention (RTI) to insure smooth flow and procedural reliability.

In order to add additional statements to the pre-existing survey, the researcher worked to preserve the reliability of the original instrument while analyzing the new statements for validity. Perception statements should serve as a quantitative measure of teacher perceptions of SST and RTI effectiveness. The new survey items were linked to the research found in the literature review section.

When eliciting responses to a survey, it is important to know that the instrument being used always elicits consistent and reliable responses. When the responses generated from a survey return a constant response, then the survey statement is said to be reliable.

According to Santos (1999), "the question of reliability rises as the function of scales is stretched to encompass the realm of prediction." One of the most popular reliability statistics in use today is "Cronbach's alpha" (Cronbach, 1951). Cronbach's alpha is used to "determine the internal consistency or average correlation of items in a

survey instrument to gauge its reliability" (Santos, 1999). Santos (1999) further states that alpha coefficient ranges in value from 0 to 1 and may be used to describe the reliability of factors extracted from survey scales (i.e., rating scale: 1 = poor, 5 = excellent). The higher the score, the more reliable the generated scale is. Nunnaly (1978) has indicated 0.7 to be an acceptable reliability coefficient but lower thresholds were sometimes used in the literature. Each survey statement was evaluated for reliability utilizing Cronbach's alpha.

Cronbach's Alpha correlates the score for an item with the total score for each individual and compares that to the variability present for individual item scores. The reliability of the survey was calculated as $\alpha = 0.809$. This Cronbach's alpha value deems the survey reliable because researchers tend to follow the guideline that alpha should be at least 0.7 ($\alpha > 0.7$). The value generated was both positive and large which means the instrument had sound psychometric properties.

Survey Statement Validity

The survey was designed to take the concepts of SST and RTI and examine teacher's perceptions of them in a quantitative or measurable way. The categories, sub-categories and statements provide for measurement with a Likert rating scale. The individual statements were designed to assess specific attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors which describe their category.

In survey research, the objective is building the case for "convergent validity." In its most accurate sense, convergent validity means "using information from a variety of sources to support each other, and triangulate on a research finding" (Page, 2002). In other words, when the data from several different sources all point to the same trends and

were telling the same story, one can have real confidence in the inferences and conclusions.

In the review of literature, several themes emerge that lend themselves to teacher perceptions of the processes known as SST and RTI. Dr. Lee-Tarver's original survey items were also subdivided into common themes such as teacher familiarity with SST and RTI; adequacy of training and teacher qualification to implement SST and RTI; effectiveness of SST and RTI; and the relationship between SST, RTI, and special education.

With these themes in mind, the researcher sought to pose perception statements that relate directly to these matters. Since Response to Intervention (RTI) has entered Georgia Student Support since Dr. Lee-Tarver's original study, her survey items that dealt with parent involvement were eliminated from the survey and statements regarding RTI were added.

In an effort to gauge teacher's perceptions in their own words, the researcher sought to pose two multiple-response questions at the end of the survey to the respondents to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the SST process in Georgia. However, open-ended questions within the context of a quantitative study would be almost impossible to account for all of the possible responses and quantify those into a coherent perception. Therefore, the researcher chose to use Dr. Rankin's (Erickson) and Dr. Aksamit's findings from their study of teacher perceptions of team coordinators, members, and teachers to provide a controlled number of research-based responses that could influence a teacher to refer a student to SST. By utilizing her previously found conclusions, the researcher avoids answers outside the scope of the study or outliers

which have no connection to previous research. The review of literature identified and provided support that these teacher perceptions influence SST and RTI and have been studied extensively. Reliance on previous research to formulate the survey statements promotes confidence and provides convergent validity in that the statements have been carefully composed from the conclusions of previous research. The following tables identify the literature that supports the perception statements from the survey and serve to validate the survey statements and lend content validity.

RQ_1: What were teachers' perceptions of their familiarity with SST and RTI frameworks?

The first research question deals with teachers' perceptions of their familiarity with SST and RTI (See Table 2) Although SST has been around since the late 80's, the tiered intervention model is relatively new to Georgia and schools have been given complete autonomy in how they utilize the structure to identify struggling learners and support their needs. The provision of targeted intervention, the progress monitoring, the paper documentation, and the support team meetings were all part of the teachers' responsibility to the struggling student. It is important to understand the teachers' perceptions of these responsibilities to better meet the professional learning needs of the general and special education teachers within the school.

Table 2 Teacher perceptions of familiarity with SST and RTI

Item Number	Survey Statement	Justification in Literature

Item #1	I am familiar with the tiered intervention model which provides more intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (RTI).	Carney, K.J., & Stiefel, G.S. (2008). p. 61 Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3
Item #5	I am familiar with the purpose and operation of the Student Support Team (SST).	Carney, K.J., & Stiefel, G.S. (2008). p. 62 Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). P. 219-220 Rankin, J.L., & Aksamit, D.L. (1994). P. 230 Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 4
Item #6	I consider the paperwork and documentation required for the Student Support Team (SST) as part of my intervention on behalf of the student.	Carney, K.J., & Stiefel, G.S. (2008). p. 62 Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 3
Item #20	The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework prolongs the Student Support Team (SST) process unnecessarily.	Carney, K.J., & Stiefel, G.S. (2008). p. 61 Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3 Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 3

RQ_2: How adequate do teachers perceive their level of training to be and do they feel qualified to implement SST and RTI?

It is vital that the teachers and specialists who compose the SST be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Their perceptions and opinions can help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures. Any framework is only as effective as those who provide it. Understanding the intervention providers' perceptions

will affect student achievement by guiding counties and districts in the effective use of resources (See Table 3)

Table 3 Teacher perceptions of adequacy of training and qualifications to implement SST and RTI

Item Number	Survey Statement	Justification in Literature
Item #2	I received adequate training prior to serving on the Student Support Team (SST).	Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 222
Item #3	I received adequate training prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)	Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3 Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 222
Item #11	It is my responsibility to provide the interventions for students in Student Support Team (SST).	McNamara, K., & Hollinger, C. (2003). p. 192 Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 220 Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 3
Item #12	It should be the responsibility of others to provide the interventions and document the Response to Interventions (RTI).	Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3, 8 McNamara, K., & Hollinger, C. (2003). Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 220 Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 3

RQ_3: What were teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of SST and RTI?

Research shows that Student Support Team (SST) and Response to Intervention (RTI) documentation were effective means of increasing student achievement and identifying learners who require additional specialized services. Teacher perceptions affect the teacher's participation in the process (See Table 4) Are the Student Support Team (SST) process and the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework perceived by educators as an effective means of increasing student achievement and identifying learners who require additional specialized services?

Table 4 Teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of SST and RTI

Item Number	Survey Statement	Justification in Literature
Item #16	Most general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework.	Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3 Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 221 Rankin, J.L., & Aksamit, D.L. (1994). p. 231, 234 Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 2, 3
Item #7	I must remain actively involved in the SST when I refer a struggling student.	Georgia Student Support Team Online Manual (2001)
Item #8	Research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common classroom practices for struggling learners in the general education setting.	Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3 McNamara, K., & Hollinger, C. (2003). p. 192
Item #9	Careful attention to paperwork and documentation are critical components of the intervention process.	Georgia Student Support Team Online Manual (2001) Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 221

Item #10	The Student Support Team (SST) meetings are beneficial to me as I seek to give aid to the student.	Georgia Student Support Team Online Manual (2001) Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 220
Item #13	The Student Support Team (SST) meeting is vital for inviting parental input into the intervention plan.	Georgia Student Support Team Online Manual (2001) Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3 Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 221
Item #14	The Student Support Team (SST) meeting should generate fresh ideas for research-based interventions for struggling learners.	Georgia Student Support Team Online Manual (2001) Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3 McNamara, K., & Hollinger, C. (2003). p. 192 Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 220 Truscott et al., (2005). p. 138
Item #15	My input at Student Support Team (SST) meetings is both valued and desired.	Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 3
Item #21	I am supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework and believe it to be effective for helping struggling students.	Hauerwas, L.B., & Goessling, D.P. (2008). p. 3 McNamara, K., & Hollinger, C. (2003). p. 192 Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 221 Rankin, J.L., & Aksamit, D.L. (1994). p. 231, 234 Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p.

2, 3

RQ_4: What were teachers' perceptions of SST and RTI as they relate to eligibility for special education?

The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework addresses the criticisms of the deficit model by providing for the actual research-based interventions as part of the overall evaluation. Teachers no longer have to "prove failure" but instead they utilize scientifically-based teaching methods to promote academic success for all learners. If students suffer with a true learning disability, students' deficits can be documented while they are enjoying the benefit of sound teaching practices in general education. Student progress does not inadvertently become a roadblock to the help they may truly need. (See Table 5)

Table 5 Teacher perceptions of the relationship between SST, RTI, and SPED

Item Number	Survey Statement	Justification in Literature
Item #17	The Student Support Team's (SST) primary purpose is to move students toward special education.	Burns, M.K., & Ysseldyke, J.E. (2005). p. 9, 17 Carney, K.J., & Stiefel, G.S. (2008). p. 73 McNamara, K., & Hollinger, C. (2003). p. 183
Item #18	When I refer a student to Student Support Team (SST), I expect that he/she will be evaluated for special education.	Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 2
Item #19	The Student Support Team (SST) is valuable for monitoring the transition from Special Education back to the general education classroom.	Georgia Student Support Team Online Manual (2001) Pugach, M.C., & Johnson, L.J. (1989). p. 220

Item #4	I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.	Burns, M.K., & Ysseldyke, J.E. (2005). p. 9, 17 Slonski-Fowler, K.E., & Truscott, S.D. (2004). p. 2

Analysis of Results

The researcher utilized Microsoft Excel to create a spreadsheet to collect the data from survey responses. Each survey was assigned an alphanumeric name to keep the surveys organized. Each school was assigned a letter and each participant from that school was given a number. A spreadsheet summary of each respondent's answers was made from the demographic and descriptive data collected.

The first section of the survey collected demographic information about the respondent. The demographic responses were converted from their circled responses to a letter value so that frequency of response could be determined. The table below shows how the conversions were made during data input. (See Table 6)

Table 6 Demographics

Survey Item	Circled Response	Data Input Value
Respondent's Completed Years of Classroom Experience	0-5	A
	6-12	B
	13-19	C
	20+	D
Respondent's Highest Level of Academic Training	Bachelor of Science (B.S.)	A
	Master of Education (M.Ed.)	B
	Education Specialist (Ed.S.)	C
	Doctor of Education (Ed.D. or Ph.D.)	D
Respondent's Certification	General Education	A
	Special Education	B
Respondent's school has:	A designated person whose sole responsibility	A

	is to carry out or facilitate SST and/or RTI frameworks (i.e. Student Support Specialists or RTI coach or leader) for the school.	
	A contact person for SST and/or RTI who has numerous other duties assigned (i.e. Assistant Principal, ILT, counselor, and/or grade level lead teacher) within the school.	B

The second section of the survey included the 21 Likert statements. This section collected the data needed to answer the first four research questions.

RQ_1: What are teachers' perceptions of their familiarity with SST and RTI frameworks?

RQ_2: How adequate do teachers perceive their level of training to be and do they feel qualified to implement SST and RTI?

RQ_3: What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of SST and RTI?

RQ_4: What are teachers' perceptions of SST and RTI as they relate to eligibility for special education?

Scaled responses were converted from Likert scale, using numeric values. The perception survey circled responses were converted to scaled numeric values so that both frequency and means could be determined. "Strongly agree" was assigned a numeric value of +2, "agree" was assigned a numeric value of +1, "no opinion" was assigned the numeric value 0, "disagree" was assigned a numeric value of -1, and "strongly disagree" was assigned the numeric value of -2. Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics which included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations for each of the 21 perception statements.

The third and final section of the survey included the two short answer questions. This section gathered the data needed to answer the final two research questions.

RQ_5: What do teachers perceive as the weaknesses of the frameworks?

RQ_6: What factors influences a teacher to decide not to refer students to SST for RTI data collection?

The final section of the survey, Short Answer Response, requested for respondents to select up to three responses to two opinion questions. The opinion questions revolved around suggestions for modifications that may make the frameworks more effective and reasons a teacher might choose not to refer a student to SST for RTI. The researcher recorded the responses from participants by placing a 1 in the corresponding box on the spreadsheet. This allowed analysis using descriptive statistics for frequency. If a respondent chose not to answer the questions, no values were recorded. If a respondent chose more than three responses, only the first three responses were input into the spreadsheet.

Once the data were input completely, the researcher exported it from the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet into the statistical analysis program, SPSS Statistics Grad Pack 17.0, for in depth analysis and testing.

The researcher posed several null hypotheses about how the demographics of a participant might influence the responses given by the survey participant. The researcher was curious to see if there would be a significant difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI related to any of the demographic information collected.

NH_1: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks in a school with a full time facilitator than in a school with a part time facilitator as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_2: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's area of certification (i.e. general or special education) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_3: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's level of education (i.e. B.S., M.Ed., Ed.S. or Ed.D.) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_4: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's years of experience (i.e. 0-5, 6-12, 13-19, 20+) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

To analyze the null hypotheses, two types of tests were utilized. T Tests were used to analyze the differences in means on items when the demographic only had two answer choices (i.e. certification and school facilitator status). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypothesis when the demographic had four answer choices (i.e. years of experience and highest level of training). The results of these tests will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Summary

Lee-Tarver's original study is almost three years old and Response to Intervention (RTI) as a means of early intervention and data collection for possible special education eligibility has been added and has been in effect in the state of Georgia for two full

school years. SST plays "…a more pivotal role as federal and state regulations change and require more of our educational systems" (Lee-Tarver, 2006, p. 532). She believed that it was vital that the teachers and specialists who compose the SST be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Their perceptions and opinions could help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures. Any framework is only as effective as those who provide it. Understanding the intervention providers' perceptions affects student achievement by guiding counties and districts in the effective use of resources.

This chapter has explained the methods used to quantitatively survey teacher perceptions Student Support Team (SST) and Response to Intervention (RTI). The survey was created by the researcher utilizing items generated from previous research and new statements. Content validity was established by linking each survey item to previous research in the field discovered during the literature review. School districts were randomly selected around the state and building level contacts were established within those districts to distribute and collect the surveys. Data were analyzed according to six specific research questions and the null hypotheses were tested for statistical differences in the means of the demographic subgroups using T Tests and ANOVA. Chapter 4 will summarize the data about teacher perceptions of SST and RTI. The demographics of the survey respondents were reported using descriptive data. T tests and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) explore relationships among the demographic groups and are summarized. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of major findings regarding teacher perceptions of SST and RTI and offers possible uses for the research and recommendations for future study.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

As stated in the previous methodology chapter, this was a quantitative, independent measures design, perception survey study replicating previous research by Dr. Aleada Lee-Tarver from Alabama State University and Drs. Joan Rankin (Erickson) and Donna Aksamit from the University of Nebraska which utilized a paper questionnaire survey designed to gather data about teacher perceptions of SST and RTI blended with two multiple-response questions regarding the perceived weaknesses and teacher considerations regarding each framework in Georgia. The list of multiple-responses was generated from the conclusions section of Dr. Rankin (Erickson) and Dr. Aksamit's research.

The items replicated from the previous studies included statements regarding teacher's perceptions of training and qualifications; attitude toward participation; and the relationship between SST and special education. Additional statements regarding the understanding and effectiveness of RTI were added to the original survey. There were 21 Likert statements (See Appendix A). The final two multiple-response statements asked for the teacher's opinions of the greatest weaknesses and personal considerations for SST and RTI frameworks in Georgia.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study include:

RQ_1: What are teachers' perceptions of their familiarity with SST and RTI frameworks?

RQ_2: How adequate do teachers perceive their level of training to be and do they feel qualified to implement SST and RTI?

RQ_3: What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of SST and RTI?

RQ_4: What are teachers' perceptions of SST and RTI as they relate to eligibility for special education?

RQ_5: What do teachers perceive as the weaknesses of the frameworks?

RQ_6: What factors influences a teacher to decide not to refer students to SST for RTI data collection?

Demographic and Descriptive Statistics

The sample of teachers in this survey study represent the over 50,000 elementary teachers around the state of Georgia. Both general and special educators were invited to participate in this study. The sample in this study includes 342 respondents from seventeen Georgia elementary schools. 648 surveys were mailed to the participating schools and 342 were completed and returned to the researcher after the survey window accounting for a 53% return rate.

The first section of the survey allowed the respondent to give some basic demographic information. The tables that follow show both the frequency and the percentage of responses in each demographic category including years of experience, level of training, area of certification, and the responsibility status of the schools' SST or RTI facilitator as full or part time.

Table 7 Years of Experience

	0-5 years	6-12 years	13-19 years	20+ years
Frequency	83	96	73	87
%	24.48	28.32	21.53	25.66

As displayed in Table 7, the majority (28.32%) of the respondents had 6-12 years of experience with the next largest group (25.66%) having twenty or more years of experience. The rest of the respondents had 0-5 years (24.48%) of experience or 13-19 years (21.53%) of experience.

Table 8 Level of Training

	B.S.	M.Ed.	Ed.S.	Ed.D./Ph.D
Frequency	95	179	61	3
%	28.11	52.96	18.05	.89

As displayed in Table 8, the majority of the respondents had a Masters degree (52.96%) with the next largest group having their Bachelors degree (28.11%). The rest of the respondents had either their Specialist (18.05%) or Doctoral (.89%) degree.

Table 9 Area of Certification

	General Education	Special Education
Frequency	274	33
%	89.25	10.75

When asked about their area of certification, the overwhelming majority of the respondents reported certification in general education (89.25%) while only a few special educators (10.75%) participated (See Table 9).

Table 10 School Facilitator

	Full Time	Part Time	Unsure
Frequency	213	106	23
%	62.28	30.99	6.73

Some Georgia elementary schools have a designated Student Support Specialist or RTI Specialist to facilitate SST and RTI full time and some schools designate an administrator or other personnel to facilitate SST and RTI part time among their numerous other duties. Most of the respondents in this study work in schools that have a full time SST and/or RTI facilitator on staff (See Table 10). 62% of the survey respondents report having a full time facilitator available to assist with SST and RTI. Almost 31% of the respondents have a person who facilitates SST and RTI in a part time capacity and shares those responsibilities among various other jobs at the school. Almost 7% of the respondents were unsure.

Teacher Perceptions of SST and RTI

The survey consisted of 21 statements seeking teacher's perceptions of SST and RTI. The survey items are as follows:

1. I am familiar with the tiered intervention model which provides more intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (RTI).
2. I received adequate training prior to serving on the Student Support Team (SST).
3. I received adequate training prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)
4. I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.
5. I understand the purpose and operation of Student Support Team (SST).

6. I consider the paperwork and documentation required for the Student Support Team (SST) as part of my intervention on behalf of the student.

7. I remain actively involved in the SST process when I refer a struggling student.

8. Research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common classroom practices for struggling learners in the general education setting.

9. Careful attention to paperwork and documentation are critical parts of the intervention process.

10. The Student Support Team (SST) meetings are useful to me as I seek to help the student.

11. It is my responsibility to provide the interventions for students in Student Support Team (SST).

12. It should be the responsibility of others to provide the interventions and document the Response to Interventions (RTI).

13. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting is vital for bringing parental input into the intervention plan.

14. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting should produce ideas for research-based interventions for struggling learners.

15. My input at Student Support Team (SST) meetings is both valued and desired.

16. Most general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework.

17. The Student Support Team's (SST) primary purpose is to move students toward special education.

18. When I refer a student to Student Support Team (SST), I expect that he/she will be evaluated for special education.

19. The Student Support Team (SST) is valuable for monitoring the transition from Special Education back to the general education classroom.

20. The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework prolongs the Student Support Team (SST) process unnecessarily.

21. I am supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework and believe it to be effective for helping struggling students.

Research Question 1

Several perception statements addressed teachers' perceptions of their familiarity with Student Support Team and Response to Intervention. Statements 1, 5, 6, and 20 on the survey are related to teacher familiarity with both frameworks. A five point Likert scale was provided with a range from Strongly Agree (+2) to Strongly Disagree (-2). Respondents had the option to express No Opinion. Surveys returned with no response were included in the No Opinion category. Table 11 provides a summary of the frequency and mean of the responses for the survey items regarding teacher perceptions of their familiarity with SST and RTI.

Table 11 Research Question 1

Survey Item	Statistical Analysis	SA	A	NO	D	SD
1. I am familiar	Mean =	31.6%	64%	2.6%	1.2%	.6%

with the tiered intervention model which provides more intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (RTI).	4.25 SD=.617	(n=108)	(n=219)	(n=9)	(n=4)	(n=2)
5. I understand the purpose and operation of Student Support Team (SST).	Mean = 4.19 SD= .590	26.3% (n=90)	68.7% (n=235)	2.6% (n=9)	2.3% (n=8)	0 (n=0)
6. I consider the paperwork and documentation required for the Student Support Team (SST) as part of my intervention on behalf of the student.	Mean = 3.99 SD=.704	18.7% (n=64)	67% (n=229)	9.4% (n=32)	4.7% (n=16)	.3% (n=1)
20. The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework prolongs the Student Support Team (SST) process unnecessarily.	Mean = 3.17 SD = 1.034	9.1% (n=31)	31.6% (n=108)	31.6% (n=108)	23.1% (n=79)	4.7% (n=16)
(n=number of respondents)						

On item #1, almost all of the respondents (95%) responded that they are familiar with Georgia's tiered intervention model and its relation to Response to Intervention. On item #5, respondents overwhelmingly responded (94%) that they understood the purpose and operation of the Student Support Team. On item #6, most respondents (85%) consider the paperwork and documentation for the SST as part of their intervention on behalf of the student. On item #20, the majority of respondents (40%) believe that the RTI framework unnecessarily prolongs the Student Support Team process. On the same

item 31% had no opinion and almost 27% disagreed and do not feel that it unnecessarily prolongs the SST process.

Item #20 had the largest degree of standard deviation (SD=1.034) which reflects that teachers perceptions varied the most.

Research Question 2

The second research question was probed through teachers' perceptions of the adequacy of their training to implement Response to Intervention through Student Support Team and their perceptions of their qualifications for the task. Statements 2, 3, 11, and 12 on the survey are related to teacher training and qualifications to implement the frameworks. A five point Likert scale was provided with a range from Strongly Agree (+2) to Strongly Disagree (-2). Respondents had the option to express No Opinion. Surveys returned with no response were included in the No Opinion category. Table 12 provides a summary of the frequency and mean of the responses for the survey items regarding teacher perceptions of the adequacy of their training to implement RTI through SST and their perceptions of their qualifications for the task.

Table 12 Research Question 2

Survey Item	Statistical Analysis	SA	A	NO	D	SD
2. I received adequate training prior to serving on the Student Support Team (SST).	Mean = 3.54 SD= .930	11.4% (n=39)	50% (n=171)	21.1% (n=72)	16.7% (n=57)	.9% (n=3)

3. I received adequate training prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)	Mean = 3.46 SD=.958	8.2% (n=28)	53.2% (n=182)	15.8% (n=54)	21.6% (n=74)	1.2% (n=4)
11. It is my responsibility to provide the interventions for students in Student Support Team (SST).	Mean = 3.99 SD=.770	22.2% (n=76)	61.4% (n=210)	10.5% (n=36)	5.3% (n=18)	.6% (n=2)
12. It should be the responsibility of others to provide the interventions and document the Response to Interventions (RTI).	Mean = -3.15 SD=1.059	6.4% (n=22)	24.3% (n=83)	22.8% (n=78)	40.6% (n=139)	5.8% (n=20)
(n=number of respondents)						

On item #2, a majority of respondents (61%) responded that they received adequate training to serve on the Student Support Team. On the same item 35% of respondents disagree and perceive that they did not receive adequate training. Interestingly, on item #3, the same percentage of respondents (61%) considers their training for Response to Intervention to be adequate. On that item 22% of the respondents disagree and believe they did not receive adequate training on the RTI framework. On item #11, most respondents (61%) perceive that it was their responsibility to provide the interventions suggested by the SST. On item #12, most

teachers (45%) disagree that it was the responsibility of others to provide for and document the RTI; however 30% of the respondents believe that it should be the responsibility of others to provide for and document the RTI.

Research Question 3

The third research question sought to probe teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Student Support Team and Response to Intervention for struggling students. Statements 7-10, 13-16, and 21 on the survey are related to the teacher's perceptions of the efficacy the frameworks. A five point Likert scale was provided with a range from Strongly Agree (+2) to Strongly Disagree (-2). Respondents had the option to express No Opinion. Surveys returned with no response were included in the No Opinion category. Table 13 provides a summary of the frequency and mean of the responses for the survey items regarding teacher perceptions of the efficacy of RTI through SST.

Table 13 Research Question 3

Survey Item	Statistical Analysis	SA	A	NO	D	SD
7. I remain actively involved in the SST process when I refer a struggling student.	Mean = 4.07 SD=.701	25.1% (n=86)	59.4% (n=203)	12.6% (n=43)	2.9% (n=10)	0 (n=0)
8. Research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common classroom practices for struggling learners in the general education setting.	Mean = 4.17 SD=.719	31% (n=106)	59.6% (n=204)	4.7% (n=16)	4.7% (n=16)	0 (n=0)
9. Careful attention to paperwork and documentation are critical parts of the intervention process.	Mean = 4.23 SD= .701	33.9% (n=116)	58.8% (n=201)	3.5% (n=12)	3.5% (n=12)	.3% (n=1)

10. The Student Support Team (SST) meetings are useful to me as I seek to help the student.	Mean = 3.78 SD=.828	16.1% (n=55)	55.3% (n=189)	20.2% (n=69)	7.9% (n=27)	.6% (n=2)
13. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting is vital for bringing parental input into the intervention plan.	Mean = 4.05 SD=.729	24.6% (n=84)	60.5% (n=207)	10.8% (n=37)	3.8% (n=13)	.3% (n=1)
14. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting should produce ideas for research-based interventions for struggling learners.	Mean = 4.30 SD=.581	34.8% (n=119)	60.8% (n=208)	3.8% (n=13)	.3% (n=1)	0.3% (n=1)
15. My input at Student Support Team (SST) meetings is both valued and desired.	Mean = 4.00 SD=.706	22.8% (n=78)	56.4% (n=193)	18.7% (n=64)	2% (n=7)	0 (n=0)
16. Most general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework.	Mean = 3.59 SD=.948	11.1% (n=38)	57.3% (n=196)	12.9% (n=44)	17.3% (n=59)	1.5% (n=5)
21. I am supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework and believe it to be effective for helping struggling students.	Mean = 3.77 SD = .813	13.5% (n=46)	59.4% (n=203)	18.4% (n=63)	7.9% (n=27)	.9% (n=3)
(n=number of respondents)						

Item #7 reveals that a large portion of respondents (84%) perceives that they must remain actively involved with the SST process when they refer a student who struggles. On item #8, teacher's overwhelmingly responded (90%) that research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common practices in the general education setting. Teachers also overwhelmingly responded (91%) on item #9, that careful attention to paperwork and documentation are critical components of the intervention process. On item #10,

most teachers (71%) believe that SST meetings are beneficial to them as they seek to help a struggling student. Of the responses to this survey item, a surprisingly high number (20%) of respondents had no opinion. However, most teachers (84%) on item #13 believe that the SST meeting was vital for inviting parental input into the intervention plan. On item #14, most teachers (94%) responded that new ideas should be generated to be used as interventions at the SST meeting. On item #15, most teachers (78%) agreed that their input at the SST meeting was both valued and desired. On item #16, most teachers agreed (68%) that general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and RTI framework. On the same item, 18% of respondents disagreed and do not feel that general education teachers are supportive of the frameworks. On item #21, most respondents (72%) personally support the SST process and the RTI framework and believe it to be effective for helping struggling students. Only 9% of respondents disagree with the statement.

Survey item #16 (SD=.948), had the largest degrees of standard deviation which reflects that teachers perceptions varied the most. Item #16 was a statement about general educators' support of the SST process and RTI framework.

Research Question 4

The last section of the survey statements sought to probe teachers' perceptions of the relationship between Student Support Team, Response to Intervention, and Special Education. Statements 4 and 17-19 on the survey are related to the relationships between SST, RTI, and Special Education. A five point Likert scale was provided with a range from Strongly Agree (+2) to Strongly Disagree (-2). Respondents had the option to express No Opinion. Surveys returned with no response were included in the No Opinion

category. Table 14 provides a summary of the frequency and mean of the responses for the survey items regarding teacher perceptions of the relationship that exists between SST, RTI, and special education.

Table 14 Research Question 4

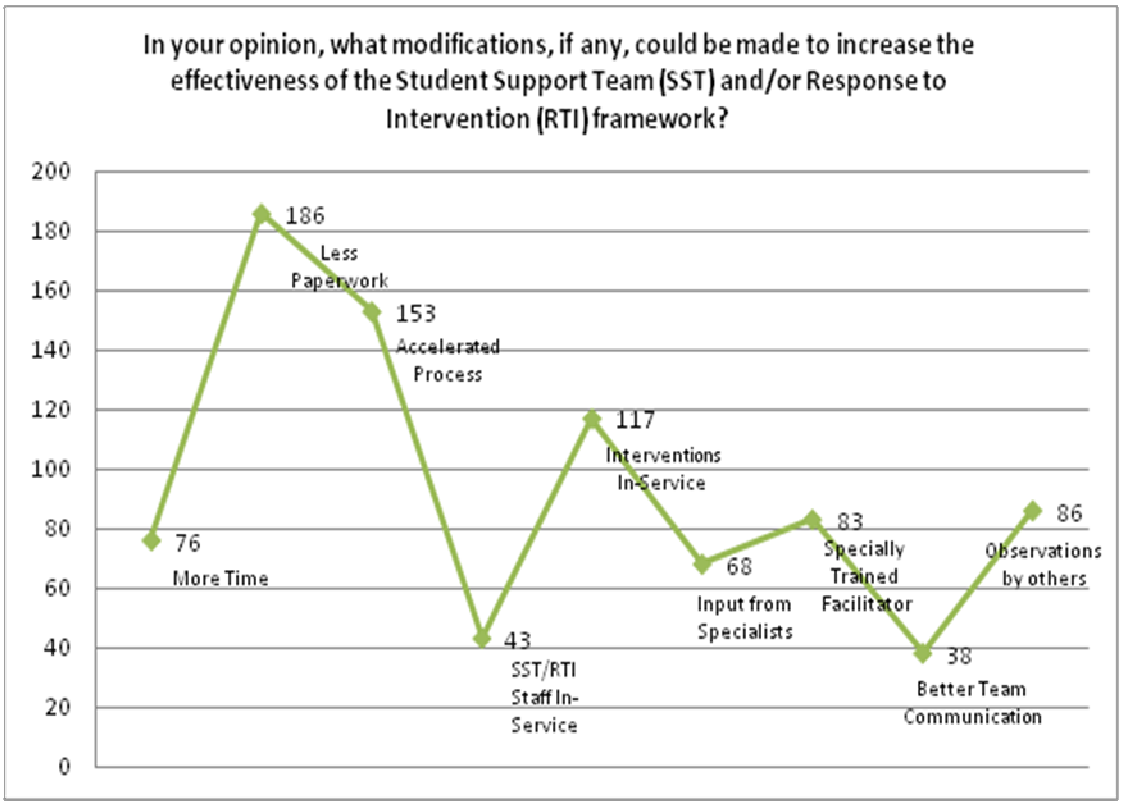
Survey Item	Statistical Analysis	SA	A	NO	D	SD
4. I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.	Mean = 3.92 SD=.857	20.5% (n=70)	62.3% (n=213)	6.1% (n=21)	10.5% (n=36)	.6% (n=2)
17. The Student Support Team's (SST) primary purpose is to move students toward special education.	Mean = 2.19 SD = .905	2% (n=7)	9.4% (n=32)	12% (n=41)	59.1% (n=202)	17.5% (n=60)
18. When I refer a student to Student Support Team (SST), I expect that he/she will be evaluated for special education.	Mean = 2.54 SD = .949	2.3% (n=8)	17.5% (n=60)	19.3% (n=66)	52.9% (n=181)	7.9% (n=27)
19. The Student Support Team (SST) is valuable for monitoring the transition from Special Education back to the general education classroom.	Mean = 3.37 SD = .863	5.6% (n=19)	43.9% (n=150)	34.8% (n=119)	13.7% (n=47)	2% (n=7)
(n=number of respondents)						

On item #4, most respondents (82%) responded that they had a basic understanding of eligibility criteria for special education. On item #17, teachers disagreed (76%) with the idea that the primary purpose for the Student Support Team was to move students toward Special Education. Likewise on item #18, teachers disagreed (60%) with the notion that they only refer students to SST with the expectation of evaluation for Special Education. However, on the same item 19% had no opinion and another 19% do refer to SST with the expectation of evaluation for special education. On item #19, almost 48% of teachers agree that SST was valuable for monitoring students' transitions to general education from special education. However on the same item, almost 35% had no opinion. Several teachers made handwritten notations on their survey that their schools don't use SST for such a transition. This may explain the variance in answers and/or lack of willingness to express an opinion one way or another on this item. Survey item #18, the statement about teacher expectations of evaluation by special education when they refer to SST had the largest degree of standard deviation (SD=.949) which reflects that teachers perceptions varied the most.

Research Question 5

The first of two multiple-response items at the end of the perception survey sought the respondents' opinions of perceived weaknesses in the SST/RTI frameworks. Survey respondents were asked to choose up to three responses to the multiple-response inquiry. Many surveys were returned with no items circled. Figure 6 provides a graph summary of the frequency of the responses for the first of the multiple-response items.

Figure 6

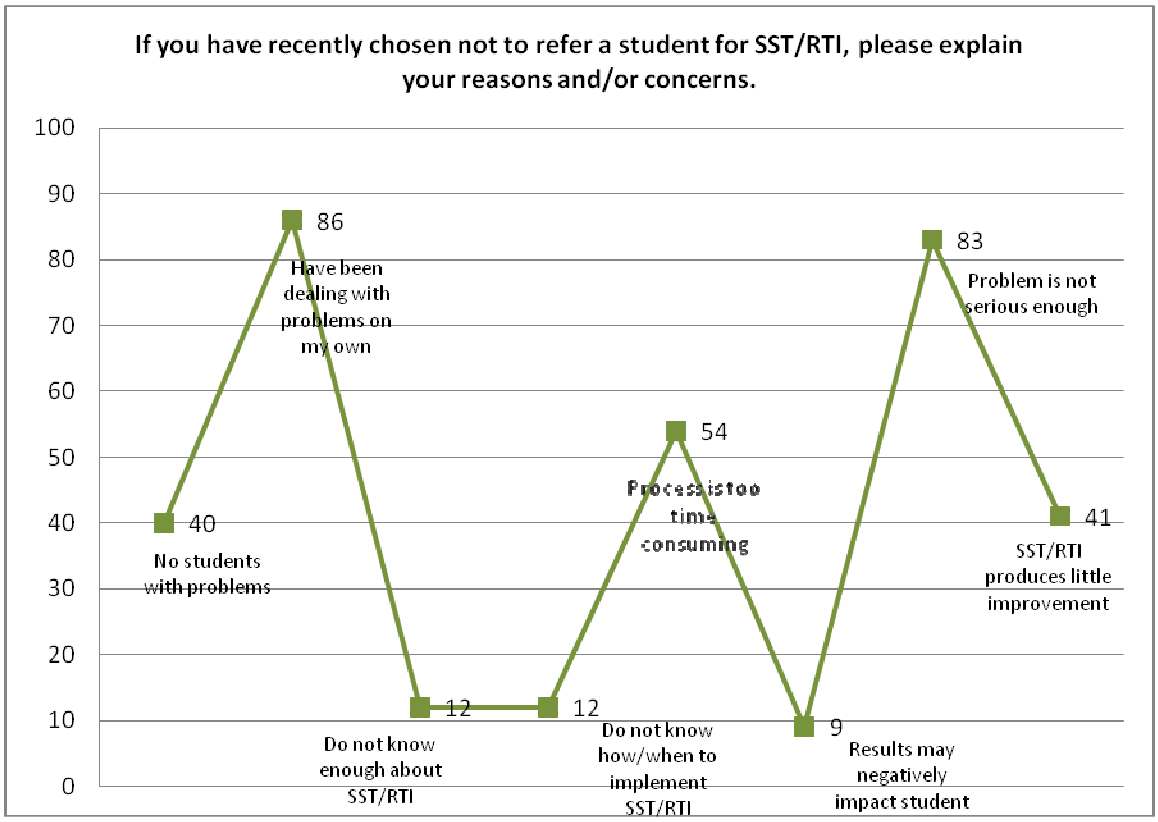


The three most popular responses to this inquiry were less paperwork (n=186), an accelerated process (n=153), and in-service training for intervention ideas (n=117). The least chosen responses were better team communication (n=38), SST/RTI staff in-service training (n=43), and input from specialists (n=68).

Research Question 6

The last multiple-response item of the perception survey sought the respondents' opinions of why teachers might choose not to refer to SST for RTI. Survey respondents were asked to choose up to three responses to the multiple-response inquiry. Many surveys were returned with no items circled. Figure 7 provides a graph summary of the frequency of the responses for the second of the multiple-response items.

Figure 7



The three most popular responses to this inquiry were that the teacher has been dealing with problems on their own (n=86), the problem is not serious enough (n-83), and the process is too time consuming (n=54). The least chosen responses were that the results may negatively impact the student (n=9), the teacher does not know enough about SST/RTI (n=12), and the teacher does not know how/when to implement SST/RTI (n=12).

Null Hypotheses

Research questions 1-4 were addressed in the 21 statement perception survey as teachers selected their responses to statements about SST and RTI. Teachers selected one of five values ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

The researcher tested to see if there was a significant difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI related to any of the demographic information collected. The null hypotheses for this study are:

NH_1: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks in a school with a full time facilitator than in a school with a part time SST/RTI facilitator as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_2: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's area of certification (i.e. general or special education) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_3: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's level of education (i.e. B.S., M.Ed., Ed.S. or Ed.D.) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_4: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's years of experience (i.e. 0-5, 6-12, 13-19, or 20+) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

T-Tests for Independent Variables

A t-test for independent variables was chosen to examine the difference between groups with two independent variables. The demographics section of the survey contained two categories which contained two variables. They were area of certification

(i.e. general or special education) and status of school facilitator (i.e. full time or part time). As directed by Salkind (2008), the researcher used SPSS to compute the t value test statistic for each independent variable. The level of significance or Type I error is .05 ($p < .05$). The obtained value for the two-tailed test (df=317) had to be less than the critical value 1.96 to accept the null hypothesis.

Facilitator Status

According to the t test results the null hypothesis was accepted for all 21 perception statements regarding the school having a full time or part time facilitator. There was no statistical difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI frameworks in a school with a full time facilitator than in a school with a part time SST/RTI facilitator on any of the survey items.

General and Special Education Certification

According to the t test results the null hypothesis was accepted for all 21 perception statements. There was no statistical difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI frameworks based on the teacher's area of certification (i.e. general or special education) on any of the survey items.

Analysis of Variance / ANOVA

A one-way Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) test was chosen to examine the difference between groups with more than two independent variables. Analysis of variances looks for the differences between the means of more than two groups. The F tests for an overall difference between means and it will produce a ratio of variability between groups to variability within groups. The demographics section of the survey contained two categories which contained more than two independent variables. They

were level of education (i.e. B.S., M.Ed., Ed.S. or Ed.D.) and years of experience (i.e. 0-5, 6-12, 13-19, 20+ years). As directed by Salkind (2008), the researcher used SPSS to compute the ANOVA test statistic for each independent variable. The level of significance or Type I error was .05 ($p < .05$). The obtained F value for the test (df=337) had to be less than the critical value 2.61 to accept the null hypothesis ($F < 2.61$).

Level of Education

According to the ANOVA results the null hypothesis was accepted for most of the 21 perception statements regarding the respondent's level of education. There was no statistical difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI frameworks based on the teacher's level of education (i.e. B.S., M.Ed., Ed.S. or Ed.D.) for survey items 2 and 5-21. When statistical differences were determined to be statistically significant, the post-hoc Bonferroni and Least Significant Difference (LSD) tests were utilized to determine differences between the subgroups.

Items 1, 3, and 4 had an F value > 2.61; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Post hoc analysis using Bonferroni and LSD of these three items was conducted to determine where the differences were and revealed the group(s) contributing to the overall significant difference between the groups.

In the initial ANOVA findings by the researcher, all three items had an F value that exceeded the critical value. When post hoc analysis was done, Bonferroni's test did not reveal a significant difference in the means for item #3 at the $p < .05$ level. For this reason, a Least Significant Difference (LSD) post hoc test was also administered for all three items. This LSD post hoc test revealed a significant difference in the means for item #3. The results are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15 ANOVA Post-Hoc Analysis of Level of Education

Survey Item	Areas of Statistical Difference	Directionality of Statistical Difference
Item #1: I am familiar with the tiered intervention model which provides more or less intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (RTI).	Statistical difference of the means between M.Ed. and Ed.S.	Respondents with M.Ed. scored item lower than respondents with an Ed.S.
Item #3: I received adequate training prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)	Statistical difference of the means between many groups.	B.S. means were lower than M.Ed. and higher than Ed.D. M.Ed. means were higher than B.S., Ed.S. and Ed.D. Ed.S. means were lower than M.Ed. Ed.D. means were lower than B.S. and M.Ed.
Item #4: I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.	Statistical difference of the means between M.Ed. and Ed.S.	Respondents with an M.Ed. scored item lower than respondents with an Ed.S.

The differences in these findings allow for the rejection of NH_3, the null hypothesis. There was a difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI frameworks based on the teacher's level of education (i.e. B.S., M.Ed., Ed.S. or Ed.D.).

Years of Experience

According to the ANOVA results the null hypothesis was accepted for most of the 21 perception statements regarding the respondent's level of education. There was no

difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI frameworks based on the teacher's years of experience (i.e. 0-5, 6-12, 12-19, or 20+) for survey items 1, 3, and 5-21.

Items 2 and 4 had an F value > 2.61; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. In order to determine where differences occurred between groups, a Post hoc analysis using Bonferroni test of these items was conducted to determine where the differences were and revealed the group(s) contributing to the overall significant difference between the group(s). The results are summarized in Table 16.

Table 16 Post Hoc Test Years of Experience

Survey Item	Areas of Statistical Difference	Directionality of Statistical Difference
Item #2: I received adequate training prior to serving on the Student Support Team (SST).	Statistical difference of the means between 0-5 and 20+ years of experience	Respondents with 0-5 years of experience scored item higher than respondents with 20+ years of experience.
Item #4: I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.	Statistical difference of the means between 6-12 and 20+ years of experience	Respondents with 6-12 years of experience scored item higher than respondents with 20+ years of experience.

The differences in these findings allow for the rejection of NH_4, the null hypothesis. There was a difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI frameworks based on the teacher's years of experience.

Summary of Results

The perception survey was divided into three distinct portions: demographics of respondents, 21 perception statements about SST and RTI, and two multiple-response opinion questions regarding teacher's opinions of the weaknesses of the frameworks and the identification of considerations that teachers make when deciding whether a student should be referred to SST for RTI. Overall the perception statements reveal an overwhelmingly positive perception by Georgia teachers of the Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks. There are certainly weaknesses associated with the process but teachers seem to understand what they have to do and they believe the frameworks to be effective for students who struggle.

Differences in perceptions were found among some of the demographic groups but those results though statistically significant did not appear to be meaningful enough to cause drastic changes in the processes as they stand. These differences in means which had some statistical significance may serve as a catalyst for professional development for those groups whose perceptions may have room for improvement.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the results, the implications of the study, and ideas for areas of further research based on the results.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Teachers identify struggling learners in the classroom every school year. The general education curriculum is challenging and all learners need varying degrees of intervention to aid their success. When general education students struggle academically or behaviorally, the classroom teacher is called upon to either manage the problem within the context of her classroom, seek the help of other professionals to problem solve and intervene through ideas gained through collaboration, or in the most serious cases seek additional specialized services for the learner. It was reasonable to believe that teachers' perceptions of those choices might impact their decision for the learner. Realistically, teachers will at least consider how much trouble a process is as they choose their means of increasing student achievement and/or identifying learners who require additional specialized services.

Summary of Findings

Response to Intervention (RTI) documentation is utilized by the Student Support Team (SST) to provide parents, teachers, and specialists with the data needed to create evidence-based instructional and behavioral strategies matched to student needs. The information gathered during this process is used to make educational decisions regarding students' education plans and placements. Since "problem solving teams can be integral to the school reform efforts that focus on outcomes for students who have learning challenges" (Bahr and Kovaleski, 2006, p. 5), it was essential to determine the perceptions of the primary interventionists in this highly involved process to help

determine the best ways to meet their needs and encourage their participation and perseverance.

There is "consistent evidence in the literature that disproportionate patterns of special education referrals, evaluations and placements can be reduced with effective support provided to teachers" (Gravois and Rosenfield, 2006, p. 51). However, for many teachers, the SST process is off-putting. Traditionally, the practice of referring a student to SST has often been viewed as lengthy and labor intensive for teachers. It has been tempting for teachers to focus their energies on proving failure instead of providing sound interventions to the struggling learner. Historically, many teachers have used SST as a means of protecting themselves from future disparagement from colleagues or administrators as students passed feebly from grade to grade. Quite often SST has been viewed as a means to secure eligibility for special education thus removing strugglers from general education classrooms.

The process changed in Georgia. The utilization of tiered intervention to provide increasingly intense research-based practices, progress monitoring and documenting for SST through Response to Intervention (RTI) were relatively new practices for general education teachers to utilize for struggling learners. Georgia has moved away from looking at the fish (the student) and now looks at the fishbowl (the classroom practices) for diagnosis of a learning or behavioral disability and to make the determination of eligibility for special education services. Research suggest that "…early support of the instructional process within the general education classroom can be effective in addressing the disproportionate placement of minority students in special education" (Gravois and Rosenfield, 2006, p.51). As teachers examine their pedagogy and shift their

focus to progress monitoring students' responses to interventions (RTI), one could not help but wonder what their perceptions were of the new processes and how those perceptions may impact the teacher's willingness or eagerness to do the hard work of SST and RTI for struggling learners.

Purpose

Changes in school practices have come about since the changes made to IDEA in 2007 which "reflected concerns that students might have to fail before targeted interventions took place and that some children were being missed who needed interventions" (Tileston, 2009, p. 22). In Georgia, Student Support Team (SST) and Response to Intervention (RTI) documentation are effective means of increasing student achievement and identifying learners who require additional specialized services. "Given that the deep and fundamental changes proposed for special education classification will likely fall squarely on pre-referral intervention teams, states should consider providing much more direction and training" (Truscott et al., 2005, p. 138). The goal of this research was to identify teacher perceptions of the problem solving team process, meetings, intervention recommendations and subsequent documentation. This information could help determine how perceptions may affect the teacher's participation in the process. Are the Student Support Team (SST) process and the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework perceived by educators as an effective means of increasing student achievement and identifying learners who require additional specialized services?

Understanding the perceptions and opinions of classroom practitioners could help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures. Any framework is only as effective as

those who provide it. Understanding the intervention providers' perceptions will affect student achievement by guiding counties and districts in the effective use of resources.

Participants

Of the randomly selected Georgia counties invited to participate, eight districts participated in the survey study. From those eight districts, seventeen elementary schools were surveyed. A total of 342 surveys were returned to the researcher which garnered a 53% return rate. The sample of teachers in this survey study represents the over 50,000 elementary teachers around the state of Georgia. Both general and special educators were invited to participate in this study.

Methods

This was a quantitative, independent-measures design study replicating previous research by Dr. Aleada Lee-Tarver from Alabama State University and Drs. Joan Rankin-Erickson and Donna Aksamit from the University of Nebraska which utilized a paper questionnaire survey to gather data about teacher perceptions of SST and RTI. Two multiple answer response statements were developed and added to the end of the study to determine the teacher's perception of the greatest weaknesses and teacher considerations of the current SST and RTI frameworks in Georgia. The list of multiple-responses was derived from the conclusions section of Dr. Rankin (Erickson) and Dr. Aksamit's research.

The researcher determined a building level designee at each elementary school who distributed and collected the paper responses. A max response count and cutoff date for the survey was pre-determined and printed on the individual surveys. A cover letter

designed to provide informed consent, explain the purpose of the survey, and guarantee anonymity was also attached.

The survey items included teacher perceptions of statements regarding training and qualifications; attitude toward participation; and the relationship between SST and special education. Additional statements regarding the understanding and effectiveness of RTI were added to the original survey. There were 21 statements with Likert scale responses to circle. The final two multiple answer statements asked for the teacher's opinion of ways to improve the frameworks and teacher considerations of the current SST and RTI frameworks in Georgia.

Survey questions fell into one of five general categories of inquiry:

- Nine statements of perceptions of effectiveness of SST and RTI regarding improved achievement
- Four statements of perceptions of the adequacy of training prior to implementation of SST and RTI
- Four statements of perceptions of the relationship between SST, RTI, and SPED eligibility
- Four statements of perceptions of general familiarity of teachers with SST procedures and the RTI framework
- Two multiple-response questions regarding perceived weaknesses and teacher considerations of current SST procedures and the RTI framework

Demographic information such as respondents' area of certification, years of experience, highest degree attained, and whether the school has a full or part time SST facilitator were included in the survey.

For statistical analysis, the raw data was collected and input into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet format for disaggregation of each perception statement. The Excel data was imported to SPSS version 17 for statistical analysis. Two-tailed t-tests were utilized to determine any statistical difference in the means of responses from teachers with full time and part time SST facilitation in their schools and the two groups based on certification. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized to analyze any variance in the means of the responses of teachers based on years of experience and level of education. Post hoc analysis was run to identify which groups' means within the sample were statistically significant.

Research questions

This study was based on the belief that teacher perceptions of Student Support Team (SST) and Response to Intervention (RTI) may likely serve as influences in whether or not the teacher will choose to utilize them. Insight into teachers' perceptions was sought in the following areas:

RQ_1: What are teachers' perceptions of their familiarity with Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks?

RQ_2: How adequate do teachers perceive their level of training to be and do they feel qualified to implement Student Support Team and Response to Intervention?

RQ_3: What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Student Support Team and Response to Intervention?

RQ_4: What are teachers' perceptions of Student Support Team and Response to Intervention as they relate to eligibility for special education?

RQ_5: What do teachers perceive as the weaknesses of the frameworks?

RQ_6: What factors influences a teacher to decide not to refer students to Student Support Team for Response to Intervention data collection?

Null Hypotheses

The researcher was seeking to find if there was a significant difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI related to any of the demographic information collected.

NH_1: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks in a school with a full time facilitator than in a school with a part time SST/RTI facilitator as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_2: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's area of certification (i.e. general or special education) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_3: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's level of education (i.e. B.S., M.Ed., Ed.S. or Ed.D.) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

NH_4: There will be no difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks based on the teacher's

years of experience (i.e. 0-5, 6-12, 13-19, 20+) as measured by the Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey.

Discussion

The perception survey captured what the researcher expected to capture regarding teacher perceptions of SST and RTI. The bottom line is that Georgia teachers were willing to do whatever it takes to help struggling learners – it does not matter what acronyms experts use to describe it. Their desire is to get it right and to make a difference for children who need interventions in order to be successful learners. The considerable amounts of time and energy that it takes to work through the SST and RTI frameworks to help a learner thrive is simply part of the job of teaching.

Although this perception survey was pre-copied with no space given for respondent comments, some teachers seemed to seek out a way to give voice to their personal concerns about SST and RTI. The researcher found notes jotted in margins on several returned surveys. Because the comments reflected more personally what teachers believe and gave a human voice to the perceptions being sought, the researcher chose a few of them to share in this discussion.

Sadly, sometimes the statements reflected the weariness that comes from going the extra mile for learners who struggle. Survey respondent G4 wrote, “"I have not chosen ‘not’ to refer a student but it is tempting because you are often asking for a lot of additional work and a lot of grief - teachers feel unsupported". Another respondent noted, “I feel like it's (paperwork) part of my job but I don't feel like it helps the student" (N9). Teachers who feel unsupported and paperwork without purpose can discourage

teachers from aiding struggling learners through SST and makes the effort associated with the RTI appear overwhelming.

Other statements seemed to reflect a more self-assured attitude that the frameworks may be much-ado-about-nothing like when this respondent noted, "Meeting individual needs is already a part of our normal small group instruction (differentiated instruction/best practices)" (L15). Effective teachers meet individual students' needs through best practices like small group differentiated instruction every day. Supporting all learners (strong and weak) with research-based instructional methods should be part of every school day and comes more naturally to those teachers who are familiar with best practices.

Conclusions

Although problem solving teams such as SST are "…common and schools devote considerable resources to them, there is a substantial disconnection between teams as reported in the literature and the teams that exist in most schools" (Truscott et al., 2005, p. 139). When all is said and done, districts and schools simply must invest their resources into professional learning opportunities that train teachers, not in teaching fads or programs that come and go, but in timeless, best instructional practices. "A critical part of RTI is providing the latest and best data on instructional practices for the staff" (Tileston, 2009, p. 23). By providing in-service in research-based instructional practices, all students benefit – those who struggle and those who do not. Perhaps those who might struggle will never have to if the instructional practices and early intervention in the general education classroom were successful.

Georgia teachers learned to utilize problem solving teams (SST) almost three decades ago to help avoid the over-identification of minority students as disabled. More recently, IDEA 2007 mandated sweeping changes in how all American schools identify students with disabilities and once again Georgia teachers have learned a new framework (and acronym) called Response to Intervention (RTI) to meet the challenge. At the end of a recent article in the Professional Association of Georgia Educators journal, Tileston concluded that a framework like "Response to Intervention is our chance to finally get it right, but we must plan carefully to avoid the mistakes of the past so that all children have access to a quality education" (2009, p. 24). According to this survey, Georgia teachers' perceptions of SST and RTI seem to imply that teachers are willing to do the work needed to avoid the mistakes of the past.

Implications

Previous studies on which this research was based…

Dr. Lee-Tarver's original research study, "A Survey of Teachers' Perceptions of the Function and Purpose of Student Support Teams" (2006) outlined several findings based on her survey research of 123 regular education teachers from two elementary schools in adjoining southern states, volunteers from a graduate education class at a state university, and participants at a regional workshop for teachers. The implications of her research were:

- The need for teacher training prior to appointment to a Student Support Team
- Pre-service institutions need to provide comprehensive training and experience in the area of student services for future teachers

- SST had changed from a "conduit for special education services" to "intervention assistance" (Lee-Tarver, 2006, p. 531).
- Parents were viewed as generally unaware of the benefit of SST and their involvement was often limited by work/schedule conflicts
- A call to compensate and recognize teachers who participate in SST for the role they play in student achievement.

Drs. Rankin-Erickson's and Aksamit's study, "Perceptions of Elementary, Junior High, and High School Student Assistant Team Coordinators, Team Members, and Teachers" (1994) outlined several findings based on their quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the perceptions of personnel participating in problem solving teams to answer the question of whether differences in perception existed based on the role one played in the process. They researched "potential problem areas, satisfaction, reasons for not referring students to the team, factors contributing to effectiveness, and suggested modifications" (p.229). Their study participants were from a predominately middle-class, university community in the Midwest. The school district contained 33 elementary, 9 junior high, and 5 senior high schools. 563 educators employed in the elementary, junior high, and senior high schools participated. Study participants included building level coordinators, teachers and other school personnel who had served as team members and a random sample of general educators from each building. A Likert-scale questionnaire with two open-ended items was designed for each specific group (coordinators, members, and teachers). The implications of their research were:

- The need for competent, committed individuals

- The need for explicit and functional procedures
- The need for adequate time and resources
- Some teachers view problem solving teams as a way to keep students in general education and reduce referrals while others may view it as the first step toward getting a student into special education
- Individuals responsible for the development and implementation of the process must assess and be sensitive to the attitudes and beliefs of various participants in the process and the knowledge and skill level of team members
- Teachers must be made aware of available and needed resources
- There is a need to "examine issues systematically at the district and building level and only then will procedures be developed and implemented that are responsive to the unique needs of teachers and students" (p. 253).

Implications of current study…

This study surveyed 342 general and special education elementary teachers in 17 schools in eight Georgia counties. This sample (.006%) represented a population of over 50,000 Georgia public elementary school teachers who utilized the SST and RTI frameworks in their schools. The teacher perception survey of Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks contained 21 Likert-scale statements and two multiple-response items regarding the weaknesses of the current frameworks and teacher considerations for a decision to not refer a struggling student.

- In this sample, most elementary school teachers were very familiar with tiered intervention and understood the purpose of Student Support Teams

- In this sample, most teachers considered the paperwork and documentation part of their intervention on behalf of struggling learners.
- In this sample, many teachers believed RTI prolongs the SST process unnecessarily.
- In this sample, most teachers perceived that they were adequately trained on SST and RTI frameworks; however, 35% did not feel adequately trained for SST and 22% did not feel adequately trained for RTI. Districts likely need to offer in-service on a regular basis to staff members who may feel under qualified.
- In this sample, most teachers perceived themselves to be responsible for interventions and disagreed that it is the responsibility of others to provide for RTI documentation. However, 30% of respondents believed that it should be the responsibility of others. Districts likely need to simplify and/or systematize the RTI documentation procedures and possibly offer in-service regarding research-based interventions and progress monitoring procedures.
- In this sample, teachers realized that they must remain active in the SST process when they refer a struggling student and they paid careful attention to paperwork and documentation because they believed they were critical to interventions.
- In this sample, teachers believed that interventions and progress monitoring were common instructional practices in general education classrooms.
- In this sample, teachers perceived that SST meetings were beneficial for both the teacher and for garnering parental input. They also perceived that their input is both valued and desired.
- In this sample, teachers wanted new ideas for interventions at the SST meeting.

- In this sample, teachers personally supported the SST and RTI frameworks, believed them to be effective for struggling learners, and believed other general educators to be supportive of the frameworks. However, 18% of respondents did not believe that other general education teachers supported the frameworks and 9% did not personally support the frameworks. Again, districts likely need to simplify and/or systematize the RTI documentation procedures and possibly offer incentives or recognition for teachers who consistently utilize research based practices and progress monitoring to improve the achievement of their struggling students.
- In this sample, most teachers understood special education eligibility.
- In this sample, most teachers did not equate an SST referral with future special education eligibility or psycho-educational evaluations for special education eligibility. However 19% of respondents did expect an evaluation by the psychologist if they referred to SST. Again, districts likely need to simplify and/or systematize the RTI documentation procedures and possibly offer in-service regarding research-based interventions and progress monitoring procedures.
- In this sample, most teachers agreed that SST might serve as a good transition for former special education students going back to general education classrooms. However, many respondents marked “no opinion” and many teachers made handwritten notations that their schools do not do this. Districts may benefit from re-evaluating their tiered intervention model. Teachers were expected to climb through the tiers one-by-one for struggling students increasing the intensity of

their interventions until they reach the tier at which the student could be successful. Would it not make sense to climb down the tiers in much the same way until the student can be successful? If a student has had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with accommodations for a disability, it would seem senseless and even cruel to expect them to stop those accommodations without any supports in place – has the disability gone away or have they learned to overcome that disability with minimal accommodations?

- In this sample, teachers identified ways that the SST/RTI frameworks could be strengthened which included: less paperwork, an accelerated process, and in-service for intervention strategies. Again, districts may benefit from re-evaluating their tiered intervention model to deal with students who require an accelerated RTI window or could be considered an "emergency case". The SST facilitator should act as the "gate keeper" of sorts to discern what merits emergency status and should be in close communication with colleagues in the special education department and/or the school psychologist for consultation on such cases. They could also consider simplifying and/or systematizing the RTI documentation procedures and possibly offer in-service regarding research-based interventions and progress monitoring procedures.
- In this sample, a small portion of the survey respondents were willing to share the reasons that they choose not to refer a student. Many of them reported that they deal with problems on their own; that problems were not serious enough to merit SST or RTI frameworks; and/or the process is just too time-consuming to undertake. It is the belief of the researcher based on the small overall number of

responses to this item compared to other items that one of two things happened. Either many of the survey respondents do not choose to "not refer" students or more likely teachers were reluctant to share their true reasons for not referring students who struggle. It is possible that the respondents did not feel it was safe to share or perhaps they did not want to admit that they sometimes decide not to refer a student who could benefit from SST and RTI. The researcher very much appreciates the respondents who did choose to share and sincerely hopes that the small number of responses means that many teachers were not making the choice to "not refer" students who could benefit.

Limitations

Although the sample size was too small to yield significant inferential findings, it did yield answers to the research questions posed. As noted in the Implications section of this chapter, the sample size for this survey study is relatively small compared to the number of elementary teachers in Georgia. Therefore, one should use great caution in trying to generalize these perceptions to every school district, elementary school, or teacher in the state. However, great care was taken to achieve a random sample of Georgia counties from the northern, southern, eastern, western, and central regions.

Although no large school districts participated, such as the urban districts in and around the city of Atlanta, there were several medium-sized suburban and small-sized rural school districts represented. The researcher was conscientious to follow-up with school districts that might participate and complete the necessary paperwork and applications to try and get into as many schools as possible with the research survey.

Since the sample size only includes elementary school general and special education teachers, one should use great caution in trying to generalize the results to middle or high school settings.

Recommendations for future practice

The state of Georgia recorded a steep decline in the number of students found eligible for many special education services in the first year of RTI implementation. "There were almost 10,000 fewer students labeled as disabled from December, 2007 to December, 2008 (-5%). The biggest changes with significant numbers and percentages were in Speech Language Pathology (-16%), Severe Developmental Delay (+15%), Autism (+11%), Emotional Behavioral Disorders (-9%) and Mildly Retarded (-8%)" (P. Mellor, email communication, February 6, 2009).

While these numbers were interesting and promising, the concern for many in student services as interventionists seek to guard against over-identification of students with disabilities is that personnel unintentionally under identify students due to the perceived weaknesses or inconveniences associated with the SST process or RTI framework. It is only natural for teachers to avoid the things that they perceive to be time or energy wasters in regards to instructional practices or duties and responsibilities. Students who struggle due to disabilities must be appropriately identified and interventions must be attempted to aid them. It is both our legal and ethical duty to identify struggling students, provide research-based interventions, study the responses of students to those interventions, and use the data created to best meet the needs of the learner so that they can be as successful as possible in school.

It is vital that the teachers and specialists who compose the SST and conduct RTI be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Their perceptions and opinions can help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures. With this in mind, the following recommendations are made:

Districts likely need to offer in-service on a regular basis to staff members who may feel under qualified to participate in Student Support Team or to provide research-based interventions and Response to Intervention progress monitoring documentation.

Districts likely need to simplify and/or systematize the RTI documentation procedures and possibly offer in-service regarding research-based interventions and progress monitoring procedures.

Districts likely need to offer incentives or recognition for teachers who consistently utilize research based practices and progress monitoring to improve the achievement of their struggling students.

Districts may benefit from re-evaluating their tiered intervention model. Teachers are expected to climb through the tiers one-by-one for struggling students increasing the intensity of their interventions until they reach the tier at which the student can be successful. It would make sense to climb down the tiers in much the same way until a student can be successful in the general education classroom. A student with a diagnosed disability, who has had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with accommodations for the disability, may need supports in place through Student Support Team to be successful in general education. Districts may also benefit from re-evaluating their tiered intervention model to deal with students who require an accelerated RTI window or could

be considered an “emergency case”. The building level student support personnel or SST facilitator should act as the “gate keeper” of sorts to discern what merits emergency status and should be in close communication with colleagues in the special education department and/or the school psychologist for consultation on such cases.

Districts or school-level student support personnel need a system of checks-and-balances in place to guard against teachers unilaterally deciding “not to refer” a student who is in need of interventions through SST. Universal screenings, periodic school-wide progress monitoring, and/or disaggregation of standardized test data may serve as good starting points to identify students for a “watch list” in need of follow-up and systematic or periodic inquiry.

Recommendations for future research

The perception survey was a good starting point to begin dialogue about ways to improve Student Support Team and Response to Intervention frameworks in Georgia schools. This research was limited to elementary schools. The researcher is certain that middle and high school teacher perceptions would be equally interesting to study. The frameworks look very different at the middle and high school levels and teacher perceptions of the frameworks may prove very helpful in maximizing their effectiveness with older struggling students.

Though it would be difficult to do, it would be very enlightening to visit the school sites before and after the survey to discuss how the school utilizes SST and RTI to help students. Georgia counties are free to set up their Student Support Teams as they deem appropriate. The tiered intervention is mapped out county by county and sometimes school by school within a county. The research would be more compelling if

the school's SST and RTI procedures were known in more detail. A post-survey interview would be interesting now that the data has been analyzed and the results are known.

Summary

This chapter has reiterated the problem that influenced the researcher to study in depth the perceptions of teachers regarding SST and RTI frameworks, reviewed the methods used for research, offered the results from the survey, discussed the implications for district and school practices, exposed the limits of the findings, and offered suggestions for future practice and possible research. The recommendations for both district and school level policy making and professional development outlined are both practical and realistic. More research should be conducted to further investigate and validate this field of research.

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Appendix A

Consent Letter, Cover Letter, Survey

Informed Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled, "Teacher Perceptions of Student Support Team and Response to Intervention Effectiveness" conducted by Lynn R. Bailey, a candidate for Doctorate of Education (Ed.D) in Teaching and Learning from Liberty University. The dissertation chairperson

for this research is Dr. Deanna Keith, Assistant Professor and Coordinator for Special Education (434-582-2417).

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. As a participant of this study, I will be asked to complete a survey which should take about 15 minutes to complete. There are no direct benefits to me as a participant. However, by participating, my answers may help the researcher gain a better understanding of teacher perceptions of the frameworks utilized in Georgia for student support.

This survey is anonymous and the demographic information collected will not be analyzed to identify the specific survey respondent. No personal or professional risk is anticipated. No individually-identifiable information about me or provided by me during the survey will be shared with others. Specific questions about the survey or research may be directed to the researcher, Lynn Bailey, via email (lrbailey@liberty.edu) or phone call (678-234-9011).

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I may copy this consent form for my records.

Lynn R. Bailey

678-234-9011

lrbailey@liberty.edu

D  h

434-582-2417

dlkeith@liberty.edu

Name of Participant _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Please sign and return consent to the building level designee with your completed perception survey. THANK YOU!

Dear Educator:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of "Teacher Perceptions of SST and RTI Effectiveness". The purpose of this study is to investigate general education teacher perceptions of Student Support Team (SST) and Response to Intervention (RTI). It is vital that the teachers and specialists who compose the SST and conduct RTI be knowledgeable and prepared for the challenges they face. Their perceptions and opinions can help guide administrators and professional development personnel as they plan for future training and implementation of new procedures.

Because school districts and counties in Georgia have been given great latitude in what they label their tiers of intervention, this survey will use the following terms for consistency across the state:

- ✓ General education: Students are afforded an education based on the Georgia Performance Standards without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for accommodations.
- ✓ Special education: Students are afforded an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for academic or behavioral modifications due to the presence of a diagnosed disability that negatively impacts his/her education.
- ✓ Tiered intervention: Struggling students are provided research-based interventions with graduating levels of intensity based on data collected over time. A student's failure to respond appropriately to academic and/or behavioral interventions would call for changing or increasing the intensity of research-based interventions on his/her behalf.
- ✓ Student Support Team (SST) is a collaboration of experts and interventionists to systematically problem solve and provide research-based interventions on behalf of struggling learners. The team may be known by a variety of names or acronyms, but their common function is to document interventions and the data collected for the purpose of monitoring a student's achievement or lack thereof.
- ✓ Response to Intervention (RTI) is defined by providing for research-based interventions over time while progress monitoring the students response to those interventions. The state of Georgia recommends both duration and increased intensity of interventions to help ascertain whether a student needs further evaluation by a psychologist and/or an individualized education plan.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to these statements.

Please return your consent and survey to the building level designee:

Bailey Tarver SST/RTI Survey

Directions: Please consider carefully and circle ONE response to each of the following statements.

Demographics				
Respondent's Completed Years of Classroom Experience	0-5 years	6-12 years	13-19 years	20 + years
Respondent's Highest Level of Academic Training	Bachelor of Science (B.S.)	Master of Education (M.Ed.)	Education Specialist (Ed.S.)	Doctor of Education (Ed.D. or Ph.D.)
Respondent's Certification	General Education		Special Education	
Respondent's school has:	A designated person whose sole responsibility is to carry out or facilitate SST and/or RTI frameworks (i.e. Student Support Specialists or RTI coach or leader) for the school.		A contact person for SST and/or RTI who has numerous other duties assigned (i.e. Assistant Principal, ILT, counselor, and/or grade level lead teacher) within the school.	

Perception Survey					
1. I am familiar with the tiered intervention model which provides more intensive interventions for students based on responses to previous interventions (RTI).	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. I received adequate training prior to serving on the Student Support Team (SST).	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. I received adequate training prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI)	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. I understand the basic eligibility criteria for special education.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. I understand the purpose and operation of Student Support Team (SST).	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. I consider the paperwork and documentation required for the	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Student Support Team (SST) as part of my intervention on behalf of the student.					
7. I remain actively involved in the SST process when I refer a struggling student.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. Research-based interventions and progress monitoring are common classroom practices for struggling learners in the general education setting.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. Careful attention to paperwork and documentation are critical parts of the intervention process.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. The Student Support Team (SST) meetings are useful to me as I seek to help the student.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11. It is my responsibility to provide the interventions for students in Student Support Team (SST).	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. It should be the responsibility of others to provide the interventions and document the Response to Interventions (RTI).	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
13. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting is vital for bringing parental input into the intervention plan.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14. The Student Support Team (SST) meeting should produce ideas for research-based interventions for struggling learners.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. My input at Student Support Team (SST) meetings is both valued and desired.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
16. Most general education teachers are supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17. The Student Support Team's (SST) primary purpose is to move	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

students toward special education.					
18. When I refer a student to Student Support Team (SST), I expect that he/she will be evaluated for special education.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19. The Student Support Team (SST) is valuable for monitoring the transition from Special Education back to the general education classroom.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework prolongs the Student Support Team (SST) process unnecessarily.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21. I am supportive of the SST process and the RTI framework and believe it to be effective for helping struggling students.	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

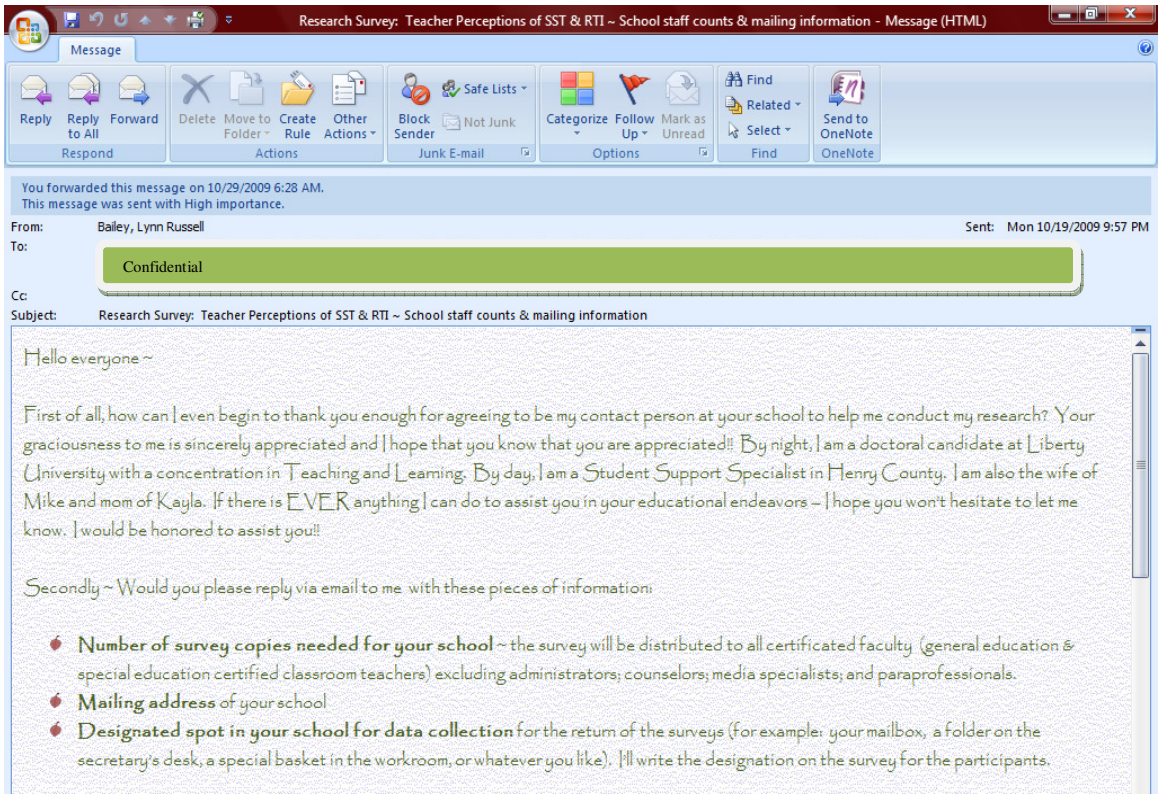
Short Answer Response				
In your opinion, what modifications, if any, could be made to increase the effectiveness of the Student Support Team (SST) and/or Response to Intervention (RTI) framework? (Select up to THREE (3) responses)	◊ More time to meet ◊ Less paperwork ◊ Accelerated process	◊ SST/RTI Staff in-service ◊ In-service for intervention strategies	◊ More input from specialists ◊ Specially trained facilitators of the process	◊ Better team communication ◊ Observations of the learner by others
If you have recently chosen not to refer a student for SST/RTI, please explain your reasons and/or concerns. (Select	◊ No students experiencing problems ◊ Have been able to deal with	◊ Do not know enough about SST/RTI ◊ Not aware of	◊ Process is too time consuming ◊ Results may negatively affect expectations	◊ Problem is not serious enough to document RTI and meet with SST ◊ SST/RTI often produces little

up to THREE (3) responses)	concerns on my own	how/when to facilitate SST/RTI	for student	improvement

Appendix B

Initial Email Correspondence to Building Level Contacts

At Each School Survey Site


Research Survey: Teacher Perceptions of SST & RTI ~ School staff counts & mailing information - Message (HTML)
Message
Reply
Reply to All
Forward
Delete
Move to Folder
Create Rule
Other Actions
Respond
Actions
Block Sender
Safe Lists
Not Junk
Junk E-mail
Categorize
Follow Up
Mark as Unread
Options
Find
Related
Select
Find
Send to OneNote
OneNote
You forwarded this message on 10/29/2009 6:28 AM.
This message was sent with High importance.
From: Bailey, Lynn Russell
Sent: Mon 10/19/2009 9:57 PM
To:
Confidential
Cc:
Subject: Research Survey: Teacher Perceptions of SST & RTI ~ School staff counts & mailing information
Hello everyone ~
First of all, how can I even begin to thank you enough for agreeing to be my contact person at your school to help me conduct my research? Your graciousness to me is sincerely appreciated and I hope that you know that you are appreciated!! By night, I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University with a concentration in Teaching and Learning. By day, I am a Student Support Specialist in Henry County. I am also the wife of Mike and mom of Kayla. If there is EVER anything I can do to assist you in your educational endeavors – I hope you won't hesitate to let me know. I would be honored to assist you!!
Secondly ~ Would you please reply via email to me with these pieces of information:
Number of survey copies needed for your school ~ the survey will be distributed to all certificated faculty (general education & special education certified classroom teachers) excluding administrators; counselors; media specialists; and paraprofessionals.
Mailing address of your school
Designated spot in your school for data collection for the return of the surveys (for example: your mailbox, a folder on the secretary's desk, a special basket in the workroom, or whatever you like). I'll write the designation on the survey for the participants.


In about a week, you will receive a large envelope from me with your survey copies enclosed. I'll email you on the day I mail them out so you'll know they are on the way. I'd like to see you either distribute the surveys to the teachers boxes to be returned within 5 days to a designated spot or if you have a faculty meeting that week ~ see if you can distribute & collect them all at once. There will be a second stamped envelope enclosed in the envelope for you to place the surveys into and mail back to me.
I've intentionally tried to keep this simple and easy! ☺
If you have any questions for me – please don't hesitate to let me know. My cell is 678-234-9011 if you need a quick answer. I check this college email each evening. Work email is the fastest way to get a reply.
Thank you again!! I look forward to your reply. lb
Mrs. Lynn R Bailey
21957503
lrbailey@liberty.edu (school)

Appendix C

Building Level Contacts

Survey Packet Cover Letter

From the desk of: Mrs. Lynn R. Bailey

Monday, October 26, 2009

Dear Educator,

Thank you again for agreeing to be my building level contact person and for agreeing to distribute and collect my surveys for my research into "Teacher Perceptions of SST and RTI". Your help is invaluable and appreciated more than you know.

Please review the procedures outlined below prior to distributing the survey. If you have any questions or need clarification, don't hesitate to contact me at any time.

1) Please accept the writing pen as a small token of my appreciation for your help in this endeavor. ☺
2) This survey should be distributed to ALL certificated teachers in your building. Support staff (such as counselors, media specialists, paraprofessionals or administrators) should not participate in this study. It is designed with general and special educators in mind who deal directly with struggling learners who may need SST or RTI documentation.
3) Distribute the surveys as-is to affected personnel on Monday, November 2, 2009 and collect on/before Friday, November 6, 2009. If you already have a faculty meeting that week, please feel free to distribute and collect in that setting.
4) Please allow only 5 days at most for completion and return.
5) When surveys are returned, please pull apart the two sheets so that I cannot match the responses to a person. The consent forms (which have their names on it) should be clipped together and the survey (with no names) should be clipped together separately. This will assure the anonymity of the respondents.
6) Please return to me at least 75% of the completed surveys. The higher your response rate, the better.
7) Please mail the surveys back to me in the postage paid envelope within three days of the due date.

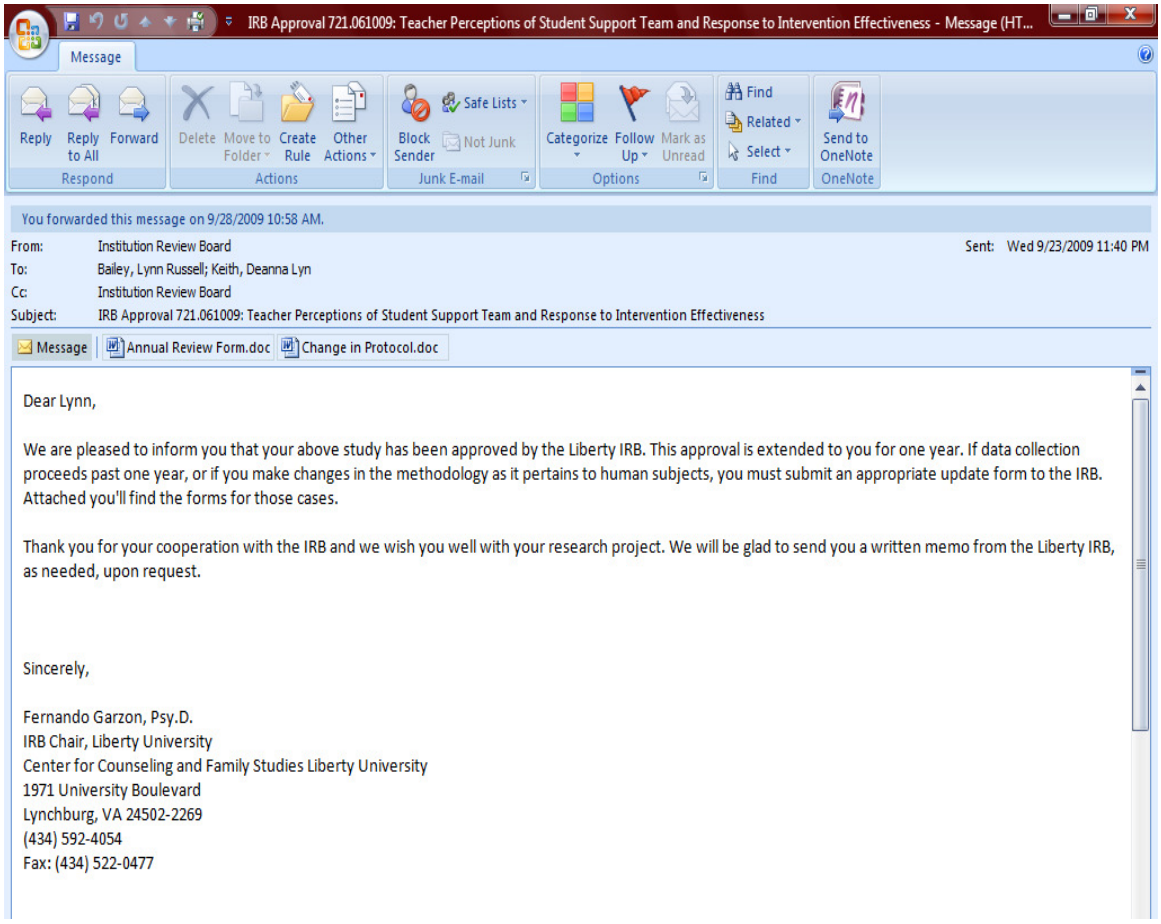
My contact information:
Lynn Bailey ~ xxx-xxx-xxxx
lrbailey@liberty.edu (checked each evening)
Sincerely,
Mrs. Lynn Bailey

P.S. If you'd like a copy of my results, please email me your request. I would be happy to share those with you in the spring, 2010, when my dissertation is complete. I'll email them to you as an attachment at that time.

Appendix D

Liberty University

IRB Approval


IRB Approval 721.061009: Teacher Perceptions of Student Support Team and Response to Intervention Effectiveness - Message (HT...
Message
Reply
Reply to All
Forward
Delete
Move to Folder
Create Rule
Other Actions
Block Sender
Safe Lists
Not Junk
Categorize
Follow Up
Mark as Unread
Find
Related
Select
Send to OneNote
Respond
Actions
Junk E-mail
Options
Find
OneNote
You forwarded this message on 9/28/2009 10:58 AM.
From: Institution Review Board
Sent: Wed 9/23/2009 11:40 PM
To: Bailey, Lynn Russell; Keith, Deanna Lyn
Cc: Institution Review Board
Subject: IRB Approval 721.061009: Teacher Perceptions of Student Support Team and Response to Intervention Effectiveness
Message
Annual Review Form.doc
Change in Protocol.doc
Dear Lynn,
We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. Attached you'll find the forms for those cases.
Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project. We will be glad to send you a written memo from the Liberty IRB, as needed, upon request.
Sincerely,
Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
IRB Chair, Liberty University
Center for Counseling and Family Studies Liberty University
1971 University Boulevard
Lynchburg, VA 24502-2269
(434) 592-4054
Fax: (434) 522-0477