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Perceptions and Experiences of Adolescent Students with Disabilities

Regarding "Flextime" in a Response to Intervention Model

Julie Daye

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Educational Specialist in School Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Attitudes of Adolescent Students with Disabilities Regarding "Flextime"
in a Response to Intervention Model

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One of the stumbling blocks to implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) in a secondary school is finding time for students to receive second level instruction. Evidence of effective implementation of RTI in elementary schools is more prevalent than in secondary schools. There is limited information on how to restructure school time and other resources in order to successfully implement RTI in secondary schools. Evidence is also limited regarding the impact of second level instruction on unique populations within a school. One population in particular includes students that are disabled and already receiving special education services.

A junior high in a mountain west state; has implemented an element of RTI where schedules have been realigned in order to provide all students with intervention time. They call this 30-minute segment *flextime*, and students use this time to either attend required interventions or enrichment activities for those students who are not in need of an intervention.

Students receiving special education services at this junior high were interviewed for the study. The students were selected by a special education teacher as participants likely to provide insightful responses. Data for this study were collected by open interviews with these students and the qualitative data were then analyzed with an inductive analysis approach.

Participants reported that flextime was effective in helping them to improve and maintain good grades. All participants agreed that if they were in charge of the school, they would keep flextime. They also offered suggestions for improvement in flextime, which included possible scheduling changes to increase flextime and the time allotted to get from class to flextime. They also recommended changes be made in order to improve their ability to access the help needed during academic interventions.

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I would also like to thank the staff of the Counseling Psychology and Special Education Department of BYU, particularly Diane Hancock. She quietly carries each of us in the school psychology program from start to finish. Every phone call, email, and explanation of policies is essential to our success in the program.

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DESCRIPTION OF STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Following the introductory pages (title page, acknowledgements, abstract, table of contents and list of tables), this thesis is segmented into two major sections: (a) the article ready for submission to a journal (pp. 1-36) and (b) the review of the literature (pp. 41-65).

This thesis contains two reference lists. The first reference list (p. 33) contains the references included in the journal ready article. The second reference list (p. 62) includes all citations used in both the journal ready article and the section titled "Appendix B: Literature Review" (p. 41).

Introduction

Educators recognize the need for continuous improvement in public education.   They seek for methods that are both effective and can realistically work best for students, teachers, and administrators. Two current transitions in education throughout the United States are intended to improve (a) learning for all students, (b) the performance of the school system, and (c) the identification process of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). These two educational approaches are Response to Intervention (RTI) and Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Although RTI was initially developed in order to identify students who may be eligible for special education, it is now typically viewed as a way to deliver a continuum of interventions for all students. In the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004, RTI was included as an option for states to use in identifying specific learning disabilities (IDEA, 2004). Many states have moved toward using RTI for this purpose (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). Most proponents of RTI, however, recognize that it is still a work in progress and should be considered "a necessary – though not sufficient – addition to the identification procedures for [Learning Disabilities]" (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2006, p. 59). In time, it became evident that RTI could assist in identifying other types of learning difficulties, as well as identifying weaknesses in teaching methods. Gresham, VanDerHeyeden, and Witt (as cited in Barnes & Harlacher, 2008, p. 417), summarize the philosophy of RTI as finding "*which* children need *what* services, delivered with *how much* intensity."

RTI is an educational model where teachers implement interventions in order to remediate the students' academic or behavioral deficits before they are considered for special education services. Within the RTI model,   teachers need to first use effective instructional

methods and regularly monitor the students' progress in their regular classroom. Those students who are not responding to the classroom instruction can then receive additional assistance or a more intense intervention. After monitoring their progress again, if the student still does not respond then they may receive another more intense intervention or they may be evaluated for a special education evaluation. Interventions are provided at different levels of intensity, depending on the needs of the student. (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, and Young, 2003).

If a large proportion of students are not progressing, then the general education instruction is failing to provide the type of learning environment that most students need in order to progress at expected rates. As part of the RTI method, and in order for RTI to succeed, at least 80% of all students should be at benchmark for their core curriculum. (Batsche, Kavale, & Kovaleski, 2006). RTI progress monitoring provides feedback for educators on their teaching methods and the effectiveness of the learning environment. Educators are taking more responsibility in the learning process and allowing for the possibility that teaching methods may need to be modified rather than assuming that the student has a learning difficulty. This is done by providing academic interventions for a student, rather than immediately referring him or her for special education assessments, The RTI model is designed to support the educational needs of all students whether or not there is a need to identify a disability. In this way, any student can receive assistance that suits his or her particular needs (Pereles, Omdal, & Baldwil, 2009). Therefore, the RTI model is helpful for students whose struggles are unique and who may not otherwise receive needed assistance.

In order to obtain the expected results from RTI, educators must implement all of the necessary features that research has demonstrated as essential. Barnes and Harlacher (2008) recommend that a complete RTI implementation would include the following five unchanging

principles and four varying features. The five unchanging principles are (a) a proactive and preventative approach to education, (b) an instructional match between student skills, curriculum, and instruction, (c) a problem-solving orientation with data-based decision making, (d) the use of effective practices, and (e) a systems level approach.

The four features are essential*, yet varying.* Essential means that each of the features is required in order for RTI to bring about the expected results. Varying means that educators can implement the features with some flexibility. In the list of essential, yet varying features below; the essential feature is listed first and the description of how that feature can vary follows:

- Multiple tiers: the number of tiers and the placement of special education within the tier system.

- An assessment system: which assessments are used, and the frequency of administration.

- Protocol: the determination of resources and the level of interventions.

- Evidence-based instruction: judging how or when a student has or has not responded to instruction.

In response to the concerns that many educators have regarding procedural changes and possible costs of RTI, Buffum et al. (2009) recommend that schools and districts approach RTI creatively in order to implement it without hiring new staff or spending more money. They say that schools "must modify their master schedules…so as to provide systematic interventions throughout the regular school day, without forcing the students to miss core instruction in the regular classroom" (p.7). RTI is, therefore, more than an identification process. It is a school-wide collaborative process with resources focused on the same outcome.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

Professional learning communities evolved out of a need to improve the learning of all students. The term "professional learning community" first emerged in the 1960's, but research in PLCs became more prevalent in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The publishing of *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement,* by Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998) provided insights for further emergence of the effectiveness of PLCs and effective implementation practices.

In order to define or describe what a PLC is, it is important to note that calling a school or a community within a school a PLC is "purposeful language" (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 19). In order to be considered *professional,* educators must have expertise and remain current in the evolving knowledge base. The term *learning* shifts the focus from what is being taught to what is being learned. Educators are responsible for their own learning, in order to increase learning among their students. Additionally, in being called a *community*, the emphasis becomes a group linked by common interests rather than just an organization of structure and efficiency.

When schools implement PLCs, they shift from the ineffective, systematized and bureaucratic types of schools to an environment where teachers are treated as experts and professionals in their field, and where they are expected to behave as such. PLCs can also help move the school toward the redistribution of resources to improve both teaching and learning (DuFour et al., 2008). These changes reflect the "learner-centered vision for American education," described by Linda Darling-Hammond in *The Right to Learn* (1997).

Although PLCs involve many components, *collaboration* is a key. Collaboration means educators are working together inter-independently to "build shared knowledge rather than pool opinions" (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 187). Providing time for this collaboration among teachers is

essential in order for an institution to function as an effective PLC. Through the collaborative process, special educators can assist general education teachers in providing students with special needs better access to the general education curriculum. In this way, teachers with different instructional training and background can support one another. Also, studies indicate that the use of specific models and procedures in the collaboration process increases the effectiveness of collaboration (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009).

The term professional learning community is often used to describe a group of educators. Sometimes it describes the school as a whole, or it can also describe subgroups within a school that can function as a PLC. For example, in an elementary school one of these subgroups would most likely consist of all of the teachers for one grade level. In a secondary school, a subgroup functioning as a PLC would most likely be organized by subject rather than grade level. Some even use the term PLC as the name of a meeting they attend. However, a true PLC is much more than a group, a subgroup, or a meeting; a real PLC is a culture that permeates the school.

The culture of a PLC reflects common attitudes amongst all of the educators. These attitudes include a focus on learning and results, collaborative processes, and data-based decision making. When a school functions as a PLC, teachers are treated like professionals and they behave like professionals. They no longer work in isolation in their classrooms, but rather work together as a community with common goals and common desires for constant improvement. In order for these subgroups to function as PLCs the school realigns its structure to provide a time for the professionals to meet regularly for collaboration. During the collaboration, the groups of professionals openly examine data as a group and make evidence-based decisions regarding ways to improve the learning that is taking place in their community. The data can be analyzed in terms of student learning strengths and deficiencies, or in terms of teacher teaching strengths

and deficiencies. Some of the areas of focus that are part of this collaborative process include shared goals and a commitment to continuous improvement. (Dufour et. al, 2008). School-wide or subgroup PLCs, involve more than just a meeting or time to collaborate. To be called a PLC means that the educators in that particular school have an attitude or tone of professionalism that includes continued desires for improvement. In other words, when a school becomes a PLC, the culture of the school changes and it becomes a new culture or has been *re-cultured* (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009).

The Relationship between RTI and PLC

RTI and PLCs both require school personnel to change the traditional ways in which teachers have taught, and students have learned in schools. As a first step to implementing the RTI model, schools need to restructure their system and re-culture their staff. To restructure means to organize differently. To re-culture a school to become a PLC means to go through steps that create a collaborative culture rather than the traditional isolated culture that typically exists in schools. Schools using PLCs already provide that restructuring and re-culturing, which then creates a foundation in the school for the RTI model. In understanding the relationship of RTI and PLCs, experts in both educational models state that "For those practitioners who have not yet begun the PLC journey, we make the case that the most promising and research-supported way to implement response to intervention is to operate as a professional learning community" (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 10).

Both RTI and PLCs place the focus on students and their learning. Buffum et al. (2009) lists the following as elements common to both RTI and PLCs: (a) collective responsibility by all staff for all students; (b) access to a high-quality core curriculum; (c) true differentiation in the classroom; (d) universal screening; (e) analysis of student work to evaluate overall

curriculum and diagnose individual student needs; (f) tiers of intervention; and (e) systematic, explicit, and research-based programs diagnostically chosen and taught by the most effective educators

Both RTI and PLCs have been implemented across grade levels in schools throughout the United States. However, evidence of successful implementation of RTI in secondary schools is not yet as prevalent as it is for elementary schools (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008). RTI may be accepted as an educational model for both elementary and secondary schools, however, "scant research and few, if any RTI models appropriate for secondary school settings exist" (Johnson & Smith, 2008, p. 1).

PLCs provide a foundation and culture that is well suited for RTI and they provide a natural atmosphere where RTI can succeed. Because of the commonalities between PLCs and RTI, they are mutually supportive and promote the success of one another.

Application of Flextime in Junior High

One challenge to implementing RTI in secondary schools is allocating time for students to receive a second level of instruction. In the implementation of RTI, students need to be taught in more intense small groups and from highly qualified teachers. They also need an opportunity to focus on concepts that have been difficult for them to learn (Johnson & Smith, 2008).

Statement of Problem

Educators are interested in improving learning and instruction for all students. Therefore, evidence of improvement needs to be investigated in all populations within a school. Currently, research on RTI implementation in secondary schools is limited; therefore, further study is necessary to learn how to effectively restructure school time and resources in order to execute RTI successfully in secondary schools. Furthermore, in order to have an understanding of how

RTI restructuring impacts all students, research needs to be conducted with subgroups of students in a secondary school. This research can be used to determine future possibilities for RTI and how it can function optimally for all student populations.

One solution to resolving the allocation of time in an RTI model at a secondary school is something called flextime. Flextime is a program that provides an additional 30 minutes of instruction for students that are struggling to grasp particular concepts. Students are tested daily on concepts in each subject to determine individuals' needs for extra instruction. The students are then given recommendations for how and where to spend their flextime the following day. Enrichment activities are offered during this time for students who do not require extra instruction.

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of flextime as one of the aspects of RTI implementation that has functioned successfully at one particular junior high. More specifically, how students that are receiving special education services experience flextime. Students who generally struggle with academic work, such as those with disabilities, may rarely be given an opportunity to engage in the enrichment activities during flextime. This could be considered a drawback of the model. By researching this particular population sample, valuable information can be collected in order to improve the model for this and other schools. New ideas for improvements of the program may also surface. The following question guided the study:

What are the perceptions and experiences of students with mild to moderate disabilities at this junior high in a mountain west state regarding flextime?

Method

Participants

In order to begin this study approval was obtained from Brigham Young University Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the Office of Research and Creative Activities. Once that was obtained, approval was then obtained from the IRB of the School District. The IRB representative of the school district then required validation from the principal of the junior high that he also approved of the study. In order to not disrupt the learning of the students interviewed, the school district representative required that the students must be interviewed during flextime. Once approval was obtained, the special education teacher team leader was contacted and he generated a list of students from eighth and ninth grade that were part of the mild/moderate special education program at the school. All students that were willing to participate were given parental consent forms. Reminder phone calls were made in order to generate as many interviews as possible. Every student that returned a signed consent form was interviewed.

Participants included eight students from the junior high's special education program. Of those students interviewed, six were male and two were female. Four of the students were in eighth grade and four were in ninth grade. Efforts were made to interview more than 8 students. However, obtaining enough consent forms from parents caused some limitations in meeting a saturation point of the data. All participants and their parents agreed to the students' participation in the study (see Appendix A). The selection of these students was based on the recommendations of the special education teacher. Although this participant selection process could pose as a weakness in this study, the researcher interviewed recommended students in order to obtain participants with insightful and in-depth responses to the interview questions.

Setting

The junior high where this study took place is located in a suburban area of a mountain west state. There are 1145 students enrolled, from grades seven to nine. The school has one principal, one assistant principal and three counselors. There are 49 teachers employed in the school, with five of those teachers being special educators. Approximately 12% of the students receive special education services and about 46% receive free or reduced lunch. The diversity of the students in the school includes 72.6% white, 1.1% African American/Black, 1% American Indian, 1.3% Asian, 21.4% Hispanic/Latino, and 2.4% Pacific Islander. Approximately 8% of the students are English Language Learners. The average daily attendance is 95% and the school mobility rate is 5%.

Through the collaboration process as a PLC, the junior high in this study developed the program called flextime. Establishing the flextime program was a key factor in the successful implementation of RTI. Through the flextime program, the number of failing grades dropped from 1,100 per term, to about 150 per term (Dicou, 2010).

Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2010), described the effectiveness of flextime at this junior high by highlighting the improvement of Math and English scores over the course of a six year span. The percentage of the overall student population demonstrating proficiency in Math in 2002 was 55%. In subsequent years it increased to 71% (2004), 82% (2007) and 84% (2008). English proficiency also increased from a baseline of 55% in 2002 to 81% in 2004, 87% in 2007, and 88% in 2008. The authors also report that the "increase occurred not only for the overall student population but also for every subgroup in the school." (p. 107)

As we have learned, the overall number of failing grades decreased significantly at this junior high and the Math and English test score have also improved after the implementation of

flextime. However, there are still areas where limited evidence has been gathered on the effectiveness of flextime at this school. In particular, no data have been collected on how flextime has impacted student populations such as those who are (a) English language learners (ELL), (b) gifted and talented, or (c) students with disabilities receiving special education services.

Research Design

Many types of qualitative research can be used to explore experiences and increase knowledge base for additional research. As a qualitative study, the researcher accepted "the phenomenological or subjectivist point of view that social science should be interested in how human beings 'experience' their worlds rather than how physical events impact one another" (Foddy, 1993, p. 14). According to Foddy, researchers can get at the heart of these experiences by using "non-directive, open questions that respondents answer in their own words rather than in terms of pre-set response categories" (Foddy, 1993, p. 14). Qualitative, phenomenological research is appropriate for this study because the purpose was to understand the experiences and perceptions of flextime for junior high students in special education. The researcher conducted interviews in order to gain insight and understand the perceived reality of the participants.

Interviews

Interview questions were formulated with the intent to explore domains of interest without leading the participant. The researcher conducted in-person interviews using a standardized open-ended format. All interviews were audio recorded. By conducting in-person interviews, questioning can be adapted to the answers of those being interviewed (Driscoll & Brizee, 2010). Participants were asked the same basic questions in the same order and the questions are worded in an open-ended format (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Each interview

lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and was guided by questions in Table 1, as well as the commonly used probes found in Table 2 in order to encourage significant responses from the participants.

The interviews took place during flextime and the students signed a form to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. By interviewing the students during flextime they did not miss any regular class time. The interviewer contacted the special education teacher each week to find out if any consent forms had been returned and the interviewer then went to the school during flextime in order to conduct the interviews.   The receptionist in the counseling office called the student to the office for the interview. The interviewer met with the students in a private office that was provided at the school. The researcher/interviewer maintained the privacy of the participants' identity by keeping tapes and consent forms in a combination lock box, and by assigning each student a number for the purpose of transcriptions.

Some of the methodological challenges of interviewing teens include the effects of research technology, and getting beyond monosyllabic responses (Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, & Chipman, 2008). In order to overcome these methodological challenges, the interviewer down played the use of the tape recorder, and if it appeared to intimidate the participant, then the interviewer was prepared to allow the respondents some time to toy with the recorder as recommended by Basset et al., (2008). Before each session, the interviewer clarified that there would be no wrong or right answers to the questions and that the participants were free to answer the questions with their own opinions. Also, at the suggestion of Basset et al. (2008) the interviewer used relevant self-disclosure prior to and during the interview, in order to create a conversation with the participant during the interview process. By creating a conversational type of interview the teen participant will be more likely to give honest answers rather than what they

view as "right answers" to interview questions. As part of the pre-interview conversation, the interviewer reminded the participants that there were no wrong or right answers and that their answers would remain confidential because their names would be anonymous in the report. Interviews were transcribed by the interviewer/researcher verbatim, except for the elimination of filler words such as "um,' "okay," and so forth. Also, the beginning of the interview that was used for building rapport and establishing conversational flow was not transcribed.

Data Analysis

An inductive analysis approach was used to analyze the data. As described by Hatch (2002), this approach generates understanding of the data by looking at specific elements from the data and then finding themes and connections among those specific elements. In looking for themes and patterns in the data, the researcher used the following steps (Hatch, 2002) in analyzing the interview data:

1. Read the data and identify the frames of analysis. (Frames of analysis are segments of quotations that contain one idea, or describe one event or thought.)

2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered in the data.

3. Identify domains that are pertinent to the study and assign them codes.

4. Reread transcriptions, refining domains of data and relationships.

5. Decide if the data support the chosen domains, and look for examples that may disconfirm the domains.

6. Conduct an analysis within the domains to identify new relationships or subcategories.

7. Search for themes and connections across domains.

8. Create a master outline that illustrates relationships within and among domains.

9. Select excerpts that support the identified domains and themes as described
   in the outline.

Once all interviews were completed, the primary investigator completed the verbatim transcription. The interviews were then analyzed and the primary investigator kept notes regarding coding and domain decisions. The domains that were assigned for this data analysis were initially guided by the questions asked of the participants for this study. In order to prevent biases from influencing the data analysis process and in order to increase credibility to the study, the primary researcher and a second graduate student in school psychology read the transcripts independently and coded them according to agreed upon frames of analysis that appeared significant and pertinent to the objectives of this study. The researchers read through the interviews to determine under which frames of analysis each of the quotes, from the transcription, would fall. Throughout the independent study of the transcripts, each researcher recorded their coding decisions. After the independent coding process was complete, the primary investigator compared both documents in order to identify discrepancies. Once the discrepancies were identified, both researchers discussed the reasoning behind their decisions and collaborated to reach a consensus on each discrepancy.

By using the coded frames of analysis, the primary researcher first divided all quotes by those frames of analysis in order to determine the domains and subcategories within domains. After analyzing these domains and subcategories the primary researcher then created an outline to illustrate these frames of analysis and subcategories and to represent the relationships within domains (See Table 3).

Once the themes within domains were established, the primary researcher used this outline to identify and outline themes among domains. This outline was used as a framework for

presenting the results of this study and to identify and select pertinent excerpts from the interviews that support the identified domains and themes.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Students receiving special education services shared their views of flextime. During their interviews, the students described what flextime does, discussed their opinions about how well it works, provided information that administrators may or may not know about flextime, and talked about how they felt about the program.

Students' Perceptions of the Purpose of Flextime

During the interviews, the students were asked to describe flextime, how it works, and its purposes. The students provided insights regarding the opportunities and motivating factors that flextime provides.

Opportunities to make up grades. The participants explained that flextime is offered to them for 30 minutes every Tuesday through Friday, and they are given an opportunity to make up failing grades or incomplete assignments. They explained that this is called *intervention* and that it is required for students failing any class. During flextime, students go to the class with a failing or incomplete grade and receive assistance from the instructor of that particular subject. Before going to intervention, students are provided slips of paper each day which indicate their current grades (as of that day), thereby providing information for the teachers to determine whether a student needs intervention. It is important to note here that the incentive behind the development and implementation of flextime is to promote learning (Dufour et al., 2010). However, the interview participants responded only to grades and grade improvement rather than learning.

Breaks from class work. The participants perceived flextime as not only a time for

interventions. In referring to Mondays, which are short days at the school, one student

commented, "We get out earlier, but it just doesn't feel like… So we're all like insane by our last

class because we haven't had that break in the middle." Participants also saw flextime as a time

to take a break from class work and a time to rejuvenate in the middle of the day.

Motivation to stay caught up in class. Some of the students perceived the opportunity

to participate in the activities when their grades are all caught up as an incentive to maintain their

grades. One student remarked, "I think it's for, I think it's to help the kids want to get their

grades up, so they can go to flextime and hang out with their friends." Another student shared

the following insight, "[Flextime] can encourage you to keep your grade up too 'cause if you

don't have passing grades then you can't have fun." The participants of this study viewed the

opportunities to attend enrichment activities as motivation to do well enough in their classes to

attend those activities instead of attending an intervention.

Students' Opinions on Effectiveness of Flextime

The students commented on the aspects that they liked about flextime and were also

willing to comment on areas of flextime that they thought needed some improvement.

Positive elements identified by students. Before beginning this study, the researcher

hypothesized that the students receiving special education services would be frustrated with

constant interventions and infrequent activities; however, as the data were collected and the

themes emerged, it became apparent that there were many aspects of flextime that the students

liked, including the opportunity to improve grades, breaks, enrichment activities, daily updated

report cards, the effectiveness of interventions, and extra time with the teachers.

Opportunity to improve grades. All participants liked that they could attend academic

interventions to improve their grades. One student stated, "Oh gee yeah. If we didn't have

flextime, and you were sick for over two days, you'd be like totally screwed."

Another student commented,

> Well I think our school has it so that we can get like our grades up. So that no one's
>
> failing in the end of the year. And I like it because, like if you're failing you can just go
>
> to that class and make it up.

Another student, when asked whether flextime had worked for him, replied, ""It has. Like, my parents want me to take advantage of that time to get my grades up." He explained that flextime is to help with grades, and in spite of identified weaknesses in the program, other participants like him perceived that flextime makes a positive difference in their grades. Although attending enrichment activities could seem to be more entertaining for youth, the students appeared to appreciate the opportunity to improve on their grades by attending interventions during flextime.

Breaks. Students liked the opportunity to take breaks from class work in middle of the day. One student explained this feeling with the following statement:

> It not only gives you opportunity to make up classes but also to have like a break from
>
> work and to do something fun and enjoyable for a little while. It kind of gives your mind
>
> a rest from thinking and I think a half an hour is enough time to do that.

Some participants also saw flextime as a period to take a break from class work and have some time to rejuvenate in the middle of the day.

Enrichment activities. The students interviewed found the enrichment activities to be a positive element of flextime. Some of the more frequently attended activities include: watching movies, going to the weight room, playing dance revolution, going to the gym, helping with the lights for movies, reading in the library and playing chess in the library. One of the students liked spending time with a particular teacher and shared the following: "I go to Mr. ----'s room

and talk to ----- (teacher's aide) and my friends. Because ----- is like a best friend to us, like when we're sick and everything, he's like there for us and stuff." All of the students that were interviewed liked the opportunity to attend the activities and many of them liked the activities that were offered.

Daily updated report cards. The students liked flextime's report cards because they kept the students informed about their grades on a daily basis; there was no ambiguity concerning their grades. Students could take immediate action to improve their grades as soon as their grades showed digression.

Extra time with teachers. The participants liked that the teachers were available to help them during the day and that they didn't have to try and make arrangements to meet with them before or after school. The students generally perceived that the extra time they had with their teachers helped them to improve their grades. As one student stated,

> [Our school] has flex because I think they think it's a good opportunity and a lot easier for all the students to reach their teachers at the same time if they need to, when they're failing instead of like doing it after school on their own time.

Areas for improvement. In evaluating the effectiveness of flextime at their school, the participants expressed insights and opinions concerning improvements that could be made to flextime.

Access to intervention instructors. One drawback students identified was inadequate access to their teachers. Sometimes students had difficulty getting into a class for the required intervention because too many students needed help that particular day. Also, when the students were able to get into the academic intervention classroom that they needed, teachers were often too busy and unable to assist everyone that needed extra help. One student said, "Sometimes

there's a lot of students in the class where the teacher can help someone that's doing bad in their

class. So there's so many students that he can't take care of everybody."

Another student stated:

Yea, when you have to sit there in class; and then some teachers really don't help you.

Although this school is a high functioning PLC, and a school that has found a way to implement

RTI by the use of flextime, it is evident that becoming a PLC and implementing RTI effectively

is always a work in progress.

Length of flextime. Many of the students reported that they would benefit by having

longer flextime. In their comments, their reasons for wanting more time were focused on the

need for more time to work on academic interventions rather than activities. One student said

that it would benefit the students that need to make up tests. This particular student commented,

At least 45 minutes. Because, like, when you're in intervention and you're taking a test

or something, you don't really got a lot of time to do it. Yeah 'cause then you have to

hustle and you just write down answers, you don't really get to think about it.

The various amount of times recommended by students for flextime ranged from 40 minutes to

one hour for academic intervention.

Transition period to flextime. Some of the students identified the need for more time to

get to flextime after their regular class. Occasionally a student's first choice for academic

intervention may be full and there doesn't seem to be enough time to make it to a second or third

choice without penalty.

Number and types of activities. Students offered a variety of suggestions for improving

on the activities in order to increase motivation to improve grades. Recommendations included

the following: add lacrosse, tennis, or dance classes instead of free dance; provide a room for

phone use; or offer a place to just talk with friends as an activity.

Student Feedback for Administrators

When students were asked if they had any comments or suggestions for administrators concerning flextime, a few themes emerged.

Pay attention to sneaking. The participants described various methods of sneaking out of flextime. Some of the students hide in the bathrooms during flextime and many students make arrangements on meeting times and places in advance via Facebook. One student described a method of sneaking that they witnessed,

> It's obvious that there's kids sneaking into things and they usually end up getting caught, it's pretty obvious. But like, I've seen people where they show a flextime slip and then they walk in then they toss it on the floor and then their friend comes in and like, "Oh I dropped it!" And there it is. But if they read the name on the flextime slip it won't be the person. But, it's hard to get away with.

Some of the participants felt that administrators already knew about some of the flextime sneaking that took place, but some of them thought that it was worth sharing some of the methods the students used to avoid intervention.

Offer more frequent opportunities for activities. For students that have higher rates of required academic intervention and fewer opportunities for activities, it can sometimes feel discouraging. One student describes it as "boring." Students generally felt that more frequent opportunities for all students to participate in activities would be beneficial and motivating.

Provide consistent helpful instruction. Some students identified a lack of helpful instruction during their intervention period. There were reports of instructors being either overly busy or providing limited interaction with a student. One of the students provided this example:

No, he gets around to everyone and then I go to get help from him, and then he's too busy

on his computer or something like that. Yeah, he just tells you what to do. Like you'll go

up to the desk and you tell him, "What do I have to do?" And just like, "This and this

and this." And he prints 'em out for you and just gives it to you.

As a result, some of the students perceived that they were not always able to obtain the assistance

they needed during intervention.

Feelings About Flextime

The students interviewed had a variety of feelings about flextime. Some of the students

revealed it was motivating, fun, necessary, rewarding, boring, or either encouraging or

discouraging, depending on the circumstances. Again, it is important to note that all of the

students interviewed felt that flextime is a good thing and that if they were in charge of the

school they would also utilize it.

<div align="center">

Discussion

</div>

The principal and staff were able to use their collaborative efforts, which are a natural

part of the PLC process, to find a way to readjust the schedules and resources at a secondary

school in order to implement RTI (DuFour et al., 2008). Through these modifications, they were

able to apply some of the essential features of RTI. Flextime was used in order to create a

preventative approach to education (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008) and is a way of providing

students and teachers the time needed for academic interventions in a secondary setting. At this

junior high, flextime was provided for all students, including those already receiving special

education services. The results of this research provide some feedback to educators about how

several special education students experience flextime. By studying the use of flextime and

students' experiences in the program, methods for its improvement as well as for the monitoring

of its effectiveness were discovered, which offer important implications for future practice.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study revealed important insights into the implementation of flextime in a secondary setting. Our research was driven by a desire to know the perceptions and experiences of students with mild to moderate disabilities regarding flextime. Overall, we discovered that these students found the program beneficial. We learned that in spite of their need to frequently spend more time in intervention than many of their peers, they were still able to recognize the value of having extra time for help on their class work. These results highlight positive outcomes of the program that should be capitalized on in future implementations. Additionally, we gathered constructive feedback from students on areas for the program's improvement. When these elements are taken into combined consideration, the viability of flextime can be evaluated for efficacy. These recommendations will be helpful for administrators looking to implement and improve upon RTI programs in the future.

Capitalization on benefits. One important outcome of this study was the identification of flextime's benefits. Recognizing areas of flextime's effectiveness and capitalizing on those strengths is essential in the successful implementation of future intervention programs. Generally speaking, the students felt that flextime provided the following benefits: (a) better grades, (b) breaks in the middle of the day, (c) a variety of activities, (d) up-to-date information with daily report cards, and (e) extra time with their teachers. The students interviewed recognized the value of having flextime in order to improve their grades and reported that it is helpful to take a break from class work in the middle of the day. They also appreciated the option to participate in activities once they were caught up with their class work and felt that such activities served as motivation to maintain good grades. All participants agreed that if they were in charge of the

school they would also implement flextime.

Although there are limitations to the breadth and depth of this study, the positive feedback on flextime from students receiving special education services is useful to educators that wish to implement a similar program in another secondary setting.

Recommended improvements. In addition to identifiable benefits of flextime, students also noted some areas for improvement. This feedback is also useful in decisions on how to most effectively implement flextime as part of the RTI method in a secondary school. Students recognized several areas for improvement including the availability of intervention instructors, the period of intervention, the number and variety of activities, and finally the occurrence of sneaking among students.

The participants reported that sometimes it was difficult to get the help they needed from the academic intervention instructors. One of the reasons for this included high demand for some interventions, which meant either an inability to attend that particular intervention or having a teacher that is too busy to get around to all of the students that need assistance. Some students perceived various instructors as not being helpful enough in providing instruction.

Another area where students recognized a need for improvement involved the logistics of flextime. They saw a need for extending flextime from anywhere between 40 minutes to an hour. They felt that sometimes 30 minutes wasn't enough to complete assignments and especially if they were retaking a test. Another logistical concern was the amount of time allotted to get from their previous class to the enrichment activities and interventions. If an intervention is full or cancelled, it is difficult to get to a second or third option quickly enough without being tardy to flextime.

Students also reported improvements they would like to see in the enrichment activities

offered. Because some of the students saw the enrichment activities as an intentional factor for motivating them to keep up their grades, it is important to consider their satisfaction with these activities. They mentioned an interest in having a wider variety of enrichment activities or to have more enrichment activities to choose from during flextime. Additionally, for some of the more popular activities currently offered there were more students who wanted to participate than there was space available. These infrequent opportunities to attend activities (due to space limitation or greater time spent in intervention) was sometimes "discouraging" and "boring" for the students. Some of the students would have liked a more fair procedure for all students to have access to those popular activities.

Finally, another item that came up in the interviews that students wanted to make administrators aware of was the different type of sneaking that occurs during flextime. While most students get caught, some are able to avoid intervention through various methods of deceit. While this was not a general theme among all the student responses, it is a valid concern for the overall effectiveness of flextime when considering future implementation practices.

Reflections on viability of flextime. In order to implement RTI with fidelity, it is necessary to provide time for interventions at various tier levels. Arranging school schedules to accommodate these interventions is relatively simple in an elementary school setting. However, it can be more complex in a secondary school setting where students attend multiple classes throughout the day and each student has their own unique class schedule. Inasmuch as RTI has been successfully implemented in many elementary education settings, it is helpful to identify one secondary school that has found a way to implement RTI by rearranging schedules and resources in order to provide a time for academic interventions. In looking for ways to perfect this systemic change, some of the students were able to share a few insights that can be

generalized to other secondary education settings. Flextime appears to be a viable feature in implementing RTI in a secondary school, and according to this study, students receiving special education services also see it as useful and essential in order to improve their grades.

Limitations

There are a couple limitations to this study. First, only eight students were interviewed. There were not enough participants to this study for data to reach a point of saturation. Having a small number of participants may not represent a complete picture of the students' experiences of flextime at this particular junior high. Additionally, because students who receive special education services could be affected differently by flextime than the general population of students, it may be helpful for a school to implement a regular system for students to anonymously report on some of the aspects of flextime in their school. This would provide helpful data for planning and implementation for all subpopulations within a school.

Second, the effectiveness of flextime for the participants is based on self-reports only. Teachers' perceptions on academic performance of the participants were not collected, nor were there any data collected to reflect actual school performance for the participants of this study. Without other data collection, we are only provided with the perceptions of these unique participants with little feedback on the perceptions of others involved.

Considerations for Future Research

Some possibilities for future research might include interviewing other unique populations within a school. Insight would be gained by interviewing students that are ELL, or students that are gifted and talented. Do either of these subgroups view flextime as beneficial? Students that are ELL may wish to receive extra language services rather than increased time in the classes in which they struggle. Perhaps students that are considered gifted and talented

would benefit from enrichment activities that provide increased academic challenges or opportunities for creativity that they are not currently receiving.

Further areas of research may include interviewing students in other secondary schools that may have found a different approach to implementing RTI. Also, by interviewing teachers and staff, additional information and attitudes would surface in order to provide helpful feedback for RTI implementation in a secondary setting. Views of teachers and staff may reflect a different reality than what is perceived by the students.

Table 1
Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me about flextime

   What is it?

   Why does your school have it?

2. How do you usually spend your flextime?

   Tell me a time when you really enjoyed flextime.

   Tell me a time when you really didn't like flextime.

3. What are some of the things you like about flextime?

4. What are some of the things you don't like about flextime?

   What would make it better?

5. What do you wish the principal and teachers knew about flextime?

6. If you were in charge of your school would you have flextime?

   If so, what would be the same?

       What would be different?

   If not, why not?

Table 2
Commonly Used Interview Probes

.

Repeat question.

Anything else?

Any other reason?

How do you mean?

Could you tell me more about your
        thinking on that?

Would you tell me what you have in mind?

What do you mean?

Why do you feel that way?

Which would be closer to the way you feel?

(University of Michigan Survey Research Center as cited by Johnson & Christensen, 2008)

Table 3
Data Analysis Domain Outline

_____

I. Perceived Definition of FLEX time of the students interviewed
    A. When
        1. Thirty minutes in the middle of the day every Tuesday through Friday
    B. Why
        1. Time provided for making up incomplete and failing grades
        2. Time to go to the class that the student is failing
        3. An opportunity for students to go to their choice of fun activities if they are passing all of their classes
        4. Time provided for students to talk with the teacher of the class in which they have a failing or incomplete
    C. What
        1. Teachers are available to help students with different subjects
        2. Different academic interventions are scheduled for different days
    D. How
        1. Daily, all students are provided with slips of paper which have their current grades in each class and indicate whether or not they are required to go to an academic intervention
            a. Students that are required to go to academic intervention are given a white slip
            b. Students that may attend one of the various activities are given a colored slip
        2. The student body is divided into two separate groups for two FLEX time periods
    E. Other elements of FLEX time
        1. "Open Intervention" is a place where students can go to work on their own when the needed instructor is unavailable
        2. Administrative Fun Time (AFT) is a place where administrators can send students during FLEX time and a place where the students can't communicate with each other

II. The perceived purposes of FLEX time, as described by the students interviewed
    A. Grades and Intervention
        1. To make up incomplete grades
        2. To make up failing grades
        3. As an opportunity to improve any grade
    B. Breaks in the day

        1. Having a break in the middle of the day in order to encourage students to keep their grades up

  C. Motivation and Encouragement

      1. Motivating the students to keep their grades up by providing activities for them to attend when they're passing their classes

III. How students interviewed usually spend their FLEX time

  A. How students interviewed usually spend their FLEX time when they are passing

      1. The movies
      2. The weight room
      3. Going to one of the teacher's classrooms to talk with the teacher and the aid because "the teacher is like a best friend to us"
      4. Dance revolution
      5. The gym
      6. Going to the movies to help with the lights
      7. To the library to read
      8. To the library to play chess

  B. How students interviewed usually spend their FLEX time when they are failing and are required to attend an intervention

      1. History
      2. English
      3. Math
      4. Science

  C. How students interviewed usually spend their FLEX time generally

      1. One student said usually activities
      2. One student said pretty evenly divided
      3. Three students said that they spend most of their time in intervention
      4. Two students did not specify whether they spent most of their time in an activity or in intervention

IV. Paraphrased descriptions of how the students interviewed evaluated how well FLEX time works

  A. Positive comments

      1. Ideas concerning grades

         a. Without FLEX time it would be really hard to class work done
         b. Without FLEX time, if a student is sick for over two days, it would be nearly impossible to get caught up
         c. FLEX time interventions help when students have been absent
         d. FLEX time is worth having because it's rewarding to pass classes

2. Ideas concerning breaks
    a. Without a break in the middle of the day, the students would feel more "insane" at the end of the day
3. General positive comments about FLEX time
    a. There is nothing really wrong with FLEX time
    b. FLEX time is entertaining
    c. FLEX time works well for the students

B. Negative comments or suggestions for improvement
1. Ideas concerning activities
    a. If there were more activities added, students would enjoy it more
    b. For some students the activities aren't motivating enough to improve grades because they don't care about the grades

2. Ideas concerning interventions
    a. Comments in interventions in general
      i. Some students may not like FLEX time because if they don't try to do well in their classes, they have to spend most of their FLEX time in academic intervention rather than activities.
      ii. FLEX time would be better without so many classes to get caught up in

    b. Comments regarding teachers of interventions
      i. Some teacher in academic interventions are too busy to help all of the students that need assistance
      ii. Some teachers in academic intervention don't help students with failing grades
      iii. Some intervention teachers give students lists of missing assignments without giving extra instruction.
      iv. Sometimes there are too many students for one teacher to be able to help them all during an academic intervention period
      v. Having more teachers in some areas would help the students to get caught up

3. Ideas concerning scheduling
    a. FLEX time should be longer
    b. FLEX time should last at least 45 minutes in order to have enough time to retake tests

V. A description of a time that the students interviewed liked FLEX time

A. Playing football and getting a couple of touchdowns
B. Helping out a friend that was crying by having an opportunity to talk with her during FLEX time

VI. Some of the things that students that were interviewed have liked about FLEX time
    A. Grade Improvement
        1. Having the time to improve or fix grades
        2. Receiving a daily report card in order to improve or fix grades
        3. Receiving assistance in order to improve or fix grades
    B. A Break
        1. Getting a break from class
        2. Having a rest for the mind
    C. Activities
        1. The activities are fun
        2. Having something to look forward to
        3. Time with friends
        4. The variety of activities
    D. Scheduling
        1. Not having to come in early for help with classes
        2. Having the time to get "stuff" done

VII. A description of a time that the students interviewed disliked FLEX time
    A. Going to a dance during FLEX time that was boring and with boring songs
    B. The first experience with having to go to academic intervention
    C. Getting in an argument with someone during FLEX time
    D. When a fellow student picked a fight

VIII. Some of the things that students that were interviewed have disliked about FLEX time
    A. Academic Intervention
        1. When the student was failing for several weeks and had to go to academic intervention without having a break
        2. It's boring
        3. When teachers don't really help
        4. Having to stay in class to get the grade up and with not freedom to move to another class
        5. Having to go to a class that isn't liked
    B. Activities
        1. Not being able to use phones during FLEX time
    C. Scheduling
        1. It's not long enough

D. Discipline
      1. Getting in trouble for talking during FLEX time

IX. What the students interviewed said they would do regarding FLEX time if they were in charge (It should be noted that all students interviewed said that they would keep FLEX time if they were in charge of the school)
    A. No change
    B. Activities
        1. To make some of the activities different with new sports
        2. To have dance classes to learn different dances rather than just free dance
        3. To make the soccer game in the gym more organized in order that everyone there can have a chance to play
        4. To allow the students to use phones in a separate room for that purpose if they don't have academic intervention that day
        5. To provide a place for students to just talk as an activity
        6. To keep all of the activities
    C. Academic Intervention
        1. To make academic intervention optional for those students that don't care about their grades
    D. Scheduling
        1. To make it a little bit longer, at least 45 minutes
        2. To provide more time to go from class to FLEX time in case the first or second choice FLEX time interventions are full
        3. To extend the FLEX time to 40 minutes and have lunch time a little bit shorter
        4. To make FLEX time one hour long
    E. Balance of Activities and Intervention
        1. To have just the activities and no interventions
        2. To sometimes have the opportunity for activities for those students that rarely earn activity passes

X. Some things that the students interviewed wished that the principal and teachers knew about FLEX time
    A. Nothing
    B. Sneaking
        1. That students try to sneak into activities by dropping their passes on the floor after they enter, in order that their friends can pretend that it was their own pass that they dropped as they come in behind.
        2. That sometimes the required intervention is unavailable and there isn't always enough time to find somewhere productive to go.
        3. That sometimes while looking for an appropriate intervention, if there's not

enough time then students are sometimes accused of sloughing.
4. That students make arrangements in advance to plan meeting locations to leave campus or hide in the bathroom during FLEX time.

C. How it feels
1. That it's boring to get grades up.
2. That sometimes it's difficult to get grades up.

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Appendix A – Interview Measures

Parental Permission for a Minor to Participate in Research

Attitudes of Adolescent Students with Disabilities and Their Teachers Regarding "FLEX Time" in a Response to Intervention Model

Introduction

My name is Julie Daye. I am a graduate student at Brigham Young University and I am conducting a research study about the attitudes that adolescent students with disabilities have regarding FLEX time. I am inviting your child to take part in this research because he/she is a student at --------- Junior High, is receiving special education services, and was recommended by an instructor as being a student that could provide insightful and thoughtful responses to interview questions.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to let your child participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- Your child will be interviewed regarding their feelings about FLEX time.
- This interview will take place at your child's school in a semi-private room and the interview will be tape recorded.
- Your child's interview will last 20 to 30 minutes and will take place at _____am/pm.

RISKS

There is a risk of loss of privacy, which the researcher will reduce by not using any real names or other identifiers in the written report. The researcher will also keep all data in a locked file cabinet in a secure location. The researcher and one co-investigator will have access to the data. At the end of the study, data will be _____

There may be some discomfort at being asked some of the questions. Your child may answer only those questions that your child wants to, or your child may stop the entire process at any time without affecting his/her standing in school or grades in class.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The research data will be kept in a secure location and electronic data will be password protected. Only the researcher will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in a locked cabinet or office. Audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits for your child's participation in this project.

COMPENSATION

There will be no compensation for participation in this project.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH

If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact **Julie Daye** at **801-556-0966 or juliedaye@q.com,** or you may contact **Professor Mary Anne Prater,** by calling **801-422-1592 or prater@byu.edu.**

Questions about your child's rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study also may be addressed to the IRB Administrator, Brigham Young University, A-285 ASB, Provo, UT 84602; 801-422-1461 or irb@byu.edu

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to have your child participate in this research study. You may withdraw your child's participation at any point without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on you or your child's present or future status at Brigham Young University.

Child's Name _____

Signature   _____   Date _____
                                Parent

Signature   _____   Date _____

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT ASSENT FORM
(approximate ages 11-14)

What is this study about?

My name is **Julie Daye.** I am from Brigham Young University. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Your parent(s) know we are talking with you about the study. This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to be in it.

In this study, we want to learn about your experience with FLEX time.

What am I being asked to do?

If you decide to be in the study, we will ask you to be tape recorded and interviewed. The interview will last about 15 to 20 minutes. We won't record you without your permission.

What are the benefits to me for taking part in the study?

Taking part in this research study may not help you in any way, but it might help us learn how to help other kids get more out of FLEX time.

Can anything bad happen if I am in this study?

We think there are few risks to you by being in the study, but some kids might become worried or sad because of some of the questions we ask. You don't have to answer any of the questions you don't want to answer. If you become upset, let us know and we will have a school counselor help you with those feelings.

Who will know that I am in the study?

We won't tell anybody that you are in this study and everything you tell us and do will be private. Your parent may know that you took part in the study, but we won't tell them anything you said or did, either. When we tell other people or write articles about what we learned in the study, we won't include your name or that of anyone else who took part in the study.

Do I have to be in the study?

No, you don't. The choice is up to you. No one will get angry or upset if you don't want to do this. And you can change your mind anytime if you decide you don't want to be in the study anymore.

What if I have questions?

If you have questions at any time, you can ask us and you can talk to your parent about the study. We will give you a copy of this form to keep. If you want to ask us questions about the study, call or email

Julie Daye   801-556-0966 juliedaye@q.com

Do you have any questions about the study now?

****

IF YOU WANT TO BE IN THE STUDY, SIGN AND PRINT YOUR NAME ON THE LINE BELOW:

____*~Yes I do give my permission record my voice* ____ *~ No I do NOT give my permission to record my voice*

_____   _____

Sign your name   Date

Response to Intervention and Professional Learning Communities

Quality instruction and effective learning are important and needed for all students. The differences in opinions lie in what processes and methods are most effective. Educators and researchers recognize the need for improvement in public education and are continuously searching for what can realistically work best for students, teachers, and administrators. Some educators find that they are more comfortable and familiar with what has worked in the past and find it difficult to try something new and wonder if it really is effective. Other educators may learn about a new approach in education and be excited about it, but find it difficult to know how to make that transition from traditional systems to something different. Some of the current transitions in education throughout the United States include two approaches that are intended to improve (a) learning for all students, (b) the performance of the school system, and (c) the identification process of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). These two educational approaches are Response to Intervention (RTI), and Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

In order to better understand RTI and PLCs, this literature review will provide definitions of each and also explain, in detail, research-based descriptions of the components that are necessary to implement these methods with fidelity. To implement an educational method with fidelity means to include the details that researchers have developed in order to produce similar results that have been obtained by the researchers in their applications of these methods. The history of each method will also be discussed. In addressing the history of RTI, it will be important to also understand the discrepancy method of the SLD identification process and how it currently fits in with the RTI model. Inasmuch as RTI is still evolving, this literature review will also briefly describe RTI's place in Utah and in middle schools.

Definition of Response to Intervention

RTI has been described as an "alternate method of eligibility determination" (Batsche, Kavale, & Kovaleski, 2006). However, there is much more to RTI than eligibility determination. Gresham, VanDerHeyeden, and Witt (as cited in Barnes & Harlacher, 2008, p. 417), summarize the philosophy of RTI as finding '*which* children need *what* services, delivered with *how much* intensity."

In other words, when a school is using the RTI model for educational interventions for students rather than remediation, there are some shifts in educational focus. In the "wait to fail" model, students must be behind academically to a large enough degree to qualify for special services. The RTI model provides another option. All students can be regularly, briefly, and more frequently tested in order to assess whether or not learning is taking place. Then, rather than immediately classifying students and assuming they are responsible for the lack of learning, the school system and educators take responsibility and change the student's learning environment in order to ensure that the student is learning.

In using the RTI approach, a series of possible interventions take place in order to assist students before they are considered for special education identification. Thus, the RTI model is intended to improve education for all students at different levels of learning difficulties, as well as provide information to educators on their teaching methods and the effectiveness of the learning environment. If not enough students are learning, then the core curriculum instruction in the general education classroom is failing to provide the type of learning environment that most students need.

A valuable quality of the RTI model is that it is designed to support the educational needs of all students whether or not there is a need to identify a disability. In this way, any student can receive assistance that suits their particular needs (Pereles, Omdal, & Baldwil, 2009). The RTI

model is, therefore, helpful for students whose struggles are unique and who may not otherwise receive needed assistance. Some of these student populations include those who do not qualify for special education yet still need assistance, and students who are twice-exceptional (e.g., students with gifts/talents as well as disabilities).

History of Response to Intervention

In 1977 SLD was included as a category in Special Education. The U.S. Office of Education determined that in order to detect and classify students with SLD, there should be a discrepancy between their I.Q. and their achievement. Each state was left to define what this discrepancy would be and what would constitute the need for SLD identification, in order for a student to receive assistance through special education services. With this discrepancy model of SLD identification, it was found that many students with SLD went undetected until they were in the upper grades of elementary school. Additionally, this model provided only limited information for developing plans for remediation. Another issue which caused great concern, was the increased diagnoses for SLD, which increased by 200% since 1977, indicating possible misdiagnoses (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

In the reauthorization of the Individuals Disability Education Act 2004, RTI was not mandated, but states were authorized to find more effective alternatives for identifying SLD (IDEA, 2004). Consequently, many states have moved toward RTI (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). RTI has developed incrementally, starting with problem-solving models, instructional support teams, and consultation teams. These elements were precursors to the current and complete RTI model (Kovaleski, 2007). The development and use of RTI has made the use of standard protocols possible. In 2003, Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, and Young (2003), first make mention of two distinct and alternative RTI approaches. They distinguish and define the

problem-solving approach and the *standard protocol* approach. There will be further discussion of these two RTI approaches later.

Other components to the current RTI model were developed by the staff of Heartland Area Education Agency, which is based in Johnston, Iowa. They developed a four level problem-solving model which has evolved into the "tier" level approach in today's (still developing) RTI model (Fuchs et al., 2003). By using a multi-level problem-solving model, students and educators can work through different levels or degrees of intervention until the student has responded to the intervention. By using the multiple levels, the pre-referral intervention of RTI becomes a pre-referral intervention and eligibility process in one construct. Although there is more than one option in the number of tiers used in the RTI model, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) support the three tier model (Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

Response to Intervention vs. the discrepancy model. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), requires academic improvement for all students and the use of scientifically-based practices, yet some see IDEA 2004 and NCLB as being "diametrically opposed," (Kovaleski, 2007) and they see weaknesses in the RTI approach. Those that oppose the use of RTI alone are concerned that RTI cannot reveal the presence or absence of underachievement, and that RTI offers no mechanism for differentiating between expected and unexpected learning failure. They see RTI as a preventative process rather than an identification process. When RTI is used exclusively it is an incomplete identification procedure. Kavale and Spaulding (2008) recommend that combining RTI and cognitive assessment can satisfy the guidelines of both IDEA and NCLB.

Another element to consider is that in using the RTI model, it is necessary to establish a

measure that determines responsiveness. The possible variations of the measurement and the possible variance in deciding what determines responsiveness may cause the same lack of reliability in SLD identification as the discrepancy model once did (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). However, the I.Q. discrepancy model often becomes a "wait to fail" model, which causes great concern to educators. Yet, low achievement does not always reflect a disability but may instead be reflective of poor teaching (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In such cases, the RTI approach to identification, when done properly, ensures that poor instruction is not the cause for material not being learned.

The question remains: Is the primary intent of RTI identification or prevention? Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) believe that RTI has potential and can greatly improve instruction and prevent chronic school failure. In analyzing RTI as a replacement for the discrepancy model, there are strengths in the RTI model that were never before addressed by the discrepancy model. However, to completely ignore the outcomes of the discrepancy model may cause a disservice to students who still need the support of a diagnosis and special education placement (Batsche et al., 2006).

RTI is a tool to be used for generally improving instruction on a school-wide basis and for adapting instruction to suit the individual needs of students. The proper use of RTI can prevent "over-identification" of learning disabilities with fewer special education placements. However, some experts are concerned that RTI will prevent educational professionals from proper and needed diagnosis of students with SLD, in particular (Batsche et al. 2006). Batsche (2006) further points out that by using RTI as the predominant method in determining learning disabilities, the definition of specific learning disability has not changed, but only the procedures used to determine eligibility.

Those that are resistant to adopt RTI must understand that the use of the discrepancy model in identifying SLD, is credited to Samuel Kirk, yet Kirk was even dissatisfied with this method (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2006). He felt it was arbitrary and invalid. His "most consistent description he used to identify individuals with SLD was that they displayed consistent, persistent, and unexpected underachievement" (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2006, p. 58).

Opponents to the RTI method claim that RTI should not preclude the use of comprehensive assessment, but most RTI supporters don't argue against comprehensive assessment. Most RTI supporters recognize that RTI should be used to rule out instructional deficiencies before the need for comprehensive assessments are determined (Griffiths, VanDerHeyden, Parson, & Burns, 2006). The discrepancy method alone has resulted in false-positives and false-negatives in assessing SLD and the placement of students into special education. Previously, students who could have benefitted by adequate classroom instruction were placed in special education. Similarly, students who really needed educational support were not properly identified for placement into special education. Thus both over-identification and under-identification are concerns regarding the use of the discrepancy model alone. (Grigorenko, 2009).

Most proponents of RTI recognize that it is still a work in progress and that it is "a necessary – though not sufficient – addition to the identification procedures for LD" (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2006, p. 59). In working toward improved education for all students Vaughn and Fuchs (2006), challenge both proponents and opponents of RTI to find connections regarding the issues of identification through discrepancy and prevention through RTI. Although solutions may still be incomplete and imperfect, the discrepancy model and RTI are both necessary stepping-stones toward helping all children to learn and have their educational needs met.

"The literature today does not have sufficient evidence prescribing the best and the most effective method of quantification and qualification of degree of responsiveness" (Grigorenko, 2009). In order to determine the effectiveness of the RTI method, it would be needful to establish that students' scores on state tests have improved, and that the achievement goals of NCLB have been attained. (Kovaleski, 2007).

The Components of Response to Intervention

Although a brief explanation of the RTI model has been given, in order to understand RTI and implement it with fidelity, it is also important to know what its components are. Inasmuch as RTI is still developing and is not fully implemented in all public schools, there remain some differences in implementation among practitioners. Some schools may be implementing only a portion of RTI and wonder why they have seen no results from the implementation. Briefly stated, with the RTI method students (a) are provided with generally effective instruction by their classroom teacher, (b) are progress-monitored, (c) get something else if they do not respond, (d) are progress-monitored again, and (e) either qualify for special education or for special education evaluation if they still do not respond (Fuchs et al., 2003).

In implementing RTI, Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) recommend that schools ask themselves (a) How many tiers of intervention will the school provide? (b) How will the school identify students who need intervention? (c) Will the school employ more of a problem-solving or protocol approach? (d) What is an adequate response to intervention? And (e) What is the function of special education in the text of the entire system?

In order to better understand the key components of RTI, Barnes and Harlacher (2008) describe the implementation of RTI in terms of five key *principles*, which should be unchanging; and four key *features*, which vary, depending on the location of the institution. These four

features help to make RTI recognizable. It is important to note that these four features can vary

without altering the integrity of a true RTI implementation.

The five unchanging principles of RTI are (a) a proactive and preventative approach to

education, (b) ensuring an instructional match between student skills, curriculum, and

instruction, (c) a problem-solving orientation with data-based decision making, (d) the use of

effective practices, and (e) a systems level approach (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008)

Table 1 represents the four essential, yet varying features described by Barnes and

Harlacher (2008) and ways in which they vary:

Table 4
The Four Essential and Varying Features of RTI

Essential Feature	Variability
1) Multiple tiers	The number of tiers and the placement of special education within the tier system
2) An assessment system	Which assessments are used, and the Frequency of administration
3) Protocol	The determination of resources and the level of intervention
4) Evidence-based instruction	Judging how or when a student has or has Not responded to instruction

In understanding the complete RTI process, we see that the entire approach is based on

effective instruction by general education teachers in the regular classroom. In order for students

to benefit by the RTI model, 80% of all students should be at benchmark for their core

curriculum (Batsche et al., 2006). In this way "unexpected underachievers" can be accurately

identified for SLD qualifications. The professional learning community, as will be discussed

later, provides avenues for developing these needed methods in order to improve instruction in the regular classroom.

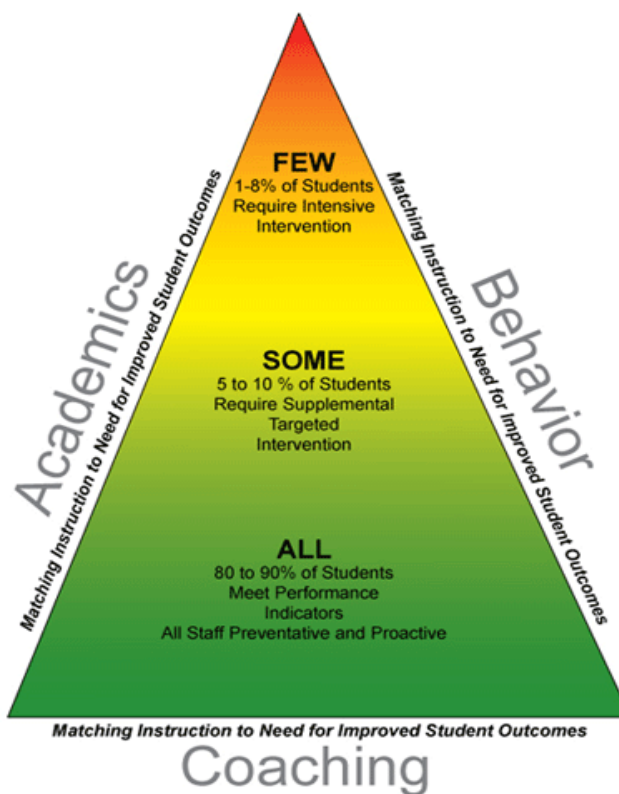Figure 1 gives a visual representation of how the RTI method works.

Figure 1.   Utah State Office of Education ABC RTI Model. This figure represents different levels of academic and behavior interventions in a Response to Intervention Model.

In illustrating the RTI process and in accordance with this diagram, the students in the first tier receive the first intervention, which is quality classroom instruction where at least 80% of the students are learning or "responding to" this intervention. As regular formative assessments are made, then those students that have not reached the benchmark standards move onto the tier two level of intervention. At the tier two level some students are provided with an

intervention of some increased level of instruction in order to bring them up to the benchmark standard. Again, with more formative assessments, some students will have responded to this intervention and will no longer need the tier two level of intervention. However, a few students will need an even more intense intervention and will move onto the third tier for that intervention.

Students can move along into different levels of interventions depending on their response to that intervention. The formative assessments not only reveal the students' response to the interventions, but it is also useful information for determining the effectiveness of the learning environments of each tier level of instruction. Then, depending on the state, district, or school; there is a referral made for special education somewhere near the top of this tier structure. At that point a student would be assessed for any special education needs. In the RTI model a student is not referred for special education until the educators have first done all they can to create the best possible learning environment for that student. With this in mind, the RTI model is also sometimes known as the *pre-referral* system.

Two approaches to Response to Intervention. As was mentioned earlier, there are two different approaches to the RTI method. One approach is the *problem-solving approach*, which is individually based, with separate plans set forth for each student based on his/her needs. The other approach is the *standard protocol approach*, where students with similar difficulties are given the same research-based interventions. There is also a third approach that would be a *hybrid-combination approach*, which is the blending of the problem-solving and standard protocol approach (Berkeley et al., 2009). Using the problem-solving approach requires expertise in assessment and intervention, and educators must be skilled in the delivery of many types of assessments and interventions that are selected and administered. In addition to these

skills, practitioners would also need to be able to accurately measure the effectiveness of the interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Table 2 illustrates a comparison between the standardized (protocol) approach and the individualized (problem-solving) approach of intervention strategies.

Table 5
Standardized RTI vs. Individualized RTI

Standardized	Individualized
Reduced instructional Decision making	Increased instructional decision making based on student assessment results
High control of materials used For instruction	Lower control of materials used for instruction
Highly specified curriculum	Low to moderate specification of curricula
Use of time specified	Flexibility in use of time to address specific student needs
High levels of fidelity to a Single approach	Responsive to needs of students
Motivation results from success	Motivation considered in text selection
Systematic and explicit Instruction	Systematic and explicit instruction
Fast-paced instruction	Fast-paced instruction
Ongoing progress monitoring	Ongoing progress monitoring

Note. Vaughn et al., p. 2008

RTI supports the learning of all students, not just those with special needs. When the RTI process is used, educators can distinguish between ineffective instruction and a possible learning disability; thereby removing blame from students for an inability to learn and placing responsibility for learning on the learning environment of the student. With the results of Curriculum Based Measures in the RTI model, educators can recognize trends in classrooms and

across grade levels, as well as the needs of individual students (Gerzel-Short & Wilkins, 2009).

Although it is logical, it is not always considered, that in order for an intervention to be effective there are three temporal components to interventions that influence the effectiveness of an intervention. These three components include not only the length of time for each intervention and the number of interventions, but also the frequency of the interventions (Griffiths et al., 2006). Regardless of what research may uncover about what is most efficient and effective in duration, amount, and frequency of interventions, the functionality of the interventions within any given school system must be considered. The general instruction in that school must also be considered.

Buffum et al. (2009) defines RTI as "the practice of 1) providing high quality instruction and interventions that match students' needs and 2) using students' learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions" (p. 14). They also state that when the RTI model is in place, general education and special education are no longer considered separate programs, and that staff from both departments are assisting all students as needed.

In response to the concerns that many educators have regarding procedural changes and possible costs of RTI, Buffum et al. (2009) recommend that schools and districts approach RTI creatively in order to implement it without hiring new staff or spending more money. They say that schools "must modify their master schedules…so as to provide systematic interventions throughout the regular school day, without forcing the students to miss core instruction in the regular classroom" (p.7). RTI is, therefore, more than an identification process. It is a school-wide collaborative process with resources focused on the same outcome.

Defining Professional Learning Communities

Kovaleski (2007) points out that there are three factors that impact the implementation of the RTI method in a school. These factors are (a) intense and ongoing training, (b) collaborative support structures, and (c) administrative follow through. These are all elements that are found in an established PLC.

Calling a school a PLC is "purposeful language" (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 19). DuFour et al. explains that in order to be considered a *professional* environment means that the educators have expertise in their field and that they are expected to remain current in the "evolving knowledge base" in their field. Furthermore, in speaking of *learning*, the focus is shifted from what is being taught to what is being learned. Educators are therefore responsible for what they are learning, in order to increase learning among their students. In being called a *community*, the emphasis becomes a group linked by common interests rather than an organization of structure and efficiency.

History of Professional Learning Communities

The term "Professional Learning Community" first emerged in the 1960's but research in PLCs became more prevalent in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Some of the contributors to this research include the following (as cited in Hord, 1997):

- Susan Rosenholtz's study of 78 schools in 1989, which reported on the importance of collaboration among teachers

- Little and McLaughlin (as cited in Hord, 1997) reported on the importance of strong professional communities which are characterized by (a) shared norms and beliefs, (b) collegial relations, (c) collaborative cultures, (d) reflective practice, (e) ongoing technical inquiry regarding effective practice, (f) professional growth,

and (f) mutual support and mutual obligation.

- In 1995 Newmann and Wehlage found that from studies of 1200 schools that "The most successful schools were those that use restructuring tools to help them function as professional learning communities."

- Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (as cited in Hord, 1997) reported that the most effective schools were PLCs with (a) reflective dialogue, (b) de-privatization of practice, (c) collective focus on student learning, (d) collaboration, and (e) shared norms and values.

The turning point in bringing PLCs from discussion to more participation among practitioners began with the publication of *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement,* by Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (2008). Educators were consequently able to more effectively define a true PLC and had specific instruction in the implementation process.

The Components of Professional Learning Communities

In describing RTI or PLCs, it is important to illustrate the elements and characteristics that define their complete structure. Experts in both arenas agree that partial or incorrect implementation is not a true RTI or PLC implementation.   Dufour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) state that "too many schools, districts, and organizations calling themselves PLCs do virtually none of the things that characterize PLCs" (p. 14).

Dufour et al. (2008); succinctly states that in a PLC

"Educators [are] committed to working collaboratively by ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional Learning Communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators" (p. 14).

In describing the important elements that are essential in a PLC, Dufour et al (2008) identifies the following six characteristics of a PLC:

- Shared mission (purpose), vision (clear direction), values (collective commitments), and goals, (indicators and timelines, and targets) – all focused on student learning.

- A collaborative culture with a focus on learning.

- Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality

- Action orientation: learning by doing

- A commitment to continuous improvement, which means –

  - Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning

  - Developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning

  - Implementing the strategies and ideas

  - Analyzing the impact of the charges to discover what was effective and what was not

  - Applying the new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

- Results orientation

These characteristics describe a shifting away from the ineffective, systematized and bureaucratic types of schools which we have developed over the years. They provide a plan for creating an environment where teachers are treated as experts and professionals in their field, and where they are expected to behave as such. It is also a step toward the redistribution of resources for schools, which will improve both teaching and learning. These changes reflect the "learner-centered vision for American education," described by Linda Darling-Hammond in *The Right to Learn* (1997).

Although there are many components that make up a true Professional Learning Community in a school, most proponents of PLCs would agree that *collaboration* is a key component. Collaboration means educators are working together inter-independently to "build shared knowledge rather than pool opinions" (DuFour et al., 2008).

Providing time for this collaboration among teachers is essential in order for an institution to function as an effective PLC. Elementary schools and secondary schools are faced with different challenges in providing this type of collaboration for educators. However, it has been successfully implemented in a variety of ways at both levels of educational environments. By including special education teachers in the collaboration process, they can assist general education teachers in how their students with special needs can better access curriculum. Generally speaking, teachers with different instructional training and background can support one another.

In working toward effective collaboration it is important to understand that it means to "build shared knowledge rather than pool opinions" (DuFour et al., 2008, p 187). This means that in order for collaboration to be effective it must be based on evidence. Further, studies indicate that the use of specific models and procedures in the collaboration process increases the effectiveness of collaboration. This benefits students with disabilities who are in general education classes (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009).

The Relationship Between Response to Intervention and Professional Learning Communities

In order for a school to begin using the RTI model, schools need to restructure the school system and re-culture the staff. When a school acts as a PLC they are able to provide that restructuring and re-culturing, which then creates a foundation in the school for the RTI model.

"For those practitioners who have not yet begun the PLC journey, we make the case that the most promising and research-supported way to implement response to intervention is to operate as a professional learning community" (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009).

Buffum et al. (2009) lists the following as elements of RTI that are in a PLC:

- Collective responsibility by all staff for all students

- Access to a high-quality core curriculum

- True differentiation in the classroom

- Universal screening

- Analysis of student work to evaluate overall curriculum and diagnose individual student needs

- Tiers of intervention

- Systematic, explicit, and research-based programs diagnostically chosen and taught by the most effective educators

For educators that are seeking to establish a PLC and implement RTI, there are many resources available, with recommendations for analyzing learning environments within schools. In *Pyramid Response to Intervention: RTI Professional Learning Communities, and How to Respond When Students Don't' Learn* (Buffum, et al. 2009)*, the authors provide reproducible appendices of charts, questionnaires, and other tools in order to facilitate change within any school.

There are elements of PLCs that naturally exist as part of an RTI framework as well. The two approaches or methods to education complement one another. Most importantly, when a school is running like a true PLC, the school has then created a place where RTI can function successfully and with fidelity.

Response to Intervention in Utah

Currently, Utah uses a state RTI model that is a hybrid of the standard protocol and the problem-solving model (Berkeley et al., 2009). School Districts in Utah are free to use the discrepancy model or RTI in identifying students with learning disabilities. The Utah State Office of Education Special Education Rules describe three methods for an SLD determination:

> "An LEA must develop written procedures for SLD determination using one of these methods.
> a) A process based on the student's response to scientific, research-based intervention, hereafter referred to as Method A—RTI
> b) Identification of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement, hereafter referred to as Method B—Discrepancy
> c) A combination of (a) and (b), hereafter referred to as Method C—Combination"

Utah's three-tiered RTI model is used for behavior and academics, and at this point the academic side of the RTI model is for reading improvement only. Mathematics is not yet included in the state RTI model. In Utah the instructional group size is specified by the tier. All but four states include behavior as part of their RTI model. Four out of fifty states also have reading-only in their academic model, Utah being one of those four states. However, this model is being expanded to provide a framework for class-room instruction and intervention for all content areas (Harr-Robins, Shambaugh, & Parrish, 2009). Most states have adopted a three-tier model but the greatest difference among states is in the third tier, especially regarding the placement of special education within the RTI model (Berkeley et al. 2009).

Although Utah has not yet adopted mathematics as a standard intervention for RTI, explicit and thorough research has now been done to facilitate the RTI process to mathematics. In 2009 the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences published the results of research using the RTI approach in mathematics for grades K-8, which was done by a panel of

experts in education and experts in mathematics. This research provides specific recommendations on screening, best strategies of interventional instruction and instructional materials, the amount of time needed for interventional instruction and recommended number of sessions, as well as recommendations for progress monitoring (Gersten et al., 2009).

Response to Intervention in Junior High and Middle Schools

Students in junior high and middle school are usually faced with longer school days, learning to change teachers throughout the day, experience increased demands in their assignments which require more independent learning, critical thinking and skills for self-regulation. Also, junior high and middle school sets a foundation for high school. (Johnson & Smith, 2008)

Prior to RTI, the only available strategies for helping struggling learners included: pull-outs in Title One schools, grade retention, and repeated failure leading to referral for Special Education services (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008). With this type of remediation rather than interventions, students are often moving on to secondary school with limited basic skills, high risk or drop-out; and often have difficulties with truancy and serious behavior problems (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008).

Vaughn et al. (2008) recommend that the reasons for improving knowledge about effective interventions for students in secondary schools include (a) the lack of sufficient and early interventions for some students, (b) increased educational demands over time, and (c) that some educational difficulties aren't manifested until later in school.

At this point, more research has been done and more effective implementations completed on RTI at the elementary school level than at a secondary level. There is a need for further research and attempted implementation of RTI at the secondary level, in order to find

ways to support the increased demands and educational changes that take place for students in secondary school. "Although state agencies and practitioners conceptually embrace the RTI concept for older students as well, scant research and few, if any RTI models appropriate for secondary school settings exist" (Johnson & Smith, 2008).

Johnson and Smith (2008) report on the process of implementing RTI in Cheyenne Mountain Junior High. Their implementation took place without additional funding for the new approach, and in their attempts to implement RTI at a middle school, cost of implementation tended to be their primary concern for future implementation at other middle schools. According to research on RTI some of the elements of application that are described as essential, were not implemented in their complete form at Cheyenne Mountain Junior High. It is presumed that this discrepancy was due to the lack of funding which is mentioned as the primary concern in this study. Further research and attempts at RTI implementation in junior high and middle schools may reveal ways to accomplish what is needed in a true RTI approach without the increased costs that make such an approach otherwise limited.

Inasmuch as the research process for implementation of RTI in secondary education is still limited, Don Deshler (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010) describes some of the unique qualities that need to be accounted for in using RTI at secondary schools:

> "First and foremost, the kids are different as learners; developmentally they've moved into a different phase. Secondly, and of equal importance, is the fact that the demands of the curriculum are markedly different. And so students may be performing well as third graders, fourth graders, and we may think, hey they're on the right path, but when they encounter the elevated curriculum demands in middle school and high school, then they're called upon to evidence different skills, different strategies, and if they don't have these then they can run into difficulties. So, it's both developmentally students are different and the demands of the curriculum are markedly different, and so we're looking at coming up with different kinds of strategies and solutions to meet their needs."

Conclusion

In education, we have learned that in order to meet the needs of students' learning abilities, we must look at their learning environment first, before making recommendations for Special Education. This process of pre-referral instead of "wait-to-fail" is accommodated by the RTI model. Although the RTI model is still evolving, there is evidence of its benefits for *most* students and continued research can provide information on how it may benefit *all* students.

Inasmuch as RTI is still in various stages of implementation throughout the United States, it is helpful to know about the best methods for this process. There is evidence that a PLC can provide the type of foundation and systems environment necessary for RTI implementation. Even without the implementation of RTI, a PLC creates educational improvements in school systems.

In order for RTI and PLCs to succeed in a school, they must be implemented with fidelity, and educators and administrators should be well aware of every necessary component of each of these methods. If one component is missing in the implementation, this will most likely affect the outcomes of the implementation. Our country's educational history has brought us to this place of improved learning. Additionally, as methods continue to evolve and research expands our knowledge of RTI and PLCs, this continued research can provide methods that work best in secondary school systems.

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