Lessons to Learn: The Implementation of Response to Intervention as a School Framework through the Lens of Past Reading First Schools

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This dissertation titled

Lessons to Learn: The Implementation of Response to Intervention as a School Framework through the Lens of Past Reading First Schools

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Abstract

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Lessons to Learn: The Implementation of Response to Intervention as a School Framework through the Lens of Past Reading First Schools

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The purpose of this study was to explore practices from the Reading First Grant implementation, which itself no longer exists, with an intent of identifying those practices that have continued to be utilized through the Response to Intervention process and the practices that have changed in the interim. This research reports the results of an instrumental multi-case study design involving three former high performing Reading First elementary schools that have continued to be successful through Response to Intervention (RtI) as a school framework. A mixed methodology approach incorporating semi-structured interviews, quantitative survey results, and state assessment data were triangulated and analyzed in an attempt to answer by what methods these former high performing Reading First schools have continued to be successful through RtI as a school framework, as well as what leadership practices and current professional development practices have impacted the RtI process. The results of this study may allow others in education and in related disciplines to benefit by learning about practices that have and have not been used effectively in the Reading First implementation and Response to Intervention process. The results of this study may also contribute to the relevant literature regarding leadership practices, which can influence student achievement.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my daughter, Katelyn Erin Abney. You are my constant inspiration and source of strength. I am driven to be the best version of myself because of you. You are my sunshine, even on cloudy days.
Acknowledgements

I once had an assignment to explain my plan for completing my dissertation. My response was based off an African proverb that says “One bite at a time”. Completing this dissertation has been a struggle, to say the least. I have often let life get in the way of doing the necessary work and have felt overwhelmed by the enormity of it all. I just needed to remind myself often to take it one bite at a time.

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues and friends who have heard me say I was pursuing my doctorate, for longer than I care to admit, and yet they did not give up on me. I appreciate the faith they displayed in me when I was losing my own.

Dr. Larson, my chair, has been extremely patient and understanding with my life situations, while nudging me with reminders about deadlines. I am grateful to him for his editing skills, encouragement, patience, and understanding. I would also like to say thank you to my co-chair and other members of my committee. Your feedback and suggestions have been invaluable.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family. Thank you for helping out whenever and however you could. I am blessed to have you in my life! Without your encouragement, patience, support, and unconditional love, this would not have been possible.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Elementary and secondary education, on a continuous basis during the last few decades, has been undertaking changes to policies, laws, standards, and assessments. One of the major reform acts for education was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush. With this reform, changes began taking place in order for schools to reach the goal of helping all students achieve grade-level success. This study will address two fundamental policies which emerged in response to the Elementary and Secondary Act of 2002, commonly referenced as the NCLB Act. They are namely, Response to Intervention (RtI) policy and the Reading First (RF) Grant.

Response to Intervention and Reading First were initiated in 2004. Each of the initiatives were developed by many of the same people, and each are nearly identical in the ways that they propose addressing the needs of students (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Response to Intervention (RtI), which was signed into law through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), has become a challenging policy to implement in public schools. Even though it has been over a decade since RtI was initiated, schools are still trying to grasp what it means and the best manner in which to implement the policy. On the other hand, schools receiving Reading First grants were held to certain non-negotiable requirements in order to receive and maintain the funding. Many of these “non-negotiables” were essentially the same as the requirements of the Response to Intervention (RtI) policy (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Torgesen, 2007; Torgesen, 2009). For example, Reading First and RtI both require
schools to provide up to three tiers of instruction for struggling students. Struggling students in this context would be those who were identified by using benchmark assessments to monitor progress. In addition, both policies require the use of research-based core instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Torgesen, 2007; Torgesen, 2009).

During the same time frame that RtI was being signed into law for all public schools, a nationwide grant, known as Reading First, was made available to schools across the United States that were having difficulty meeting the requirements of NCLB. The Reading First policy was established due to the extant research results, which suggested that students who have not mastered reading by the fourth grade will most likely never have the skills to become good readers. As such, the Reading First grant was created to support schools with high numbers of struggling readers in kindergarten through third grade. Under the Reading First initiative, nearly one billion dollars were distributed to states, districts, and then to schools through competitive awards for periods of up to six years. The grants were specifically made to support efforts to teach literacy and to increase reading development of K-3 students (particularly low-income students) by incorporating the five essential components of reading, as suggested by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000). The components begin with foundational skills and progress to the more complex, which are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These components were “non-negotiables” to be taught in uninterrupted literacy blocks. Reading First coaches were hired for every building receiving the grant funding. The job of the coaches was to help ensure that the mandated components were being taught. The coaches were to address the responsibility by providing professional
development for the schools and individuals, observing instruction, and coaching teachers. In order to be considered for Reading First funding, as a condition of receiving the grant, states were required to submit requests to a panel of experts at the U.S. Department of Education, detailing the manner in which the funding would be used and the requirements that would be addressed (Ashby, 2007; Barbash, 2008; Stern, 2008).

Due to the apparent interconnectedness of the dimensions of Reading First and RtI, the results of successful former high performing Reading First grant recipient schools may hold a vast quantity of valuable information regarding the implementation of RtI. After all, these RF schools have essentially implemented RtI since its inception. In other words, there likely may be lessons to learn that could help schools across the nation which are still trying to implement successfully an RtI framework. Additionally, other studies that have examined the effectiveness of the Reading First grant process, specifically in Kentucky, have found that principals who help provide a high level of support may also contribute to the success of schools and their students (Carney, Pittard, McGinnis, Perez, & Seales, 2010; Johnson, Madden, & Chambers, 2010). Therefore, the driving question of this study was to consider what methods former high performing Reading First schools continue to implement to be successful with RtI as the primary framework. One source of this evidence is the obtainment of higher than state average percent of students falling in the proficient, and distinguished categories on Kentucky state assessments. Furthermore, current leadership practices were also investigated in order to ascertain the manner that principal leadership influences the RtI process.
Additionally, literacy coaching and professional development were also examined as Reading First and Response to Intervention both promote the use of these factors.

Reading First was a well-funded initiative, as already noted, that had several similarities to the RtI process. However, the lack of related research to support the processes of Reading First appears to be unfortunate (Bean, 2009). Efficacy studies regarding Reading First exist. However, the studies are limited in scope. Research on these school-wide reform initiatives, (that is Reading First) typically was conducted via randomized controlled trials, or RCTs, that investigated differences between treatment groups. The studies were based upon the assumption that any variations in implementation would represent a normal distribution within the sample. In other words, an efficacy study of Reading First would view variations as a limitation, which would inhibit the generalization of results obtained from a comparison of Reading First and non-Reading First schools. Effectiveness studies, on the other hand, actively seek to understand variations in implementation. An effectiveness study would view such variations as potentially rich data for understanding the issues associated with implementing the treatment and reform in ways that can inform practice. The existing literature, which pertains to the Reading First grant, is primarily comprised of efficacy studies that unfortunately do not adequately account for variations in implementation.

While RtI has been implemented for some time, there are still many variables and unknowns about the process. One, often asked question throughout the literature, is how can RtI, as a general education model, be implemented effectively and with success in schools? The existing research to answer this and other related questions regarding RtI is
considered by many scholars as incomplete, undefined, and insufficient (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale & Spaulding, 2008; Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009; Wixson, 2011). In order to answer these questions, researchers are calling for more in-depth studies that will delve deeper into the processes of RtI in schools, particularly those that are deemed successful, that can possibly be used as a guide for other schools and districts (Wixson, 2011). A review of these studies can be found in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

Statement of the Problem

Findings from several studies (see Al Otaiba et al., 2008a; Manzo, 2008; Reyhner & Hurtado, 2007; Trainin, 2006) call attention to an apparent compelling limitation in the extant literature regarding the Reading First grant, which pertains particularly to the manner that the grant was implemented. The largest body of research, the Reading First Impact Study, deemed the program to be a nationwide failure within three years of its implementation (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008). However, the claim appears to lack veracity, as each state was allowed the freedom to decide the manner that the schools would implement the grant, the programs that would be used, and the level of professional development that would be offered (Gamse et al., 2008). These variables seem worthy of further consideration. In addition, the level of commitment of teachers to implement the non-negotiable aspects of the grant, as well as the leadership and involvement of the principals, appear to be essential to any large-scale transformation and are seldom addressed in any of the extant literature, especially those that have touted Reading First as an epic failure.
A case in point regarding the implementation of Reading First occurred in the state of Kentucky. The grant was implemented in 72 Kentucky schools, beginning in the 2004-2005 school year. Schools across the state began the year by acquiring a baseline percentile score on the state required Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) norm-referenced standardized test. This test was given to students in kindergarten through third grade three times per year. The state of Kentucky used GRADE to determine if students were at or above grade level and if individual student percentile scores were at the 50th percentile or greater. The students in each grade were tested in the fall with an off-grade level assessment. For example, kindergarteners were tested using a preschool assessment, while first grade students were tested using a kindergarten assessment. The winter and spring assessments were given on-grade level.

This assessment arrangement seems worthy of additional consideration. The students were being tested each fall at a grade level below their current status; therefore, it would seem reasonable to assume that the scores would be higher than expected. However, that was not the case. In the fall of 2004, only 30.1% of the students in kindergarten through third grade across the state scored at or above the national 50th percentile on off-level testing. In other words, less than one-third of the 72 Reading First schools had students in K-3 reading at or above what is considered the average on a test that was already a year below their respective grade levels. However, Kentucky, by the final year of implementation of the program, had shown significant growth, as 77% of all K-3 students were reading at or above proficiency when using on-grade level assessments (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Kentucky GRADE Percentile Scores, Abney & Johnson, 2008.

Some of the reported data regarding the Reading First (RF) Program appear to be contradictory. For example, the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (CCLD) reported results for Reading First in Kentucky that were quite different from those emerging from the Reading First Impact Study (Carney et al., 2010). The Reading First Impact Study’s greatest flaw in design was that it only included data from the first three years of the implementation of the grant program, and included only 125 actual Reading First schools from 13 states (Gamse, et al., 2008). While the study may seem large in scale, it is only representative of approximately two percent of the RF schools, as there were 5,880 Reading First grants disbursed to schools across all 50 states, including Puerto Rico (Gamse, et al., 2008). The findings from the CCLD study in Kentucky are, in fact, quite the opposite of the Reading First Impact Study. The CCLD studied the 72 participating schools, for the entirety of the Reading First grant, using quantitative data. Also used were qualitative data incorporating observations of different school sites each year and the responses by school staff members to survey questions regarding the school
climate and change process in order to obtain and form an overall implementation picture (Carney et al., 2010). At the conclusion of the Reading First initiative, the Kentucky high performing schools, on average, were 75.3%, which exceeded the state’s percentage of 73.55% of the students being proficient or distinguished (Carney et al., 2010). These results appear to be in stark contrast to the Reading First Impact Study, the results of which found Reading First to be ineffective (Gamse, et al., 2008).

Another study in Pennsylvania of Reading First schools found similar results to those in Kentucky, in that 80% of Reading First schools experienced increased numbers of students reading at a proficient level, while also undergoing reduced percentages of students falling into the at-risk category (Bean, 2009). Interestingly, Bean (2009) noted that many of the schools in Pennsylvania needed all five years to achieve these levels of improvement, as did the CCLD study in Kentucky (Carney et al., 2010). A significance being that Reading First was deemed a failure after only three years of implementation.

**Purpose of the Study**

Even though the Reading First grant funding has ended, RtI has continued, which appears to purport that schools would be served to understand the best way to implement RtI as a framework. In Kentucky, 72 schools participated in the Reading First grant while also implementing the new IDEA law of RtI. The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore practices from the implementation of the Reading First Grant with the intent of identifying those approaches; that have continued to be utilized and have changed through the Response to Intervention Process. Schools used in this dissertation study were identified as being former high performing Reading First schools which have
continued to be successful as evidenced by their current percent of students falling in Kentucky’s *proficient* and *distinguished* categories (being above and beyond the state average). For this reason, the results of this study may allow others in education and related disciplines to benefit by learning about practices that have and have not been used effectively in the Reading First and Response to Intervention Programs. In addition to investigating the procedures and practices of RtI as a framework, principal leadership, professional development, and literacy coaching were also examined, as previous Reading First studies showed these to be potentially important factors for student achievement (Carney et al., 2010; Chambers, Madden, & Johnson, 2009; Johnson et al., 2010). These findings may also contribute to the relevant literature regarding leadership practices, which reportedly influence student achievement.

More specifically, this is a multi-case study of three former Reading First elementary schools, which were considered successful at the end of the grant period, and which have maintained similar levels of success since the grant ended. This study was conducted by collecting survey data and interviews from teachers in grades K-3, special education teachers, coaches, and principals, as these were the same professionals who would have experienced Reading First. An objective was to explore the manner in which the three participating schools have been successful through RtI practices, principal leadership, and professional development.

**Research Questions**

The primary question guiding this research was:
By what methods do former High Performing Reading First (HPRF) schools continue to be successful with the use of RtI as the primary educational framework, and in what manner do these methods compare?

The following two sub-questions also guided the research:

Sub-question 1: In what manner have the principal leadership practices in the schools that were identified as high performing Reading First schools influenced the Response to Intervention process?

Sub-question 2: In what manner have the current professional development practices and the roles of literacy coaches influenced the Response to Intervention process?

**Significance of the Study**

The existing literature pertaining to the Reading First grant and the Response to Intervention approach, when viewed as similar frameworks, appears to be limited. This study may contribute to the knowledge base regarding the manner that Response to Intervention may be implemented as a framework similar to that of past successful Reading First schools. Additionally, the results of this study may contribute to the literature pertaining to the value of principal leadership practices through an examination of the survey results and a comparison of the student achievement data. Finally, this study may provide researchers and scholars with a foundation that can be used to examine the manner that schools are able to implement long term sustained change by comparing the student achievement data with interviews and survey results of former Reading First schools in this study.
Design of the Study

The research design of this study used current data sets released by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to determine which former Reading First schools are still considered high performing as evidenced by the percent of proficient and distinguished students meeting or exceeding the state average. Once the schools were identified, three schools were chosen for a multiple case study design. Schools with the same leadership were given priority, but as turnover and the number of years since the end of the grant are great, any school that was considered successful and has continued to be successful was considered. After the three schools had been identified and the Institutional Review Board had provided approval of the study, online surveys regarding Response to Intervention processes, leadership, and coaching were administered to K-3 teachers, special education teachers, literacy/reading coaches, and principals. A comparison of the survey results and the semi-structured interview responses of this study have been used to determine the feasibility of the obtainment of sustained significant system change when using implementations with similar frameworks as the Reading First and the Response to Intervention approaches.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations are often encountered by researchers when conducting studies. This study is no exception. One limitation of this study pertains to the time constraints associated with the use of a survey. Respondents who felt overworked and who felt that they did not have the time to fill out a survey may have failed to complete the survey (Simon & Goes, 2013). The incompletion and/or lack of
submission of the survey may explain the limited number of responses. Additionally, the
survey mainly uses a Likert-scale. The differences between ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’
may potentially have been irrelevant to the respondents, and could have affected the
study results (Simon & Goes, 2013). The respondents who took the survey may have a
level of bias which also could have affected the results of the survey. Additionally, the
interview respondents were chosen by principals based on having experience with
Reading First, as these candidates were preferred. As the principal was asking the
teachers to participate, there could have been bias regarding who has been chosen as to
who best would answer interview questions in an accurate manner. Furthermore, the
number of interviews conducted were limited by time and the willingness of participants
to be interviewed. In addition to this, the dimensions and the data for this study are
familiar to the researcher, who has worked with the Reading First grant and Response to
Intervention policy in the state of Kentucky. For this reason, the synthesis and analysis of
the data may have been influenced by the predilections of the researcher.

A delimitation of this study would likely be the population of schools included
within the study. There were 72 schools in Kentucky that participated in the Reading
First grant and some of these schools have been abolished and consolidated in the
interim. There were only three schools chosen for this multiple case study of former high
performing Reading First schools. Moreover, a qualification for this study was that the
schools chosen had been successful at the end of the Reading First grant on both GRADE
and state testing in 2009 and are currently at or above the state average of 54.3%
proficient and distinguished. At the end of 2009, 45 out of the 72 Kentucky schools,
which included rural and urban, had 75% of their students reading at or above grade level on the GRADE assessment. However, of these 45 schools, only 21 met or exceeded both GRADE and Kentucky Common Core Test expectations. According to the 2016-2017 KDE database, of these 21 schools, who were successful across all grade levels, the number of schools who have met or exceeded the state average on Kentucky State testing has fallen to a mere 14 schools; none of which are urban. Despite these limitations and delimitations, this study may have contributed important information to the extant literature regarding procedures and practices, which may be replicated by other educators in successfully implementing RtI as a framework.

**Definitions of Terms**

In order to assist the readability of this study, listed below are a defined list of terms, often followed by acronyms, which are referenced and discussed throughout this dissertation.

*Discrepancy Model*—often referred to as the “Wait to Fail” model, this refers to an IQ-achievement discrepancy to identify students as specific learning disabled (SLD) that was the norm for special education identification prior to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; Feifer, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale & Spaulding, 2008; Wixson, 2011).

*Distributed Leadership*—a term referring to the manner in which a leader/principal leads. It is often synonymous with collaborative, shared, or participative leadership, as
many researchers have found them to be quite similar in concept (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).

**Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE)** - A norm referenced assessment used three times a year in grades K-3. This assessment was used to measure success for the schools participating in the Reading First grants in the state of Kentucky (Carney et al., 2010).

**High Performing Schools (HPS)** - Schools participating in the Reading First grant whose average test scores reached at least 75% on grade level on the GRADE standardized assessment (Carney et al., 2010).

**Instructional Leadership** - A term referring to a leadership style that pertains to the ability of a leader to establish school-wide goals, provide professional development for the teachers, manage instructional programs with the use of data, and ensure the specific needs of students are met (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Massey, 2012).

**K-Prep** - Kentucky’s current standardized testing system for reading and math in grades K-8 that are norm referenced and criterion-referenced measures providing national percentiles and student performance levels of *Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, and Distinguished*. These performance levels are determined by cut-points in the scoring of the assessment. Students are considered on grade-level when reaching the *Proficient* or *Distinguished* categories. Students in the *Apprentice* category are just below grade level and students in the *Novice* category are considered significantly below (Kentucky Department of Education, 2017).
**Literacy Coaches/Reading First Coaches**-Highly qualified teachers of reading who often hold a master’s degree in reading and a minimum of five years of teaching experience. These coaches typically model lessons, observe classroom teachers, initiate coaching and collaborative conversations, and provide professional development for staff members (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007).

**National Reading Panel (NRP)** - This panel was made up of leading researchers in the field of reading, teachers of reading, and professors from colleges of education, as well as administrators and parents. They were commissioned by Congress to review research results considered valid and reliable and of the highest quality in order to make suggestions for improving reading practices. The NRP’s findings are often referred to as “The Big Five” and include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (NRP Report, 2000).

**Non-Negotiables**- These are certain expectations that had to be followed in order to maintain a Reading First Grant in the state of Kentucky. The “non-negotiables” were: the implementation of a minimum of a 90-minute reading block; a scientifically research based core program that was being taught with fidelity for Tier I instruction; a scientifically research-based approved program for Tiers II and III instruction; a norm referenced assessment given three times a year; the use of a research based progress monitoring tool; the implementation of 80 hours of professional development per year in literacy; and the employment of school literacy coaches that would help provide the needed modeling, professional development, and coaching (Carney et al., 2010).
Public Law 107-110, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) portion of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2002 - Enacted as bipartisan legislation by Congress in 2001, President George W. Bush signed it into law in 2002 and it is now most commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Reading First Grant – “The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) established the Reading First (RF) Program, a major federal initiative designed to help ensure that all children can read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.” (Gamse et al., 2008, p.1).

Research Based Instruction - A term that refers to instruction that is based on the National Reading Panel’s findings as being the most effective and statistically significant in regards to teaching children to read based on “The Big Five” (NRP Report, 2000).

Response to Intervention (RtI) - The Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) was created out of concern regarding the increasing number of students being identified for special education services (President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). The related RtI process generally includes three tiers of instruction that are based on the needs and level of the students. The tiers are briefly explained in the following definitions. All instruction in each Tier is supposed to be research based and delivered by qualified instructors.

Tier 1 - Instruction that is delivered to all students and is differentiated to meet the needs of students. Generally, 75-80% of students can be effectively taught using Tier 1 instruction within a normal classroom setting (Buffman, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; Feifer,
Tier 2-Students who have not been able to be successful in Tier 1 instruction receive additional small group instruction that generally focuses on skills that need remediation. This can be provided by a classroom teacher, another teacher or assistant, or a reading specialist, usually three to five times a week in a group of no more than five students (Buffman et al., 2009; Harlacher et al., 2010; Lembke et al., 2010; Moore & Whitfield, 2009; Torgesen, 2007; Wixson, 2011).

Tier 3- Students who have not been successful with Tier 1 and 2 instruction receive an additional bump of instruction. This is considered the highest and most intense intervention. It is usually delivered daily, in a group of no more than a three to one student to teacher ratio. It is most often delivered by the most qualified staff member, such as a reading specialist (Buffman et al., 2009; Harlacher et al., 2010; Lembke et al., 2010; Moore & Whitfield, 2009; Torgesen, 2007; Wixson, 2011).

Organization of the Study

Chapter One is organized with a brief introduction and overview of the study. This is followed by the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research questions, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. These sections are followed by a section that contains definitions of specific and not necessarily well-known terms which are used throughout the study. Chapter Two reviews the extant literature examining the history and general information behind the Reading First policy, as well as the results of a longitudinal study in Kentucky. The
similarities of the Response to Intervention approach to the Reading First grant, as well as the manner in which Response to Intervention might be implemented, follows. Literature addressing literacy coaches and principal leadership styles are also examined. Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study, including the sample size and population, the data collection and analysis procedures for data sets from the Kentucky Department of Education, and data obtained from the survey and interviews. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study and the procedures for interpreting the data. Chapter Five includes a synthesis and discussion of the findings, implications for current educational procedures and practices in schools, and future research possibilities.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this review of the literature is to investigate two related educational policies that were released within very short proximity of each other, in order to gain a better understanding of the aspects that can be learned from one and applied to the other. This literature review will first examine the history of the Reading First Grant: the general information regarding the grant, the controversies surrounding the grant, the outcomes of the studies that have been conducted to determine its efficacy in schools across the nation, and to examine the results of a related longitudinal study in Kentucky. Another section of this review will be focused upon an analysis of the Response to Intervention (RtI) legislation, the similarities of the RtI to the Reading First approach, and the reports of current research regarding the implementation of the Response to Intervention strategies. As literacy coaches were an integral part of the implementation of the Reading First grant, the related literature pertaining to the coaches will be described in this chapter. In addition, literature regarding leadership styles will be included. Among other things, leadership could have influenced the efficacy of the implementation of the Reading First grant and could now be influencing the RtI approach, particularly as measured through student outcomes.

The History of Reading First Policy

Education has been and probably will continue to be one of the more conflicted subjects in America. An ongoing debate has emerged with the National Defense Education Act in 1958; and the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) legislation of 1965, which was commonly referenced beginning in 2001 as the No Child
Left Behind Act (NCLB) and then the *A Nation at Risk* report (Spring, 2005). One of the most controversial policies passed as part of NCLB was the initiative called Reading First. Many educators have lamented over the policies of the NCLB Act and have blamed President Bush for its ramifications, particularly those which have necessitated change. However, the foundational aspects of the NCLB Act and the Reading First grant began prior to the presidency of George W. Bush. Beginning with the Johnson administration in 1965, the War on Poverty was declared and the ESEA was passed in an effort to give educational opportunities to children from impoverished families, many of whom had multi-cultural backgrounds (Edmondson, 2004; Spring, 2005). The ESEA began the federal government’s reliance on states to control funding to individual schools based on their socio-economic status, a practice which is now known as Title I (Spring, 2005). Not only did this legislation begin a new era regarding the manner in which schools received federal aid, but it led the way to legislation being amended during the Reagan years so that state and local schools would have even more control over funding through block grants (Spring, 2005).

As previously mentioned, educators have touted their disapproval of the NCLB. Educators have particularly expressed disapproval of the standardization of the curriculum and testing requirements of the NCLB Act and the Reading First grant. However, the “roots” of this ideological perspective began with earlier policies. In a 1983 report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, trouble in America’s schools were tied to the economic woes of the nation (Edmondson, 2004; Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005; Spring, 2005). Due to the release of this report, a
political frenzy ensued with an emerging focus on a need for reform and standards in curriculum and testing in order to ensure that American students would be ready to compete in the global market. However, the real push for this focus would be initiated later with the Clinton administration and continue on with the George W. Bush administration (Edmondson, 2004; Spring, 2005).

During a State of the Union Address in 1996, Bill Clinton introduced America Reads as a solution to helping students become proficient readers by sending volunteer tutors to struggling schools (Edmondson, 2004; Miskel, & Song, 2004). A new reading plan was suggested the following year by Representative Bill Goodling (R-Pennsylvania), Chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, which proposed the Reading Excellence Act to Congress (Edmondson, 2004; H.R. 2614, 1998; Miskel, & Song, 2004). The Reading Excellence Act appears to have been an important piece of educational history, as the act, passed in 1998, is the predecessor to the NCLB Act, the Reading First Grant, and the Response to Intervention legislation. The Reading Excellence Act especially focused on students in the lower primary grades and began the initiative to use scientifically based materials, to include family literacy practices, and to reduce the number of special education referrals (Edmondson, 2004)

**Publications Contributing to the Creation of Reading First**

During this same time frame of the development of the NCLB Act, other influential reports would be created and released that appeared to have significant influence in the eventual fruition of the Reading First grant. One such report, which appears to be steeped in controversy, is the National Reading Panel (NRP) release of
Teaching Children to Read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction, in 2000. The panel was charged by Congress with creating this report in response to the National Assessment of Educational Progress results that suggested nearly 60% of elementary school children were reading below proficiency (Edmondson & Shannon, 2002). The panel’s members included administrators, leading researchers in the field of reading and professors from colleges of education, parents, and teachers of reading (NRP Report, 2000). The panel concluded that there are five essential components of reading and these should be included in the design of reading instruction in order for all students to achieve reading proficiency. They are included in the NRP report in order as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The controversy, which ensued with the release of this report, stems from the perceptions that the studies examined by the NRP were viewed by some as having an overemphasis on phonics instruction and having used experimental research designs; seemingly having ignored research that was based on qualitative and ethnographic methodologies. (Allington, 2001; Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005; Hines, Conner, Campano, Damico, Enoch, & Nam, 2007; Lewis, 2006).

The NRP panel, which was composed of 14 individuals, was given approximately two years to identify the most relevant research from approximately 100,000 studies which had been released beginning in 1966 (NRP, 2000). The panel’s choices of particular topics and “scientific” research were questioned (Allington, 2001; Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005). The panel’s choices were made in part due to the National Reading Council report and in part due to the outcomes of the public hearings which
were held across the U.S. in order to understand what was most important to educators, parents, policy makers, and researchers (NRP Report, 2000). The panel acknowledged in the introduction of its report that the sheer volume of research precluded it from addressing all of the important topics that might lead to greater reading achievement (NRP Report, 2000). In addition, the NRP chose to use an evidence-based methodology, as is the norm for studies conducted in psychological and medical research (NRP Report, 2000). This methodology, which focused upon quantitative research exclusively, was viewed as being biased by groups such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) for not having included qualitative studies and for having shown favoritism by only looking at one model of scientific research (Stern, 2008).

Aside from the NRP report, an apparent influential report was released by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) entitled *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do* (1999). This report reiterates many of the same findings released by the NRP, regarding the importance of systematic and direct instruction of beginning reading skills, such as phonemic awareness and phonics, comprehension strategy instruction, and vocabulary. The report also purports the value of high quality professional development for teachers, which is an important component of the Reading First grant. Interestingly, this report was prepared for the AFT by Louisa Moats through a grant funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (AFT, 1999). The NICHD is the organization, along with the influence of the Secretary of Education, which provided considerable support for the initiation of the NRP (NRP Report, 2000). Nonetheless, the
AFT was found to play a significant role in the development of the Reading First legislation (Miskel, & Song, 2004).

After President George W. Bush came into office, he engaged several experts in the field of reading in the hopes of helping to solve the reported reading deficit of America’s children. Using the reports from the NRP, the AFT, and the recommendations of experts such as Laura Bush (a former librarian), Barbara Foorman, Reid Lyon, Louisa Moats, and Margaret Spellings, a new proposal was created and attached to the No Child Left Behind Act and the Reading First initiative under Title I, Part B (Miskel, & Song, 2004; Spring, 2005; Stern, 2008). The legislative aspects of this proposal were passed as a bipartisan effort, with the help of Democrats such as Senator Ted Kennedy and Republican Senator Gregg (Miskel, & Song, 2004). Ironically, while the bill was passed with virtually no opposition, no one thereafter seemed to want to claim any ties to it.

**The Controversies of Reading First**

According to the guidelines of the Reading First policy, schools must choose a scientifically-based reading program that provides instruction in the identified five essential components. The term scientifically-based was meant to be scientifically-proven. However, the term was changed to be more lax due to concerns regarding the limited number of core programs that could actually meet these standards (Stern, 2008). At the time, only two programs could provide proof through scientific studies that they were effective, namely Direct Instruction and Success for All (Stern, 2008). A change in the policy language provided the big textbook companies with an opportunity to compete in the market by changing their basal readers to include the five essential
components of reading that are “scientifically based” to meet the Reading First requirements (Stern, 2008). Not only did this change in wording allow the textbook companies to get a piece of the profit, it caused additional controversies.

Embedded deeply within the controversies over the textbooks and core programs is the belief that the U.S. Department of Education and those involved in the approval of the grants had created a list of allowable programs, which in turn effectively blocked whole-language related programs. This perception has been disproven through several studies and articles written on the matter, including a study by the International Reading Association (IRA), now known as the International Literacy Association (ILA), that identified that the states had not been forced to choose any prescribed programs (Bell, 2003; Berger & Gunn, 2003). While the ILA supported the process leading to Reading First, the association and its members have become some of Reading First’s greatest opponents.

Integrated within the textbook controversy is a deep and longstanding conflict that is often referenced as the “Reading Wars” (Miskel & Song, 2004). Ken Goodman, a former International Reading Association president and known to be one of the whole language movement leaders, has been an outspoken opponent of the Reading First grant (Spring, 2005; Stern, 2008). He has written several articles trying to disclaim the effectiveness of the grant, especially due to the inclusion of phonics, referring to it often as being absurd and a tool of right-wing Christian fundamentalists (Spring, 2005; Stern, 2008).
On the other side of the controversy are those individuals who consider the five components of reading to be essential and offer support for the results that Reading First has brought to their schools. While some of the aforementioned opponents of the NCLB Act and the Reading First grant believe it is culturally insensitive, biased, socially unjust, and a conservative plot to turn America’s students into human capital, the support offered by the proponents of the Reading First grant is substantiated by research-based studies (Barbash, 2008; Hines et al., 2007; Stern, 2008).

**Reading First Efficacy Study Results from Across the Nation**

The *Reading First Impact Study Final Report* (2008) contains evidence of the efficacy of its supporting grant in relation to student achievement for schools across the nation. The results of this report were widely publicized and were often viewed as being negative. Key findings of this report were obtained through the analysis of data over a three-year period during the 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07 school years. The study was conducted on 248 schools in 13 states and included 18 sites (17 school districts and one state-wide program) (Gamse, et al., 2008). Of the 248 schools selected, 125 of them were Reading First schools. They were compared to Title I schools that had similar demographics and locations as the Reading First schools included in the study (Gamse et al., 2008). While the specifics for locations are not provided in the report, it does state that the sample is geographically diverse. Major conclusions from the *Reading First Impact Study Final Report* are:

- Reading First produced a positive and statistically significant impact on amount of instructional time spent on the five essential components of reading
instruction promoted by the program (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) in grades one and two. The impact was equivalent to an effect size of 0.33 standard deviations in grade one and 0.46 standard deviations in grade two.

- Reading First produced positive and statistically significant impacts on multiple practices that are promoted by the program, including professional development in scientifically based reading instruction (SBRI), support from full-time reading coaches, amount of reading instruction, and supports available for struggling readers.
- Reading First did not produce a statistically significant impact on student reading comprehension test scores in grades one, two or three.
- Reading First produced a positive and statistically significant impact on decoding among first grade students tested in one school year (spring 2007). The impact was equivalent to an effect size of 0.17 standard deviations (Gamse et al., 2008, pp. xv-xvi).

The results of the Reading First Impact Study Final Report could be considered questionable due to the methodology that was used by the researchers. For example, the schools, which were chosen for the study, were based on cut points. This practice means the chosen schools either barely qualified to receive (or not receive) the grant based on the percentage of students from low socio-economic status (SES) homes and those who had poor test scores (Gamse et al., 2008; Shaughnessy, 2008). The quandary, which has emerged with the purported faulty methodology, is that Reading First exhibited the most
improvement in schools with the highest numbers of students in at-risk categories such as high poverty levels and low passing rates on state assessments. The fact that the *Reading First Impact Study Final Report* did not specify the actual geographic locations of the study appears to be a significant limitation, as it makes it impossible to know if these results are applicable to rural schools or inner-city schools, as both of these types of schools often have the highest poverty percentages and would not typically have been at the cut point for free and reduced lunch criterion. In addition, the schools chosen for the *Reading First Impact Study* would not have the highest gain scores and therefore would have exhibited less progress than those who have the highest poverty levels and need for support (Shaughnessy, 2008).

Also, the comparisons between Reading First and Non-Reading First schools in the *Reading First Impact Study Final Report* may not be a true picture of the manner that the grant influenced instruction, as many school districts decided to adopt the same non-negotiable Reading First requirements for their other Title I schools that did not receive Reading First grants (Shaughnessy, 2008). The implication is that comparing Reading First and Non-Reading First schools is difficult if they are using similar pedagogy, professional development opportunities and tests. An example of this potentially faulty research approach can be found in a rural case study of three schools in Kentucky wherein at least one district reported adopting Reading First principles in all the elementary schools, despite whether or not the schools had been categorized as being in the Title I category (Chambers et al., 2009).
The apparent most glaring problem with the *Reading First Impact Study Final Report* is associated with its timing. The final report was completed before five years of data were available. In fact, the *Reading First Final Impact Study Report* was implemented using year-three data. Concluding that a program is a success or failure before the completion of its grant seems inaccurate and invalid. From a research standpoint, systemic change tends to take place over an extended period of time and cannot be explicated after a few years (Hutchins, 1994).

**Reading First in Kentucky**

The Reading First grant was implemented to help those schools with factors that often negatively affect student achievement and are viewed as having disadvantaged populations, based upon the percentage of students receiving the benefits of the free and reduced lunch program, as reported for Title I assistance. Many of the schools that serve students from economically disadvantaged families are also serving America’s rural populations. According to recent statistics, there are over 9 million children enrolled in rural public schools; this equals 19% of the nation’s total public school enrollment (Johnson & Strange, 2009). The state of Kentucky has one of the highest populations of rural schools in the nation, with one out of every 10 public school students attending a rural school (Johnson & Strange, 2009). Moreover, Kentucky also has large schools within large districts due to consolidation, with low instructional funding (Johnson & Strange, 2009). Given that the Reading First Program has had its largest influence with high poverty schools; Kentucky appears to be a state for which further research would be useful.
As of April 2007, Reading First grants were disbursed to 5,880 schools across America (Gamse, et al., 2008). Generally speaking, the requirements associated with this grant most often applied to schools considered urban or rural, as these two locales generally have higher levels of poverty and related educational challenges. In Kentucky, 72 schools received Reading First grants for the 2003–2004 school year. Of these, 37 are labeled as being rural, nine are labeled as being town, and the remaining 27 are labeled as being urban and suburban (NCES, 2004).

According to a 2007 Kentucky Reading First study, the statistics for the state, beginning in Year 3 of its implementation, reflected that the participating schools were reaching the goal set by the state’s education commissioner, Gene Wilholt. Of the 72 Kentucky schools receiving Reading First grants, 20 were in Jefferson County and Fayette County, the two largest urban districts in the state. For the 2006–2007 school year, 36 Reading First schools reached the goal of 75% of their students reading on or above grade level using the GRADE standardized test. Of the 36 schools meeting this goal, two were from the urban areas of Fayette and Jefferson counties. The other schools were located in rural areas. The top 11 Reading First schools were from the rural Appalachian portion of Kentucky. Given these factors (Abney & Johnson, 2008), Kentucky appears to be a state in which this dissertation study is applicable, particularly as its student outcomes may have implications for other rural locales.

In Kentucky, previous studies have found that the effectiveness of the Reading First grant was explained best by examining the differences in the implementation of the policy than by exploring traditional explanations for achievement gaps, like socially-
ascribed characteristics of the student population, resource disparities, and the like (Johnson et al., 2010). Additionally, differences in overall improvement over a four-year period were related to school size, as smaller school size was associated with greater gains (Johnson et al., 2010). These findings could be interpreted to suggest that school-wide reforms may be implemented with more ease and effectiveness within smaller schools. Other studies have established that the smaller the school, the greater the reduction that the harmful effects of poverty will have on student achievement and, as such, will in turn likely help students from less affluent areas narrow the academic achievement gap (Bickel & Howley, 2000; Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; Howley, 1996; Howley & Bickel, 1999; Howley & Howley, 2004; Huang & Howley, 1993; Johnson, Howley, & Howley, 2002; Johnson, 2007; Lee & Smith, 2001; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1997).

In conjunction with the positive effects of smaller school size, are findings that suggest organizational structures that foster and facilitate a distributed leadership model, as well as merge titular and legitimate authority, may also contribute to the success of these rural schools (Johnson et al., 2010). In the Final Kentucky Reading First Study, survey results reflected that coaches, principals, and teachers expressed that the professional development, which had been provided, was relevant to reading improvement (Carney et al., 2010). Additionally, the results of the final study reflected that the majority of the participating coaches, principals, and teachers in the successful schools expressed that the principals had provided a high level of literacy support (Carney et al, 2010).
Response to Intervention and Reading First

While RtI is written as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), many practitioners and scholars consider it to be a framework or school improvement model, such as Reading First (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Torgesen, 2009). RtI and Reading First were implemented in a rather close period of time, have several similar requirements; and many of the same law-makers involved with Reading First grant also were responsible for the RtI policy (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Reading First, as already mentioned, was intended to help schools with high numbers of struggling readers obtain additional support for kindergarten through third grade students, which in theory, should have helped students meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. By applying for and receiving the funding, schools were also agreeing to meet and abide by some fairly strict, non-negotiable factors for up to a six-year period. The factors included:

- A common assessment must be used (chosen by the state);
- A minimum of 90 minutes per day must be devoted to literacy;
- A school coach must be provided;
- Grantees must choose a “scientifically-based” reading program from a list of several identified by the federal government as having met its evaluative criteria for each of the three tiers of instruction;
- Parental involvement must be incorporated into the plan.

RtI, like Reading First, also expects that all student learners will receive quality scientifically-based and intensified instruction, as well as frequent progress monitoring in
order to attend effectively to the needs of these learners. While there are substantive similarities between RtI and Reading First, they differ significantly in one way. RtI is part of IDEA law that all schools, regardless of their socioeconomic status or test scores, must observe unless the original identification of special education through the use of the discrepancy model is still being followed. The discrepancy model is also referred to as the “Wait to Fail” model as students may not be identified until third grade as they must show a severe enough discrepancy to qualify for additional services through IQ test scores (Berkeley et al., 2009; Buffum et al., 2009; Feifer, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale & Spaulding, 2008; Wixson, 2011). Another significant difference is that Reading First was a grant that provided coaching for teachers, professional development, and other resources; while RtI is arguably an unfunded mandate. Aside from the matter of funding, RtI and Reading First are nearly identical in that both policies are focused on meeting the needs of all children (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). At the heart of RtI is the belief that all children should receive needed services by providing “a comprehensive, systemic approach to teaching and learning designed to address language and literacy problems for all students through increasingly differentiated and intensified language and literacy assessment and instruction” (IRA, 2009, p.1). In fact, the requirements of both RtI and Reading First are so nearly identical that one might be tempted to wonder which came first.

Several commonalities exist that are obligatory of RtI and Reading First, especially the focus on early reading difficulties (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale, & Spaulding, 2008; Torgesen, 2007). First is the condition to use
scientifically research-based core instruction for all students, which is commonly referred to as Tier 1 instruction (Buffman et al., 2009; Harlacher et al., 2010; Lembke et al., 2010; Moore & Whitfield, 2009; Torgesen, 2007; Wixson, 2011). Second, both policies require the use of assessments to monitor progress in order for teachers and administrators to make data-based instructional decisions for students (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale, & Spaulding, 2008; Lembke et al., 2010; Torgesen, 2007; Wixson, 2011; Wixson & Valencia, 2011). Third, interventions, according to RtI and Reading First, shall be determined based on the data collected. Interventions also shall increase with intensity by frequent monitoring throughout the tiers and should be provided by highly qualified professionals, including reading specialists and special education teachers (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale, & Spaulding, 2008; Lembke et al, 2010; Torgesen, 2007).

In addition, professional development for teachers, as was the case with Reading First, is mentioned often in the literature as a crucial part of RtI’s likelihood of success, as teachers need to understand the manner to differentiate Tier 1 instruction with the most effective research-based teaching strategies (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Kavale, & Spaulding, 2008). While professional development is necessary for teachers, it is costly, and many school districts struggle to solve this funding dilemma in order to implement RtI as it was intended. The related research reflects that there are many supporters and opponents alike of RtI, and that a plethora of questions have yet to be answered regarding the effectiveness of this federal legislation.
RtI: Special Education Identification Model

Response to Intervention (RtI) was initiated in the midst of creating No Child Left Behind and enacting the Reading First Grant. This federal legislation was created out of concern that an increasing number of students were being over or under identified for special education services due to a discrepancy regarding the manner IQ testing and achievement were being identified and implemented respectively (President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). For this reason, RtI was introduced through IDEA (2004), upon scientifically researched practices that increase with intensity and differentiation through specific instruction based upon student needs and frequent progress monitoring. Identification of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) may follow when students do not show adequate progress after intense scientific, researched-based interventions (Kavale & Spaulding, 2008).

Prior to RtI, students were mainly identified for special education services through the Discrepancy Model, which, as previously mentioned, is often referred to as the “Wait to Fail” model because it is frequently not until third grade that students show a severe enough discrepancy to qualify for additional services (Berkeley et al., 2009; Buffum et al., 2009; Feifer, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale & Spaulding, 2008; Wixson, 2011). Another reason for the implementation of RtI to supersede the discrepancy model was that the number of students being identified with specific learning disabilities (SLD) had increased 200% during the period from 1997, which caused educators to wonder if students were being misdiagnosed (Berkeley et al., 2009; Kavale, Kauffman, Bachmeier, & Lefever, 2008). For that matter, the increase in the
identification of students needing special education services was resulting in costs to 
school districts of two to three times more the amount for students receiving regular 
education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Proponents of RtI emphasize that the discrepancy 
model did not require a systematic approach to scientifically-based interventions, nor did 
it take into account that a child’s deficit may have been due to the nature of the general 
instruction received, or lack thereof (Berkeley et al., 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 
2006). Moreover, the discrepancy model does not help educators understand what skills 
are needed to help with remediation (Berkeley et al., 2009).

Opponents of RtI believe that as a special education identification model it is 
ailing as miserably or worse as the discrepancy model (Kavale et al., 2008). Due to the 
nature of the RtI model’s failure to respond to interventions for the identification of SLD, 
many educators have expressed concern that students will be misdiagnosed yet again, as 
other disabilities may not be differentiated, or that students, who are just slow learners, 
will be identified (Berkeley et al., 2009; Kavale et al., 2008; Kavale & Spaulding, 2008). 
Additionally, many scholars are of the opinion that IQ testing is still a valid method for 
identifying SLD, as students may reveal low academic success levels, despite having or 
not having a discrepancy (Kavale & Spaulding, 2008; Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009). 
While some scholars are irresolute as to whether the discrepancy model truly 
misidentified students or if RtI is actually a superior special education identification 
model, some do believe the RtI process may be a good general education model.
Response to Intervention: Instructional Framework Model

Researchers are now investigating and asking crucial questions about RtI, such as the manner in which it can be implemented in regards to decreasing the number of students who need special education services or who are identified as SLD. Researchers also are examining RtI’s influence on school climate and decision-making, particularly in situations in which the process is used as a school framework (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, & Saenz, 2008; VanDerHeyden, 2010). To address questions pertaining to the use of RtI as a school-wide model, the focus tends to be directed upon the school and/or its district leadership’s belief regarding the system of implementation that would work best; which typically would include identification through the measurement approach (special education identification), the prevention of special education through instruction approach (general education model), or an amalgam of the two. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Johnston, 2010; Torgesen, 2007).

There is no one model for RtI as an instructional approach, but there are guidelines that are widely accepted, such as frequent progress monitoring, intensified differentiated tiers of instruction, and scientifically research-based instruction. The purpose of the RtI model, as an instructional framework, is to identify students early in their schooling who are at-risk and then to provide systematic and explicit interventions (Kavale et al., 2008; Torgesen, 2007). While there may be some researchers who disagree with RtI as a way to identify students for special education, there are many who believe RtI is best viewed as an instructional framework for meeting the needs of all students (Kavale et al., 2008; Lembke et al., 2010; Torgesen, 2007). In fact, research on
former Reading First schools in Florida who were using RtI as an instructional model, reportedly saw significant reductions in students with reading difficulties (Torgesen, 2007).

The RtI legislation does not mandate or endorse a specific model. However, an expectation exists that Tier I instruction should be scientifically-based and differentiated with frequent monitoring of students. As for Tiers II and III, schools may choose from two primary systems or a hybrid of the two. They are the protocol system, or otherwise known as standard treatment, and the problem solving system (Berkeley et al., 2009; Buffman et al., 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Local agencies and RtI teams are responsible for determining the best approach in their schools and districts.

With the protocol system, a student is prescribed a specified remedial program in order to address a deficient skill that emerges from a designated assessment. This system tends to be more efficient when used in data analysis meetings and teacher trainings, as well as when interpreting student results based on the prescribed program. This system reportedly may produce more accurate identification of needed special education services, as the delivery of the intervention is evidenced-based, small in group size, and delivered by experienced teachers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Harlacher et al., 2010). In addition, the protocol system often has students with similar skill deficiencies and the protocols to be delivered are chosen from a bank of research-proven interventions (Berkeley et al., 2009).

The problem-solving system is less rigid, not requiring that all identified students get the same intervention for a certain skill. However, the individualized needs of the
students are discussed, identified, analyzed and then different interventions are designated based on the needs of the students, and then further evaluated (Berkeley et al., 2009; Harlacher et al., 2010; Kavale & Spaulding, 2008). As one might expect, the problem solving meetings typically take longer to conduct and require a broader range of programs from which to choose. Therefore, the problem-solving approach often requires more teacher-training and may be more difficult to provide without adequate funding. Yet, research has shown that the funding spent on professional development for teachers typically outweighs other dollars spent when it comes to student achievement outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1996, Lose, 2007).

No matter which model of RtI is implemented, a specialized team, which can recognize deficits and recommend an intervention specific to each student is needed (Buffman et al., 2009). The practice of a school psychologist acting as the primary decision maker for the identification of special education students has changed with the implementation of RtI decision making teams. RtI teams are typically comprised of general education teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers and psychologists, with the principal often at the helm. The teams need to understand the manner to diagnose and treat students in areas of deficiency and this requires professional development. Teams, which have received such training, tend to be rare. For that matter, such teams require ongoing collaboration and development through professional learning communities (Buffman et al., 2009). All stakeholders, including the principal should be well versed in understanding the RtI process and what options are available. This
objective requires the principal to lead the process and act as the “head learner” (Barth, 1990, p.162).

**Literature on Leadership**

The purpose in reviewing the literature about leadership is to recognize the importance of the manner in which the principal may act as an instructional leader, practice distributive leadership through instructional coaches and/or teacher leaders, and help provide professional development; all of which have been determined via research as contributing to student learning outcomes in the RtI process and in the former Reading First schools. A review of the research regarding distributed leadership practices, particularly as they relate to mentors, reading specialists, and teacher leaders, appears to be of particular significance to this study, as these are reportedly important factors with the implementation of RtI. In addition, studying the influence of distributed leadership and instructional leadership practices on student achievement seems to have important implications for the effectiveness of the implementation of RtI.

**Distributed leadership.** The term distributed leadership may be substituted with collaborative, shared, or participative leadership, as many researchers have found them to be quite similar concepts (Leithwood et al., 2006). Several theoretical constructs exist regarding the most effective ways to provide leadership for schools. They include charismatic, servant leadership, transactional, and transformational. Distributive leadership and instructional leadership were created based upon and are considered by some to be primary aspects of the transformational leadership style (Fultz, 2011). This
portion of the literature review will focus on the distribution of leadership as a subset of transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership refers to the initiative of a leader to influence effectively others in order that they believe in a vision, and to foster among them a desire to establish and achieve goals in pursuit of the vision (Smith and Bell, 2011). Distributed leadership is the idea that leadership cannot be accomplished by one individual, but needs to be spread throughout the organization to those who believe in the same vision and are committed to accomplishing related goals (Fultz, 2011; Timperley, 2005). In order to pursue and sustain a vision and mission of a school, leaders have corroborated the necessity to distribute leadership and its responsibilities to others (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). In a “nutshell,” distributed leadership occurs when a leader shares responsibilities with qualified individuals who have the same vision.

Empirical research outcomes exist to substantiate the relevance of distributed leadership. A case study of 20 schools, which had experienced continued growth in relation to pupil outcomes, resulted in a pattern of important leadership qualities for the successes of the schools. The qualities include the establishment of a strategic vision and culture of change through encouragement; the creation of a sense of shared ownership in decision making; and the building of needed capacity among teachers and staff members to pursue the vision (Penlington, Kington, & Day, 2008). These qualities, which are typically associated with distributed leadership, are often referenced as being important to the establishment of a healthy school climate and its connection to desired student achievement (Fultz, 2011; Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007).
**Instructional leadership.** A leader has many responsibilities, especially when the leader is a school principal. For example, principals are expected, among many responsibilities, to provide leadership for the establishment of school-wide goals, provide professional development for the teachers, manage instructional programs with the use of data, and shepherd the pursuit of the learning needs of the students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Massey, 2012). Understanding and providing direction for instructional programs, data, and the manner to address the specific needs of students are among the demands on principals, who are expected to lead the RtI meetings within their schools. In fact, principals need to understand related policies and practices and be able to lead teachers through cultural changes in order to make RtI an educational norm (Kozleski & Huber, 2010).

Principals are expected, as leaders, to create goals and targets for the school and individuals, to influence others, and to be motivating. The principals are no longer considered just to be managers. They are expected to be instructional leaders who are responsible for developing effective learning within their schools (Gulcan, 2012). Expecting principals to provide instructional support has become more common, as RtI teams are typically led by principals. One fundamental aspect of effective instructional leadership pertains to the collaboration of a principal and the other stakeholders to deliberate and examine what is needed (Massey, 2012). Principals can and do affect instruction/student learning, as research outcomes purport that leadership is the second greatest influence, next to classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2006).
Instructional leadership can have an effect on teachers’ self and collective efficacy as well, which can directly influence student achievement (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Cagatay, 2012). In fact, collective efficacy has been found to be significantly related to student achievement, even greater than socioeconomic status (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). When a high level of collective efficacy exists, teachers are far more likely to have an overall belief that they can make a difference which relates to the manner in which students will do well (Calik et al., 2012; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Researchers have found that principals who generate collective efficacy, provide a clear vision, positive support, significant professional development, and shared leadership, which are typically considered to be the behaviors of an instructional leader (Calik et al., 2012).

**Literacy Coaches**

One way that professional development was addressed in Reading First schools involved the requirement for the presence of a reading coach. While few schools may now have the funding for a reading coach, particularly with the discontinuation of the funding provided by the Reading First grant, published research results favor having at least some sort of mentoring to help provide constructive feedback to teachers, even if provided by a lead or head teacher or reading specialist. On the other hand, the research is not abundant on this topic, particularly regarding the effectiveness of a coach on overall student achievement. In any case, this portion of the literature review will investigate the recent research regarding the use of academic coaches, lead teachers, specialists, and the like, especially pertaining to relevant outcomes, particularly those that relate to the use of RtI for professional development purposes.
All Reading First schools were required to provide a coach throughout the entirety of the grant in order to offer on-going job-embedded professional development. The basis for the requirement was due primarily to the existing research outcomes that indicated that teachers would absorb and implement professional development more effectively when a knowledgeable professional, who is a part of the school staff, provided ongoing job-embedded professional development which included discussions, modeling, and then follow-ups with teachers (Deussen et al., 2007; Guskey, 2000; Norton, 2001; Wood & McQuarrie, 1999), versus the perceived failure associated with one-time professional development sessions (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

While Reading First schools appear to have used instructional coaches; they are not the only schools to recognize and use such coaches. With the onset of RtI, Common Core Standards, and the emphasis on serving the needs of all students regarding core instruction, a growing number of schools appear to have pursued and implemented ways to increase job-embedded professional development. The premise is that coaches can aid teachers with the analysis of data, insuring that expectations are met (Deussen et al., 2007; Dole & Donaldson, 2006). The suggestions made by the International Reading Association regarding the employment of a Reading Coach still appear to be relevant for those schools looking for a way to educate teachers to meet the RtI expectations. The suggestions are as follows:

- Are excellent presenters and group leaders
- Are excellent teachers of reading, preferably at the levels at which they are coaching
- Have expertise in working with teachers to improve their practices
- Have in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction
- Have the experience or preparation that enables them to model, observe, and provide feedback about instruction for classroom teachers (IRA, 2004, para. 5).

While the aforementioned requirements for Reading First coaches had not been published until schools had already hired coaches, one study conducted by a Regional Educational Laboratory found that the majority of reading coaches were qualified, particularly regarding the need for experience (Deussen et al., 2007). Other research outcomes reflect that schools with Reading First coaches, who hold reading endorsements and certificates, and possess advanced degrees can have a significant influence on student achievement (L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010). In Kentucky’s final Reading First evaluation report, researchers found that high levels of collaboration and communication were ranked by the participants as being the top change characteristics that contributed to high performing schools. The majority of teachers (88.3%), principals (85.7%), and all school reading coaches (100%) agreed completely with the statement that “the school coach, principal, and teachers collaborate to meet instructional reading goals and objectives” (Carney et al., 2010, p.7). This finding appears to be an important indication for schools implementing RtI, as coaches may be integral in not only implementing the RtI process, but also coaching teachers in solid Tier I instructional strategies.
Due in large part to the implementation of the Reading First grant, hiring coaches has become more prevalent than was the case in the past. In addition, a growing need is emerging for some sort of specialist, such as a coach, to keep up with RtI, Common Core, and other initiatives being introduced in states throughout the nation. The few studies, which have been published specifically about coaching, have been focused on the roles and responsibilities of coaches; the manner in which the allocation of time by coaches to various duties may vary from school to school, despite having the same job requirements; and the challenges that the coaches face (Al Otaiba, Hosp, Smartt & Dole, 2008b; Deussen et al., 2007; Dole, 2004; Dole & Donaldson 2006; Elish-Piper, L'Allier, & Zwart, 2009; Knight, 2009; L’Allier et al., 2010; Mangin, 2009; O'Connell, 2008; Rainville & Jones, 2008; Steckel, 2009; Walpole, & Blamey, 2008).

Given the limited existing research outcomes about coaches and coaching, distributed leadership studies were considered for this research project, particularly those studies that discuss professional development being led by a specialist or head teacher and which appear relevant to the implementation of RtI. After reviewing the literature, certain implications about effective coaching practices began to emerge. One overlapping theme is the importance of developing relationships when coaches behave as mentors to teachers. Coaches may mentor teachers through various approaches, such as conferencing, co-planning, co-teaching, modeling lessons, and observing classroom instruction. Studies have found that in order to gain confidence and trust from teachers, coaches need to focus on supporting them through one-on-one conversations, especially when the needs of the teachers become evident (O’Connell, 2008; L’Allier et al., 2010;
Walpole, & Blamey, 2008). In fact, data from one study reveals that when a coach acted as a mentor, most teachers were receptive to modeling the suggested instructional strategies and requested more mentoring (O’Connell, 2008). The results of other studies have corroborated that literacy coaching is more effective when teachers feel there is trust and confidentiality with the coach (L’Allier et al., 2010). These studies appear to have important implications for principals who employ coaches. Although coaches need to observe teachers in order to help them grow professionally, principals may need to consider doing at least some observations with the coaches. One study noted that teachers’ confidence levels and attitudes are higher towards professional development when principals are observing, present, and giving feedback (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). This approach appears to help teachers to recognize that the principals have confidence in the mentor coaches and that they are supportive and actively involved in the process of improving teacher practices for the betterment of the students.

Principals who believe in distributed leadership through the involvement of teacher leaders, coaches, and specialists should understand that the approach requires more than simply handing out responsibilities to those in these related positions. Principals should not expect that their role has been completed when they give a task to someone else. Such a perception represents a mistake, which was confirmed in a study about the distribution of leadership to literacy coaches (Timperley, 2005). Timperley’s (2005) study of seven schools, in which the methodology included a triangulation approach, examined the varying results of student achievement data, which she correlated to the manner in which principals interacted with the coaches and
teachers. Timperley’s study concluded that the schools in which the principals remained involved in the decision making process by working in conjunction with literacy coaches experienced far better student achievement growth than did the schools in which the principals did not interact with the coaches or failed to have a full understanding of the data analyses that had been conducted. While this is only one study, the results appear worthy of consideration by principals when thinking about their continued involvement in the pursuit of instructional and learning strategies to enhance student achievement in their schools.

Another interesting finding from Timperley’s (2005) study was that a principal must choose wisely with whom to share responsibilities. After all, distributing leadership to others can be quite risky and may result in even more incompetence. This distribution of power requires that a principal be cognizant of the staff members who are pedagogically sound and who share the same vision for the school. In addition, literacy coaches can be influential decision makers and an asset to school principals when viewed as literacy leaders within their buildings (L’Allier et al., 2010). In fact, the most compelling research about coaching found that schools with coaches who spend high percentages of their time modeling and conferencing with teachers in their classrooms, make the greatest contributions to academic gains (L’Allier et al., 2010). There is still much to be learned about such leadership and its effects on student achievement. While studies regarding student achievement data have found there are positive correlations with distributed leadership, the research consistently concludes that more studies need to be conducted in order to define the ways in which the distribution of responsibilities
works best. For example, research outcomes confirm the importance of teacher leaders having a useful vision, a positive attitude, and the like. However, research outcomes appear to be more ambiguous regarding the influence of teacher leaders on student achievement (Penlington et al., 2008). Additionally, “research is needed across more districts to ascertain the possibilities of distributed leadership that includes districts, schools, and teacher leaders and the implications of such leadership for the improvement of teaching and learning” (Firestone & Martinez, 2007, p. 24). While there may be questions that remain about distributed leadership, the existing research and application appear to suggest that it is an effective practice when implemented as a part of transformational leadership.

**Contribution of Literature to Research Questions**

The overarching research question for this study pertains to an investigation of the manner that previously identified high performing Kentucky Reading First schools have continued to be successful with the use of Response to Intervention (RtI) as the school framework, and the manner that the Reading First and RtI strategies, which have been used in these schools, compare with each other. This literature review has addressed the history of the Reading First grant and its many similarities to RtI, particularly given that both policies were created by many of the same people and with many of the same requirements. For this reason, schools that have been successful with the implementation of Reading First purportedly would be good models for others which are trying to implement RtI. Given that Kentucky Reading First schools reported a relatively high percentage (75.6%) of students reading at proficient levels in the spring of 2009 (Carney
et al., 2010), schools in the state seems like excellent locations for further study to learn whether or not the principles of Reading First continued, after the grant ended, through the implementation of the RtI framework.

The literature reviewed within this chapter also discussed two different schools of thought regarding the manner that RtI may be implemented, either as a prescriptive protocol or through a problem solving team approach. The research design of this study attempted to identify the types of RtI processes that are being implemented and to examine the influence of these processes on student achievement.

The first sub-question of this study pertained to the manner that principal leadership practices in former high performing Reading First schools influenced the Response to Intervention process and outcomes. The time period for the comparison was designated as being after the Reading First grant ended and RtI became fully implemented. The literature review has discussed the significance of distributed leadership practices by principals and the importance of literacy coaches in helping to implement change, with the Reading First and the RtI programs. Principal leadership, particularly instructional leadership, is important to the success of change, as described in the literature of this chapter. After all, the leadership of the principal reportedly determines the manner in which the RtI teams are led and do their work, and the manner that related decisions are made. These processes purportedly have a substantive effect on student achievement.

The outcomes of this literature review pointed toward a perspective that the titular power of a principal when being handed to a literacy coach, in a meaningful manner,
reflects the notion of distributed leadership. Current research results provides support for
the notion that coaching is an important aspect in increasing Tier 1 instruction, which
seems vital to helping answer the sub question regarding the manner that
current professional development practices and the roles of literacy coaches in former
high performing Reading First schools influence the RtI process.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter appears to have contributed knowledge to
the research questions of this dissertation study. However, more research appears to be
needed regarding the most effective ways to implement RtI. This study has attempted to
add to the current body of literature regarding the effectiveness of RtI by delving deeper
into the available quantitative data, coupled with qualitative responses to interviews of
relevant Kentucky school personnel. Chapter Three contains a description of the manner
in which the overarching research question of this study has been explored. More
specifically, an attempt has been made to investigate whether or not previously high
performing Reading First schools continued to be successful using the RtI framework.
This study also sought to ascertain, through the outcomes of a survey and interviews, the
most effective approach to RtI, as for example with the protocol model or the problem
solving model. Finally, the role of the school literacy coach and the principal’s
leadership style were evaluated and compared with the results from the interviews, along
with student achievement data and survey responses.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will describe the research questions of this study, explain the research methodology, delineate the study’s population sample size, and describe the methods of data collection. It will also discuss the data analysis and synthesis. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a section on ethical considerations, credibility and trustworthiness, and limitations.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, the central purpose of this study has been to explore practices from the Reading First Grant implementation, which itself no longer exists, with an intent of identifying those practices that have continued to be utilized through the Response to Intervention Process (RtI) and the practices that have changed in the interim. This study has also explored the leadership practices, in the aforementioned schools, with the intent of examining the manner that leadership may influence the Response to Intervention process. In addition, an attempt has been made to ascertain the manner that professional development and literacy coaching may influence the Response to Intervention process.

Research Questions

This research study, as previously indicated in Chapter One, addresses two fundamental educational policies, which are Response to Intervention and Reading First. Reading First and the Response to Intervention approach, which were initiated in 2004, were developed by many of the same people, and are nearly identical in the ways that
they propose addressing the needs of students (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Torgesen, 2007; Torgesen, 2009). For this reason, a focus has been placed on the manner in which former Reading First schools, all of which no longer receive grant funding, are currently fulfilling the requirements of Response to Intervention (RtI), as many of the “non-negotiables” of the Reading First grants, were essentially the same as the requirements of the Response to Intervention (RtI) process.

Reading First schools were required to provide three tiers of instruction for struggling students, who were identified by using benchmark assessments and progress monitoring, as well as by using research-based core instruction. Response to Intervention requires the same process for students. For this reason, successful former high performing Reading First schools may hold a vast quantity of valuable information regarding the implementation of RtI, having essentially implemented RtI throughout the entirety of the Reading First grant.

As such, the primary question of this study was to investigate the methods that former high performing Reading First (HPRF) schools have continued to be successful with the use of RtI, as their primary framework, and the ways in which the Reading First and RTI strategies used in these schools compare. The following are sub-questions that have been investigated:

- In what manner have the principal leadership practices in the schools that were identified as high performing Reading First schools influenced the Response to Intervention process?
• In what manner have the current professional development practices and the roles of literacy coaches influenced the Response to Intervention process?

Research Design

The research design for this study involved an instrumental, multiple case study using a qualitative framework and employing such mixed methods as semi-structured interviews along with quantitative student achievement data and participant survey responses. Case studies have long been used by scholars to answer research questions and can be quite credible as a study design (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2012). An instrumental multiple case study is described as a way to provide insight into a specific topic that may help to facilitate understanding of common circumstances by jointly studying more than one case (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Stake, 2005). The goal of using a multiple case study approach was to be able to replicate findings, which could be used to help draw comparisons and/or predict contrasting results based upon relevant theories (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; Yin, 2012). Case studies are used to answer descriptive questions, such as “what is happening or has happened”, which is exactly the intention of this study (Yin, 2012).

Qualitative research is often referred to as a “soft” science, versus the “hard” science of quantitative research (Bogdan & Biklan, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In fact, the National Reading Panel was often criticized for not including qualitative research studies in their analysis, as it was not deemed “scientifically research based” (Allington, 2001; Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005; Hines et al., 2007; Lewis, 2006). However, some in the research community found it appalling that only
experimental, evidence-based research design methods were used and believed it endorsed a narrow view of science (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2004). As such, various researchers look to qualitative research to help explain the why of a phenomenon which is predominantly the intention of this study.

This study has used both quantitative and qualitative data sources to answer the research questions in order to enhance the credibility and reach a more holistic understanding of the subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2012). Scientific research is not only quantitative; rather, it is any research that is systematic, thorough, and data-based, which by definition encompasses qualitative research as well (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). The use of qualitative data in conjunction with quantitative data is viewed by some researchers as quite beneficial and can be used to aid in the validation of quantitative measures when gathered from the same site or subjects (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Qualitative research has no specific discipline or method and may use statistics, tables, graphs, and numbers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), as has been the rationale for this multiple case study. Given that case study findings can have great influence on future educational policies and practice (Ezzy, 2002; Merriam, 1998), it is the hope that the findings from this research will be applicable, relevant, and viable to any school seeking to improve its own understanding and practices in relation to RtI, leadership and professional development.
Context of the Study

Site criterion. The three schools for this multisite case study were chosen using several criteria. Schools which participated in the Reading First grant all administered the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) assessment for grades K-3. These data were used by the Kentucky Department of Education and the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (CCLD) to determine which schools were highest performing at the end of the Reading First grant in the 2008-2009 school year, as compared to the 2004 grant base-year data. Additionally, the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT) scores were also examined, effective at the end of the 2008-2009 school year. In order to be considered a successful school at the end of the grant period, both test results needed to show high performance levels; GRADE needed to be at or above 75% and KCCT scores needed to meet or exceed the state average of 74% proficient and distinguished. Out of the 72 Reading First schools, only 21 schools were high performing on both assessments at the end of the 2009 school year. After identifying the 21 previous former HPRF schools, a new list of eligible schools were identified using the data from the 2016-2017 school report cards to conclude which schools had maintained high performing success. Out of 21 schools that were former HPRF schools, only 14 schools continued to meet or exceed the state average of 54.3%.

It is important to note that not only did the number of successful schools decline, the percentage of proficient and distinguished schools across the state also experienced significant decreases from 74% to 54% proficient and distinguished. These outcomes may conceivably be due to significant changes in Kentucky’s state testing. In 2009,
Kentucky General Assembly enacted a new Senate Bill (SB 1) which required that a new testing system be put in place by 2011-2012. The new and current testing system is referred to as Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP). This assessment is a blend of criterion-referenced and norm-referenced outcomes that include state and national norms. The criterion reference test (CRT), which is part of K-PREP, is designed especially for Kentucky’s state adopted standards and the score categories are reported as being novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished, as were the KCCT scores of previous years (K-PREP Technical Manual, 2016-2017).

Of the remaining 14 successful schools after the testing changes, only two have maintained the same principal since 2009, of which only one has been the principal for the entirety of the Reading First grant. These two schools agreed to participate in the study. The remaining former HPRF schools were contacted, each of which was located in different counties than the two that had already been chosen. From these schools, a third school was acquired for the study based upon its high level of success, differing locale, and agreement to participate.

According to previous studies of Reading First in Kentucky, the top schools were often rural and the lowest performing were urban (Abney & Johnson, 2008; Carney et al., 2010; Chambers et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2010). This outcome has remained unchanged. Even the urban schools that were previously considered successful at the end of the Reading First grant have drastically fallen below the state average of 54% of students reaching proficient or distinguished on the state assessment. In fact, not one of
the previously successful urban schools has continued to be high performing. For this reason, no urban schools were included in this study.

**Site selection.** After eligible schools had been identified for this study, a brief description of the study and a request for the participation of the schools in the study was sent via e-mail to the principals for their consideration. After not receiving any positive responses within a week of the emails, follow-up phone calls to the principals (sometimes several) were made in order to discuss the details of the study and to try to obtain permission for participation. Consent forms, interview questions, and survey questions were sent to the principals first for their consideration. After permission had been obtained, including a letter of support from the principals, dates and times were set for a site visit in order to conduct the desired interviews. Then an IRB application was submitted and the permission for the study was approved. All three site visits were completed within the same week.

The three contributing schools were assured anonymity when agreeing to participate in order to encourage candid answers without fear of repercussions. Therefore, the participating schools will be referred to as School A, School B, and School C, respectively. Participants were also assured before beginning the interviews that their answers would not be shared in a way that might allow others to identify them, and that the results would be analyzed and discussed using only pseudonyms when referring to the schools presented in the study (See Appendix C: Interview Consent Form).

**School A demographics.** School A is in the southern locale of the state and is classified as *Rural: Fringe*, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics.
School A is one of several schools within the district. There were between 425-450 students enrolled in the school. Based upon the percentage of free and reduced lunch, which was approximately 80-85%, School A was considered Title I school-wide. Less than 5% of School A’s population was reported as homeless. The school’s population was predominately white, with less than ten percent being comprised of minorities. Each grade level had approximately 70 students and three classes per grade. The male to female ratio was nearly equal. Students reported as gifted and talented were approximately 25% of the school’s student population. Conversely, students reported as being in special education were 15-20%. The technology ratio of students to Internet connected instructional computers was nearly 1 to 1.

School A had 31 teachers and a 14 to 1 student to teacher ratio. The average number of years of experience of the teachers was approximately 13 years as compared to the state average number of 11.9. According to the school’s report card of TELL survey data, which closely link teacher retention and student achievement to working conditions, teachers reported:

- School leadership was rated as being greater than 95%,
- Managing school conduct was rated as being nearly 100%, and
- Community engagement and support were rated as being approximately 95%.

Also according to the school report card, this school had logged over 4,000 community volunteer hours for the 2016-2017 school year.

School A was recognized as a high performing school by the Kentucky Department of Education due to the number of students scoring in the distinguished
category on the Kentucky state test (K-PREP). For the 2016-2017 school year, approximately 60-65% of students in grades 3-5 scored proficient and distinguished, outscoring the state average of 54.3%. Furthermore, approximately 35% of students in special education scored in the proficient and distinguished categories. For that matter, the percentage of students, who qualified for free and reduced lunch program, who were proficient or distinguished, was greater than 60%.

School B demographics. School B is centrally located in the state and is classified as Town: Distant, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. School B was one of five schools within the district. There were roughly 300-325 students enrolled in the school. Based upon the percentage of free and reduced lunch, which was approximately 75-80%, School B was considered Title I school-wide. Approximately 10% of School B’s population was reported as homeless. The school population was predominately white, having less than ten percent comprised of minorities. Each grade level had varying numbers of students, ranging from 45-70, with three classes per grade. The male to female ratio was fairly equal. Students reported as being gifted and talented were less than 15%, while students reported as having been designated for special education, were near 30%. This was well above the state percentage of 13.7%. The technology ratio of students to Internet connected instructional computers was 1 to 1.

School B had 32 teachers and an 11 to 1 student to teacher ratio. The average number of years of experience for the teachers was approximately 9, as compared to the state average number of 11.9. According to the school’s report card TELL survey data,
which closely links teacher retention and student achievement to working conditions, teachers reported:

- School leadership was rated as being above 90%,
- Managing student conduct was rated as being above 90%, and
- Community engagement and support were rated as being above 85%. No data was available for community volunteer hours.

School B was recognized as a high performing school by the Kentucky Department of Education due to the number of students scoring in the distinguished category on the Kentucky state test (K-PREP). For the 2016-2017 school year, between 70-75% of students in grades 3-5 scored proficient and distinguished, outscoring the state average of 54.3%. Furthermore, 60%-65% of students in special education scored in the proficient and distinguished categories. Seventy to seventy-five percent of the students, who qualified for the free and reduced lunch program, were labeled as being proficient and distinguished.

**School C demographics.** School C is located in the northern part of the state and is classified as *Rural: Distant*, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. School C is one of six schools within the district. There were roughly 250-275 students enrolled in the school. Based upon the percentage of free and reduced lunch, which was approximately 70-75%, School C was considered Title I school-wide. Less than 10% of School C’s population was reported as homeless. The school’s population was predominately white, with less than ten percent being comprised of minorities. Each grade level had varying numbers of students, ranging from 35-45 students and two
classes per grade. The male to female ratio was slightly male heavy with 55% male and 45% female. Students reported as being in the gifted and talented category were 15-20% while, students reported as being designated for the special education program were also 15-20%. The technology ratio of students to Internet connected instructional computers was 1 to 1.

School C has 21 teachers and a 16 to 1 student to teacher ratio. The average number of years of experience among the teachers is approximately 14 as compared to the state average number of 11.9. According to the school’s report card TELL survey data, which closely links teacher retention and student achievement to working conditions, teachers reported they strongly agree/agree with the following:

- School leadership was rated at nearly 100%,
- Managing student conduct was rated at 100%, and
- Community engagement and support were nearly 100%.

According to the school report card, nearly 3,000 community volunteer hours had been logged at this school.

School C was recognized as a high performing school by the Kentucky Department of Education due to the number of students scoring in the distinguished category on the Kentucky state test (K-PREP). For the 2016-2017 school year, 60-65% of students in grades 3-5 scored proficient and distinguished, outscoring the state average of 54.3%. Furthermore, nearly 60% of students in the special education program scored in the proficient and distinguished categories. Sixty percent of the students, who qualified for free and reduced lunch program, scored proficient and distinguished.
Participants. After the three sites had been selected, the principals had agreed for their schools to participate in the study, and permission had been granted for the study by the IRB, each principal was emailed an anonymous Qualtrics survey link, specific for its school, to be forward to all kindergarten through third (K-3) grade staff members, special education teachers, and the literacy coach (if applicable). The principal also was requested to complete the survey. In order for the participants to begin the online survey, an explanation of the study and a consent to participate statement was included on the first page and a positive response of understanding was required in order for each participant to continue (See Appendix A). Intermediate teachers were not included in the surveys as the Reading First grant was only Kindergarten through Third Grade (K-3). So many of the questions would not apply to the intermediate teachers. Prior to the researcher’s arrival for the interviews at each school, a purposeful sampling method was used as the principals were asked to arrange for teacher volunteers from each grade level in K-3, special education, and any reading specialists/coaches, with a priority on teachers who had been a part of the Reading First Grant. The rational for using a purposeful sample was that a selection of teachers, who were knowledgeable of the content being studied, was perceived as being helpful to the obtainment of meaningful responses to the interview questions (Ezzy, 2002; Patton, 2002). Given that the actions and perspectives of teachers have been found to be one of the most important aspects of the implementation of school changes (Calik et al., 2012), the opinions of these participants regarding RtI and Reading First were considered to be important and particularly useful.
Seventeen individuals agreed to take part in the interviews. School A had six participants including the principal; School B had six participants including the principal; and School C had five participants, including the principal. The survey results have a total of 27 participants across the three schools. The results and findings of the interviews and surveys are discussed in Chapter Four.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Quantitative data sets. Reportedly, all Reading First schools administered the GRADE assessment in K-3. In addition, all schools in Kentucky purportedly administered a norm referenced/criterion referenced statewide assessment beginning in third grade in order to fulfill the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Kentucky has undergone several changes to state testing in order to meet and measure Common Core standards. For example, Kentucky’s third graders were given in 2010 the Kentucky Core Content Tests (KCCT) in order to measure reading achievement. For that matter, the 2014 student achievement test is now K-PREP (Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress). While these assessments are not the same, the categories of novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished, have remained on the state report card. The Kentucky Department of Education continues to consider students to be on or above grade level when proficient and distinguished categories are achieved. Therefore, state report card results have been analyzed in a cross comparison, using proficient and distinguished as the common denominator in order to ascertain if student achievement levels of proficiency have stayed the same or have changed in the identified schools since the time that the Reading First grant ended.
The quantitative data set for this study was obtained using information from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) school report cards and data sets beginning with the first year, 2008-09, that Reading First data was available, and ending with the 2016-2017 school year, which represents the latest published data set for third grade students and overall school performance. The KDE data file includes information on total school enrollment and student demographic information such as, student ethnicity, special education program status, gifted and talented program status, student homeless status, and the number of students qualifying for federally subsidized meals. The school report cards also include information on teacher qualifications and years of experience. Moreover, the school report cards also contain information on technology, teacher perceptions of survey data, and even community volunteer hours. Additionally, the assessment data sets on the school report cards display overall school performance on the state assessment in reading, grade level results for third grade through sixth grade, as well as specific results for each demographic category; all of which are disseminated by the novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished categories, including a final category of proficient/distinguished, as this is the manner that Kentucky measures overall success. The past Reading First GRADE results for 2008-2009, overall school-wide Kentucky State Assessment Scores for 2008-2009, and the 2016-2017 Kentucky state assessment scores have been merged to create a unified data set for use in the initial quantitative analysis to determine eligible schools for this study. As the GRADE test is no longer used, there are no comparisons for school data sets on report cards. GRADE was only
used in the initial identification of schools for this study, reflecting past Reading First
distinctions for the determination of high performing schools.

Survey data. The survey was completed by the study participants using the Qualtrics system (Provo, UT) that is available through Ohio University. The Qualtrics system is a highly secure site that is password protected. According to the Qualtrics website:

> Our servers are protected by high-end firewall systems, and scans are performed regularly to ensure that any vulnerabilities are quickly found and patched.
> Complete penetration tests are performed yearly. All services have quick failover points and redundant hardware, with complete backups performed nightly


In sum, Qualtrics is a highly secure site for data collection and participants’ responses.

Before sending the survey to the hopeful participants, an expert panel comprised of a school psychologist, a reading specialist, classroom teachers, and a university professor who was formerly a Reading First teacher, reacted to the surveys using a link devised solely for testing, in order to give feedback on wording, avoidance of bias, and any confusing or ambiguous questioning. Using the testing link also allowed for the site itself to be verified to ascertain the manner in which the data would arrive and ensure that the links worked. Suggestions from the panel were considered and then applied, as applicable, before sending the survey links to the schools.

The participants were notified before beginning the survey of the purpose of the study, of its potential benefits and discomforts, and that the software for the survey is
secure and confidential. No identifiers were used. Multiple ways exist to participate in Qualtrics surveys, including mobile devices, QR scan codes, and off-line, face-to-face for the comfort of some participants. Principals were emailed an anonymous link to forward to the appropriate staff members as previously discussed. Participants were given choices regarding the manner that they preferred to participate, such as by the emailed link, mobile device, or face-to-face in a private room at their school. No teachers expressed an interest in the face-to-face, off-line option.

Participants were encouraged to complete the survey within two weeks of receiving it. The on-line survey through the Qualtrics program was chosen to help expedite the process of survey data collecting, as real-time results can be seen and there is an option to send a reminder to respond. Another benefit of conducting the surveys through Qualtrics is that the surveys are held on a secure server and are password protected. Additionally, the data collected was transferable to other programs such as Excel, to run basic quantitative analysis with the data sets. The data could be analyzed by individual schools, as well as compiled into one large file for greater exploration.

In an attempt to increase the return rate of the surveys, the principals encouraged, per the request of this researcher, the qualified staff to complete the surveys after having briefly explained the study. Principals forwarded the consent forms by email to all the possible participants, which also included a basic description of the study. Furthermore, the Qualtrics survey links are mobile friendly which can be considered more convenient and private. In addition, on the day of the site visit to conduct interviews for the qualitative portion of the research study, the staff members were able to see a face behind
the name (namely the face of the researcher). The qualified staff members, with whom the researcher spoke, were again encouraged to take the survey if they had not. To facilitate goodwill on the day of the site visit, treats were provided for the staff, with permission from the principal being previously acquired. Despite the attempts at increasing the return rate, only 27 surveys were completed. While survey results provide data that can be used to get a general understanding, they do not allow for the obtainment of deep findings.

**Interviews.** Aside from the quantitative data that were acquired through the surveys and state data sets, interviews were chosen as the main method of inquiry as they are seen as an essential instrument for a qualitative research design (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2013). For example, the results of the interviews can provide further insight into ways in which the RtI process is perceived to work within the schools, which according to some scholars, ultimately may assist in the devising of more effective policy (Ezzy, 2002). An assumption, is being made that the answers of the interviewees will be knowledgeable and meaningful due to their involvement in the daily workings of the school (Patton, 2002), and for this reason the data collected from the interviews will enhance the overall findings of the study. While there is a plethora of quantitative research studies that have been conducted regarding education, there are few that have been focused on the perspectives of those directly involved with the day-to-day workings and processes that create education (Seidman, 2013). This study seeks to assist in filling that void in the research by conducting interviews that hopefully may help answer the *how* and *why* of what makes some schools successful through RtI.
Prior to my arrival, as the researcher, on the day of the site visit, the principals had been requested to have identified K-3 teachers who were willing to participate in interviews, who had taught more than one year, and who preferably had been a part of the Reading First grant. Interviewing involves ethical concerns such as, informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey, 2005). A quiet, private setting was requested to conduct the interviews as well as adequate time for the teachers to participate. As teachers value their time and planning times vary from building to building, the interviews were kept to thirty minutes or less as promised.

The interviews were approached in a semi-structured format, using questions that allowed for explanations and explorations of the topic in order to avoid being rigid and failing to be qualitative in nature (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Semi-structured interview protocols included a combination of predetermined items intended to prompt specific information about procedures of importance and also to allow for investigative probing about a topic that might have not have previously occurred to the interviewer. In this case, predetermined items were informed by findings from a review of the literature on the similarities of Response to Intervention and Reading First as potential frameworks, professional development, and leadership styles and practices (See Appendix B for Interview questions).

Before beginning the interviews, introductions were made with a brief dialogue about the interviewer and the reason that the study was being conducted. The participants were notified that the interviewer was a former Reading First (RF) teacher and RF coach in Fayette County, Kentucky. An acknowledgement was made of the interviewer’s
interest in RF schools that had been successful and had continued to be successful. As this was a semi-structured interview, it was hoped that, the interviewer, would be able to achieve a “balanced rapport”, of being friendly and casual that would allow for answers to flow freely and honestly, without the participants perceiving that judgements and evaluations were being made of their responses. (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

The participants were asked to sign a permission form that signified a willingness to participate and an understanding that no harm would emerge to them. Participants were also reassured that their responses would be maintained with complete anonymity, as pseudonyms would be used for the participating schools. Furthermore, an assurance was made before commencement of the interviews that the answers of the participants would not be shared with administration and that no identifiers would be used in order to remain their confidentiality. Also, the participants were told that at any time a question made them uncomfortable, they could choose not to answer and they could end the interview at any time. The interviews were then recorded with the permission of the participants.

Every effort was made to produce good interviews that resulted in meaningful results by asking probing questions in order to encourage the respondents to offer their perspectives in a manner that was filled with details (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The general interview guide approach was used in order to try and keep the researcher’s bias to a minimum, to keep the interviewees on track, and to collect similar information from each of them. As listening is one of the most important skills an interviewer can have,
pausing was also used intentionally in order to allow the participants time to think and elaborate before moving on to another question.

The interview questions were printed on a separate sheet to allow the dictation of notes throughout the interview process. Notes for each interview were taken in real time, as this approach was perceived to help the interviewer maintain active listening by staying focused on the interview, avoid interrupting, and allowing the interviewer to keep track for follow-up questioning (Seidman, 2013). The notes were taken in front of the participants and often the participants would point to sections and elaborate more after reading what was written. Throughout the interview, the interviewer would restate key points to the participants to ensure their agreement. This approach allowed the participants to help make corrections or elaborate more, acting as an immediate member checking technique in each interview. Member checking is a recommended practice in qualitative research, as it contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the report by asking those interviewed for feedback (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach & Richardson, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013).

**Interview analysis.** The audio recordings were transcribed after the interviews were completed using a word processing program. The interviews each took approximately a half an hour. All participants’ responses were transcribed verbatim and put into a word document for ease of use and then printed on paper. Data analysis began while taking notes during the interviews. Certain themes became evident in each interview, and were recorded repeatedly in the notes, which contributed to the coding process. Coding of qualitative data means creating categories from interpretations of the
data (Ezzy, 2002). Coding techniques were used after the interview transcriptions had been completed in order to look for important phrases and words within the transcripts, along with the notes that had been taken. Coding categories were developed in order to help sort the information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Patterns, phrases, and common practices were highlighted and put into common categories. Line-by-line coding was also used, as is recommended for analysis by Charmaz (2006). Contradictions or outlier answers were kept in the forefront as to avoid bias, as this process can help the researcher to understand the data gathered and the importance of having differing points of view (Seidman, 2013).

**Survey data analysis.** After giving the schools adequate time and reminders to complete the survey, on the online Qualtrics system, the results were collected and exported to an Excel document. The use of Excel allowed for easier conditional formatting and sorting by various criteria, in order to analyze the results for each school. Also, the data from each school could easily be combined into one data set and analyzed as a whole.

As this study involved a mixed-methods approach, the results from the interviews were triangulated with the survey data, school demographic data, and the state test scores. After all, mixed methodology should represent the complementary strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods and avoid overlying weaknesses (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). The use of triangulation allowed the researcher to represent different methods in different combinations and hopefully create a whole picture (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The results of the analysis are discussed in Chapter Four.
Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are important to any research study, particularly for the personal protection of the participants (Christians, 2005; Merriam, 1998). For example, informed consent is important, as the research participants must be informed of the nature of the study and any consequences that might occur (Christians, 2005). Above all, there are three topics that are most often addressed by researchers which are informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey; 2005). All of these topics were addressed with the participants with the use of a signed consent form before the interviews were conducted (Appendix C) and online consent form for the survey participants (Appendix A). In order to be respectful of the participants’ limited time, interviews were kept to thirty minutes or less.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In order to implement a good case study design, multiple sources of evidence such as direct observations, interviews, archival records, documents, participant-observation, and physical artifacts are considered to be beneficial (Yin, 2012). According to Yin (2012), “Case study research involves systematic data collection and analysis procedures, and case study findings can be generalized to other situations through analytic (not statistical) generalization” (p. 6). This multi-case study design included semi-structured interviews, surveys, document reviews, and archival records of school assessment data, using a systematic data collection process and analysis procedures.

When conducting quantitative studies, researchers typically describe the validity and reliability of the study. However, a responsibility of a qualitative researcher is to
confirm that the methodology and analysis of the data are credible and trustworthy (Brantlinger et al., 2005). There are several common practices that can be implemented throughout a study that help others to cognize that the researcher’s findings are credible and trustworthy which include audit trails, member checking, peer debriefing, researcher reflexivity, thick description, and triangulation (Brantlinger et al., 2005). This study employed all of these measures in various ways.

**Audit trail.** An audit trail is the means by which a researcher keeps tracks of interviews, field notes, observations, and the time spent addressing each of these techniques. This study used semi-structured interviews in each of the three separate school sites within the same week. Permission to audio record the interviews was obtained before beginning the interviews and after the participants had read and signed the adult consent forms. Audio recordings of the interviews were digitally recorded on a password protected laptop while real-time, detailed notes were taken. The notes were stored in a binder, in a secure location at all times, with the signed adult consent forms. The audio recordings were then transcribed into separate word documents for each interview. The files were stored on a password protected computer. In addition, official letters of support from each school were also emailed to the researcher to upload for IRB approval. These letters were on official school letterhead and are not included in the appendices due to the anonymity agreement between the researcher and the schools.

**Member checking.** Member checking refers to the interviewer checking for the accuracy or inaccuracy of the transcripts or notes taken during the interviews (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Real-time detailed notes were taken during the interviews for each question.
The researcher provided each of the interviewees with an opportunity to check the notes. This approach allowed for the clarification of any miscommunications before the interviews were finalized. This approach also allowed the researcher to ask better follow-up questions if clarifications were needed. After the participants read the researcher’s notes and initial interpretations, they were given the opportunity to add or clarify answers before leaving the interview session, as checking for interpretations with the participant’s during the interview process is a recognized qualitative measure to create trustworthiness (Ezzy, 2002).

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing is the act of receiving critical feedback at key intervals throughout a study, giving the investigator an opportunity to explore theories and interpretations of the data through discussions with others knowledgeable about the subject (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Ezzy, 2002). The researcher discussed, at several intervals, throughout the study, the proposed research questions and the methodology of the study with a former Reading First teacher who is now a university professor. The background knowledge of Reading First, literacy instruction, and leadership practices of this peer were helpful, particularly for testing ideas and pursuing interpretations. The peer has also conducted qualitative studies and for this reason was knowledgeable about interviewing practices and the coding of data thereafter. In addition, debriefings were also conducted with a school psychologist who was part of Reading First in Ohio and for this reason was able to provide insight and help with the identification of questions to ask the participants and logical approaches for the dissemination of the interview findings.
Furthermore, advice and guidance was sought from members of the dissertation committee throughout the process.

**Researcher reflexivity.** Reflexivity involves attempts to ascertain and disclose assumptions, beliefs, biases, and values of the researcher that may affect the study (AERA, 2006; Brantlinger et al., 2005). An attempt at disclosing assumptions, beliefs and biases is addressed later in this chapter in the *Myself as a Researcher* section. Before being granted permission to conduct the study at each school, a description of the study was sent to principals, along with phone conversations that briefly explained that the researcher was a former Reading First coach. Before beginning each interview, a brief introduction was made and explanation of the researcher’s background and experience was offered. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using protocols that included a combination of predetermined items intended to prompt specific information about procedures of importance related to the research question. The researcher remained neutral throughout the interviews by using these predetermined questions. Prompting for further clarifications was carefully done so as to avoid leading the participants in a certain direction.

**Thick description.** Throughout Chapter Four, the researcher has provided a thick description of the interview responses by providing quotations that reflect evidence of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions as is recommended for qualitative research in order to help provide credibility and trustworthiness (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is the use of multiple and varied data sources that assist in determining if congruency has occurred within the data (Brantlinger et al., 2005;
Yin, 2012). This research study used participant interviews, online surveys, and
document reviews of Kentucky school report card data, district and school websites,
school Facebook pages, and statistical data from NCES. The document review of the
school report card data, complemented the Reading First data of those schools which had
remained successful. The school report cards also provided demographics of school data,
teachers, and the TELL data from the teachers, who participated voluntarily in the state
survey. The district and school websites provided additional information about the
schools, including accolades and awards from the state, as well as the school motto for
School A. The survey data provided an overview of the general beliefs of the
participants, without the pressure of being interviewed. The survey approach also
provided an opportunity to identify emerging themes in comparison to the interviews.
The interviews provided rich, detailed descriptions of the RtI practices that are occurring
in literacy, professional development, and principal leadership. All the data gathered
allowed for the researcher to corroborate the findings, creating a greater opportunity to
answer the how and why research questions with greater confidence.

**IRB Approval.**

In order to conduct any study where human subjects are directly involved,
permission must be granted by Ohio University’s Institutional Review Board. Permission
from the board was sought after the proposal defense with the dissertation committee in
order to incorporate its thoughts and suggestions into the application. The IRB
committee analyzes each application to ensure that participants are safe from harm, and
any risk associated with the study is outweighed by the benefits of the study results.
Another provision to ensure that researchers are conducting ethical, reliable, and valid studies is the requirement for a researcher to participate in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). These online courses on ethics, human subjects, data management, and the like, are required courses prior to any IRB approval at Ohio University.

The IRB requires a summary of the study, an explanation of the study, and an identification of specific participants (i.e. names of schools participating), the risks and benefits of the study, and the contributions that a study will hopefully make to society when it is completed. Documents such as the survey questions, interview questions, consent forms, and letters of support from the selected sites for this study were required to be uploaded to the IRB application.

The principals at each participating school site also received the adult interview consent forms that cover: a summary of the study; explanation of the study; the risks, discomforts, and benefits of the study; the confidentiality and records of the study; future use of the study results; and finally, consent. Moreover, the actual interview and survey questions were submitted in order to obtain final approval. After acquiring permission to conduct the study in the schools, a letter of support was required from each school on letterhead stating that the schools understood the study’s intent, agreed to the study, and the conditions required. Once the letters of support had been obtained, they were uploaded, to the IRB online application.

As soon as the IRB application was approved, an e-mail was sent to the principals of the identified schools with an anonymous link to the survey that was designed to be
forwarded to the appropriate staff members. A request to principals was made to allow time for the staff members to complete the surveys. Days and times for the actual site visit to conduct interviews were also finalized at that time.

Principals were asked to inform their staff members that their schools would be participating in a study consisting of an online survey and interviews. The three principals emailed the designated staff members the link to the survey, along with an explanation of the study. The principals contacted specific staff members, who they believed would be good potential candidates for the interviews due to their past Reading First experience. In order to inform the potential interview participants of the study, the consent form and interview questions were shared with them. Participation was voluntary, albeit encouraged.

Before beginning the interview process, participants signed a consent form, acknowledging that their participation was voluntary and that no anticipated harm was anticipated for them. Additionally, before the tape recording of the interviews began, the participants were asked to give oral consent to the process. Participants were assured that all answers would be kept confidential, as pseudonyms would be used for the names of the schools and participants in order to safeguard against unwanted exposure or embarrassment. All research related digital documents have been stored on a secure, password protected computer, and paper notes and documents associated with the study have been kept within a locked drawer. The survey results have also been held on a secure Qualtrics server, which is password protected.
Myself as a Researcher

In 2005, I took a position as a Reading First Coach in an urban district in Kentucky. The school was not only struggling, but had reached a crisis level according to NCLB and the state accountability measures. I grew frustrated as three years passed and while the school continued to increase its scores, it had not reached the expected 75% goal. This frustration also turned to embarrassment when I attended state meetings and nearby schools, were applauded for being able to reach or exceed the goal. I felt a strong need to identify a strategy to remedy the apparent inadequacy.

This situation caused me to spend hours examining the results that led to the state ranking of the school’s achievement. I finally identified a glaring discrepancy: nearly all the schools achieving the 75% goal or better were located in rural districts. Fortunately, I had the foresight to mention this to my professor, who had researched rural schools. I became intrigued and borderline obsessed about finding out why urban districts were being outperformed by remote Appalachian schools and luckily was able to form a partnership with the professor, and later a friend and colleague experiencing similar problems as I was, with research regarding Reading First schools in Kentucky.

After the Reading First grant ended, I was employed as a Reading Specialist in a suburban school district of Cincinnati, Ohio. Upon being hired, I learned that the district was just starting the Response to Intervention process, six years after the law had been initiated. The district struggled with the RtI process, which caused me to reflect upon the schools in Kentucky who had put RtI practices in place congruently with Reading First. This observation prompted me to want to investigate if Reading First practices had
continued and the manner that things had changed since the grant ended. I am hopeful that this research study regarding the relation of Response to Intervention and Reading First practices may help schools to recognize and understand the factors that enhance and hinder student success. I also hope that the results from this study will contribute to the literature regarding Response to Intervention, leadership, the implementation of programs/grants, and finally, contribute some positive information to the research literature concerning Reading First. I do not believe Reading First was nearly the disaster as it was portrayed in the literature, at least not in Kentucky. I thoroughly believe that there are still lessons to learn from past Reading First schools that can be useful in schools that are struggling with Response to Intervention. Regardless, measures were taken to avoid allowing my perceptions to influence this study, particularly when conducting the interviews.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The first limitation, which emerged, was the lack of schools that would fit the criterial of the study. At the end of Reading First, there were 21 Kentucky schools who were considered high performing, in rural and urban locations. According to the compiled data base, out of the former 21, only 14 can now be considered high performing, and none of those are located in urban districts. Additionally, out of the 14 schools, only one of these has had the same principal since Reading First. One other school has had the same principal since 2010. This also represented a limitation as it made it difficult to compare leadership practices from the years of Reading First to now.
In addition to having a limited number of schools, which met the study criteria, obtaining permission from the two schools with long standing principals was also difficult. This was a challenging and long process. Not having any contacts in the schools that qualified as high performing, made it difficult to even get past “the gatekeepers” in order to speak to the principals. Luckily, I was able to make contact and obtain permission for the two schools that met the study criteria qualifications. A third school was even more difficult to obtain. One principal whom I contacted said it wasn’t a good time to conduct a survey in her building as testing was on the agenda. The principal of another school indicated that the teachers could not have any more time taken from planning, as they only have thirty minutes a day, and are often asked to participate in other meetings. Finally, a third school agreed to participate after many follow up phone calls. Overall, phone calls were more effective in actually making contact with principals, as not one principal responded to an email inquiry.

As it was difficult to obtain schools that would agree to participate in the study, a lack of responses by the participants to the survey emerged. While a hope existed that 100% participation to the survey would occur, this was certainly not the case. Also, personal bias may have emerged by the respondents on either their answers to the interview questions or their responses to the survey questions, which could have skewed the data results. Additionally, this study could be limited by the perceptions of the researcher in interpreting the data, as the researcher was a Reading First Coach for three years.
Also, not one of the three schools has had a reading/literacy coach since the ending of the Reading First grant, which is reportedly due to a lack of funding. This was extremely unfortunate, as one of the research questions was about the influence of coaches on the RtI process. Only one school had an instructional coach, who now serves all the grade levels and content areas in the building, along with having other district responsibilities.

A delimitation may be the scope of this study, as it is limited to one state, Kentucky, and a relatively small sample including three schools. Another delimitation may be reflected in that all three schools are fairly homogeneous in race and are not urban. For this reason, some individuals may conclude that the findings from this study may not be transferable to more diverse schools.

Summary

This chapter has detailed the methodology and research design for this study. The purpose of the study has been stated and the related reasoning has been explained. Response to Intervention and Reading First are very similar in many ways. For this reason, learning from schools that have been successful in the past and continue to be with Response to Intervention should be beneficial for academics, administrators, educators, and legislators looking to improve schools. Using a mixed methodology approach of qualitative and quantitative data hopefully has resulted in greater insight into the *whys* of student successes, as opposed to simply attempting to identify the manner that schools can replicate successful results as evidenced by norm-referenced, state required assessments.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the findings of the survey data collected and the interview results that reflect the procedures, processes, and practices regarding Response to Intervention (RtI) in three highly successful former Reading First schools in various locales in Kentucky. In this chapter, the comprehensive findings of 17 interviews of teachers and principals from three schools will be presented in a detailed analysis for each school and then cross-analyzed. These schools were chosen because they are three of the top performing schools in the state and were also former Reading First schools. Reading First and Response to Intervention are highly connected by the procedures, practices, and expectations which make these schools ideal for study as there are still many questions about RtI as an educational framework. The data for the interviews was collected one-on-one and audio recorded with permission. The surveys were sent via a secure email link that participants could take on a computer or personal computer at their leisure. The interview questions and online survey were designed with the hope of answering this study’s research questions.

The primary question that guided this research was as follows:

By what methods do former High Performing Reading First (HPRF) schools continue to be successful with the use of RtI as the primary educational framework, and in what manner do these methods compare?

The following two sub-questions also guided the research:
Sub-question 1: In what manner have the principal leadership practices in the schools that were identified as high performing Reading First schools influenced the Response to Intervention process?

Sub-question 2: In what manner have the current professional development practices and the roles of literacy coaches influenced the Response to Intervention process?

School Demographics Overview

The state of Kentucky has 186 school districts with over 1,500 schools in operation (NCES, 2017). The three schools that qualified for the study are located in differing counties and locales across the state of Kentucky. School A is classified as Rural: Fringe, which is defined as less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2006). School B is classified as Town: Distant, which is defined as more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area (NCES, 2006). School C is classified as Rural: Distant, which is defined as more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2006).

Fundamental demographic data is represented in Table 1. Data representing the averages for the participants from each school can be found in Table 2.
Table 1

*Demographics of Study Sites*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region Location</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Northern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Classification</td>
<td>Rural: Fringe</td>
<td>Town: Distant</td>
<td>Rural: Distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade levels served</td>
<td>Pk-5</td>
<td>Pk-5</td>
<td>K-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>425-450</td>
<td>300-325</td>
<td>250-275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff size</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and reduced lunch</td>
<td>80-85%</td>
<td>75-80%</td>
<td>70-75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Kentucky Department of Education School Report Cards, 2016-2017 school years

Table 2

*Averages of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Sites’ Participants</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avg. years in RtI</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. years in RF</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals’ tenure</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. participants’ tenure</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School A is located in the southern part of the state. The enrollment size of the school is less than 450. School A is one of several schools located within one of Kentucky’s larger populated rural counties. The county itself is considered high performing overall in the state of Kentucky. School A is found down a curvy road in a picturesque setting near a river. It is an older building with a welcoming atmosphere. The motto statement of the school reads, “Whatever it takes, our kids are worth it!” This motto rang true throughout answers received to the interview questions pertaining to the
students. This motto also was echoed during the interview process with the five teachers and principal.

The principal is a Caucasian female who has been in education between 25-30 years, 19 of which have been spent as the principal of School A. Her teaching experience was in lower primary prior to becoming an administrator. She is between 45-65 years of age. She has been the principal prior to the Reading First grant and continued throughout the entirety of the Reading First grant and has remained since.

School B is located in the central part of Kentucky. The school is classified as Town: Distant. The enrollment size of the school is small with less than 325, as it serves a tiny low income community within a larger county. School B is an older building found in the middle of a little town, but is welcoming and technology is updated inside with 1 to 1 digital learning. The county the school is located within has a small number of schools that serves approximately 2,500 students. The school district is one of the top performing districts in the state.

The principal is a Caucasian female between the ages of 40-60. She does have an assistant principal; however, the assistant was at a training the day of the site visit. The principal of School B began her tenure the year the Reading First grant ended and has a tenure of 8 years with this school, but 24 years in education. While she was not principal during Reading First, she had been a primary classroom teacher in another district in a Reading First school for at least three of the five years so she is very familiar with how Reading First worked and the procedures and practices that were non-negotiables in Kentucky. There were six interviews conducted with the principal included.
School C is located in the northern part of the state in Amish farm country. The school is found off of a very curvy two lane road with no middle line. Nothing but farms and houses surround the school. The classification is *Rural: Distant*, and is the most rural school of the three visited. However, the building is less than five years old and is very technology-oriented for the new digital age. The enrollment of School C is also the smallest of the three examined with less than 275 students. The county has a small number of schools, but School C is the highest performing of all the elementary schools on the state assessments. The vision of School C is to be recognized as a School of Distinction, which is the highest recognition given by the Kentucky Department of Education.

The principal of School C is a Caucasian female between the ages of 30-50. She has been an educator for 14 years in the district, but an administrator for only three. The school has had a large number of turnover in teachers and principals alike since Reading First. In fact, this school has had three different principals since Reading First, as well as three different superintendents. The teachers’ responses seem to suggest that they are happy to have the current principal, as she has made significant improvements in the RtI process. There were five participants interviewed at this school including the principal.

**Interview Findings**

The process of data analysis began by typing out the research questions and making a separate sheet for each participant so that real-time notes could be taken. The general interview guide approach was used in order to allow some flexibility and to capture the participants’ perspective of RtI and compare its practices from now back to
the years of Reading First. The interview questions were clustered according to topics designed with the intention of answering the research questions. As such, the interview findings are disseminated in this same manner.

**Questions 1-4: Getting to Know You**

In Questions One through Four, teachers were first asked about their years of experience teaching, years in current position, years involved in Reading First, as well as years involved in Response to Intervention. The purpose of these questions was to ascertain if there was a correlation between the perceptions of Reading First and RtI practices. Detailed information regarding the teachers’ experience in each school can be found in Tables 3, 4, and 5. The averages for each school reflect that School A has the participants with the longest tenure at 17 years, as well as participation in Reading First at nearly five years on average. School C has reportedly had a great deal of turnover, including principals, which is reflected in the average tenure being approximately eight years in the school, and only seven years involved in RtI, and unfortunately, very little experience with Reading First. School B fell in the middle of the averages, with participant tenure being 11.5 years in the school, four and a half years in Reading First, and 14 years on average experiencing RtI.
### Table 3

**School A Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years Worked in School</th>
<th>Years Worked in Current Role</th>
<th>Years in RF</th>
<th>Years in RtI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19 (Principal)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5 (3rd)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13 (CI)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>P5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3 (majority in 3rd)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
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**Average Total**

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### Table 4

**School B Interview Participants**

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<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Years Worked in Current Role</th>
<th>Years in RF</th>
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</tr>
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<td>3 (3rd)</td>
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<td>8 (Principal)</td>
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**Average Total**

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Table 5

School C Interview Participants

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<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years Worked in School</th>
<th>Years Worked in Current Role</th>
<th>Years in RF</th>
<th>Years in RtI</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>1.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
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The coded interview response tables for the remaining questions for each school can be found in Appendices E, F, and G, as well as the general interview guide in Appendix B. The following interview questions are broken down by categories and reported for each school’s overarching results. A cross analysis will then be examined for similarities and differences across the schools.

**Question 5: Describing the Tiers of Instruction.**

**Tier 1.** The intent of the RtI model as an instructional framework is to identify students early who are at-risk and provide systematic and explicit interventions, generally through various tiers of instruction (Kavale et al., 2008; Torgesen, 2007). There is no singular model for schools to follow for RtI to be implemented as an instructional approach, but there are guiding principles that are commonly recognized, such as scientifically research-based instruction, frequent progress monitoring, and intensified, differentiated tiers of instruction. The first tier, or Tier 1, is generally recognized as high quality instruction for all students (Buffman et al., 2009; Harlacher et al., 2010; Lembke
et al., 2010; Moore & Whitfield, 2009; Torgesen, 2007; Wixson, 2011). The participants at each of the three schools were asked to briefly describe the instruction for each Tier. The breakdown regarding the manner that these high performing schools address Tier 1 can be found below.

**School A.** The principal and five teachers were interviewed one-on-one for approximately 30 minutes each. All of School A’s participants reported that the literacy block is 120 minutes in primary; of that, 30 minutes are for whole group instruction, with the remaining time spent in small groups. School A uses a program from *McGraw Hill* as its main program for Tier 1. This program comes with leveled readers for guided reading, as reported by participants five and six. Supplemental programs such as *Lexia* and *Reading Plus* were also identified as being used. The majority of the participants reiterated the same answer for what Tier 1 instruction is in their building: whole group for all students. It was clear that all the participants believed that Tier 1 instruction is the same for all students. Participant six emphasized the idea that not only do students get the same instruction, but excellent instruction, saying “We aim for high quality instruction for everyone.”

**School B.** The principal and five teachers participated in one-on-one interviews. Each interview lasted no more than 30 minutes. Five out of the six participants responded that the school’s literacy block is 120 minutes. All of the participants in School B believe that Tier 1 is whole group instruction that all students receive. Tier 1 instruction in this building is based on standards from the Common Core and/or developed learning targets, as this was repeated throughout five of the six interviews.
Three of the participants reported using *Daily 5* in their classrooms which includes small groups with students Reading to Self, Reading to Someone, and Writing. Only one participant, the Kindergarten teacher, reported using a program to teach whole group lessons. The other participants emphasized that there were not programs anymore (since Reading First). Participant Two explained this reason succinctly as “We find that when teachers have a program, they teach to the program as opposed to the standards. So we don’t have a program.” Along with teaching the standards, teachers in School B reported using common assessments to drive their instruction. These assessments are based on the standards and learning targets.

**School C.** The principal and four teachers participated in one-on-one interviews for no more than 30 minutes each. This was the smallest school that was visited, with only 21 teachers total in the building. This school also has the least amount of tenure as it had experienced high teacher and leadership turnover. Nonetheless, the participants being interviewed had nearly the same answers for what makes Tier 1 instruction in their school. The teachers in School C reported using *Engage New York* as their core program, along with *Houghton Mifflin* and *Project Read*. Four out of the five participants described Tier 1 as whole group instruction. Three of the five participants identified whole group as focusing on the standards for the grade level, so that all students are exposed to the grade level content. *Kagan* strategies, which focus on cooperative learning, are also employed during whole group, as reported by two participants.

**Tier 2.** RtI requires the use of assessments to monitor progress in order for teachers and administrators to make data-based instructional decisions for students (Bean
Students who are struggling with skills, concepts, or standards as evidenced by progress monitoring may need extra instruction. Interventions begin at the Tier 2 level and are determined based on the data that are collected by teachers. These interventions typically increase with intensity by frequent monitoring throughout the tiers and are generally provided by highly qualified professionals, including reading specialists and special education teachers (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale, & Spaulding, 2008; Lembke et al., 2010; Torgesen, 2007; Wixson, 2011; Wixson & Valencia, 2011).

**School A.** After explaining Tier 1, participants went on to explain Tier 2 instruction. Individualized instruction was mentioned five times throughout the interviews from the six participants in this school. Small group instruction was discussed three times as generally pulling out students by assistants or other personnel for 30 minutes at a time. School A uses *Lexia, Great Leaps, Fresh Reads, Cars and Stars, i-Ready Reading, Reading Plus, and Sing, Spell, Read, Write* as programs for Tier 2 instruction. Participant Six noted that there is no specific program, just a “hodgepodge of whatever they need”.

**School B.** After Tier 1 was explained, Tier 2 instruction was described as very intentional small group instruction, by five out of the six participants. Five out of six participants also described Tier 2 as being flexible/ability-grouped according to needed skills or standards-based knowledge. Data is used to determine the skills and standards that should be addressed, which are individualized in order to meet the needs of students.
The special education teacher reportedly pushes in to the classrooms (meaning teaches students in the classroom versus pulling them out) to provide Tier 2 instruction and help reduce the teacher to student ratio according to three of the participants. Students served in Tier 2 range from 15-25 minutes daily. Students are generally not pulled out of the classroom.

**School C.** Tier 2 instruction was described by four out of five participants as small group instruction occurring for 10-30 minutes daily, depending on the grade level. School C has exhibited creativity by using personnel resources, as classroom teachers, assistants, the librarian, and two retired teachers all serve Tier 2 students. The view that interventions provided during Tier 2 are based on what the individual students are struggling with specific to content, was repeated by three participants. Interventions reportedly available to be used include *Project Read, Achieve, IXL,* and *Reading A-Z* passages.

**Tier 3.** Tier 3 instruction is essentially the most intensive of the interventions. Tier 3 interventions increase the intensity by decreasing group size to no more than a 3 to 1 ratio to 1 to 1, are taught daily, increase the minutes instructed per day, and are taught by a highly trained/qualified teacher, specialist or special education teacher. Tier 3 interventions become vital when inadequate student progress is evident from Tier 2 intervention data. Tier 3 interventions should be explicitly targeted to meet the individual student needs and skill deficiencies (Buffum et al., 2009). Progress monitoring is critical at this level to ensure the interventions are working.
School A. When describing Tier 3 instruction, four of the six participants specifically said the interventions occurred daily. In School A, the overarching belief expressed by the study participants concerning Tier 3, appeared to reflect that students who are not making adequate growth at this tier, are reasonable candidates for a referral process. Two participants specifically mentioned that students in Tier 3 are receiving one-on-one instruction that is targeted and intensive, provided by the special education teacher. The programs, which the participants mentioned using in School A, are Reading Plus, Reading Mastery, Fresh Reads, and SRA Corrective Reading. Additionally, extra lessons from programs used in Tier 2 may also be used. The amount of reading interventions in Tier 3 range from an additional 30-45 minutes of instruction. Participant six explained that “some students may get up to 90 minutes a day of reading”.

School B. The most frequently mentioned aspect of Tier 3 instruction from School B’s participants was one-on-one instruction, though small groups were mentioned as well. A common theme throughout the interviews was the emphasis on interventions being individualized to meet the students’ needs. The number of minutes spent in Tier 3 reportedly varied from 20-40 minutes daily, depending on the grade level, and may be accomplished by extra staff pushing into the classroom to reduce the teacher to student ratio or by pulling the students out. In addition, School B has “Review Friday” that allows for students to have extra time in small groups to review concepts, skills, and standards that students may have struggled with that week based on data from exit slips. School B is also creative in finding additional staff members to push in on these days by
using the principal, assistant principal, ESS funded interventionist, and special education teacher.

**School C.** Four out of five participants responded that Tier 3 instruction takes place outside of the literacy block’s core time. It is clear that School C believes that Tier 3 instruction should be individualized according to whatever skills the students need. The fact that there are no programs for Tier 3 was reported twice, as students are provided with exactly what is needed based on student data. However, School C implements a “Breakfast Club” in the morning that provides a phonics based intervention called Project Read for 30 minutes. The consensus among participants is that Tier 3 instruction is 30 minutes daily and may be provided by the classroom teacher during the students’ computer time.

**Questions 6-8: Process for RtI**

The question of describing the three tiers was asked to gain a perspective of the teachers’ beliefs regarding the logistics of the approaches to instruction in each of the three schools. Interview questions six through eight were queried with the purpose of delving deeper into the *how* and *why* of RtI. According to the state data base, all three school sites are some of the highest performing in the state while also having high percentages of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. However, quantitative data only states what is, not the *how* or *why* of explaining that which makes schools perform the way they do. With the intention of attempting to answer the research question regarding the methods with which these schools maintain their success with RtI, questions six through eight explored the following:
• What is the decision making process for RtI?
• How are the interventions selected?
• How are the students served?

For RtI to be effective, it takes a specialized team that can recognize deficits and recommend the needed intervention specific to each student (Buffman et al., 2009). Decisions on moving students through the tiers and deciding interventions are the responsibility of RtI teams as opposed to only a school psychologist doing the decision making. RtI teams frequently include general education teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers and psychologists, with the principal as the leader. It is essential for those serving on RtI teams to understand the available, appropriate interventions and to match them, according to the data with the skill deficits of the students.

**Protocol system v. problem solving system.** When deciding Tiers II and III, schools have a choice of following the protocol system, or the problem solving system, or a hybridization of the two (Berkeley et al., 2009; Buffman et al., 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The participating staff members of each school must decide as a team what they believe to be the best approaches for their students and to couple those choices to the available resources. The protocol system is a specified remedial program to address a deficient skill. One advantage of the protocol system is that the delivery of the intervention is evidenced-based and research proven and can be delivered to a small group of students who have similar skill deficiencies (Berkeley et al., 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Harlacher et al., 2010). However, the problem solving system is preferred
by some individuals, as it is does not require that all students get the same intervention for a certain skill. Problem-solving is aptly named as students’ needs are discussed individually and problems are solved by selecting different interventions based on the identified needs of the students (Berkeley et al., 2009; Harlacher et al., 2010; Kavale & Spaulding, 2008).

The answers to Questions Six and Seven tended to overlap when the participants described the decision making process of RtI and the manner in which the interventions were selected. For this reason, these answers were combined when summarizing the overarching themes for each school. The answers to Question Eight pertained to the manner that students are served and they are reported separately from the answers to Questions Six and Seven.

**School A.** When asked to describe the decision making process for RtI, it was clear there is continuity among the staff. All the participants described the process as a team effort, occurring via grade level meetings, with the curriculum specialist, and the principal. School A has Explicit Planning meetings two to three times a year where the team goes over MAP data as well as other formative assessments. All the participants relayed the message that assessment data tend to drive these meetings, which are focused upon those students falling below the 25th percentile and for that matter on all of the students. However, the bottom 25% of the students, who would be placed in Tier 3, are reportedly the focus of the first meeting of the year. In addition, teacher observations and recommendations, in addition to the data, are given consideration. Students placed in Tier 2 are likely to be those who score in the *apprentice* category on the state assessment
or score in the borderline proficient category. All interventions are targeted at the needs of the individual students.

While the Explicit Planning meetings only occur two to three times a year when benchmark data is available, the teachers and the principal made it clear that RtI occurs throughout the year in weekly PLC/grade level meetings. All the participants being interviewed seemed impassioned about the work that occurs during these meetings. Not one participant rolled her eyes or had any negative connotation about attending, but rather seemed to implore how important these meetings are to them. Participant Four, while explaining how her grade level comes together with the principal to discuss how to help students, enthusiastically said “And it is just the best, absolutely the best,” ending her comment with “It’s just very beneficial.”

Another repeated sentiment throughout the answers was that while data is important to them, other factors are just as much a part of the process. Participants commonly expressed that the whole student was discussed. For example, Participant Five stated:

And we don’t just look at their performance on the MAP test. We look at, okay, what’s going on at home? And are there counseling services that we need to try to refer this child to? We look at is there…are they having issues? Like, are their parents having some financial difficulties? Are there things that we can help in that area? Could it be a hearing problem? Could it be a vision issue? Is it a behavior problem? What have we been doing as far as addressing those types of issues? What have we been trying and what have we targeted?
Looking at the whole child is clearly an important part of the RtI process at School A as it was mentioned six times throughout the interviews. The participants’ answers reflect that students are not simply a number on a piece of paper, but are multi-faceted and in order to best serve them, ALL their needs are addressed, not just their academic needs. Aside from looking at data, teacher opinions and observations from the classroom are also taken into consideration and important in the decision making process, being repeated four times by the participants.

**How students are served.** Once the RtI team decides who is struggling, it is determined what interventions may best meet their needs. No one specific program was referenced as being absolute for Tiers 2 and 3, but rather the focus was on the available choices to best meet the needs of students. The team determines what is best, with the principal having the final say. While whole school intervention time existed in the past, the budget of the school has been cut and it no longer has funding for every day physical education, music, or art, and specially designated staff members to provide interventions. Now, students are generally pulled out for Tier 3 intervention and served by trained teachers, or even the principal. Participants reported five times that Tier 2 is often served in the classroom during rotations by the teacher or assistants in small groups. The general consensus was students are pulled out of centers or other times when they would not be as successful on their own, as opposed to during core instruction time. Students are also pulled out after breakfast before the bell rings. The participants also conveyed the importance of monitoring student progress and making changes to interventions, accordingly. While School A has a program for Tier 1, interventions were not prescribed
for students, but rather problem solving was the general consensus as students’ individual needs were considered and addressed.

**School B.** The six participants at School B were asked to describe its process for RtI, particularly regarding the manner that student placement decisions are made, the interventions that are provided, and the resources and capacity with which the students can be served. The RtI committees are comprised of the grade level teachers, special education teachers, and the principal. School B implements a master scheduling meeting at the end of every school year to identify students’ needs in each grade level for the following school year. The principal and other participants reported that classes are designed for ability grouping to allow special education teachers to push in to classrooms to reduce the teacher to student ratio and to better serve struggling students. Weekly grade level meetings are used to discuss students and to make data-driven decisions. While the principal is reportedly very supportive, the classroom teachers and special education teachers are in charge of making the decisions for student interventions as was reported by the participants, including the principal. Participant Five reiterated this when saying “The principal is there to bounce ideas off of, but she can’t know all my kids in my room like we do”.

School B is extremely data driven, as this was the most mentioned aspect of RtI, having been said ten times. Benchmark assessments such as MAP are reviewed. Even more so, are the common assessments teachers use each week. The consensus of the staff at School B is that the standards and learning targets can be used to identify the objectives to be reviewed on a weekly basis in order to determine the deficiencies of the
students. Participant Two emphasized this fact saying “Multi-standards assessment drives our instruction when it comes to RtI”. Tiers 2 and 3 are extremely fluid, as kids move in and out of intervention based on the frequent monitoring of data. In fact, not only do the teachers collect data on their students, but according to Participant One, students in School B are encouraged to set their own learning goals.

While the emphasis of not using programs was very apparent as it was repeated throughout the interviews, there are programs for teacher use as resources such as *Leveled Literacy Intervention*, *Reading Mastery* materials, and various others. It is clear School B uses problem solving to address what is needed in Tiers 2 and 3 as teachers are undoubtedly proficient at identifying where the deficiencies or gaps are in reading. Participant Four referenced that classroom teachers identify the location of the gaps and ask questions such as, “Is it phonics? Phonemic Awareness? Comprehension? Fluency? We pinpoint what we need to work on.”

**How students are served.** As previously mentioned, classes are designed with the specific purpose in mind of the special education teacher, as well as other staff members, pushing into classes. There seems to be minimal pull out for intervention as this was repeated 11 times throughout the six interviews. The classes are flexibly grouped for low, middle, and high performing students. According to the principal, designing classes in this manner allows the low group to have a teacher to student ratio of 1 to 4 or 1 to 5 due to reduced class size for the lowest group, as well as additional staff members pushing in to deliver interventions. This flexible grouping allows for students to be served in small groups or one-on-one depending upon their needs. For that matter, every
participant in School B discussed the pursuit of small group instruction for the lower performing students within the school.

The interventions take place within the literacy blocks but not during core instruction. The answers from participants reflected the perceived importance of students being instructed first in grade level content and standards. Interventions take place during rotations where the students will interact with the classroom teacher for small group instruction and may interact with an assistant, special education teacher, an additional staff member, or a combination of all of those, once again depending on the needs of the individual student. Participant Four explained that “Teachers are in charge of making sure they (other staff providing interventions) understand what to do and how to do it.”

School C. The participants at School C were also asked to describe their RtI process and who decides interventions and how they are delivered. The RtI committee is made up of a general education teacher, a special education teacher who helps run the meetings, the Read to Achieve teacher, and the principal. This committee meets once a month. According to Participant One, the committee only considers students for special education after they have gone through the three tiers. School C’s committee members use data to inform their practices and to meet children at their point of need, as all the interview participants emphasized this approach in their answers. Not only do they use benchmark assessments such as MAP three times a year, but weekly, even daily, informative assessments that reflect if the students are learning the standards being taught for the week. Teachers meet weekly with the principal in a PLC where lesson plans and student data are discussed. Data is posted on the walls in the conference room. There are
also student intervention logs and spreadsheets, as well, for teachers to use when meeting. Participant Three elaborated how data is used by saying, “And, so, we decide then, okay, who’s falling behind? Who do we need to still look at? So, I mean, that’s done weekly that we look at data on every child in our classrooms.” Participant Two’s answer concurred, as she stated, “Once a week we do PLC’s. Everything’s based on data.”

Every nine weeks the school has identified specific exit criteria for each grade level that is part of the report cards. This information is shared with parents. This information is also used for the determination of the skills that the students are still struggling and the identification of the best ways to address the deficits. The answers were congruent among the interview participants that while there are programs available for teachers to use such as Achieve 3000, IXL, Read Theory, and others, which help provide placement or determine areas of weakness, the instruction is individualized and involves problem solving. The principal explained that when doing PLC meetings there is much to consider, saying:

And we use triangulation. So, we use the classroom data, we use MAP data and look at the learning continuum with the breakdown. We target any student that is below the 50th percentile. And then we also utilize our benchmark data as well. So, we take all of those pieces of the puzzle, look for discrepancies, look for patterns and trends and then base our decisions from there.

The principal went on to explain further that when considering what instruction will be used for interventions:
…our RtI team does a great job of reviewing data and ensuring that all of the instruction that’s presented to students is research based and scientifically proven. We only accept that type of instruction as utilized for our data points if a child is being recommended for special education process, so we require extensive intervention before we ever look at that to progress.

**How students are served.** Students are served in the classroom mostly for Tiers 1 and 2. Tier 3 is generally a pull out intervention provided by the special education or intervention teacher. The pullouts occur outside the literacy block, while Tier 2 is usually within the literacy block and by the classroom teacher. However, the principal also supports special education teachers pushing in to provide a collaborative co-teaching model. Participant One explained the reasoning why classroom teachers need to provide the tiers as, “Man power is very little around here so…we have to make sure that we service all tiers within the classroom because we’re not guaranteed that we’re going to have an intervention teacher around here.” Three other participants noted that students are pulled out for Tier 3 during computer lab time so they are not missing core instruction. Students may also be pulled out once or twice a week from the literacy block by a retired teacher or two days a week by the school librarian.

School C does something unique to try and provide even more time for struggling students to work on specific skills. On Fridays, students have clubs. There are various clubs in which students can participate, but those students who are still below grade level and struggling will go to an “intervention club.” According to Participant Four, the clubs are supposed to be fun for the students but provide them with extra practice on skills with
which they are struggling. Other students go to enrichment clubs or hobby clubs which are operated by other staff members, which in turn provides the teachers extended time for planning. This school also has Breakfast club four mornings a week that focuses on phonics using *Project Read* for third graders for 30 minutes.

Overall, School C has been very creative regarding the manner that students can get extra services, from the Breakfast Club, Fun Friday clubs, to hiring retired teachers with different funding, to even using the librarian. It is evident from the participants’ answers that the problem solving approach is used in Tiers 2 and 3 at School C.

**Questions 9-11: Support for Teachers**

In researching the extant literature, leadership and professional development (PD) seem to be acknowledged often as critical to the success of RtI as an educational framework. School principals are no longer considered just administrators; rather, they are expected to be leaders who are responsible for developing instruction within their buildings (Gulcan, 2012). As instructional leaders in the building, principals are frequently in charge of RtI meetings and/or committees. Principals are expected to not only be knowledgeable about the nature of instruction and learning in Tier 1, but also regarding the intervention programs that are research based and effective. One necessary aspect of effective instructional leadership is when the principal and other members analyze and examine what is needed (Massey, 2012). Principals must know how to lead data analysis, and to advise teachers how to meet the individual needs of students. In order for RtI to become an educational norm, it is imperative that principals comprehend the RtI policy and practices and lead teachers into the necessary cultural changes needed
for this to occur (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). RtI teams that are specifically trained to make data-based decisions to move students through the tiers of instruction are rare and require constant collaboration and development through professional learning communities (Buffman et al., 2009).

In order to have effectively trained RtI teams, teachers need ongoing professional development to understand and use in Tier I instruction the most effective research-based teaching strategies (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Kavale, & Spaulding, 2008). Budget cuts and lack of funding in education may impair the ability of schools and districts to provide needed professional development. Yet, research has shown that the funding spent on professional development for teachers more than compensates for the expenditure when it comes to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1996, Lose, 2007).

Reading First schools had coaches in every building in order to help facilitate professional development by having job-embedded PD in the form of book studies, conferencing, modeling, and in-house seminars. Each Reading First Grant teacher in Kentucky was required to have 80 hours of PD in literacy alone. Now, funding is not available to have coaches help facilitate PD, conduct observations, model lessons, and give consistent, timely feedback, as it was before the grant ended. The three schools visited no longer have coaches due to budget cuts, so there is no support from coaches in the buildings. School A represents somewhat of an exception, having a curriculum specialist. However, she is not for literacy alone and has several other responsibilities throughout the day.
The following questions were asked in the interviews, based upon the findings of the literature, in order to gain further knowledge and attempt to answer the sub-questions of this research study which pertain to the following:

- How do current professional development practices occur?
- How does the principal support you in RtI?
- How do coaches support you?

In fact, the answers of the participants from each school to Questions Nine and Ten of the interview are described below regarding the manner in which the teachers are supported with PD offerings and enjoy the support for the implementation of RtI. The responses to Question 11 regarding coaching are not applicable to coaching and for this reason not included at this juncture.

**School A.** Participants in School A were asked the manner in which PD occurs within their school. The consensus, having been stated five times by the participants, was that the principal supports teachers in their endeavors towards professional development. There are job-embedded PD and summer trainings provided by the district, as well as teacher growth days. The teachers in School A complete a growth plan each year. Each teacher then meets with the principal and discusses needs or weakness for professional growth. The teachers state that they feel supported by the PD that is offered through the district and the allowance of going elsewhere if needed. Participant Two stated that “Whatever the teacher feels like they need, the principal is very supportive to make sure that we get that professional development.” Participant Five also reflected positively by saying:
…anytime we feel like there’s an area that we’re struggling in and we know of a PD, then we just email our principal and say I feel like I need to attend this training. I’m not as strong in this area and it’s always been granted as far as I know. We’re very fortunate with professional development.”

Overall, School A’s participants appear satisfied with the level of professional development they receive and believe if the district doesn’t meet their needs, they can go elsewhere.

**Principal support.** Aside from the principal supporting teachers by making sure they receive the professional development they need and want, the teachers overwhelming believe that School A’s principal is supportive of them. The exhibition of dedication and understanding emerged from each of the interviews with the teachers.

The belief that School A’s principal will do whatever it takes to help the teachers and the students was repeated six times throughout the participants’ interviews. Serendipitously, the school Motto is “Whatever it takes, our kids are worth it!” Participant Five shared an excellent and powerful example of how the principal lives up to the school motto when discussing the manner that she helps with the RtI process by providing interventions:

I mean, our principal pulls intervention groups…And that’s where I’m saying leadership is important. Because if you are not willing to do that, I mean, ‘cause it’s a scheduling nightmare also to try to figure out how we’re gonna do this, because—and some people are giving up their planning periods to do this, to try to serve these kids. And if we don’t have the buy in and buy in’s gonna come from the top down, you know? And if you don’t have that, then I can see where
you’re not gonna be successful now that the funding isn’t there…Yea, the principal takes groups. There is not a position in this school that she would not be doing. I mean, you come, and you see her out on the mower. She’ll be mowing the lawn sometimes, so yeah. And it makes it easier when she asks us to do things, because I know I have no problem doing something for her know that it—she wouldn’t think twice about doing something like that. So nothing is above my job description! I would be willing to do whatever she asks me to do if it was in the best interest of the child. Yeah, she’ll do whatever it takes.

Participant Five’s description of her principal’s dedication to the school was not only heartening but a tribute to her devotion and commitment to truly living up to the school motto.

Participant Four described School A’s principal as being very supportive, as an administrator who can be counted on to help figure out what students are missing by visiting and observing in classrooms:

If I say, would you be able to come in and just watch this child and see if you see the same things that I see? And typically, I don’t tell her what I’m seeing and she will always come in anytime you ask her to come in and observe a child or look at data. She’s very supportive in helping us locate those kiddos.

School A’s principal also supports teachers with the RtI process by meeting with teachers during Explicit Planning meetings and leading the RtI committee. She is an expert at leading the teachers in analyzing the data as evidenced by the data walls in her
office, and the reported discussions with teachers that prompt them to think even deeper about how to best help students, a sentiment that was repeated by three participants.

Overall, School A’s principal seems to be well respected among all the participants. She has been the leadership in the building for 19 years and was a primary teacher before becoming an administrator. She understands instruction not only from her experience, but because she participated in the 80 hours of PD required during Reading First as well. According to the principal and her teachers, she fully subscribed to the principles of Reading First and still runs her school based on those principles. An example is stated by Participant Two, who attributed the school’s success to being a part of Reading First and continuing the practices:

And I think a lot of our success now is-reflects that we kind of continue those same practices. Those teachers that were here continue those same practices, the uninterrupted block, the length of the block of reading, to me, I just-and I think the centers and the small groups are very individualized.

The primary difference reported by participants is merely that the process has improved and it is now referred to as RtI.

**Coach Support.** School A does not have a Reading First coach any longer. According to the curriculum specialist, who now serves K-5 in all content areas, the funding just wasn’t there to support having a reading coach. The previous coach is now an assistant principal at another elementary school in the district. The current curriculum specialist helps lead the RtI meetings along with the principal and is in charge of the paperwork. While the curriculum specialist helped support intermediate teachers during
Reading First in a similar manner as the RF coach did for primary teachers, she reported that she had the opportunity to learn right along with the RF coach, attending all the summer PD saying, “In this position, it’s (Reading First) all I know”. When the curriculum specialist was asked the manner that she supports teachers with RtI, she explained that she tries to be there for the teachers by going in classrooms, gathering resources, giving suggestions, and addressing anything with which they need help. She also helps to lead the Explicit Planning meetings three times a year and is in charge of the interventionists and the interventions that they provide.

The teachers reported that while the curriculum specialist is not the same as having the Reading First coach, she does provide them with materials, instructs small groups, and is available to them whenever they need her. Overall, participants seem to all agree on the responsibilities of the curriculum specialist and feel she is supportive to them in the RtI process.

**School B.** The six participants, including the principal, were asked to describe the way in which PD occurs for teachers. All six participants responded that the district provides all of the PD in-house and rarely do participants go outside for PD. The PD that is offered is based upon the data emerging from surveys completed by teachers, other data results, and the outcomes of walk-throughs performed by the principal in which classroom instruction is observed. Most of the PD is offered throughout the summer as was reported four times by the participants. Other ways teachers reported obtaining PD included weekly meetings with the principal, staff meetings, and sharing information. The body language of some of the participants seemed to change when asked about PD.
No participant said anything particularly negative about the PD, but would pause and look at me with a nervous laugh before answering. The impression was given that the participants were not as pleased with the way PD is now handled in the district as compared to when the school had participated in Reading First. Participant Three was a little more open in addressing her feelings when explaining how the district decides PD for them saying:

…part of me sometimes thinks, well, they don’t really know ‘cause they’re not here. But then the other part of me knows, well, they probably consult with the principals and they give input, so it’s kinda offered on where they see we need growth. Sometimes you attend things that don’t pertain to you and other times you go to things, you’re like, oh, okay, that was great. That’s typically how that works.

Overall, the participants gave the impression that the district PD was “hit or miss,” even though they are offered choices on PD days.

**Principal support.** Participants were asked to describe the manner their principal supports them in RtI. The main response of the participants, which was mentioned six times, was that the principal supports them by providing extra materials and people to meet the needs of the students. One way the principal provides extra people is by doing Review Fridays, as this was reported five times by her staff members. The principal doesn’t just send other staff members in on Fridays for reviewing learning targets; she and her assistant principal also teach groups on Fridays. Three of the participants spoke of this practice with what seemed to be admiration and respect. The principal also felt
this was an important way she helps teachers as she elaborated on Review Fridays by telling:

Well, I feel like I support ‘em pretty well by giving ‘em extra people. You know, I don’t know if anybody’s told you about Review Fridays? You know, it’s kind of an all hands on deck. So, you know, Fridays every classroom teacher gets an extra person to help with intervention instruction on Friday’s. We just kinda think, you know, our kids don’t have a lot of support at home, and so we don’t want to send them home on Friday not mastering the targets for the week, so they use their data from Monday through Thursday’s to regroup the kids on Friday’s. And they’re either gonna be in an intervention group, an extra practice group, or an enrichment group. And then, when their extra person comes in, they just give them a group and something to do with those kids, which might allow the classroom teacher to spend more time with the kids who, maybe were in that intervention group. So, I think probably the most—that’s probably the biggest way to support ‘em, is just by giving ‘em there the extra people and materials that they need to teach.

Another way the principal supports the staff, according to the participants, was by being involved by leading discussions on students’ needs, and doing walk-throughs. Both of these practices were mentioned five times throughout the interviews. The walk-throughs, which are executed by principals observing brief moments of instruction in several classrooms on a weekly basis, did not seem to be a source of contention or fear, but desired and appreciated. Participant 3 expounded on this saying:
She does walk-throughs, and so if she sees something she’ll tell ya or make a suggestion. After each common assessment you have to fill out a proof positive, which is a way for you to go back and look as a whole and then individually at kids on how they performed. Did they meet their goal? Why do you think they did? Why do you think they didn’t? So she’s very much involved that way.

The discussion of students’ data with the principal was mentioned five times by the participants. The respect that the participants have for the knowledge of their principal and her insight and suggestions regarding student data became apparent.

Participant Five explained how the principal supports the staff by leading discussions, doing walkthroughs, and giving feedback:

She does a very good job. She, I mean, if you go in her room you see our data boards which is old Reading First. They don’t look the same, but we still do data boards. And we’ve got our distinguished kids and our proficient kids and our apprentice and our novice now…And, we still do all that, so she works with us too. See who’s moving on the regular. You know, what are we doing for our red kids? What groups are they giving? Who are they seeing? And if they’re not, why aren’t they? So, she’s very involved with who they are. And we have a… master scheduling meeting. And we’ll pull in one representative per grade level. All our special ed teachers, our principal, and that’s probably about it. But we sit down and really look at our schedule and making sure that special ed teachers are aligned with their classroom where they need to be, or their grade level where they need to be. So, I mean, she supports there. If you ask her, she’ll help you. I
mean that she’s very good, she’s very open. She was a first grade teacher, herself, and she lived through Reading First in her school. So she knows, I feel like, as a principal, she knows more in our little kid area than others do. You know, you have a principal that’s a fourth or fifth grade teacher or a, who knows, or a high school teacher they don’t relate. And she can walk in my room and know what it should look like and what it should sound like and the kids are doing what they’re supposed to be doing. And if they’re not, she gives you—she’s not judgmental. She’s very good about just giving you suggestions on what to try, so she’s good at that. She does walk-throughs. Yes. And then when we have our weekly meetings she will, she might have noticed something that all three of us are doing well that she wants to share. Or something that, you know, things we maybe haven’t thought about.

The participants expressed appreciation and respect for the manner that she leads the RtI process, which includes providing extra intervention time and resources, by doing walkthroughs, and by giving feedback. The overall impression from the participants from School B was that they respected their principal and felt supported by her efforts.

Coach support. School B no longer has a coach due to a lack of funding; therefore question 11 could not be answered. There is no data regarding the manner in which a coach supports School B currently in the RtI process.

School C. Five participants including the principal were asked about the manner in which professional development occurs. The most frequent answer from the participants was to say that PD occurs through the district vertical team meetings once a
quarter, whole school Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings once a month, and through grade level PLC’s every week. Three participants discussed that teachers are surveyed at the beginning of the year to identify existing needs. Participants also expressed that whatever they feel they need extra help in, they are allowed to go to outside trainings as well. Participant Two gave an example of an outside training she attended such as *Handwriting Without Tears*. School C also partners with the Kentucky Department of Education to provide PD for the staff. The principal takes it as her responsibility to provide the necessary PD for her staff by saying:

> We surveyed the teachers at the beginning of the year, certified and classified, for development needs. RTI was among those needs. They identified what their biggest need area was, both individually, and as a group. Individually, that’s more on me to provide those opportunities for teachers to grow based on their needs.

Overall the staff in School C seemed satisfied with the way PD is provided by the district and the ability to go outside the district.

**Principal support.** The five participants including the principal were asked how the principal supports the teachers at School C in the RtI process. The overwhelming answer from the participants was that she is very supportive. All individuals gave examples as to how the principal supports them in RtI. The most recurrent response, repeated five times, was that the principal leads the RtI meetings. Participant Four explicates how:
She’s a part of the RTI team as well, and she has helped us kinda set that criteria to move people within the Tiers of intervention, and just to kind of inform regular teachers about what the Tiers of intervention look like and what they are, so that way we are doing them with fidelity and we’re not getting so many students just referred for special education before we actually do go through the tiers. And, anytime that any staff member ever needed help with those interventions or knowing what to do for kids, she’s always right there in the mix too. She’s not… she doesn’t just leave you hanging out to dry. She’s always there to help you do anything that those kids need you to do.

Four participants offered that the principal informs them about the process of RtI and the nature of the tiers of instruction. The principal reportedly addresses these objectives by providing PD specifically on RtI in partnership with resources from KDE and also through weekly meetings. The principal explained this process concisely:

So, RTI has been an evolving process over the past three years. When I entered into School A in this role I don’t know that RTI was very systematic. It was… data wasn’t being looked at the way it needs to be looked at to make sound decisions. So, we did a lot of training on… we have to know where our kids are, black and white, we have to know where they’re going. So, at the beginning of the course, we still had student growth goals and we still had state growth goals within our evaluation system. So, I worked with W**** S*****, which at that point, was an effectiveness coach for KDE and we provided one-on-one training with each teacher around student growth goals, around data collection. We
utilized different graphing mechanisms to ensure parallelism between what we’re saying students are scoring within the classroom, to how they’re performing in universal screenings, state assessments, our own benchmark assessment, and just ensuring that congruency, that language, that standards are being taught with fidelity. And from that point, we began looking at individual students, breaking down their needs, identifying what intervention was needed at that time, and coupling students with the appropriate small group and one-on-one.

The next most popular response was that the principal helps with the obtainment of needed resources. Participant One described how the principal supports teachers with resources saying:

Well, she is with us every step of the way. And if we need something, or we need guidance from her, she is always there ready, willing, and able to help us with anything we need. She was very instrumental in getting the retired teacher to come in to do the reading intervention. The additional reading intervention we needed weekly. Actually we have two retired teachers. One does math and one does reading intervention. So she got that up and going. That's been phenomenal for us. To have that extra help. She's very much on the edge of things. She brings things that would help us and programs that maybe we didn't think of getting or using or looking into. She'll do the research for us to find what we need or what works.

Overall School C’s principal appears to make her staff feel supported by providing extra people to provide interventions, and more importantly, providing PD for
her staff in order to improve the RtI process. The teachers seem to understand the instructional tiers and to be more effective with the analysis and interpretation of the data.

**Coach support.** School C no longer has a reading coach due to lack of funding. For this reason, the question of how the coach supports them currently was not relevant and was not asked.

**Questions 12 and 13: Reflection**

Questions 12 and 13 were asked of participants in each school to allow for more open-ended responses and allow for reflection of practices. Seidman (2013) purports that “so much research is done on schooling in the United States; yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of the students, teachers, administrators, counselors, special subject teachers…whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling” (p. 9). For this reason, asking participants to reflect about what is done well and what needs to be can be useful in the hopes of learning more about the experience of these individuals within their buildings.

**School A.** Each of the six participants were asked to reflect on what they believe they are doing well in literacy and what they feel needs to be improved. Interestingly, there were several similar themes or ideas that emerged from the six individual responses. The most common reflection, being repeated seven times among the participants, was that the focus of the school has remained on literacy, with small groups and centers still continuing from Reading First. Another common theme repeated four times, was that the participants felt they are very good at identifying each individual student’s needs. The
only outlier, but one that appears worth mentioning, was Participant Four describing the Ringing of the Literacy Bell:

And this year we have, I don’t know if you’re familiar with, it’s called Ringing the Literacy Bell. It’s when a kindergartner or a first grader can read their first book, an actual grade level book. And they get to go to the public library and they get to ring the bell. It’s like a field trip up there and it happens every other month. And so things like that are big incentives too for kiddos here.

Incentives like this are important for students and give them something for which to strive. While incentives are not directly related to RtI, goal setting may be an effective strategy to implement as this develops a sense of accomplishment and pride for the students and teachers.

**What needs improvement.** Just as similar themes emerged from the six participants for what is being done well, similar themes emerged for what could still be improved upon. Nearly all of the participants said that they wish the state would provide more support through funding in order for the school to be able to provide more interventions. Participant Six explained:

We’re a little concerned about what next year might bring with the budget. And in years past, there’s been times that we’ve not had any interventions for first grade. We’ve had to provide ‘em in the classroom. So, and that’s difficult, especially when you’ve got 22 students and you’re the only intervention, plus you’re trying to do you’re regular instruction as well. I think that’s something that we need, to be a priority, and not that it’s not the school level, but, I know
that’s a budget issues, but that is an area that we can improve on is being consistent with providing our interventions.

Another emerging theme from two participants was the need for better PD. Participant One explained why she felt this was necessary, “We need more support from—not just from our district, but mostly from our state. I feel like that we need more professional development, that it’s targeted to the individual skills and improving those skills for students.” Research has confirmed that PD is essential in order to help the teachers and principals to meet more effectively the needs of students. For example, participant Five expressed that more PD is necessary in order for teachers to remain better informed to meet the needs of students in areas such as comprehension. Other outlying comments were from the curriculum interventionist who offered that having only half day preschool is a hardship because the students are missing a great deal of early literacy. School A previously had all day preschool programs, but the funding has been cut in the district due to transportation issues. Participant Two discussed that writing responses to questions similar to that of the state assessment could be improved upon. The apparent significant idea emerging from the interviews was that funding is an issue in the state of Kentucky and school teachers are doing everything they can to provide interventions for students, even if it means giving up their planning time and doing extra jobs with the intent of obtaining excellent student learning outcomes.

School B. Similar answers emerged from the School B participants as had from the School A participants. School B’s participants overwhelmingly stated that they feel the time they dedicate to the reading block is a strength. This was mentioned seven times
throughout the interviews. Along those same lines, continuing the “Big 5” in reading instruction was also mentioned by two participants. Participant Four discussed both of these in her answer:

I think just the time we dedicate to it and since we’ve been Reading First, we’ve done a really great job of not interrupting that core time. We still hold really true to that. And I think just that we still focus on the five components, probably not as much vocabulary, but we… well, I shouldn’t say that….But we keep those strong, like we really make a conscious effort to see, what are we teaching for phonics, phonemic awareness, the comprehension, the vocabulary, and the fluency, to make sure that we keep that in our forefronts so they’re ready.

Two participants noted that co-teaching with special education teachers during the literacy block for interventions has been successful. Four participants discussed that they believe they use assessments well and are good at providing interventions to the students. Another common theme from half of School B’s participants is the willingness to try everything or give everything they can to help students. Participant Three reflected this idea by stating:

We are going to—for a kid not to be successful in literacy, it has to be something that we just don’t have the resources for. We don’t give up on a kid. We try everything we can think of. We ask people their input. We work really well as a team. If I can’t figure it out, who can I ask? If they can’t figure it out, what do we do next? Or, oh, that worked for you? Great. I’m gonna share this with everybody. Let’s share that out. I used to jokingly say, I’m not worried about my
own personal children. If they can’t read because they’re gonna—we’re gonna fix that. You know, we’re going to do everything possible to get kids where they need to be. We’re very good at sharing out and trying different things. So, I think that’s one of our strengths.

Finally, just as the teachers expressed that they feel the school is respectable at providing good interventions for students, the principal indicated that years of PD and experience is what makes the teachers strong in knowing the related contents and the manner to meet the students at their point of need and then to move forward.

**What needs improvement.** School B had several emerging themes that participants felt they need to improve. One aspect participants felt could be improved is in the area of enrichment. The participants indicated that the lowest, most struggling students tend to get more attention, but the highest students need to be challenged as well. The principal noted that:

Yeah, I think our data also shows that, you know, we have a lot of kids who will score distinguished at the beginning of the year. And I think, my teachers need more—I don’t know if it’s training, or if it’s just ideas and resources for pushing those kids forward. I know, and seeing that they move along as much, you know, they make that kinda years’ worth of growth like their peers who are in intervention do.

Another theme that was mentioned three times by School B’s participants is that the school could do a better job of training new teachers and offering PD to continuing
teachers in order that they can learn about new ideas and resources. For example, Participant One expounded on this saying:

I’m… fifteen years I’ve been teaching and I noticed, just now that I’m starting to ask the right questions in guided reading groups. So I think it’s maybe, for the younger kid… younger teachers is, ‘cause they ask, I’m not sure what to do in small groups? I’m not sure how to…? So, it’s coaching them to get them ready to ask the right questions, but it’s kind of… that’s so difficult, because it’s different for each child. But learning how to ask questions, higher questions that get the kids to think. I’ve… like the shades of meaning of words and get them thinking of that instead of just reading. So preparing our younger teachers the right questions in the small groups.

Other outliers that were mentioned by the interview participants as needing improvement were conveying to students that reading can be fun, having an interventionist, improving vocabulary instruction, and refining writing responses. Overall, extending students’ learning and continuing to train teachers were the aspects of improvement which were mentioned the most frequently

**School C.** The participants from School C were also asked to describe its strengths with literacy. Several themes emerged from the participants. School C had four participants state that they believe they do a good job of providing interventions and strategies for students. Participant One clarified:

I think we do a really good job of identifying students and their needs and providing them with those interventions that allow them to become successful in
reading. We analyze all sorts of data. We look at benchmark data, we look at MAP testing data, we look at fluency check data. One thing that has helped us is in K-3 is we have exit criteria that students have to pass exit criteria in order to move on to the next grade level.

The principal offered several things that she feels her school does well:

I think we do many things really, really well. As far as literacy, we use project base learning, and passion projects. So, we try to incorporate student interests….We utilize a lot of literacy strategies to help students be successful on text dependent questions and developing question formulation techniques. My primary grades use Project Read, which is very beneficial in preparing students for the phonics skill set they need to break down words as they get more difficult.

Daily five has been big for us, just that small group reading instruction.

Homework… students… any homework students receive it’s on their reading level, so it is differentiated as well. We use a lot of differentiation with literacy.

Four participants stated they feel that phonics is a strength, particularly with the implementation of the phonics based program, Project Read. An outlying response from Participant Four identified School C’s strength as saying, “We are good at being flexible.”

**What needs improvement.** Each of the interview participants were queried regarding the improvements that they perceive are needed within the school. The responses from the participants of School C varied more than those from the participants
from Schools A and B. The only common answer that School C identified was from two participants who said School C could improve on fluency. Participant Two answered:

We’re working with fluency. That’s been our, trying to figure out where our medium is for fluency for each grade level. You know, what’s expected. So, that’s the one that we’re still struggling with. And we still work on it and we meet, primary meets once a month as well. I forgot to tell you that one, on one of our Friday planning’s to determine areas that we need to work on. Yes, fluency’s always been on the table. I’m the Chair of that meeting, so it’s always on the table, usually, between Reading and Math.

Participant One expressed a need for more resources. Participant Three felt the teachers could do a better job of incorporating content writing. Participant Four stated the teachers are still trying to identify a commonality in regards to reading programs that will work for everyone, similar to the common program that was mandated for Reading First kindergarten through third grades students. Finally, the principal indicated that half day Kindergarten and that phonics instruction could be improved, especially in 3rd and 4th grades.

**Questions 14-16: Comparing Reading First and RtI Practices**

The Primary Research Question of this study asked by what methods do former High Performing Reading First (HPRF) schools continue to be successful with the use of RtI as the primary educational framework, and in what manner do these methods compare? Questions 14-16 were asked of the participants specifically to address the part of the research question regarding the manner that current RtI methods compare to
Reading First practices. Scholars consider RtI to be a framework or school improvement model, similar to that of Reading First (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Torgesen, 2009). The schools, which were examined in this study were former HPRF schools and have remained as being high performing with the absence of the Reading First grant and the implementation of the Response to Intervention framework. For this reason, these sites appeared to be ideal to study in order to learn about the practices that may be applicable for implementation as part of a successful school framework.

**School A.** School A’s study participants have the longest average participant tenure with 17 years, and 4.8 years as the average length of involvement with Reading First out of five. The participants in this school have had the same leadership throughout the entirety of the Reading First grant until present. When asked to compare literacy practices now to literacy practices during Reading First, all six participants appeared qualified to answer, as they all had been a part of Reading First for more than a year. Five out of six participants resoundingly said that practices have stayed the same. This sentiment was repeated 11 times. Participant Six felt that RF practices had been continued, but believed there was now more of a focus on the upper grades of fourth through sixth, as compared to the past when the primary grades of kindergarten through third were the primary focus. Participant Two noted that “Teachers who were here then and now still do it the same way. It was engrained in them that we do it a certain way. We knew it worked so we stayed with it.” Participant Five reflected that Reading First had provided the teachers with the needed knowledge to implement structure within the
literacy block. Additionally, Participant Five mentioned that the approach for teaching reading to students is pretty much the same.

Obviously not all aspects of the “non-negotiables” have remained since it has been over ten years since the Reading First grant ended. The teachers reported that the programs, which were “non-negotiable” in Reading First, are no longer being used. Reference was also made to the absence of a reading coach, which was mandated with the Reading First grant. Participant Six discussed that Kagan strategies are new and are now being implemented. However, the participants generally expressed that the practices that were put into place with Reading First have remained intact.

**Compare RtI to before and after Reading First.** When participants were asked to compare RtI to before the Reading First grant to after the grant ended, three of the participants felt the process is better now and two felt the process is the same. One participant reported that there was no specific process for students to be placed in special education during the period before the Reading First Grant ended. Three participants indicated that the special education identification process has improved since the end of the Reading First Grant, purporting that teachers have gotten better at identifying students, discussing their needs, and having a structure in place that allows teachers to spend more time with individual students. The principal stated her feelings saying, “So, thank God for Reading First and I wish we still had it, so, but it did help improve our Response to Intervention.”

Participant Six felt the process they follow is the same, stating:
It still seems to be the same type of thing. We just analyze data and look at progress and classroom performance. And then, of course, we have paperwork that we fill out...And, before it was pretty quick. But now, it seems like it takes longer to get things rolling and get things started. And there are times that I might submit paperwork for to start RTI on a student and it may be—I mean we—I guess we do start interventions and do things like that, but as far as getting the feedback and things like that it just takes longer now than it did before.

Participant Five offered that there wasn’t a process before RtI explaining:

Well, to be honest with you, I don’t really feel like there was a specific process before we had RtI program. It was pretty much, I would get with the curriculum specialist and say, I really think this person might have a learning disability, maybe we should have them referred for testing type thing. And I would address, in my classroom, but there was no structure or something to follow. So, just because I addressed it in my classroom didn’t mean the person next door to me was doing it, or the person in second grade was doing it, because there wasn’t anything to follow. And some people aren’t gonna put as much effort into trying to figure it out as other people, ‘cause you have to have the accountability somewhere, I think. And I think Reading First gave us that accountability and a structure to follow what you do exactly. Sometimes, people want to do things, but they don’t know what to do, so you have to—Reading First allowed us to see specifically how it can be addressed and help us to find those materials. But I feel like when you were talking about how it’s different here, initially yea, we found
these materials, these are the research based materials that we were using, but if
you look, these are still the same materials that we’re using. It’s like it never
got—you never updated. It was never built upon. It was like, here we have it so
this is what we’re gonna do now. That’s where I feel like we need some more
variety now. Yea, since the grant ended.

Overall, the RtI process does not appear to have changed since the ending of the
RF Grant. What appears to have changed is the manner that the teachers address student
needs by being more targeted with instruction. The data boards and structure that was put
in place with Reading First has remained. However, the staff has become better at
examining and using the data. Participant Three reported that RtI is not just a “catch
phrase” to be used but, “It’s having those meetings and talking about the whole child.
Talking about what needs do they have? Where can we meet them to get them where
they need to be?”

Finally, before ending each interview, participants were given the opportunity to
add comments or final thoughts. Participant Four responded that the uninterrupted
literacy block is important for teaching reading. She also expressed her thoughts on
Reading First stating:

So, the uninterrupted literacy block is fabulous for us too… the Reading First was
fabulous. It really was. It gave us a lot of support. I wish we still had it. I wish
every school could have it, because it truly was a great benefit to all of us, and
especially the Reading First coach. She would come in and observe and then give
you suggestions on what you should do a little differently, or activities that you can put in or take out. So, it was a great benefit. It really was.

The principal in School A offered a final comment regarding RtI with:

You know, a lot of people—I think many years ago when people heard RTI - Response to Intervention, they always thought it was the avenue to get ‘em in to special ed. And, yes, it’s documentation that can be used and looked at, and reviewed, and it gives you great information about how a student learns. It also gives you information of where a student is at, where they still need to go. But it’s not a ticket to get to special ed and that’s so hard to get people to understand that, you know, we intervene with so many students on a daily basis in any given content, even behavior, and that it is not always a way to get into special ed. And sometimes we have a hard time getting people to understand that, ‘cause sometimes parents will question us and they’ll say, well is this—are you thinking my child is special ed? And I’m like no, they just need help with this skill in this area at this time, so, but that’s probably the one thing.

School A’s general philosophy about students became evident when interviewing each participant. These teachers were proud of their accomplishments. They conveyed the belief that they appreciated Reading First’s practices and have continued to use them because they work. While the programs and the assessments that are now required have changed, they have adapted, grown, and improved as part of the RtI process.

School B. Participants in School B were asked to compare literacy practices now to the literacy practices during Reading First. Four out of six participants felt they could
answer these questions, as they had participated in the grant for a period of more than a
year in their current school. One participant had been a classroom teacher in another
school and a Reading First coach but did not feel she could speak to this question, having
not been at School B to make the comparison. The principal started at School B at the
end of the grant, but had been a Reading First teacher in another school. Her answers
were based on what she knew of the grant requirements and what practices she observed
happening in the building when she took over as principal.

One theme emerged six times when the participants compared literacy practices
now to the period in which Reading First was being implemented. The participants
expressed that the trainings, which had been provided and the knowledge that had been
established, were still being exhibited and were continuing to improve. Participant One
offered her experience with Reading First and how things have changed:

So, when I first came, I mean, tons of knowledge. It was great. The Reading
First gave a whole, I feel like foundation of knowledge for the kids and for the
teachers. They taught us the basics. And they taught us what was needed for the
kids to have a foundation to grow. So we took that. And then we, of course,
realized like the DIBLES and the fluency, we needed to do differently. That
wasn’t meaningful. So we’ve taken in—I feel like we’ve now grown it to a more
meaningful practice. Before, I think, with Reading First there were so many
stations, so many focuses. You know, we called ‘em stations or they had to
switch a lot. They weren’t getting enough reading time them. So now we’ve
taken that and learned how to take those stations and put it inside of our teaching
in our small groups and our one-on-ones, so now they have more time to read.

So, there’s not so many to do’s as more as it’s an enjoyable time of reading and then conferencing.

Other participants offered several practices that they had learned as part of Reading First such as: analyzing data, having guided reading, teaching the five components of reading, understanding how to meet students’ needs, and using mini-lessons that are still a part of their daily instruction.

The interview participants expressed that they had grown since the Reading First Program has ended, which they feel reflects changes that have been implemented in the interim. One example that was expressed three times by participants was pushing into classroom versus pulling students out. During Reading First, pull outs existed and were to occur outside the literacy block. However, the participants from School B expressed that the way they now have special education push into the classrooms is more beneficial. The participants from each of the schools mentioned five times that a definite difference between Reading First and current practices is that instruction is now flexible, as opposed to the rigidity of the grant requirements. For that matter, no need exists for a particular reading program anymore. The participants said throughout the interviews that they no longer use reading programs but base learning on the standards and the data.

**Compare RtI to before and after Reading First.** Five out of six of the participants engaged in a discussion of RtI after the Reading First Grant ended. The teachers articulated seven times that they feel confident knowing what to do, particularly being able to make collaborative decisions. The participants also mentioned six times that they
fled that they are better at providing interventions. Participants similarly expressed that they have learned over the years to be data driven. Participant Five explained:

I mean, I feel like we have—as teachers, we’re more responsible on our own now. And we’re expected to. It’s not just, you know, oh, you can do that and it doesn’t happen. It still happens. Nobody’s really babysitting us to do that anymore. It’s more natural now. We learned how to do it, we learned why we did it, and we learned the right ways, and then we just have carried that over, so that’s probably… that’s a good thing.

Participant Four conveyed that teachers do better now with the collection of data for the purpose of engaging in collaborative discussions:

And I think, like anything, it’s with experience and trial and error, but I think we do a better job of keeping that data and recording that data for—like, this year, we started new intervention documents that we share on Google for Reading and Math and, it’s just nice to have one spot where everybody can go and add to that form. Where, in the past, it was all as a classroom teacher, I was the one doing all of it. But now, special ed teacher can add her part. The interventionist can add her part. The classroom teacher can add their part, so you’re getting the whole picture.

Another difference, which was communicated by Participant Three, was that when RtI was implemented during Reading First there was more of a focus on assessments as opposed to the whole performance of the child, as is the case now. She believes that her school now uses classroom performance and teacher recommendations
instead of just hard data. Additionally, changes were mentioned twice regarding the procedures, which are used now for providing interventions in the classroom, as opposed to the pull out approach that was used during Reading First.

The principal described RtI as not being so rigidly attentive to the three tiers, as was the case with the Reading First Grant. The principal further noted that the tiers do not appear to be needed by the teachers, as they are adept at moving the students in and out of intervention based on their needs. The principal offered that when students reach a point where teachers have exhausted all they know to do and there is still no growth, then the students are placed through the referral process:

Well, if they’re not moving they might be referred. And we’ll just—a lot of times teachers will just say, here’s all the things that we’ve tried. We’ve tried small group, we’ve tried—they may have tried an LLI type of program, but if they see a kid isn’t moving, then they’ll complete the referral process and here we have to have six weeks of data to show how they’re progressing, what interventions that we have tried, and if they place, great. But I always tell people, well, instructionally if they place, are you gonna do anything different for them? And they’re like, well no, not really. So, I think our instructional practices are pretty solid.

The teachers expressed that the changes, which have occurred since the Reading First Grant ended, have in their perception been for the better. For example, the use of the push in model, as opposed to the pull out approach from Reading First, was repeated several times as being effective. Similar positive reactions were offered regarding the
avoidance now of using blindly a particular reading program. Participants’ answers seem to point to teachers using data to make decisions for the best interest of the students, with only proceeding to referrals after the students have not responded to interventions.

Finally, School B’s participants were asked if they had any final thoughts or comments that they had not had a chance to offer in their interviews. A few did respond. Two indicated that they liked the Reading First foundational knowledge and practices regarding the instruction of reading using the five components, guided reading, and the mini-lessons from Reading First. The teachers indicated that they have continued using the practices. Participant Three offered that School B has had multiple principals and RF coaches saying:

I feel like we did a good job with it, but I’m sure that, that impacted it in one way or another. So, just something to think about. And with every principal that comes in, you’ve got a new way of doing things. Not a better way, not a worse way, just a new way. I think that may have something to do with it. Our RtI practices, I think right now we’re pretty streamlined. We’ve done really well with that. I think our students are doing well because we really take that time to set forth a schedule that we do our best to make everybody, allow everybody to benefit from that.

Participant One wanted to restate her feelings on Reading First saying:

I’m glad we had it (RF)…. But I’m glad I had that, because I learned so much from Reading First that I had no idea. College didn’t prepare me. My own learning, it really helped make a base and I feel like our school is founded off of
those foundations here and it’s still in here. Yea, I do. I feel like we’ve made ‘em better for our school. I’m not saying that they were bad. They were great. But we have evolved from there to making it to what we need, yea. And our teachers, I think, grown from that as well.

As a whole, the participants from School B appeared to appreciate their Reading First training and experience, particularly the learning that emerged from the PDs, which had occurred during the grant period. For that matter, the participants indicated that the “meat” of what they learned is still being implemented. What has changed is the way that they serve students, going from a pull out to a push in model so as to reduce class size and better serve students with the available resources. The participants also feel that they are now more effective teachers. They have grown and evolved to the use of more individualized instruction.

School C. Of the five participants, only three could respond to the manner that literacy practices have changed or remained the same since the end of the Reading First Grant. Participant Three answered the questions, but she was involved in Reading First less than a year. This is not surprising given the high turnover rate of teachers at School C. Reportedly, there have been three principals and three superintendents in the district since the end of the grant. In addition, the teachers in School C have the youngest tenure of all the participating schools with an average of only eight years in education and a year and a half of experience with Reading First.

When the two participants, who had experience with Reading First, were asked to compare the literacy practices used now and during the grant period, they both indicated
that influences from Reading First still exist. Participant One discussed her continued dedication of time to literacy, having at least 90 minutes. She also discussed that many Reading First practices have remained in her teaching:

But by being a part of Reading First it makes you more aware of things. It’s not just all about Tier 1 instruction. You have to really...if you want to make them successful at reading you have to get down individually and work on the areas they really need that help with.

Participant Two discussed that the literacy instructional practices are a little more flexible now. However, mention was made that the practices still include the five components of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

We still cover all the five areas of reading. But, it’s more flexible in how we cover it. Whereas, Reading First was very structured and very, very strict is what I would call it, about how you did it and if you did it right. And you were always worried, did I teach that right? But it’s now kinda—and maybe that’s just the veteran teacher in me, you know, to say, ok, I think this went well. But I think it’s just a little more flexible...We have a little more say in how we teach it, basically… I mean, it’s just common knowledge that you should always have phonics and you should always have some type of phonemic awareness and handwriting and fluency.

The overall practices that have continued from Reading First are the length of the literacy block and the continued use of the five components. School C does have a core program, Engage New York, as well as Project Read, but the overall sense from
participants throughout the interviews was that these are not mandated for use, but valuable resources. The teachers, who do not want to use the core program, typically use other resources, which represents a change as during Reading First the teachers were required to adhere to the chosen program written in the grant and teach it with fidelity whether they liked it or not.

**Compare RtI to before and after Reading First.** Due to the three different leadership changes in School C, RtI has been very inconsistent according to the participants. It was agreed upon by all that the former principals did not execute RtI. The participants implied that they felt like they were floundering before the current administration. Participant One expounded on this:

> For a while Response to Intervention kind of went to the wayside. Can't say that we did it with fidelity because we didn't. Came from the point that there was a misunderstanding about what RTI was all about. I really feel like in these past 3 years we have gotten a very good handle on RtI on the different tiers. What children belong in each tier and what are the expectations. What are the expectations for Tier 1? What are the expectations for a Tier 2? What are the expectation for Tier 3? That has helped us as teachers, so it has ultimately helped the kids. RtI is a beast to learn! You read and you read and you read. But I'm not sure that everyone who has touched RtI really has a clear understanding of it. It's very complex on what has to be done.

Participant Two described the manner that RtI was handled prior to Reading First ended and the way in which it has evolved to what it is currently:
We still did somewhat of group time, but I don’t think as a new tea—thinking back as a new teacher at that time, that we weren’t ever really taught that in college. Does that make sense? I don’t, you know, you’re kinda thrown to the wolves and you have to kinda figure it out. So, as a teacher at that time, I don’t know how much veteran teachers at that time did. But I think we’re more group based now. We’re more individualized based now than we were before. And I think Reading First helped to get us into that mode, especially with the groups. And then we’ve evolved from there and now we’ve gone more individualized instruction.

The participants largely expressed satisfaction in the manner that the current principal leads them in the RtI process. Current practices are not possible to compare to those used before the grant as the majority of teachers were not there at that time. What was expressed is that RtI practices are being implemented and that the teachers feel that they are contributing to the learning needs of the students. While the principal has only been in leadership for three years, it is evident the teachers feel confident in her ability to lead them in RtI. Participant Four stated:

She’s a part of the RtI team as well, and she has helped us kinda set that criteria to move people within the tiers of intervention, and just to kind of inform regular teachers about what the tiers of intervention look like and what they are, so that way we are doing them with fidelity and we’re not getting so many students just referred for special education before we actually do go through the tiers. And, anytime that any staff member ever needed help with those interventions or
knowing what to do for kids, she’s always right there in the mix too. She’s not… she doesn’t ever just leave you hanging out to dry. She’s always there to help you do anything that those kids need you to do.

The principal reflected on the manner that the RtI process has evolved over the three years of her tenure, illuminating on the subject with “And so, the first year was a productive struggle. The second year was, what is missing? Let’s problem solve. And this year is, ok, we’ve found the solution, let’s move forward.”

The participants were asked at the end of each interview if there were any additional thoughts or comments they would like to express about their RtI process or school in general. Participant One reiterated her belief about the RtI process saying:

I think we have a very organized structure right now. I think that every teacher in this building has a focus. I also think we have a support system put in place now that allows us to be successful for our kids.

The principal expressed her final thoughts on RtI saying:

I think that we’re very meticulous in how we do RtI here. But I will say that every student in this building has an individualized plan based on their needs, their interests, their growth areas, their strengths. So, I think it goes past the point of just having a great RtI structural system to really the cultural piece of knowing every student leaning in on every student’s data, but not just their data. They’re also—who they are as a person and embracing that and ensuring those opportunities happen on a daily basis. So, I think that’s the bigger picture. RtI is a part of that picture, but regardless if we have a mainstream student that will only
receive that whole classroom instruction and doesn’t necessarily need that small
group or that one-on-one. In some areas, they will still get that based on their
needs and growth areas.

The final thoughts of the principal regarding the RtI process in her school seem
pertinent to the philosophy and school culture of not just looking at hard data when
discussing the students, but looking at them as whole persons, which is likely an
important part of the school’s success with RtI as a framework.

**Cross-Analysis Summary of Schools A, B, and C**

All three school sites were chosen because they were former HPRF schools who
are currently still high performing on state assessment data. The three schools have also
achieved top accolades from the state of Kentucky for their academic performance. Each
school has its own strengths and unique attributes. The interview responses for each
school have been disseminated and discussed in this chapter. Common themes, ideas,
and repeated words emerged for each school when performing a cross analysis (See
Appendix H). Separately the schools have distinctive practices that set them apart from
others in the state as evidenced by their data. Collectively, there are similar themes that
emerged across all three schools regarding certain practices. Dissimilarities also
emerged. This section will discuss similarities and differences from School A, B, and C.
This data may help contribute to answering the primary research question and sub-
questions.
Tiers of Instruction

Similarities. The first commonality across all three schools was the length of
time, which is spent in the primary grades with literacy. All the schools had up to 120
minutes of literacy. The participants from the schools also indicated that Tier 1
instruction involves their whole group time, with each students being exposed to the same
standards. Schools B and C specifically mentioned that Tier 1 includes learning targets
based on the standards. All the schools reported spending less than 30 minutes in whole
group instruction during the literacy block. The remainder of the time in all three schools
is spent in small group rotations. Schools B and C use the Daily 5 Café format to rotate
students through groups with a teacher, which includes read to self, read to someone,
listen to reading, word work, and write about reading. Schools A, B and C also each had
participants who incorporated Kagan’s active engagement strategies in their whole group
instruction. School A does rotations as well, but with more differentiated centers.

Students in Schools A and C are not pulled out during the core whole group
literacy time. Tier 2 in all three schools involves small group instruction that is based on
students’ needs. Tier 2 for Schools A, B, and C have different programs listed as
possibilities for intervention. Tier 3 was described by participants in all three schools as
providing one-on-one individualized instruction daily.

All three schools are similar in the way they have been creative with the provision
of extra instructional time for the students and the identification of effective
interventions. Schools A and B both have principals who provide interventions to
students School A hired a substitute with the use of Extended School Service funds in
order to provide interventions. An AmeriCorps trained volunteer was also used to provide interventions. School A also has the principal and curriculum specialist pulling out intervention groups. School B has Review Fridays where the principal and assistant principal push in to classrooms to provide extra intervention on standards that the students did not master in addition to regular intervention. School C provides Breakfast Club every morning that targets third graders who need phonics instruction. School C also does Fun Friday Clubs that allow the students to receive an extended time in intervention while other students receive enrichment or participate in hobbies. School C also uses retired teachers and the librarian to help provide interventions.

**Differences.** The main differences noted for Tier 1 instruction pertain to the use of prescribed programs or lack thereof. School A has a core program that participants mentioned four times. The School B participants specifically indicated that they follow no prescribed programs and that instruction is standards-based with frequent assessments, such as exit slips. However, programs are available as resources in School B. School C has various programs but they reportedly represent an option, not a prescription, to meet the needs of students. Tier 3 in school A has another program for intervention use, while Schools B and C do not.

The delivery model for Tiers 2 and 3 vary at each of the three schools. School A and C pull students out for Tiers 2 and 3. School B delivers Tier 2 instruction during the literacy block using ability grouping of classes and a push in model for special education. Tier 3 in School C is delivered often by the classroom teachers while students are in a
computer lab. School A has staff pull out students for Tier 3. Tier 3 in School B is delivered only with the push in method.

**Process for RtI**

**Similarities.** The foremost similarity among the three schools is that they are all assessment and data driven. Each of the participants expressed that they are constantly looking at data such as MAP, fluency checks, common assessments, and exit slips. Each school uses data boards and/or spreadsheets to review student progress throughout the year (weekly to monthly). Progress monitoring is a constant among all the schools. While each school may have different programs to choose from, all of them incorporate the problem solving method for Tiers 2 and 3. None of the schools described the RtI process as involving certain programs or being based upon student scores. Instead, each school emphasized that it examines the whole child and decides the instructional approach that will best meet the individual needs of students. Schools A and C, in particular, stressed that all aspects of the students are considered, including financial issues, vision, hearing, behavior, and classroom performance.

The participants from each school offered that they work together with their colleagues as a team to make RtI instructional and learning decisions. The teams in each school include the principal, the general education teachers, and the special education teachers. None of the participants expressed that the RtI final decision making process was addressed by the school psychologist or just the principal. All of the schools purported that RtI is a process. None of them look at it “as a road to special education.” Rather, the view that was expressed repeatedly in each school is to focus upon what can
be done to help a student to get on track? In fact, participants in all the schools indicated that special education is the final option, only after multiple strategies and/or solutions have been tried. All three schools expressed that the tiers are fluid throughout the year, moving students in and out as necessary. Finally, all three schools identify and use at least six weeks of data points and evidence of research based interventions for the referral process to occur.

**Differences.** School A has Explicit Planning meetings two to three times a year, along with meetings more periodically with the principal as the leader. The Explicit Planning meetings involve the entire grade level, the principal, the curriculum specialist, and special education teacher. These meetings occur in order to discuss all of the students, including *all* the needs of *all* the students in the grade level, not just intervention.

School B has a day set aside in the spring to plan for classes the following year. The classes are initially based on special education student needs, but they are also comprised of students who will need additional support but are not in special education. The RtI process happens throughout the school year at grade level meetings if teachers feel that there are students who need to be referred for special education. The principal attends these grade level meetings. However, the teachers decide what interventions are appropriate for the students. Students are only referred for special education after not responding to the three tiers of instruction, a decision that is based upon the available data.
School C has a RtI committee with a special education teacher as the chair, a general education teacher, the Read to Achieve interventionist, and the principal. This committee meets monthly. Teachers in School C must go through the RtI committee before initiating the referral process. Students must go through the three tiers of instruction with evidence of research based interventions and data points before a referral is made. This committee is also used to assist teachers who need help with the identification of appropriate interventions.

**Professional Development**

**Similarities.** Professional development was considered to be extremely important when Reading First was implemented. All Kentucky Reading First schools had to deliver 80 hours of PD every year in reading to their teachers. Now schools are required to provide far less PD a year. Participants from Schools A and C seemed satisfied with the way PD occurs in their schools and/or districts. The reactions of the participants from Schools A and C likely reflect that they are allowed to seek outside sources whenever they feel they need them. All three schools reported that PD is based on surveys and is provided by the district.

**Differences.** Dissimilarities seem to abound among the three sites regarding the way that PD is approached. School A participants reportedly have a wide variety of PD available to them, whether from the district or from outside sources. School A bases its PD on growth plans, which the participants described as emerging from discussions with their principal. School A participants also reported that they have job embedded PD through PLC meetings.
School B participants seemed the least satisfied with the way PD is developed in their district. Participants reported that it is based on areas of growth or needs which are decided by the district and/or principal. Some of the PD is based on data and some is based on the walkthroughs. The teachers seemed somewhat unimpressed with the PD that is provided in the summer despite the fact that there are purportedly choices.

School C participants counted their monthly PLC meetings as PD when asked the manner that PD occurs. They also felt PD occurred during vertical teaming meetings. Participants from School C seemed pleased about what the district provides and the choice they can have to attend outside PD. The principal believes it is her responsibility to provide what the teachers need. One of School C’s greatest needs was training in RtI, which the principal gladly provided by partnering with a consultant from KDE.

**Principal Support**

**Similarities.** The participants were asked about the manner that their principals support them in the RtI process. All participants, without exception, gave the impression of feeling supported by their principals. All the participants felt their principals were very involved in the RtI process. One way that the principals reportedly supported teachers in all three schools is by providing human resources to help with interventions. The participants of each school gave examples of the manner that their principal had been instrumental in finding ways to provide extra help, from writing grants, to obtaining retired teachers, to changing schedules. Schools A and B were particularly complimentary of the ways their principals provide interventions to students. In Schools A, B, and C, the principals are the instructional leaders, helping teachers discover what
might work for students, providing feedback, and asking questions. All the principals use data boards or project spreadsheets of student data during RtI meetings. The principals in each school seemed to know their students and were very involved with the data, meeting weekly to monthly with teachers. All the principals taught at the elementary grade level before becoming an administrator.

**Differences.** The main difference seems to be the tenure of the principals. School A has had its principal for 19 years. She went through the entire Reading First grant process and has maintained those same practices in the school. She is in charge of the RtI committee and has the final say, but her teachers reported feeling they are a team and are all looking out for the best interest of the students.

School B’s principal has been in the school eight years, arriving right after the Reading First Grant ended. She was a classroom teacher in a Reading First school so she brought with her the experience and reading knowledge from the PD. School B’s principal does weekly walkthroughs and then pushes into the classrooms to provide intervention on Friday Review days. School B’s principal was a primary teacher in low-income Title I schools, some of which were urban. She has background knowledge and experiences from teaching outside her current district that she brought with her. School B’s principal seemed to depend on her teaching staff to provide the appropriate interventions and puts little emphasis on calling them Tier 1, 2, and 3.

School C’s principal has only been a principal for three years, but an educator for 14 years. Her school has a relatively young staff as it had a great deal of turnover, including leadership. School C’s principal seems to have the respect of her staff, despite
her short tenure. All her experience has been in the same county. School C’s principal is the only one that was not reported as instructing intervention groups. Also, School C seemed to be the only school with one designated committee for RtI that all teachers must go through for the referral process.

**Reflection: Doing Well**

**Similarities.** The participants of each school were asked to reflect on what they thought was done well. Interestingly, there were similarities in the three schools. The participants in Schools A and B both reported they think they do a good job providing an uninterrupted literacy block. Both Schools A and B participants also felt they have done an effective job of maintaining the five components of reading, which are practices from Reading First. Both Schools B and C participants felt they have done a useful job of providing interventions.

**Differences.** As would be expected, each school appears to have its unique strengths. School A participants expressed that they do a good job of keeping the focus on literacy with small groups and centers. School B participants expressed they are effective at being willing to try anything and everything in order for the students to succeed. They also felt they are good at developing and analyzing assessments that help drive effective instruction. School C’s unique strength reportedly was the implementation of *Project Read*, which emerged when the school’s data reflected a decline in phonics, which resulted in the selection and implementation of the program.
Reflection: Needs Improvement

Similarities. One similarity emerged across all three schools regarding funding. Kentucky’s budget is a source of contention, as teachers have been protesting the cuts to education, especially to the retirement system. All three schools are reportedly being creative with ways to service students. In fact, the schools indicated a concern about being able to provide the interventions needed the following year.

Another similarity shared by the participants from Schools A and B pertains to training. The participants from both schools expressed concerns that there wasn’t enough training for brand new teachers. As PD is generally related to funding sources, the budget could be influencing the school’s abilities to train new teachers.

Differences. The participants from each school indicated instructional practices needing improvement. School A participants indicated that writing needed improvement, especially writing in the content areas. School A participants also suggested that the lack of funding to support full day preschool is influencing the students’ learning outcomes in a negative manner.

School B participants suggested that an area of improvement could be in enrichment and extending instruction for higher learners. They indicated that much time is focused on students who are struggling and for this reason the strongest students are failing to obtain needed attention. School B participants also expressed that vocabulary instruction needs to be improved.

School C participants indicated that fluency instruction, phonics, and writing are all areas in need of improvement. Even though its Project Read program is helping K-2
students, a need persists for more instruction in linguistics in the upper grades. In fact, plans exist to implement *Project Read* in these grade levels.

**Comparing Literacy Practices**

**Similarities.** When the participants were asked about the manner that practices compare now to when Reading First was implemented, the heart of the participants’ answers from Schools A and B was that the practices they had learned have remained. School A, by far, has kept the practices as much the same as possible. The principal is still a proponent of what was learned and how it changed the school for the better. School B also has carried over the practices such as the five components, guided reading, and mini-lessons. The participants of each of these schools expressed that they learned how to instruct students with Reading First, but have evolved since then to more individualized approaches to instruction and learning. School B’s participants repeated each other saying the Reading First PD provided the foundation and knowledge they now have to teach reading. School C participants also reported that the five components have remained, although only one participant was a teacher then. The participants from each of the schools reported that they no longer have a reading coach. The coaches were reportedly lost due to a lack of funding. The participants indicated that the funding the schools received for coaches, materials, and extra reading teachers is now sorely missed.

**Differences.** The main differences reported from the schools is the instructional programs have been changed. Schools A and C have different programs than before. School B no longer uses a program for its core instruction; rather, it uses standards. School B pushes in to the literacy block and has restructured its classrooms for ability
grouping. School C reported that it is less structured and more flexible now than during the Reading First period.

**Comparing RtI Practices: Before and After Reading First**

**Similarities and differences.** Participants were asked to compare the ways in which RtI practices have changed since Reading First. The answers to this question were mixed. Some participants from Schools A and B reported that practices have improved, and some reported they had stayed the same. School A participants responded that Reading First gave them a structure to follow in order to implement RtI. The participants expressed that they feel they have gotten better since the end of Reading First. School A participants expressed that RtI used to be thought of as a ticket to special education, but it is no longer viewed that way.

School B’s participants responded that the teachers are now much more confident in knowing what to do and in making better collaborative decisions. School B participants also indicated that their colleagues are better at providing interventions. School B participants reported that the interventions from Reading First were intentional and data driven and are continuing to be used in the same way. The main difference existing in School B is the change from a pull out system to a push in model and the lack of a specific program such as those that were mandated with Reading First. School B participants did note that they feel like the RtI process is streamlined within their school.

School C’s high level of staff turnover did not allow for much discussion on this topic. What was apparent and acknowledged was that the participants did not do RtI with
any fidelity and they have only started to understand and implement it well since the new principal began.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

Quantitative data was collected for Schools A, B, and C through Qualtrics, an online survey system available through Ohio University. This survey was designed for the purpose of exploring teachers’ opinions regarding coaching, literacy practices, principal leadership, and the Response to Intervention Process. The on-line survey reportedly took no longer than 20 minutes to complete. The survey included an explanation of the study and an online adult consent form. Participants had to click the “I understand and consent” button to proceed with the survey. The answers to the survey questions have been maintained in a completely anonymous manner.

**Demographic data.** Each school principal was sent an anonymous link to access the survey. The principals were requested to forward the link to the K-3 teachers and primary special education teachers with a request that they complete the survey. The principals also took the survey. Results from each school were collected separately then downloaded to Excel. The data from each school were combined as a way to cross analyze and average total quantitative results from all three schools. The combined total of responses was 27, the results of which are displayed in Table 6. As this is a small sample size, data may not be generalized. Rather, this data may be better used to corroborate the more in-depth interview results.
Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Approximate Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants from each school, including the principals, were requested to respond to 37 questions, the first four being demographic in nature. See Appendix A. Participants had the option of taking the survey at home, at school, or on a mobile device for privacy and ease. The survey included a five-point Likert scale with the categories being Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree and Not Applicable as a 6th option. Before downloading to Excel, the text was converted into a numeric system from 1-5 corresponding to the text categories, with the exception of N/A remaining the same so as not to be averaged in the data. Questions on the survey were grouped into the following categories: Coach, Literacy Practices (LIT), RtI, PD, Leadership, Assessment, and Family. Figure 2 shows a categorization of the questions with descriptors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Survey Question Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Assessment   | Reading assessment practices have changed due to RtI  
Need more effective assessments  
Analysis of data and progress monitoring occurs as part of RtI  
Students are involved in establishing short and long term reading goals |
| Coach        | School coach, teachers, and I collaborate to meet instructional reading goals and objectives  
School coach demonstrates literacy lessons and provides feedback  
School coach/reading specialist provides PD that is relevant  
School coach/reading specialist and principal work collaboratively and have same instructional goals  
Reading coach/specialist is involved in RtI process |
| Family       | I communicate with families about reading instruction  
School needs more family and community involvement |
| Leadership   | Teachers are held accountable for literacy practices by principal  
Principal provides high level of support for literacy improvement  
Leadership team continually supports our school-wide focus  
School receives a high level of support from the district  
Principal is actively involved in RtI process |
| Literacy     | Research Based Instruction (RBI) has impacted our schools instructional reading practices  
Core reading program has been modified due to data analysis and progress monitoring  
Teachers utilize a variety of reading practices  
Students have access to multiple types of literacy resources  
The “Big 5” is vital to literacy instruction |
| Practices    | School works collaboratively to improve literacy instruction through PLC  
PD occurs and provides me with new instructional literacy knowledge |
| PD           | RtI process is occurring for all grades  
RtI has had a positive impact on students’ reading achievement  
Tiered instruction has improved or students’ reading ability  
There is a defined process for decision making for RtI  
School uses a problem solving method for placing students in intervention  
School uses a prescriptive method for placing students in intervention  
Classroom teachers are actively involved in the RtI process |

*Figure 2. Survey question descriptors*
**Mean categories.** Survey questions were devised to inquire what the predominant beliefs are concerning factors that may be related to successful school practices that were carried over from the implementation of Reading First. A brief explanation of each category and the mean score for each school is below, followed by a summation of all the categories.

**Literacy coaching.** The questions about coaches had a mean score of 3.8 in School A, 4.3 in School B, and 3.7 in School C. The average for all three schools is 3.9. As School A is the only school currently with a coach of any type, these results seemed somewhat surprising as one might assume the average would be zero. One hypothesis for this outcome could be that the participants were referencing a Reading First coach with their responses.

**Literacy practices.** The Literacy category questions pertained to practices that were established during Reading First. The answers to these questions were anticipated to be helpful with the establishment of whether the practices have continued. The mean score for the literacy practices category for Schools A, B, and C are respectively, 4.2, 4.6, and 3.9. The overall average is 4.3.

**Response to Intervention process.** The RtI process questions queried beliefs regarding the occurrence of RtI practices, if they are impacting student learning, and if a defined process is followed in their school. The mean scores regarding RtI for School A is 4.0, School B is 4.3, and School C is 4.4. The overall average is 4.2.

**Leadership practices.** Leadership questions were asked regarding the perceptions of the participants if their principals hold teachers accountable, provide a high level of
support, and are involved in the RtI process. Another question in this category pertains to district support for the instructional efforts of the participants. The mean scores regarding leadership for Schools A and C are 4.1. School B had the highest average of 4.6. The total average is 4.3.

**Assessments.** The survey assessment questions pertained to whether RtI has changed the assessment practices, if there is a need for better assessments, if data analysis occurs as part of the process, and if students are involved in goal setting. The mean for the assessment category for School A is 2.9. School B’s mean is a bit higher at 3.9. School C’s mean is in the middle at 3.6. The overall average is 3.4.

**Family involvement.** The last category pertained to family. As these schools have high poverty percentages, the students reportedly lack background knowledge regarding literacy skills. Teachers frequently blame a lack of family involvement on students’ poor performance. For these reasons, questions were included to obtain a general impression of the participants’ feelings on communication and involvement. School A's mean score regarding communication to families and need for more involvement was 3.7. School B’s mean was the highest at 4.1. School C’s mean score was the lowest at 3.3. The average score was 3.8.

**Total mean scores.** Overall, the total mean scores for all seven categories were as follows: School A, 3.9; School B, 4.2; and School C, 3.9. Out of all seven categories, leadership had the highest scores across the board; however, the mean was 4.3 overall. Literacy practices also had an overall mean of 4.3. RtI was the second highest mean at 4.2. Assessment had the lowest mean overall at 3.4. Essentially, the mean scores in the
seven categories ranged from 3.4 to 4.3. These outcomes appear to reflect that the participants mainly agree to strongly agree with the questions in each category. Leadership, literacy practices, PD, and RtI held nearly the same level of importance, which seemed to have congruency to the results of the interviews.

Figure 3. Qualtrics Total Mean Scores by Category
Chapter 5: Synthesis of the Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the findings of this qualitative multiple case study by incorporating triangulation of the interview responses, collected survey data, and document reviews. As case study findings can have a meaningful influence on future educational policies and practices (Ezzy, 2002; Merriam, 1998), this chapter presents a synthesis of the findings from this research study that may be applicable, relevant, and viable to schools seeking to improve their own understandings in relation to Reading First (RF), Response to Intervention (RtI), leadership, and professional development. In addition, this chapter also addresses implications for future research and final remarks.

Overview of the Study

A document review of the most currently published 2016-2017 Kentucky State assessment scores was merged with the 2008-2009 past Reading First GRADE results and overall school-wide Kentucky State assessment scores, to create a unified data set for use in the initial quantitative analysis to determine eligible schools for this study. Of the 72 past Reading First schools, only 21 schools met both assessment criteria as being high performing at the end of the 2009 school year. After identifying the 21 previous former high performing Reading First (HPRF) schools, a new list of eligible schools were identified using the data from the 2016-2017 school report cards to conclude which schools had maintained high performing success. Of the 21 schools that were former HPRF schools, only 14 schools continued to meet or exceed the average of 54.3% on the state assessment.
Principal leadership, as measured by the length of tenure, was considered as a factor for the identification of the schools to be studied. For this reason, schools with principals having the longest tenure were given the first priority for this study. After acquiring permission from three schools, site visit dates were established and online survey links were sent to principals to forward to the appropriate staff members (i.e. K-3, literacy coaches, principals, and special education). Each of the three schools was visited within the same week. Six participants, including the principals, were interviewed at School A and School B, and five participants, including the principal were interviewed at School C. Each of the three school sites are considered to be high poverty, having above 75% free and reduced lunch designations. All three schools have been designated in the top echelon of the state for their high percentages of students in the proficient and distinguished categories on the state assessment. The schools vary in size with the enrollment ranging between 250- 450.

**Synthesis of the Findings**

This instrumental multiple case study attempted to answer a primary research question and two sub questions through the use of semi-structured interviews, survey data, and document reviews. With the intention of further synthesizing the study findings, recurrent themes that pertained to categories important for this research were grouped together. Figures 4-8 reflect a combination of the themes and practices that were expressed as being important for each school’s outcomes.

**Literacy findings.** The primary objective of visiting the three HPRF schools, each of which has maintained a high ranking by the state, was to investigate their
practices, with the hope that they might be worthy of being replicated elsewhere. The first finding that seemed evident in all three school sites was the amount of time spent in literacy. Each school spent up to 120 minutes a day. This practice was a priority in each building, according to study participants. The practice was also identified as having been carried over from the Reading First Grant. In fact, one of the RF grant’s non-negotiables was a minimum of a 90-minute uninterrupted literacy block. All three schools had participants, who stated that they felt that the time dedicated to literacy was important to their successful state designations. While dedicating time to literacy reportedly is the first important step, the manner in which the time is used represents an equally or even more important purpose.

**Tiers of instruction.** Each of the three schools seemed to have the same philosophy about the tiers of instruction. Tier 1 at each school was described as involving whole group instruction, which all students received, based on grade level standards. Something common in each of the schools was that whole group instruction amounted to 30 minutes or less. Each school spent most of its literacy time in stations and/or centers. School A uses differentiated centers for students to rotate through while they are engaged in guided reading. Schools B and C both use the Daily 5 model for rotating students through small groups and reading stations. The focus is for students to spend as much time as possible reading. The participants from each school reported on its survey that a variety of reading practices, which include guided reading, shared reading, and independent reading, were being used.
**Modifications.** Other literacy practices, which emerged from the survey data and the interviews, were that the practice of whole group instruction, when coupled with core reading programs, had been modified due the outcomes which emerged from having analyzed the data. Several non-negotiables existed for schools that had received Reading First Grants. One of these was that schools had to use an approved scientifically research based program with fidelity. Each of the schools now seems less dependent on a program and more data driven in regards to what to teach next. School B does not even use a program since Reading First ended. Each of the schools reported that it is more individualized with instruction since the ending of Reading First. Participants also reported that the professional development, which occurred as part of Reading First, helped them to recognize the value of using data to drive instruction. Now, all three sites report they have evolved and are more effective at meeting students at their individualized needs.

**Kagan strategies.** Another interesting finding, which was identified at each of the three schools, pertains to the use of Kagan strategies. Kagan strategies are designed to incorporate collaborative learning, actively engaging all learners (Kagan, 2001). Kagan strategies are not about teaching a specific curriculum, but rather about the manner that instruction is delivered. These strategies can be employed in other subjects, as they pertain to cooperative student learning. There are a multitude of research articles on the Kagan website that support multi-modal strategies. For that matter, several literacy practices emerged as commonalities at each of the three schools, which may have contributed to the continued success of these schools after the Reading First Grant ended.
The practices include time dedicated to literacy; 30 minutes or less of whole group instruction; daily small group instruction; individualized instruction; standards based assessments; and Kagan strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes for Literacy</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated block of time to literacy -120 minutes</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole group lessons are less than 30 minutes</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are in stations, small groups, and intervention during rotations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-3 reading instruction is explicit and systematic</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core programs have been modified due to data analysis and progress monitoring</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research based instruction has impacted instructional reading practices</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kagan Strategies</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use a variety of reading practices (shared, guided, independent)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards Driven Instruction</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. Common Themes for Literacy*

**Assessment findings.** A notable characteristic of each of the three schools was its focus on assessment to drive the RtI process. Schools B and C seemed to be extremely data driven with standards-based instruction and assessments. Both of these schools reported using frequent exit slips and computer programs that helped track the data and the progress of the students. Schools B and C also dedicated time specifically on Fridays.
for the occurrences of extra interventions to help re-teach skills and standards.

Assessments that drive instruction were palpably important in all three schools, as weekly to monthly progress monitoring occurred in each of the buildings, which reflected the needs of the students. A brief summation of common themes that emerged regarding assessments can be found in Figure 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes for Assessment</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading assessment practices have changed due to RtI</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of data and progress monitoring occur as part of</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RtI process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are involved in goal setting</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments are standards based</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. Common Themes for Assessment*

**Response to Intervention findings.** While interventions could happen, in each of the schools at a time outside the literacy block, the students, depending upon their needs, mostly received Tier 2 interventions during the station/center time, in both small group and in a one-on-one basis. Whether Tier 2 was addressed by pull-out or push-in, rotations during literacy instruction represented a time at which students were most often served in order that they did not miss new material that was being taught. All the schools were strategic regarding the time at which the students were pulled out, if at all, so they
did not miss grade level content and fall further behind. Tiers 2 and 3 were noted in all schools as being very individualized based upon the needs of the students. The interview participants often mentioned that interventions are more flexible now, and not as rigid as during the Reading First Grant period. Participants also commented that since the ending of Reading First, they have become more focused on individualized, as opposed to small group instruction.

**RtI teams.** The principal, teacher, and special education teacher participants of this study all responded that they work as teams in their respective buildings. Teachers expressed they felt supported by their principals in RtI meetings and PLC’s. In fact, these meetings seemed valued as a time to collaborate with others in finding solutions for students to succeed. One of the most striking themes in each of the schools was that each child is viewed as a “whole child”. The teachers and principals look at the students as being more than a test score. The participants from each of the schools indicated that they considered behavior, classroom performance, financial needs, home life, and medical needs as factors deserving attention in order for students to be successful. The overarching sense was that these schools truly care about their students. All the schools exhibited a “whatever it takes” attitude. Because of this outlook, the RtI process is not regarded as a hoop to jump through, but a process to be used to meet the needs of students in the most effective manner possible. Special education designations in each of these buildings were only considered after all other avenues had been explored, implemented, and that the data proved that interventions would not be effective. In other words, the schools all shared the common belief that students must go through three tiers
of instruction with data points from progress monitoring showing no response to intervention to prove that the students are in need of special education. A brief summation of the common themes can be found in Figure 6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes for RtI</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessments/Data Driven</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal is highly involved in RtI process</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are actively involved in RtI process</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid Throughout the year</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Monitoring occurs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RtI is not viewed as “a road to special education”</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole child view (health, financial, family, behavior, etc.)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students are discussed and data reviewed</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RtI process has had a positive impact on students’ reading achievement</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RtI process occurs in all grades</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffs understand the RtI process</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 1-Whole group grade level standards taught to all</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2- Differentiated individualized instruction-small group to one-on-one</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 3-Individualized instruction based on need -1:1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiered instruction has improved students’ reading ability</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are not pulled during Core instruction</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Method</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Whatever it Takes” attitude</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6. Common Themes for RtI*
Principal leadership findings. Along with interviews and surveys, a document review of the state report cards, school websites, and a school search using the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) was completed in order to gather more background knowledge on each of the three schools that were studied. On the KDE school report cards, there is a tab containing TELL survey data, which is completed by teachers voluntarily on a multitude of topics, one of which is leadership. Of each school that participated in this study, the principal had over 90% of staff choose agree or strongly agree with the quality of the leadership. The teachers’ responses in the interviews and survey questions corroborated this data, as the principals in each building, appeared to be well respected by their staff members.

When asked about the manner that principals support teachers in the RtI process, several common responses emerged. First, participants in each school reported that the principal is always available and willing to give advice concerning students. All participants discussed that their principals are highly involved in RtI. In Schools A and C, the principals lead the RtI meetings. In School B, the principal is a part of the RtI process, but the teachers decide the nature of the interventions. All of the participants reported viewing their principals as instructional leaders. An example of this phenomenon can be found in Schools A and B in which the principals provide interventions to students. The participants expressed appreciation throughout the interviews when discussing the manner that the principals support the staff by providing extra human resources and needed materials.
Another factor that emerged from the survey data in relation to principal leadership was that the staff members believe that the principals hold them accountable for literacy instruction. The principals in each school have data boards in the rooms in which they meet with teachers for PLC’s in order to refer to each student and discuss the child’s progress. This seemed to be a valued conversation by the participants, as it was brought up numerous times in each building during the interviews. A brief summation of common themes that emerged for principal leadership findings can be found in Figure 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes for Principal Leadership</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leads RtI process</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides advice/feedback</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides interventions/takes groups</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides extra resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff feels supported</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does walkthroughs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal holds teachers accountable for literacy instruction</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leadership team supports the school-wide literacy focus</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data driven discussions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7. Common Themes for Principal Leadership*

**Professional development (PD) findings.** The participating schools continue to provide PD for teachers, as was evidenced in the surveys and interviews, but not
necessarily in the same manner as was the case with Reading First. All of the schools reported that PD is provided by their respective districts based on the results of surveys. School A reported that conversations with the principal regarding growth plans also create more individualized recommendations for PD, which means that teachers are encouraged to seek outside sources for trainings that will accommodate their needs. School B participants reported that walkthroughs and data results also contribute to the nature of the PD that will be offered by their district. The study participants from Schools A and C seemed to have much more flexibility in deciding the PD they could attend, where School B only offers PD through the district. The survey results reflected that professional development is provided at Schools A and C during PLC time. Additionally, participants agreed strongly that PD occurs and provides participants with new knowledge. School B had more somewhat agrees on the survey and the responses of the interview participants. In fact, this school had the least enthusiasm over the type of PD provided by the district. Still, the overall responses from each of the three schools were positive. The general consensus was that the participants are continuing to learn. School C, from which the most positive responses were received regarding the available PD, has a principal who feels that it is her duty to provide developmental activities that each teacher needs. For example, RtI training was a need in her building which she provided by partnering with KDE consultants. The participants from this school expressed “100% strongly agree” on the survey in regards to understanding the RtI process. A brief summation of common themes that emerged regarding PD findings can be found in Figure 8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes for PD</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Provided</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD based on surveys</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration through PLC’s to improve literacy</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on Growth Plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal provides what teachers need</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8. Common Themes for PD*

**Contribution of Findings to Current Literature**

Qualitative data allows the researcher to ask questions that attempt to answer the “how” and “why” questions that quantitative data alone does not. This was certainly the case of the interview data that emerged which contributed to answering the primary research question regarding the methods that former high performing Reading First (HPRF) schools continue to be successful with RtI as the primary educational framework and the manner in which Reading First and RtI methods compare. In fact, the findings from this study appear to have added to the growing body of research regarding methods and processes for successfully implementing RtI as a school framework. Additionally, the findings regarding instructional leadership practices seem to have contributed to current literature and knowledge regarding effective approaches to leadership.
Primary research question. The extant research regarding Reading First and RtI purported that Tier 1 instruction should consist of scientifically research-based core instruction for all students (Buffman et al., 2009; Harlacher et al., 2010; Lembke et al., 2010; Moore & Whitfield, 2009; Torgesen, 2007; Wixson, 2011). According to the interview and survey data, all three school sites reported having a minimum of 90 minutes and up to 120 minutes for the literacy block. Within the literacy block, each schools’ participants reported that time spent teaching whole group lessons was approximately 30 minutes or less with the remainder of the time focusing on small group instruction. Schools A and C both used scientifically based core programs for Tier 1. School B did not use a core program, but rather taught to the common core standards, using district common assessments and exit slips to ensure that the students understood the contents. Additionally, all three schools reported using Kagan strategies, particularly during whole group instruction. The strategies are scientifically based and are focused upon increasing student engagement. An important theme that occurred in each of the three schools was that all of the students received high quality, grade level, Tier 1 instruction.

Another finding from the literature review was that Reading First and RtI policies share the requirement of the use of assessments to monitor progress in order for teachers and administrators to make data-based instructional decisions for students (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale, & Spaulding, 2008; Lembke et al., 2010; Torgesen, 2007; Wixson, 2011; Wixson & Valencia, 2011). Each of the participants, who were interviewed, noted that assessments are reviewed
frequently and changes in groupings are made as part of the RtI process. Each of the principals still uses data boards to track student progress and discuss every child’s needs. The groups are fluid throughout the year and instruction is provided by a multitude of staff members including classroom teachers, principals, and special education teachers. These findings are in accordance with current research regarding the manner in which interventions should increase with intensity by frequent monitoring throughout the tiers and should be provided by highly qualified professionals, including special education teachers (Cole & McCann, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Kavale, & Spaulding, 2008; Lembke et al, 2010; Torgesen, 2007).

**Protocol versus problem solving approaches.** While programs were available to use for the students in intervention at the three school sites, students’ individual needs were considered and then instruction was designed based on skill deficits. The current literature recognizes the problem solving approach as an effective manner to address the individualized needs of the students. Problem solving is based upon the use of discussion, identification, analysis and the designation of different interventions based on the needs of the students, which would be reevaluated thereafter (Berkeley et al., 2009; Harlacher et al., 2010; Kavale & Spaulding, 2008). For this reason, problem solving, as opposed to a prescriptive, or protocol approach, was the method identified for Tiers 2 and 3 instruction in the selected schools of this study. However, the outcomes of the research regarding the RtI processes note that the protocol system often has students with similar skill deficiencies and the protocols to be delivered are chosen from a bank of research-proven interventions (Berkeley et al., 2009). These interventions are typically delivered to small
groups of students. For that matter, the problem solving approach, which is being used in the three schools of this study, represents a difference from Reading First, in which each school used the protocol approach of having a specific scientifically research based program that was used for interventions.

**Response to Intervention approaches.** Current research results pertaining to the use of RtI as a school-wide model, often ask the question regarding the system of implementation that would work best; being the identification through the measurement approach (special education identification), the prevention of special education through instruction approach (general education model), or an amalgamation of the two. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Johnston, 2010; Torgesen, 2007). In the three schools selected for this study, RtI seemed to be implemented as both a prevention of special education through high quality instruction for all students and as a way to identify students when interventions did not show sufficient improvements in students’ data points. While the results of this study do not provide “grist” for the literature as to whether RtI is under or over identifying students for special education services, the findings appear to have offered insights regarding the use of RtI as an instructional framework. The potential effectiveness of RtI as a framework in the three schools that were studied is evidenced in the impressive percentages of students reaching proficient and distinguished on state assessments, despite being schools with high levels of poverty. The summation of the findings which answer the primary question regarding literacy and RtI practices may be found in Figure 9.
**Primary Research Question:** By what methods do former high performing Reading First (HPRF) schools continue to be successful with RtI as the primary framework, and how do these methods compare during the implementation of Reading First?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Findings</th>
<th>Response to Intervention Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✤ Dedicated time to literacy 90-120 minutes.</td>
<td>✤ Assessments drive the RtI process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ This practice has continued since RF</td>
<td>✤ Tier 2 interventions occur during the station/center time, in both small group and in a one on one basis, depending on their needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✤ 30 minutes or less of whole group instruction based on the “Big 5” but standards driven.</td>
<td>➢ This has changed somewhat since RF, as students were often pulled out of other contents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ This practice has changed, as whole group lessons were formerly based on the SBRR Programs designated from RF.</td>
<td>✤ Each child is viewed as a “whole child”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✤ The “Big 5” were more disjointed during RF, while current practices are inclusive.</td>
<td>✤ The principal, teacher, and special education teacher work as teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✤ Daily small group instruction</td>
<td>✤ Teachers expressed they felt supported by their principals in RtI meetings and PLC’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ This is a continued practice from RF.</td>
<td>✤ Meetings seemed valued as a time to collaborate with others in finding solutions for students to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✤ Focus on individualized instruction</td>
<td>✤ Common belief that students must go through three tiers of instruction with data points from progress monitoring showing no response to intervention to prove that the students are in need of special education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ This practice has evolved from RF small group focus on students with programs to individual student needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✤ Standards based assessments:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Exit slips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ District made assessments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✤ Kagan strategies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 9. Summation of Findings for the Primary Research Question](image-url)

**Sub-question one.** In regards to answering sub-question one of this research regarding the manner that principal leadership practices influence RtI, an analysis of the outcomes seem to suggest that principal leadership is extremely important to the RtI as an instructional framework. According to the outcomes of instructional leadership research, principals need to understand both policies and practice, and to be able to lead teachers through cultural changes in order to make RtI an effective, educational norm (Kozleski &
Huber, 2010). All three of the principals epitomized this concept. Findings from the literature review discussed instructional leadership in relation to the collaboration of a principal and the other stakeholders to deliberate and examine what is needed (Massey, 2012). In all three schools, the principals’ leadership, during RtI meetings, was reported as being valued by the teachers. The participants repeatedly discussed the manner in which their principals were present in the meeting to bounce ideas off of, to offer advice, and to offer observations regarding teacher instruction and student learning. The principals’ participation with the discussion of student needs and provision of interventions, seemed to have a positive effect on the participants’ attitudes about their principals. The teachers expressed recognition throughout the interviews that their principals were knowledgeable about reading and interventions. According to the literature reviewed, principals can and do affect instruction/student learning, as research outcomes purport that leadership is the second greatest influence, next to classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2006). The principals in each of the schools exhibited actions and characteristics that exemplify the definition of instructional leadership. A summation of the findings for sub-question one can be found in Figure 10.
**Sub-Question 1:** In what manner do the principal’s leadership practices in the schools that were identified as high performing Reading First schools impact the Response to Intervention process currently?

**Leadership Findings**

- The principals’ leadership is valued in the RtI meetings by the teachers.
- The principals’ participation with the discussion of student needs and provision of interventions, seemed to have a positive effect on the participants’ attitudes about their principals.
- The teachers recognized throughout the interviews that their principals were knowledgeable about reading and interventions.
- The participants repeatedly discussed the manner in which their principals were present in the meeting to bounce ideas off of, to offer advice, and to offer observations regarding teacher instruction and student learning.
- Principals are viewed as instructional leaders

*Figure 10. Summation of Findings for Sub-Question One*

**Sub-question two.** In regards to answering sub-question two regarding the manner that professional development practices and the roles of literacy coaches influence the Response to Intervention process, a useful answer is not as evident. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two referenced an important reason for having coaches as they can aid teachers with the analysis of data, insuring the likelihood that expectations would be met (Deussen et al., 2007; Dole & Donaldson, 2006). As the schools no longer have coaches to fill this role, it seemed that the principals had fulfilled this need instead. As instructional leaders, the principals contributed to conversations about students’ data and not only assisted in making instructional decisions, but School A and B’s principals provided interventions. School B’s principal also fulfilled the role of a coach through her suggestions regarding instruction based on her frequent walkthroughs.
Another important reason for having coaches is due primarily to the existing research outcomes that indicate that teachers absorb and implement professional development more effectively when a knowledgeable professional, who is a part of the school staff, provides ongoing, job-embedded professional development which includes discussions, modeling, and then follow-ups with the teachers (Deussen et al., 2007; Guskey, 2000; Norton, 2001; Wood & McQuarrie, 1999), versus the perceived failure associated with one-time professional development sessions (Hawley & Valli, 1999). An apparent importance of professional development for teachers pertains to the positive reception to the 80 hours of PD in reading that was required every year in Kentucky’s Reading First Grant Schools. With no coaches now available to help provide job-embedded PD, 80 hours of PD a year is no longer feasible. However, the findings of this research regarding the influence of coaches on RtI cannot contribute to the literature, as they were not employed in the schools that were studied. Only School A employed a curriculum coach, but her job responsibilities pertained to all subject areas, which left very little time for the provision of PD.

Nevertheless, all schools reported that PD practices had continued, often referring to PLC time with their principals. In fact, the principals in all three schools seemed to have absorbed the role of the coach by leading discussions about instruction during PLC’s. This practice seems to be congruent with the literature regarding the importance of PLC’s. The literature suggests that such teams require ongoing collaboration and development through professional learning communities (Buffman et al., 2009). Additionally, the literature reflected that all the stakeholders of a school, including the
principal, should be well versed in understanding the RtI process and what instructional options are available. This objective requires the principal to lead the process and act as the “head learner” (Barth, 1990, p.162), as appeared to be the case in all three schools. A summation of the findings for sub-question two can be found in Figure 11.

**Sub-Question 2:** In what manner do the current professional development practices and the roles of literacy coaches impact the Response to Intervention process currently?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PD Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ PD still is occurring but to a much lesser degree than the 80 hours required during RF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ PD occurs during the summer and during the school year in PLC meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Districts are providing most of the PD opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Teachers expressed the need for choice and the ability to seek outside resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Teachers expressed that the PD received during RF was informative and helped improve their instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11. Summation of the Findings for Sub-Question Two*

**Implications for Future Research**

The scope of this qualitative multi-case study was limited to three schools in Kentucky, which were former high performing Reading First schools that have continued to enjoy student academic success after the grant ended. The purpose of this study was to identify the methods and practices that have contributed to the success of these schools, as they have implemented RtI. A hope existed that the outcomes of the study might provide direction for other schools. For that matter, this study could be expanded for future research in a multitude of ways.

One approach would be to expand the research to other successful schools who were not former Reading First schools with the purpose of continuing to search for
effective practices of RtI as a literacy framework. A number of questions could be asked of non-Reading First schools in order to expand upon the research questions of this study. Examples of questions that could be inquired of non-RF schools, could consist of the amount of time that is spent in literacy instruction, if there is an emphasis on the “Big 5,” the manner that RtI teams function, and the leadership practices of the principals.

Another avenue that could be pursued would be to conduct further qualitative research in the schools that are no longer high performing. Former HPRF urban schools could be included in future research, as their state assessment data have dropped significantly since the ending of the Reading First grant. A pertinent question would pertain to the factors that have contributed to this drop in academic performance. Several variables could be studied such as teacher turnover, student turnover, district initiatives, top-down management, and principal leadership. There are still a few urban schools with the same leadership from Reading First. It would be interesting to pursue the reasons that the scores of these schools have fallen so significantly, when the leadership has remained the same.

A sub-question of this research pertained to the manner that literacy coaches have influenced the RtI process. This question could not be answered in this study since all the schools had lost their coaches due to budget cuts. Reading First coaches reportedly had a positive influence on the classrooms as they helped to provide job-embedded PD that was often individualized for teachers’ needs. The study participants indicated that their RF coaches were helpful. The participants also suggested that they missed the feedback provided from the observations of and modeling by the coaches. While there is
research supporting coaching, further research into this topic and the manner that coaching is influencing RtI could be important for schools wishing to improve Tier 1 instruction through modeling, observations, and feedback.

**Reflections and Final Remarks**

As a former classroom teacher and Reading First coach, I was supportive of the methodology that was mandated in the Reading First grant of using scientifically based reading research, the “Big 5”, assessments, small groups, and centers. While my students exhibited steady gains in their achievement, there was still much I did not know about teaching reading. Reading First continued my education through 80 hours of PD every year. After becoming a coach, I continued to learn along with and from classroom teachers. Observations are a powerful tool in education. I witnessed many effective lessons from teachers in the school in which I worked as a Reading First coach and from others across the state, that have permanently and positively influenced my current role as a reading specialist.

The research outcomes that touted Reading First as a failure seemed harsh and unjust, as the outcomes were not consistent with my experience in Kentucky. Every year I witnessed student data getting better across the state and in my own urban school as well. I witnessed teaching improve with explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. I saw our kindergarten students go from not knowing which way a book is held to reading primer books independently by the end of the year.
Lessons on leadership. In a past study of successful schools in Kentucky (Johnson et al., 2010), my colleagues and I found that in the highest performing schools the principals were fully immersed in the Reading First initiative. They attended weekly meetings, the RF conferences, the professional development days, and did constant walkthroughs to hold teachers accountable. In the schools visited for this study, similar practices were occurring with the principals attending and leading PLC meetings, conducting walkthroughs and observations, and leading the data discussions for interventions. The teachers repeatedly discussed the manner that they felt supported by the principals in the RtI process. The principals in each building were former elementary teachers who understood the dimensions of instruction in an elementary classroom and were able to provide suggestions and feedback regarding ways to improve lessons and learning. In two of the schools, the principals helped to provide interventions, which seems to have bolstered the appreciation expressed by the teachers. All the teachers and principals interviewed had a “whatever it takes” attitude when it came to meeting the needs of their students.

Lessons regarding Reading First and Response to Intervention (RtI). A unique advantage of Reading First schools was that part of the grant requirements were to implement the RtI process of three tiers of instruction. While other schools did not implement straightaway this change in policy, Reading First schools applied this model immediately, attaining many more years of experience with this aspect of the RtI process. However, there were perceived disadvantages of being a RF school as well. The requirements of the grant seemed stifling at times. For example, little or no flexibility
existed regarding the forms of instruction that were used in each tier, as the program, which was chosen for a school in the grant application and its implementation, became a non-negotiable thereafter. Educators often argued regarding the forms of instruction that constituted a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention, losing site of what was best for the children. Educators regularly worried about having an adequate representation of the “Big 5” (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) in their centers or lessons, for fear that the Reading First Grant would be taken away. A despair existed that the program, which had been selected for the grant, had to be used regardless of the best interest of the students.

Nonetheless, the Reading First Program provided many important strategies, which appear to have been continued in the three schools of this study. The educators in the past Reading First schools have continued teaching the “Big 5.” However, they now integrate these literacy skills together in the best interest of the students. The educators no longer exhibit a perception that each skill needs to be approached in a disparate manner as occurred with Reading First. For example, educators approach instruction based upon a notion that comprehension and vocabulary can easily be taught throughout a read aloud or through the books that students are reading in groups.

The rigidity of the programs that once governed reading instruction during the Reading First era are no longer an issue. Of the schools that constituted this study, only two reported using a prescribed program. Neither of these schools’ participants seemed to feel pressured to teach exclusively from the programs, but rather used the programs as resources of effective instruction with useful rigor.
The RtI process, as used in the schools of this study, appeared to have been organized in the best interest of the students, constituting more than another hoop to jump through in order to be able to place a child in special education. Each of the schools appeared to regard the process as a way to make certain that the students are receiving the instruction that met their needs, particularly before they were referred to special education. Each teacher seemed to know every child’s individual needs. This approach contrasts the data boards, which were used in the past with a focus on groups of students, as opposed to individual students. Each of the participants in the schools, which were studied, expressed that the focus was now on the “whole child.” In fact, one participant, who had worked under the Reading First Grant, stated that the RF grant had been focused on the “hard” data, with little attention to the individual needs of the students.

**Lessons I learned.** Part of my current job responsibility, as a reading specialist, is to lead school-based RtI meetings. I am regularly looking for ways to improve the process. An outcome of this study is that it has helped me to address my responsibilities. For example, I have learned from the schools, which were studied, that the teachers know their own students and feel completely responsible for them. These teachers, of their own volition, are providing Tier 2, if not Tier 3 instruction out of a recognition that they cannot rely on the availability of outside funding from year-to-year to provide extra resources. In my experience, teachers who have access to reading specialist and special education teacher pull out programs, sometimes appear to lose a sense of being ultimately responsible for their students. Such a practice of passing challenging students to the reading specialists and special education teachers did not appear to exist, at least with the
study participants that I interviewed. The study participants reported engaging in weekly, grade-level conversations that focus on the needs of the students, particularly as reflected on the data. The key idea, which I grasped from the study participants, is that assessment data is useful, timely, and used to inform student instruction.

The leadership, exhibited by the principals of the schools in the study appeared to be instructionally focused. The principals’ were very involved with the RtI process from conversations about students to actually being involved in the instruction of the students. Principals, who are seeking to improve the RtI process, need to be not only involved in but capable of leading the conversations at each grade level and regarding each child. Knowledge about instruction appears to be a key to effective principal-based leadership.

Maya Angelou (date unknown) said “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” The schools, which I visited as part of this study, appeared to engage in this practice. While they had learned, as part of Reading First, good fundamental practices regarding reading instruction and effective ways to provide interventions, they now appear to have learned even more effective strategies, which they are practicing. Each school has evolved, as it has continued to fine tune its practices, year after year. My expectation and desire is to use these approaches in the school in which I am currently employed as a reading specialist. Further, I hope that the outcomes of this research study will help other educators identify practices that can be used to improve reading and RtI practices in their own schools.
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Appendix A: Online Consent and Survey Questions

Title of Research: Lessons to Learn: The Implementation of Response to Intervention as a School Framework through the Lens of Past Reading First Schools

Researchers: Karen Coffman

IRB number: 18-X-5

You are being asked by an Ohio University researcher to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of the research project. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to participate in this study. You may print a copy of this document to take with you.

Summary of Study
This is a case study of three elementary schools, which were past Reading First Grant recipients, which were considered successful at the end of the grant period, and which have maintained since similar levels of success since the grant ended. This study will be conducted with the use of a survey. A visit to the school will be scheduled in order to conduct interviews with willing participants about the Response to Intervention process. A request will be made for at least one teacher per grade level (preferably someone who participated in the Reading First Program) to participate in an individual, in-person interview. The interviewees' responses cannot be connected to the on-line surveys as the on-line responses are completely anonymous.

The survey will be approached, using an on-line secure server system called Qualtrics. Principals, teachers in kindergarten through third grade, reading coaches, and special education teachers will be asked to complete the survey questions, which pertain to leadership, professional development, and Response to Intervention (RtI) practices. Permission for participation for the on-line survey will be collected directly from the on-line survey. All survey answers will be kept confidential. The results will only be included in the study results as they relate to each school as an entire entity. The schools will have pseudonyms for anonymity; therefore, there should be no risk involved in your participation in the study.

Explanation of Study
The purpose of this study is to explore practices of the Reading First implementation, which itself no longer exists, with an intent of identifying those practices that have continued to be utilized through the Response to Intervention Process and the practices that have changed in the interim. The schools, which have been selected for this study, have been successful according to Kentucky state testing data. For this reason, the results
of this study may allow others in education and in related disciplines to benefit by learning about practices that have and have not been used effectively in the Reading First implementation and Response to Intervention Process. The results of this study may also contribute to the relevant literature regarding leadership. If you agree to participate in the on-line survey, it should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. Your answers will be anonymous. Your answers will not be shared with anyone. Your school will only be referred to through a pseudonym, for anonymity, when the study results are reported. You should not participate in this study if you have less than a year’s experience as an educator.

**Risks and Discomforts**
The survey will be completed online using the Qualtrics system that is available through Ohio University. The Qualtrics system is a highly secure site that is password protected. The servers are protected by high-end firewall systems, and scans are performed regularly to ensure that any vulnerabilities are quickly found and patched. Complete penetration tests are performed yearly. All services have quick failover points and redundant hardware, with complete backup performed nightly. Additionally, data are stored in a specific location; it does not float around in the cloud. As a participant, you should know the survey is secure and confidential. No identifiers will be used. Qualtrics has multiple ways to take surveys including mobile devices, QR scan codes, and can even be done off-line on the day of the site visit. You will be emailed an invitation through Qualtrics to follow a link and log-in. This allows you to do the survey on a private home device, mobile phone, or you may even opt to do the survey on a mobile device at your school using mobile data to fill out the survey if you would be concerned about any repercussions or security from school devices. No information will be shared with administration. The data from the surveys will be deleted by July 2018. At any time you feel uncomfortable, you may end the survey. No repercussions will occur.

**Benefits**
This study’s published results may contribute useful insights to the academic literature regarding instruction and learning practices. The results, in turn, could possibly be used by principals and teachers seeking ways to improve instructional and learning practices, particularly as they apply to the Response to Intervention (RtI) Process and for use in preparation programs for teachers and school leaders. While you may not benefit directly and personally by participating in this study, you may benefit from knowing that the reporting of your school’s successful practices may help others in education to approach the RtI Process effectively. This knowledge, in turn, may benefit the students who are being helped with the RtI Process.

**Confidentiality and Records**
Your survey information will be confidential and anonymous. The schools’ name will be a pseudonym when the overall results are reported. The Qualtrics system is a highly secure on-line system. I, the researcher, will be the only person accessing the survey results.

For maximum confidentiality, you may wish to take the survey on a private, non-school device. Please clear your browser history and close the browser before leaving the computer.

**Future Use Statement**

Data/samples collected as part of this research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used for future research studies.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator Karen Coffman at knkatie@hotmail.com, 513-432-4091 or Dr. Bill Larson at larsonw@ohio.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By agreeing to participate in this study you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time
- if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

☐ Yes, I consent to participate.

☐ No, I do not consent.

Q2 Years working in this school:
Q3 Years working in your current role:
________________________________________________________________

Q4 Years worked in Reading First (0-6):
________________________________________________________________

Q5 Years involved in Response to Intervention process:
________________________________________________________________

Q6 How many minutes is your literacy block?
________________________________________________________________

| Research Based Instruction (RBI) has impacted our school's instructional reading practices. | Disagree Completely | Disagree Somewhat | Agree Somewhat | Agree Completely | N/A |
| The core-reading program has been modified due to data analysis and progress monitoring. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | Disagree Completely | Disagree Somewhat | Agree Somewhat | Agree Completely | N/A |
| | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
I understand the Response to Intervention (RtI) process.

The Response to Intervention process is occurring for all grades.

RtI has had a positive impact on students' reading achievement.

I believe our tiered instruction has improved our students' reading ability.

The school coach, teachers, and I collaborate to meet instructional reading goals and objectives.

The school coach demonstrates literacy lessons and provides instructional feedback.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Disagree Completely</th>
<th>Disagree Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree Completely</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our school works collaboratively to improve literacy instruction through Professional Learning Communities.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe teachers are held accountable for literacy instruction by the principal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe the principal provides a high level of support for literacy improvement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe the school coach provides Professional Development (PD) that is relevant to our school’s needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The school coach/reading specialist and principal work collaboratively and have the same</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The reading assessment practices at our school have changed due to Response to Intervention.

I believe our school needs more effective assessment instruments.

Analysis of data and progress monitoring occurs as part of the RtI process.

Students are involved in establishing their short and long term reading goals.

I communicate with families about reading instruction.

Our school needs more family and community involvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disagree Completely</th>
<th>Disagree Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree Completely</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Teachers utilize a variety of reading practices (shared, guided, independent, readers' theater).

Students have access to multiple types of literacy resources.

Our K-3 reading instruction at our school is explicit and systematic.

The implementation of the "Big 5" is vital to literacy instruction.

Professional development occurs and provides me with new instructional literacy knowledge and skills.

| Our leadership team continually supports our school-wide literacy focus. |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Disagree Completely     | Disagree Somewhat | Agree          | Agree Somewhat | Agree Completely | N/A            |
|                         |                 |                |                |                  |                |


Our school receives a high level of support from the district for literacy improvement.

There is a defined process for decision making for RtI.

My school uses a problem solving method for placing students in intervention.

My school uses a prescriptive method for placing students in intervention.

I believe the principal is actively involved in the RtI process.

A reading coach/specialist is actively involved in the RtI process.

Classroom teachers are actively involved in the RtI process.
Appendix B: Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. How many years have you been working in this school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. How many years have you been working in your current role? (What is your current role?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many years did you spend working during the Reading First (0-6) grant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How many years have you been involved in Response to Intervention process?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Please briefly describe what instruction occurs in your school for each Tier of instruction.

5A. Tier 1-

5B. Tier 2-

5C. Tier 3-

6. Describe your decision making process to place students in intervention.

7. How do you decide which interventions will be given to the students and who decides it?

8. How are the students served (i.e. pull-out during literacy block, pulled during content, whole school intervention time, push in to classes) and who provides intervention?

9. How does professional development occur?

10. How does your principal support you in the RtI process?

11. How does your reading coach/specialist support you in the process?

12. What do you believe your school does really well in literacy?

13. What do you believe your school still needs to improve on in literacy?

If involved in Reading First and RtI, the following questions will be asked…

14. Compare literacy practices now to literacy practices during Reading First.
15. Compare the Response to Intervention process before Reading First to after the grant ended.

16. Do you have anything you would like to say/add that I didn’t ask about RtI?
Appendix C: Ohio University Adult Consent Form with Signature

**Title of Research:** Lessons to Learn: The Implementation of Response to Intervention as a School Framework through the Lens of Past Reading First Schools

**Researcher:** Karen Coffman

**IRB number:** 18-X-5

You are being asked by an Ohio University researcher to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of the research project. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Summary of Study**

This is a case study of elementary schools, which were past Reading First Grant recipients, which were considered successful at the end of the grant period, and which have maintained since, similar levels of success since the grant ended. This study will be conducted with face to face interviews in a private setting on your school’s campus. Participants will also be asked to fill out an online survey that will be completely anonymous. No results from the survey will be associated with your interview answers. Benefits of participation may be represented through your contribution of information, which can have the effect of broadening the research literature for others who are interested in understanding the practices that were and are effective respectively in the Reading First implementation and the Response to Intervention (RtI) Processes.

**Explanation of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore practices from the Reading First Grant implementation, which itself no longer exists, with an intent of identifying those practices that have continued to be utilized through the Response to Intervention Process and the practices that have changed in the interim. The schools, which have been selected for this study, have been successful according to Kentucky state testing data.

For this reason, the results of this study may allow others in education and in related disciplines to benefit by learning about practices that have and have not been used effectively in the Reading First implementation and Response to Intervention Process. The results to this study may also contribute to the relevant literature regarding leadership practices, which can influence student achievement.

If you agree to participate in an in-person interview in a private setting at your school, the interview should take approximately 30 minutes. Your answers will be recorded for later
transcription and analysis for the study. However, all recordings are confidential and will not be shared with anyone.

No school or participant names will be used. Schools will only be referred to through pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity. You should not participate in this study if you have less than a year’s experience as an educator.

**Risks and Discomforts**

No risks or discomforts are anticipated as the interview will be kept completely confidential and no individual results will be reported or shared with others. The school results as a whole will be represented by a pseudonym. The interview should take place in a private setting and will last approximately 30 minutes. If you would experience discomfort at any time, you may end the interview. No repercussions will occur if you end the interview.

**Benefits**

This study’s published results may contribute useful insights to the academic literature regarding instruction and learning practices. The results in turn could possibly be used by principals and teachers seeking ways to improve instructional and learning practices, particularly as they apply to the Response to Intervention (RtI) Process and for use in preparation programs for teachers and school leaders.

While you may not benefit directly and personally by participating in this study, you may benefit from knowing that the reporting of your school’s successful practices may help others in education to approach the RtI Process effectively. This knowledge, in turn, may benefit the students who are being helped with the RtI Process.

**Confidentiality and Records**

Your study information will be kept confidential and anonymous in the study results. The schools’ name will be a pseudonym as well. The voice recordings of the interviews will be kept on a password protected computer. Only the researcher and the dissertation chair will have access to the recordings. These recordings will be destroyed by July 2018 or prior if the study is finalized sooner.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.
Future Use Statement
Data/samples collected as part of this research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used for future research studies.

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator Karen Coffman at knkatie@hotmail.com, 513-432-4091 or Dr. Bill Larson at larsonw@ohio.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_________________________________________ Date__________________

Printed Name___________________________________________________________

Version Date: [02/19/18]
Appendix D: IRB Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Number</th>
<th>18-X-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Status</td>
<td>APPROVED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee:</td>
<td>Social/Behavioral IRB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance Contact:</td>
<td>Robin Stack (<a href="mailto:stack@ohio.edu">stack@ohio.edu</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Investigator:</td>
<td>Karen Coffman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Lessons to Learn: The Implementation of Response to Intervention as a School Framework through the Lens of Past Reading First Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Review:</td>
<td>EXPEDITED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Social/Behavioral IRB reviewed and approved by expedited review the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IRB Approved:</th>
<th>03/27/2018 4:45:37 PM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expiration:</td>
<td>03/16/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Category:</td>
<td>6,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Waivers: No waivers are granted with this approval.**

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. In addition, FERPA, PPRA, and other authorizations / agreements must be obtained, if needed. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Any changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Periodic Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid
expiration of the IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. All records relating
to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit
for at least three (3) years after the research has ended.
It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the
Office of Research Compliance / IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse and
potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
### Appendix E: School A Data and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A Interview Participants</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years worked in School</th>
<th>Years Worked in current Role</th>
<th>Years in RF</th>
<th>Years in RtI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19 (principal)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13 (CI)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 (K)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5th-5 years K 2/3 3-majority</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average of Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A Interview themes</th>
<th>Length of Lit. Block</th>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>K=120 3rd=60</td>
<td>Core program, Reading Wonders.</td>
<td>Lexia, computer based program. 30 minutes. Great Leaps Reading for fluency. Fresh Reads for fluency.</td>
<td>SRA program, Fresh Reads, 30-45 minutes daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Everybody gets the same instruction. Whole group &amp; then broken down into centers and small</td>
<td>More individualized instruction in small groups. Differentiate with</td>
<td>That’s more the special ed kids isn’t it? Those are the ones that are targeted for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Group and Materials</td>
<td>Instructional Approach</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>K-2</td>
<td>Reading Wonders K-5, Lexia, technology based K-5. Reading Plus for 3-5.</td>
<td>Cars and Stars, iReady Reading that is technology based. SRA corrective reading. Reading Mastery for the lower levels, very basic with phonics. Combination of extra Lexia, Reading Plus, or iReady, depending on need.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Tier 1-Whole group</td>
<td>Whole class. All children get the same instruction, whether it’s phonics, vocabulary, all children get the same instruction. McGraw-Hill series.</td>
<td>Small groups where my assistant pulls out two to three kids, Sing, Spell, Read, and Write program. Computer program that goes with it for students to interact with on the board. 15 minute groups. More severe. Students who are in referral or go to special ed teacher. May get one-on-one with me or my assistant daily. Flash cards, Drops in the Bucket as an additional activity. 10 minutes. Lexia 40 minutes a week.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>We use our core reading program,</td>
<td>More focused approach. Reading Plus daily. Groups get</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wonders and supplemental program Reading Plus and tiered readers that come with it. Fluency checks in the classroom with all our students.</td>
<td>Additional time on Reading Plus. Three times a week. Leveled readers, be more specific. Vocabulary journal. Fluency checks 2x a week. Kansas City writing strategies.</td>
<td>seen every day. Some are pulled out by another instructor daily. Great Leaps. May need more phonics. Different strategies and PD we were able to have when RF was here. We had 80 hours of PD then as opposed to 24 hours. That’s a big change.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>120-30 minutes of whole group.</td>
<td>Just daily instruction. We aim for high quality instruction for everyone. We do whole group in the morning. Reading wonders is our program. Leveled readers are used for guided reading. I will split up the class into 3 groups. Spend more with my lower kids and a little less with my higher ones.</td>
<td>Small groups for our reading instruction based on need. Pulled out. We base it on their assessments and how they score, perform in the classroom, &amp; if they’re not meeting the standards, then we give extra assistance. Lexia lessons for some individual instruction. Students in groups are trying to find things they all need. Below level activities we can do with them. Lexia lessons.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intensive interventions, pulled out one-on-one. Then after that stage they’re referred for special ed or already receiving services. We’re trying to see how they do with that before we refer them. 30 minutes daily. Some students get up to 90 minutes a day of reading.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
No specific program really, just hodgepodge. Whatever they need. Tier 2 is pulled out for 30 minutes.

| Overall Themes & Repeated Responses | K-2=120 min.-4x 3-5=90 minutes | Core Program/Reading Wonders-4x Same instruction for everyone/Whole group-7x | Lexia Program-2x Great Leaps-1x Sing, Spell, Read, Write-1x 30 min. Pull out-3x Individual instruction-5x Small group-2x | SRA/Reading Plus-3x Targeted for RtI/Special Ed.-3x Pull out one-on-one-2x Daily-4x |

### Process for RtI Q’s. 6-8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A Interview Themes</th>
<th>Decision Making Process for RtI</th>
<th>Deciding Interventions</th>
<th>How Students are Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Throughout the school year, we look at MAP data and how students are performing, so we might move students out of an intervention. Place new ones in. All year process.</td>
<td>Curriculum Specialist and Principal, along with classroom teachers. Meet 2-3 times a year &amp; look at MAP results, as well as our formative assessments. Placement tests with our reading program. All of that at the beg. Of the year. Also the prior year’s teacher recommendations.</td>
<td>Based on what students need. Some are pulled out. That’s more Tier 3. Give them something in addition to, so most are pulled out. Also have some Tier 2 interventions in the classroom as part of the teacher’s small group work w/students in the classroom. We have a combination of everything. Don’t pull through core instruction, but after when students go to learning centers. Doing</td>
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</table>
### P2

| Teacher opinion, watching and learning how the kids participated and how they worked in class. Also by assessments. Kids who performed low were targeted with more in-depth, kids on the cusp of low were targeted in small group with the teacher, but lower end with assessments were given intervention. |
| Based on 25% or below they’ll get more in-depth instruction for intervention. Principal, curriculum specialist, teacher, it’s a group effort. We have weekly PLC’s with explicit planning w/principal and curriculum specialist, and look at all kids, all test scores, and grades. |
| During the instruction time, they’re pulled out. Intervention kids get pulled out before the bell rings also. Go eat breakfast and get pulled for intervention and then some is done during the block. |

### P3

| At the B.O.Y., hardest time to place them b/c you realize some of those kids need extra help. Go on MAP data, AIMSWeb, and teacher recommendations. Start looking at the list of names deciding who gets interventions first. Bottom tier first. 25%ile and below. Start with them and work our way up, depending on how many we can serve. Classroom teacher picks up the rest. During PLC’s throughout the year, look at kids. Go |
| Usually a team-classroom teacher, principal, interventionist. Depends on students’ needs. Classroom teachers might do word lists with them, doing some fresh reads, extra time on the computer with Lexia, iReady, and Reading Plus. Not as detailed as Tier 3. |
| Tier 2 works within the classroom, so those kids get an extra 30 minutes. A lot of it is during the 120. They do small group and different things within the classroom. Tier 3 is provided by Americorp and a sub we’ve hired for 139 days who’s certified. Trained in these programs. Classroom teachers do intervention as part of their rotations. If there’s an aid, that might be one-on-one. Small group or |
through the whole list. Talk about them, their needs. Comprehension, phonics, fluency, word recognition, vocab? Specific problem? Address the intervention based on that. Depending on student needs. They are progress monitored weekly in Tier 3. Maybe a few in tier 2 get monthly. Most are every week.

| Computer. No more than 6 in our interventions |
| No more school wide intervention time due to budget cuts. We don’t have PE everyday or Music, or Art to help with interventions, so we weren’t able to continue doing a block. |
| Students are pulled out during center time when they aren’t successful on their own. Not missing the teacher or computer time. |

| Keep documentation, data progress monitoring every week and in October when report cards come out- compile a list of students I feel are struggling. In Nov. we have Explicit planning. Whole grade level meets with our Principal, CI, and go through each and every child. Tell principal what the MAP scores are, progress monitoring data, AIMSWeb. Take that data and decide which children are struggling. Then ask “is attendance a factor? Is different characteristics at home...home life? |
| Explicit planning meetings. Teacher workdays, How is the progress going? Look at the data and see if child is making significant progress or not. Principal has ultimate decision based on data we keep and test scores from MAP. Assessments from AIMSWeb. More examples from classroom. Scores determine if they qualify for RtI. |
| We provide wherever they’re struggling the most, that’s where we pick up. Ex. if they are struggling with letters, or these are struggling with sounds, we work individually on that. Problem solving. My assistant pulls from my carpet time (whole group) for tier 2 and tier 3 gets pulled out during the whole block to go with the special ed teacher. |
Then we get down to saying what we think it is. We’ll start the process-hearing, vision. That’s how we select students for RtI. Mrs. * will come and observe students who we are on the fence about and make a recommendation to go on w/RtI or wait. We bounce ideas off each other, ask questions, it’s the best. Mrs. M. will say let’s talk about these kids and see what we can do to help them more. Very beneficial.

| P5 | We use MAP scores. Tested 3x a year. Bottom 25%ile goes to tier 3. Novice students. Tier 2 might be more like apprentice and borderline proficient. Depending on the skills, if a kid isn’t getting something we’ll stick them in a group for extra instruction. We don’t wait for MAP to come out again. Being aware of where your kids are. Using your observations and assessments as well as the activities we are doing and how they’re performing. We do a lot of Kaegan strategies. Releases responsibility. To the learners. Better |
| Decide as a committee. Explicit planning days and grade level meetings. We use explicit planning to go over MAP and talk about each individual student. We talk about every single one. Don’t just look at their performance, what’s going on at home? Counseling services needed? Are parents having financial difficulties? Is there a hearing problem, vision? Behavior? What have we been doing to address these issues? What have we targeted? What have |
| We track students progress with specific assessments. I track how many they got correct and how many they didn’t and it shows what to do in next lesson. If they can move or if they need to stay at this level. Additional instruction on a particular skill. Great Leaps for fluency checks and data points from that show whether they’ve gained in those areas. |
opportunity to facilitate learning and working together. Allows me to see who’s getting it and who’s not. Also to pair them up with a lower learner. Something different that wasn’t around during RF.

we done with this child? What can we do to try and help them? Every child is discussed individually and who will be in Tiers 1, 2, and 3. We keep records if someone will go through RtI we have the strategies and progress they’ve made. Makes RtI easier. We’ve already implemented those things and strategies.

| P6 | We meet 2x a year for explicit planning meetings w/our principal, curriculum specialist, and teachers. Look at classroom performance, make decisions based on progress. Make sure results weren’t just a one time thing. We start with test data. | Ultimately the principal decides. We all work together to decide but it’s based on needs and what they’re reading at the time. We focus on what the problem is and their need and we go from there. | We don’t do whole school intervention. Pulled during instruction time. When not losing core instruction times. Won’t pull them from our reading whole group or small group time. Pulled from lab or computer time. |

<p>| Repeated phrases, ideas, &amp; words | Use Assessments-10x Meet with principal-7x Student in-class performance/needs-7x Work as a team-7x Explicit planning-6x Use progress monitoring data-6x Target below 25th%ile/struggling students-6x Look at whole child-6x Teacher opinion/observations-4x Determine which students are struggling-4x | Pull out-8x Not during Core-4x Small group classroom-5x One-on-one-1x |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview themes</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Principal Support</th>
<th>Coach Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Variety. Job embedded PD at school. Training after school and in the summer. Teachers do a survey at the end of the previous year and beginning of the year. They write a growth plan and all of that is used to determine what growth opportunities will be available to teachers.</td>
<td>Attends all RtI meetings. Meet with parents throughout the school year during parent/teacher conferences as well. Sometimes parents attend the RtI meetings, the option is there and they have the availability to come if they choose.</td>
<td>We don’t have a Reading specialist/coach anymore. We lost the funding. We have a curriculum coach so she does all content. She does lead our RtI meetings and does the paperwork.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Development is based on my needs so principal is very supportive to make sure we get that professional development.</td>
<td>Very involved. She knows the kids. She’s very supportive. Goes through the paperwork that we complete. It’s a group effort with her, CI and interventionists.</td>
<td>No Reading coach anymore. Curriculum Specialist work with principal in RtI meetings. She handles the paperwork. We turn our paperwork into her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>We have a variety. We have job embedded. During PLC’s. People come in from our technology based programs and train teachers during their planning. We have growth days. Teacher work days when students don’t have school.</td>
<td>She’s very supportive. She’s one of our main leaders of RtI. It’s me, our interventionist, classroom teachers. We invite parents as they can come. She’s very supportive. Our teachers are so trained to do everything they can for our kids that by the time RtI, they’ve pretty much got it.</td>
<td>I was hired the first year of Reading first but I focused on intermediate. I learned along with the reading first coach. I went to all the summer PD In this position it's all I know. We just continued all of those... We still have our centers around...</td>
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it's hard for everyone to come in during the summer. Lot of growth days we'll do or during planning time. I'll go in and do some kind of modeling of the lesson of what we've talked about. So things within their daily routine.

already been in RtI b/c they've been getting interventions. They've been getting interventions already. Having that explicit planning 3x a year. That came from RF. Looking at data and saying what do my kids need? Is it vision, hearing? Having the data boards. Then looking at data and saying if I do this then how is this gonna change and what do I need to do next? Those processes we had from RF allowed them to continue that even after it was over b/c our principal was so invested in RF ideas but doing everything you can for your kids.

those core ideas of reading first with phonics and vocabulary and fluency. Our centers are still set up that way and our teachers still do small group. that was never an option to not do those once the grant was over. we even had conversations do you think this is working and the teachers said yes. we can't hire a reading first coach we don't have the money. But we take all of the things that we learned and continue to use them. there might be a new teacher who wasn't here for that 6 years and I'll be able to show them resources we used because I had so much training all the way through. I try to continue to be there for them. Go into classrooms but not as much as reading first. give suggestions or information or anything they need help with. I lead explicit planning meeting that we use to help get our RTI started. in charge of interventionist and the interventions they're
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<th></th>
<th>We determine what areas we need to be focusing on. What areas we need to work on. Find areas your needing help with and feel the weakest in and look for PD in that department. PD is provided by the district. We do professional growth plans submitted online and anytime we feel there’s an area we’re struggling in we know of a PD we just email our principal and say I feel I need this training and it’s always granted. We’re very fortunate with PD.</th>
<th>Explicit planning she listens to my reasoning and I’ve never been told no. she listens to all your suggestions and the data you’ve collected. She’ll come in and observe. She’ll see if she sees the same things as me. I don’t typically tell her what I’m seeing and she will always come in anytime you ask her to come and observe a child or look at data. She’s very supportive with our kiddos. I can go to her and say “help me”. What else should I do with this kid right now? She’s good to come down and observe. Anytime that you just ask her, she’s always there and ready to give you any advice she can. She’s good to provide manipulatives and provides everything she can to help us in that area.</th>
<th>No Coach</th>
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<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>At the BOY we have a growth plan with our principal and decide areas we feel are our biggest areas in need of growth. She sits down individually with each teacher and goes over. We The principal pulls intervention groups. You have to be creative so we can continue services that they need. The leadership is important. Because if you’re not willing to do that, b/c it’s a scheduling nightmare to figure out how to do this, some</td>
<td>The CI pulls different groups and helps locate materials. Reading comprehension...not a lot of research based materials out there. She’ll help us find additional supplemental type</td>
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<td>discuss...do I feel like I improved? Have I moved from this area to this area? Am I making improvements? Do I want more PD? The district does it...pretty limited now. The principal will help us to identify different programs that we can use to address even if it’s an educational issue.</td>
<td>people give up their planning time to do this, to try to serve these kids. If we don’t have “buy in” and the buy in’s got to come from the top down. If you don’t have that then I can see where you won’t be successful now that funding isn’t here. There’s not a position in this school she would not be doing. You see her out on a mower. She’ll be mowing the lawn sometimes. It makes it easier when she asks us to do something b/c I know I have no problem doing something for her-she wouldn’t think twice about doing something like that. Nothing is above my job description. I’d be willing to do whatever it takes if it was the best interest of the child. She’ll do whatever it takes.</td>
<td>materials.</td>
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P6

Most of it is in the summer. District selected PD and then we have schoolwide PD our principal chooses. Little bit of freedom to choose something that we are interested in. District provides us with a list. Choice of several so it’s based on need. We can give suggestions. We also have Explicit planning 2x a year with the principal and CI so we can discuss any issues or concerns and we have her full attention that day. She’s available any time we have questions or concerns. She’s pretty good about providing things we need, as far as assistance, extra support for students. Same as principal. She’s available any time we have questions or concerns. We can always go to her for help. She works hard to make sure we get extra assistance. Both the principal and CI have provided interventions themselves and pull small groups as well.
They do a questionnaire thing to see what areas we would like to have more PD in or what we feel weaker in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repeated phrases, ideas, words</th>
<th>Variety-3x</th>
<th>Job embedded-3x</th>
<th>District provided-3x</th>
<th>Growth plans-4x</th>
<th>Principal supports/provides-5x</th>
<th>Very involved/supportive/does whatever it takes-6x</th>
<th>Provides advice/extra support-3x</th>
<th>Leads RtI-2x</th>
<th>Explicit planning meeting w/principal and CI-2x</th>
<th>No Reading Coach, but Curriculum Specialist.-5x</th>
<th>CI leads RtI process/same as principal-4x</th>
<th>Principal and CI provide interventions-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Reflection Q 12 & 13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A Interview themes</th>
<th>Doing Well...</th>
<th>Needs Improvement....</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Identifying each individual student’s needs and figuring out a way to meet them.</td>
<td>We need more support our state. Need more PD that is targeted to individual skills and improving skills for students. You’d be surprised at the college candidates...they don’t have a clue how to teach phonics. We need more training specifically “What is literacy?” What are the five components and how do you teach those? How are those embedded into daily instruction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>A lot of things. an uninterrupted block we did that during reading first. our success now reflects that we continue those same practices teachers that were here continue those same practices, the uninterrupted block the</td>
<td>I think writing content short answer responses</td>
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<td>length of the block of reading, the centers the small groups, very individualized.</td>
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<td>P3</td>
<td>I think our Focus on literacy that is important. huge population of students who don't know how to hold a book. kindergarteners come in holding it upside down. We have to make that up are on the same playing field. give the instruction of how you handle books and which way they go where do you start to read? 2 hour uninterrupted block dedication from the teachers To continue to work and do small groups and centers.</td>
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<td>Budget cuts. we only have half day preschool it's hurting you we don't have the funding. biggest struggle right now is getting them prepared to come to school. We live in a lower social economic area and so at times school is not the most important thing because putting food on the table is more important. constant reminder these are some things you could do before they come to school. we've worked with daycares to to help strengthen them or when they come to school.</td>
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<td>P4</td>
<td>Kept up the five components of reading first principal is very strict on that. she wants those addressed in your literacy centers. we have continued to do those activities. also if we see a child struggling we bring that to the front immediately. found a child really struggling it does help with literacy in our schools. continuing the five components really helps my class. we do ringing the literacy Bell. it's when a kindergartener or first grader can read their first book on grade level they go to the public library and ring the bell. it's a field trip that happens once every other month. things like that are a big incentive</td>
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<td>if we can get more interventions in the budget system. we don't get reading intervention like we did and reading first. if we just had that extra 20 minutes it would help a lot in kindergarten getting reading interventions would be the biggest thing for us. we have to provide our own to your to me and my assistant and it's hard to find that time. getting reading interventions back in kindergarten would make a world of difference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Addressing the needs of individual kids. Asking what</td>
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<td>Focusing too much on fluency! It’s important but its only one of the big 5!</td>
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</table>
does this child need? Who are the specific people who fell into this category? Trying to individualize instruction = more successful. We do a really good job with that. Being willing to do whatever it takes to get that person, not making excuses. Not saying there’s no money, or I’m the classroom teacher, I can’t do it by myself. Not using that as an excuse.

The other 4 are just as important. If I have a slow student but they comprehend then I don’t care if they read fast. I know it’s important but it’s not the end all be all. I think we need to research different types of programs. Funding is limited but maybe more training on how to address comprehension better. That was something RF did that was awesome! It broke down each component. You got specific training in those areas. Obviously made me a better teacher.

Really good about that uninterrupted block. 120 minutes. We make sure we get plenty of time for literacy. Emphasize the importance of that time. Really well with instruction as far as providing centers, small group, leveled instruction. Everybody participates in that.

Providing interventions. We’re concerned about next year and the budget. It’s difficult to provide interventions in the classroom. You’ve got 22 students and you’re trying to deliver regular instruction along with interventions. Being consistent with interventions is an area we can improve on.

Identifying each individual students’ needs - 4x
Uninterrupted block - 3x
Focus on literacy, small groups, centers 5x
Keeping 5 components from RF - 2x
Ringing the Literacy Bell - 1x

More support from the state with funding - 5x
PD - 2x
Providing interventions - 4x
Writing in content - 1x
Full day preschool - 1x

Comparing Reading First and RtI practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A Interview themes</th>
<th>Compare literacy practices now to literacy practices during RF</th>
<th>Compare RtI to before RF to after the grant ended</th>
<th>Participants Extra comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Stayed the same.</td>
<td>So much better. The grant helped us target and begin to realize that</td>
<td>I think many people heard RtI and thought it was an avenue to spec.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>you’ve got to meet individual needs. The grant helped us do that. Gave us a structure to put in place to help give teachers more time to spend with individual students and small group. Before it was more whole group. Thank God for RF. I wish we still had it. It helped improve our RtI.</td>
<td>Ed. It is documentation that can be looked at, gives you great info about how a student learns. Also gives info about where a student is at, where they still need to go. Not a ticket to spec. Ed. That’s so hard for people to understand. We intervene so much with kids that it’s not always a way into spec. Ed.</td>
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<td>P2</td>
<td>Very much the same. Teachers who were here then and now still do it the same way. It was ingrained in them that we do it a certain way. We knew it worked so we stayed with it. We have different program, different texts, but the teacher supports it in the same way.</td>
<td>It’s gotten a lot better. Definitely more detailed and we’re more comfortable with it. I think it’s a good thing. It’s just targeted on a kid and I think it’s gotten better. Teachers have gotten better with it.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Haven’t changed. Stayed the same and that’s due to the principal. Leading us, just believing in RF so much that she knows we need to continue this. This works good. This is where we’ve gotten to.</td>
<td>Before, RtI was just one of those words, catch phrase for a period, it was “When we do all that stuff with kids. We do interventions and try to document it.” It’s more than that though. It’s having those meetings and talking about the whole child. Talking about what needs do they have? Where can we meet</td>
<td>Our district has a lot of paperwork. It’s why we do explicit planning b/c it can be overwhelming for the teachers. Let’s go through the steps of the paperwork. Our district wants a lot of data. They don’t want it to be just a ticket in special ed. Usually for flat lines on data points is when we refer. We try</td>
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<td>P4</td>
<td>Going exactly the same. Do everything exactly the same. Keep</td>
<td>We have the same procedures in place. It’s the same thing. We</td>
<td>Our school is very focused on an uninterrupted literacy block.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>my centers going. I just don’t have the RF coach coming in to</td>
<td>had explicit planning meetings to where we got together and</td>
<td>Reading time in the morning should be totally uninterrupted.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>observe and give me feedback. That’s something I really miss.</td>
<td>dissected data and the principal went over it with us. That’s</td>
<td>there’s no phone calls unless it’s a dire emergency. That really</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If I’m not explaining something as well or she she saw a good</td>
<td>how we choose for RtI. The only difference now is the programs</td>
<td>helps our classes and not allow interruptions. Reading first</td>
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<td></td>
<td>activity, she’d tell. The RF coach made a world of difference.</td>
<td>because we have the same procedures in place.</td>
<td>was fabulous it gave us a lot of support. I wish we still had it.</td>
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<td>I keep my classroom running the very same way. The only thing</td>
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<td>I wish every school could have it because it was truly a</td>
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<td>that’s changed is not having the coach there.</td>
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<td>benefit to all of us and especially the rating first coach.</td>
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<td>She would come in and observe and give you feedback on what</td>
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<td>you could do a little differently or activities you could put</td>
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<td>in or take out. It was a great benefit it really was.</td>
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<td>P5</td>
<td>Other than not having the professional development that was</td>
<td>I don’t feel there was a specific process before we had RTI. I</td>
<td>Sometimes people want to do things but don’t know how or what</td>
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<td></td>
<td>available then or the extra stuff like materials or to</td>
<td>would get with the curriculum specialist and say I really think</td>
<td>to do. Reading first allowed us to see specifically how it can</td>
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<td></td>
<td>purchase through those funds the structure that reading first</td>
<td>this person might have a learning disability maybe we should</td>
<td>be addressed and help us find those materials. Still have same</td>
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<td></td>
<td>gave us and how we approach teaching reading to students is</td>
<td>have them referred for testing. I would address in my classroom</td>
<td>materials. That’s where I think we need some variety.</td>
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<td>but there was</td>
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<td>P6</td>
<td>We carried over a lot of practices. We still continue to do a lot. There was much more of a focus on primary and reading instruction and getting students prepared to read independently and go up more prepared. Now the focus has shifted to Upper grades and we are left to provide a lot of that for ourselves. when we had a reading first coach and funding we have plenty of interventions plenty of support so that's the thing we missed most. Carrying on instruction the way we did we do a pretty good job with that continuing those things that we use that were successful. we've added Kagan</td>
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<td>we followed the same process. We would analyze data and look at those individual students. We made data board so we could track progress and we still do stuff like that. the process has changed a bit in the way we do it . maybe there was a little more urgency with RTI when we were reading first because we had a coach, extra assistance that got things done quicker. It got done more in primary. It takes longer to progress through RTI now. it doesn't seem as quick as it used to be.</td>
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<td>We miss reading recovery that was something really beneficial to our school. It's really hard us losing that it made a big difference.</td>
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</table>

<p>| Repeated phrases, Practices have stayed the same-11x | Process is better now-4x | RtI is not a ticket to special ed. -3x |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ideas, words</th>
<th>Different programs-1x</th>
<th>Process is the same-3x</th>
<th>Uninterrupted block of reading-1x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No coach-3x</td>
<td>No process before RF-1x</td>
<td>Reading First was great!-2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss extra</td>
<td>Targeted instruction-2x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>materials/funding-2x</td>
<td>Structured-2x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss PD funds-1x</td>
<td>Individual needs-3x</td>
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<td>Track progress-1x</td>
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<td>Meeting on students-2x</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix F: School B Data and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School B Interview Participants</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years worked in School</th>
<th>Years Worked in current Role</th>
<th>Years in RF</th>
<th>Years in RtI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9 (2nd)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 (3rd)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7(intervention)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12 (K)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10 (1st) 2 as RF coach</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 (Principal) 3 (in a different school as a teacher)</td>
<td>24</td>
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**Average of Participants**

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<td></td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>14</td>
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### Tiers of Instruction—Q. 5 A-C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School B Interview themes</th>
<th>Length of Lit. Block</th>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>120 minutes Plus 30 additional minutes of writing.</td>
<td>Whole group. Intentional, higher-order thinking skills. Whole group we use Kagan strategies. Pair them up</td>
<td>Small group instruction. We use our running records, and all our assessments to form our groups. Groups are very intentional. Still do the 5 components inside those small groups. Following the same guide as RF. Groups</td>
<td>One-on-one is more intentional for that student. Individual goal, so we can raise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
strategically. We teach to our learning targets. No program. We create our own assessments. With common core, we dissected them all and are still changing our assessments-still learning. We just redid them. We understand the core targets even deeper now. Daily 5-more like Daily 3. Students read the whole time. Read to self, read to someone, and writing. are 20-25 minutes long daily. Special ed teacher pushes in but gen ed teacher takes the lower ones. Two teachers allow us to reach all the kids. We do Words their Way-phonics and phonemic awareness with spelling. No programs. Whatever the target is. Looking at exit slips I do one-on-one with those not getting it. Focusing on a different way to teach them the target. They set up goals for themselves. Pulled one-on-one. Many multi-facets.

| P2         | 100 minutes 10-15 minutes of whole group. | Whole group instruction. Lots of rotations. Very little whole group. No program b/c teachers teach to the program instead of the standards. We make common assessments in the summer after | Small groups. Grouped accordingly to ability. | Small groups are 40 minutes. Lessons differ. Special ed teacher comes in for extra time with her. Review Fridays allow for time to |
school PD’s to make them more rigorous. Structured into our daily lessons to help teach those standards. review standards from exit slip data one-on-one.

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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>120-30-45 minutes of whole group</td>
<td>Whole group, everybody gets it. Sacred time. Not to be interrupted. Schoolwide events are planned around it. Use data like common assessments, DRA, BRI, Additional support staff-interventionist, special ed., instructional assistant-you have 2 adults in the room. Smaller class size. LLI, Des Cartes from MAP. Early literacy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A third adult in the room and even smaller class size. Pull out and receive additional small group or one-on-one depending on the child’s needs. 30 minutes</td>
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</table>

<p>| P4 | 120 + 30 minutes writing. | Whole group lesson and regular centers. Based on standards. Imaginate is core program. Break it into smaller groups. Use more of our data to make the groups to determine what skills they need to work on. More individualized. 15 minutes. Imaginate but lots of supplemental resources. Based on standards and what they are missing. |
|   |   | Look at students not making progress. Meet one-on-one or in small group. ESS money to pull in extra interventionist for Tier 3. Individual for 5 minutes. Individualize |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Plan Details</th>
<th>Special Education Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>No program, it’s common core based. Use standards and we find materials. Follow the phonics continuum, good strategies for comprehension. All 5 components. Everybody gets Tier 1. In whole group I do read aloud time, vocabulary, and talk about words you don’t know. Reading first things were isolated. We’ve learned some things just go together over the years.</td>
<td>Small group. Flexibly grouped. Very differentiated. Leveled groups. Smaller and get pulled more often. 15 minutes daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Master schedule w/special ed. In order to reduce class size. Students are ability grouped for reading to</td>
<td>Smaller class size for smaller teacher to student ratio. Co-teaching format. Receive learning target intervention. Differentiated instruction. Low to high enrichment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall phrases, ideas, &amp; repeated words</td>
<td>120-5x 100-1x</td>
<td>Whole group-6x Learning targets/standards-5x Common assessments-4x No program-3x Daily 5/Centers/small group-3x Imaginate program-1x</td>
<td>Ability group/flexibly grouped-5x Small group-4x Differentiated/Individualized-3x Smaller class ratio-3x Spec. ed pushes in-3x Data based-2x Standards-2x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Process for RtI Q’s. 6-8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School B Interview Themes</th>
<th>Decision Making Process for RtI</th>
<th>Deciding Interventions</th>
<th>How Students are Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Assess different ways. DRA’s, fluency checks, Reading A to Z, Running Records, MAP. Based on common core and making assessments rigorous enough. Exit slips for those targets.</td>
<td>Special Ed teacher, Gen ed teacher. Those who work one-on-one with the kids. Sometimes we involve the kids in setting their own goals b/c we are a leader and me school. Flexibly grouped between classes.</td>
<td>No pull outs. Students are served in the classroom between special ed teacher and classroom teacher. Intentional one-on-one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Student data, MAP, common assessments, exit slips,</td>
<td>Don’t really follow a program, based on</td>
<td>All within 1 hour 40 minute block.</td>
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</table>
diagnostic information, running records. Common planning beginning, middle and end of year. “During lunch will sit and talk about kids that might need to be moved/shuffled.”

<p>| P3 | Common assessments, MAP testing, exit slips and Benchmark assessments. DRA’s. It’s data driven. Teacher opinion/recommendation. Adjust class size based on the needs of the students. Those that excel get a larger class than those who need more individualized get the smallest class size. Consideration for Special Ed students not automatically placed in the lowest class. If modifications needed we try to make it where we can service everybody equitably and consistently. | Based upon how the classroom teach sets up their classroom. We have a few systems that we have access to. Discuss with administrators - see if there’s something that might work and if they will pay for it. If there is a program out there that works we use it. If not, we may develop our own thing. Keep records to show if it’s working or not. | Meet with students 3 times per week. Do running records. Keep their words per minute and percentage of accuracy. Ask comprehensive questions. Students kept the data and graphed the data to see if they went up or down. Kids are in the classroom every day meet with the teacher. Meet with the Special Ed teacher. Extra intervention with as many as I could get. |
| P4 | It’s data driven. We make a spreadsheet that has how students do at the beginning of the year on MAP. Winter is common assessments and other data. Start from high to low and as many students that we can get intervention we do based on the most needs. | Classroom teacher looks at data and analyzing data to see where are the gaps. Is it phonics? Phonemics awareness? Comprehension? Fluency? Pinpoint what we need to work on. Pull resources for the interventionist. | Push in the only time a student leaves the room is for speech or OT. All other services are in the classroom. Never pull them from whole group lesson. Want them to get that standard. It would be during their small group. Ability group with Special Ed teacher in the classroom for low group. Special Ed teacher and interventionist are providing support in K. All of them have Regular Ed teacher. Instructional assistant part of the block. Lowest group has additional 3rd Special Ed teacher. Tier 3 lowest ability group is daily. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P5</th>
<th>Teacher and Special Ed teacher are in charge of who gets what or what they get or based on group need.</th>
<th>Looking at your data and the teacher decision Principal is there to bounce ideas off of but she can’t know all my kids in my room like we do.</th>
<th>Push in no pull out any more. Makes better use of our time more kids get serviced. Classroom teachers Special Ed teachers and instructional assistants. Teachers are in charge of making sure they understand what to do and how to do it. No program you have to know your kids you have to know your data.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>MAP scores, DRA’s, BRI, common assessment data, exit slip data. Move fluidly throughout the year.</td>
<td>The teachers do. “I am a big proponent of, you know, don’t make a kid do the program.” LLI, reading master materials, various other intervention programs. Look at where kids are deficient and that’s what they teach to.</td>
<td>We do more Push In than we do pulling out. Flexibility group the kids low, medium, and high. Low class has a low number of kids. They have the Special Ed teacher that goes with them and either instructional assistant or another certified teacher. Ratio 1:4 or 1:5. Middle group has an additional person, few more students than the</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
low group but not as many as in the high group. Another adult in that room to reduce the student to teacher ratio. High group is our proficient and distinguished kids with the regular teacher. Extra adults in the room choose some type of co-teaching format. Parallel teaching, station model, chunking model. Kids are in small groups or 1:1 within that block time they receive content or learning target instruction. They will also receive some type of learning target intervention depending on what group they are in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall repeated phrases, ideas, words</th>
<th>Who decides...</th>
<th>Small group or One-on-one-5x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who decides...</td>
<td>General ed teachers-6x</td>
<td>No pull out-4x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal-3x</td>
<td>Served in classroom/Push in-7x</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Spec. ed.-2x</td>
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<tr>
<td>How decided...</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Driven/Assessments (MAP, Common, DRA’s Fluency Checks)-10x</td>
<td>Meet w/spec. Ed &amp; gen. Ed.-5x</td>
<td>Interventions based on learning targets/grade level content-4x</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Move kids in and out/fluid-4x</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>See where kids are deficient-3x</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>One-on-one-1x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Involve kids in goal setting-1x</td>
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Support for teachers Q 9-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School B Interview themes</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Principal Support</th>
<th>Coach Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>District provides our PD. Look to see what we need from this course and different things and they provide what we need. They make an overview but we still pick what we want. They don’t just tell us what to do. They give us opportunities to choose things.</td>
<td>We made a 2nd grade team. Look at MAP data. We write those kids. We talk about how we are going to help them move based on red, yellow, and green. We look at all of our kids. She helps us group and if we have anything we have questions on or if we need anything, we just ask. Its a team effort. Everybody has a say. We all fight for the kids. What’s best for the kids. Good discussions. She and the Assistant Principal come Friday for Review Fridays. Kids not meeting standards are pulled. Sometimes they are doing DRAs or working on the target with aa group of kids. Very involved with the whole</td>
<td>No Coach anymore. No funding. Old coach knew a whole lot. Meet with us in meetings. She would learn new things. She’d come in and give us all these new ideas. Watch this video, try this new way of reading. She helped start the Daily 5. Observe us.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
school. Making sure that we are all meeting the needs. If we need them during the week even they’ll be there.

Tell us what they see and maybe another way we could implement something else. Another outside eye coming in not telling us what we’re doing wrong but what else we could do to help and what they see from the kids. Observations. We get observations all the time. People walking through all the time. So we get feedback, try this, this is what I saw. Never stop learning so they always make sure they give us great new stuff.

| P2 | Surveys on things we’re interested in learning more about. | Principal and assistant principal good to say what do you need this Friday? They’ll No Reading coach anymore. |
| **P3** | District looks at what the need is across our 3 elementary schools. Offer PD that matches what they feel we have a need…”well part of me thinks they don’t know ‘cause they’re not here. But then the other part of me knows they probably consult with the principals and they give input.” Offerings on where they see we need | Very vigilant making sure schedules in place. Master scheduling meeting to make sure those students receive Tier 2 and Tier 3 services the next school year. Representatives from all the grade levels. We put it all up on a big board to make sure the kids needs are met. She facilitates giving MAP. She’s always anxiously awaiting test results. She knows where the kids are. She will come in and offer suggestions on how to improve | No Coach. |

Different walkthroughs, district and principal will see areas of growth we could benefit from. Devise a plan. PD hours in the summer but some through the school year. We do have a say, but a lot is based on data from walkthroughs. Rarely go outside the district for PD.

come in and teach a group or pull students individually. Confer with students as well. We tell them what standard that student’s showing deficiency in and they’ll plan lessons. Very hands on. They’re in our classrooms probably once a week. Mainly they observe, but on Friday’s they offer their services for sure. They look at Mastery Connect-database for online exit slips to our common assessments. Break each question down by standards. Able to see at a glance what kid is missing which standard. Team meetings on Wednesdays centers around data driven discussions with our students.
growth. Sometimes they don’t pertain to you and other times it’s great. We departmentalize.

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<th>or trends she sees occurring. Walkthroughs, if she sees something she’ll tell you or a make a suggestion. Proof positive forms after common assessments -allows you to look at a whole and individually at kids and how they performed. Meeting goals? Why did they or why didn’t they? Very involved.</th>
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<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Fill out a survey. In RF we had reading PD. Teachers fill out a survey to talk about what they want. Look for the most needs and then sign up for what we want. Varies year to year based on assessments, test results show how we’re doing in reading or math so it determines what we’re going to do. District provides it. Small group of teachers pulled from every school and we wrote our own reading book about best practice in the classroom and we shared during 5 days of PD.</td>
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<td>Review Fridays the principal or assistant principal come in to work with a small group on skills they didn’t master. We tell her what to do, what skill we worked on that they are lacking. She’ll use a resource or goes and finds her own based on the standards. It’s nice. She’s always willing to find the money to provide things we need. Like intervention program-Imaginate it! She found the money. She’s always willing to help in any way she can.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No Coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Lot of Summer PD. District decides or principal decides. Faculty meetings we might pull in little pieces. Weekly meetings w/principal &amp; that’s PD based, data based. Looking at data and kids who are moving. Naming and claiming kids. Summer when we get our big hours but district provides. We don’t get to go anywhere anymore or bring a lot of people here. More in house people/teachers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Very district driven. Systematic literacy instruction 2 years ago. 5 days of just reading instruction over the 5</td>
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areas of reading. Teachers, admins, principals, assistant principals, reading interventionists from across the district all planned that PD. Most PD is team meetings, staff meetings, discussing student data, sharing ideas, sharing strategies, no trainings we send people to.

to help with intervention on Fridays. Our kids don’t get a lot of support at home so we don’t want to send them home on Friday not having mastered their targets. Use data from Monday-Thursday to regroup kids on Fridays. Extra person comes in they give them a group and something to do with them. Biggest way I can support them by giving extra people and materials they need.

Overall repeated phrases, ideas, words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District provided-6x</th>
<th>Providing extra materials/people-6x</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on areas of growth/need-5x</td>
<td>Review Fridays/teaching a group-5x</td>
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<tr>
<td>PD in Summer-4x</td>
<td>Very involved-5x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t go outside district-4x</td>
<td>Data driven discussions-5x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices provided-4x</td>
<td>Good discussions/suggestions-5x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on teacher surveys-3x</td>
<td>Walkthroughs/observations-3x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on data/walkthroughs-2x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal influenced/provided-2x</td>
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No Coach Anymore due to funding

Past RF coach was very supportive

Started Daily 5

Provided PD Observations with feedback

Reflection Q 12 & 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School B Interview themes</th>
<th>Doing Well...</th>
<th>Needs Improvement....</th>
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<td>P1</td>
<td>Enough time in literacy block. Some don’t have as much as we do. Making sure there’s time for the kids to read. We know how to assess really well and what to do with it after. What to do with kids who aren’t getting it. Review Friday, excellent opportunity to make sure kids get what they need. Flashbacks, reviewing process, continuously seeing this cycle going back around.</td>
<td>Vocabulary. I’m just starting to realize I’m asking the right question in GR. Coaching the younger teachers to get them to ask the right questions. Learning how to ask questions, higher order questions that get kids to think.</td>
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<td>P2</td>
<td>Really good at tracking data. Very intentional data driven school. It’s what drives our instruction, what drives our RtI &amp; PD. It is what leads it all.</td>
<td>Literacy block was longer last year. Our writing and reading block are different. We don’t make the connection between the two.</td>
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<td>P3</td>
<td>“For a kid not to be successful in literacy, it has to be something that we just don’t have the resources for. We don’t give up on a kid. We try everything we can think of.” Ask for input. Work well as a team. If I can’t figure it out who can I ask? What can we do next? That worked for you? We’ll share that with everybody. We’re doing everything possible to get kids where they need to be. Very good at sharing out and trying different things. It’s one of our strengths.</td>
<td>If there’s something we can do as a school to convey reading is fun. So it’s not such a work thing all the time. I really want the students to see reading as a “get to” thing not a “have to” thing.</td>
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<td>P4</td>
<td>The time we dedicate to reading. Since RF we’ve done a really great job not interrupting core time. Still hold true to that. Still</td>
<td>It’d be nice to have a full time interventionist. Continue training new teachers. Our district does a teacher academy and KTIP but it’s</td>
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<td>focus on 5 components, probably not as much vocab but we keep those 5 going strong (phonics, pa, comp, vocab and fluency.)</td>
<td>the resource teacher’s responsibility to teach them things like the Big 5 that come up in conversation, not as much the schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Spend a long time in literacy. Still holding that over. Still doing our five components. Not doing so isolated anymore. More meshed together. I think our interventions are good. Our ways of push in is better than pull out. Special ed teacher is as involved with a whole room of kids that is the teacher vs in the past she’d just know 7 or 8. Good job working with intervention in struggling kids.</td>
<td>Extending with kids we are struggling. We worry most about the kids who can’t read. How do I make the strategies harder? We focus on the other end more than the top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Co-teaching and intervention. Data shows year after year novice kids and move them up to at least apprentice if not proficient. Very conscientious protecting read to self time. Went to Daily 5 training and have varying degrees of it in the building. For our kids to improve in reading, we have to have that uninterrupted reading time. It’s really helped us. I think teachers here are very conscientious with their kids. Years of experience and PD trainings make the teachers know their content well and grade level standards well so they’re able to meet kids at their point of need and move forward.</td>
<td>Enrichment. Data shows we have a lot of kids who will score distinguished at the BOY. I think my teachers need more training or ideas and resources for pushing those kids forward.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**Comparing Reading First and RtI practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School B Interview themes</th>
<th>Compare literacy practices now to literacy practices during RF</th>
<th>Compare RtI to before RF to after the grant ended</th>
<th>Participants Extra comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Tons of knowledge. RF gave a whole foundation of knowledge for kids and teachers. Taught us the basics. Taught us what was needed for the kids to have a foundation to grow. We realized later Dibles and fluency needed to do differently. That wasn’t meaningful. We’ve taken it and grown into a meaningful practice. Before w/RF there were so many stations and focuses. They weren’t getting enough reading time then. Taken that and learned how to take stations and put it inside our teaching in</td>
<td>Feel like it’s the same. Intentional. No coach and we don’t have people being pulled out for intervention. Now happening in the classrooms. We find resources we need. If they need a program we get it. We can still pull if it’s needed but now we are wiser of what this one needs or if this one needs small group. We’re not just doing programs. We know what to do with our kids. We look intentionally what is it</td>
<td>I’m glad we had RF. I learned so much from RF that I had no idea (what I didn’t know). College didn’t prepare me. Helped make a base and our school is founded off those foundations &amp; it’s still here. We’ve made them(the practices) better for our school. We’ve evolved from there to</td>
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<td>small groups and one-on-one. They have more time to read. More enjoyable time of reading and conferencing.</td>
<td>they need? What are they missing? Plugging them into places they need.</td>
<td>making it what we need. Our teachers have grown from that as well.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>We have great leadership here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Station workshop model. We have a lot going on at the same time. We are very little whole group instruction. We do so to introduce our target. To provide a hook for our lesson. Majority is in those small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>What I experienced w/RF we have kept some things that have been successful. Flexibly grouping our students we didn’t do then that we do now. We can pool our resources. Kid struggling they’re going to be in a class where resources are flooding. As opposed to having kids learning their letters to some reading chapter books. Less diversity in the class now.</td>
<td>We only looked at GRADE and DIBLES to give interventions when we had RF. We still use hard data, but we use classroom performance, teacher recommendation. True sense of the whole kid, rather than one moment in time. Looking at a kid who performed high on MAP but classroom</td>
<td>While we had RF we had 2 principals and 3 different reading coaches. It was probably effective, we did a good job with it, but that probably impacted it one way or another. Every principal comes in has a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Getting people together so we can make sure they’re all getting the benefit of resources. Opposed to a special ed teacher in one room for 20 minutes. She can be in one for an hour and pour into some of those students who need it. We didn’t have that in RF. Having mini-lessons and GR, we’ve kept those structures.

performance doesn’t match. What’s the outlier? Feel like RF focused more on just assessments vs. whole performance of the child.

new way of doing things. Not better or worse, just new. RtI practices are pretty streamlined now. We’ve done really well with that. Students are doing well b/c we take that time to set forth a schedule that we do our best to make everybody benefit.

P4 We’ve just continued to grow. Taken the training we had and continue to be more intentional about instruction. We spend even more time analyzing data. Nice in RF days b/c we were given the PD days to do that. Now it’s on our own. We’ve learned how to do that so we can do it on our own. We do some during team meetings with your specific grade level or after school with your team. Where we share kids, we want to make sure we are on the same page. I feel like I’ve grown more in understanding, but it’s just with experience.

We’ve better ways to record data. Experience, trial and error, but I think we do a better job of keeping data and recording data on intervention documents. Nice to have one spot where everybody can go and add to that form. In the past, it was all classroom teacher. I did it all. Now special ed teacher can add her part. Interventionist can add her part. So there’s a whole picture. Mastery Connect too shows NA
what standards they are either mastering or which ones they need to work on. It was time consuming but now I don’t think about it. Nice b/c every standard for your grade level is there and color coded red, yellow, green. Quick picture you can use that info to plan interventions. Review Fridays have helped with constant review of skills. We keep moving kids forward if they’ve mastered skills. Look at what standard came before that. Why are they not getting it? Underpinning I’m missing? Will this skill make it easier? Use a lot of data. No new content of Fridays.

We know to spend more time in reading. Before RF we didn’t do testing. We’ve kept our tiers. Kept the 5 components. Kept leveled readers. We had GR levels. We had reading recovery. The structure has changed

It’s different but still the same. Still based on data. Whatever data we’re collecting now. Whatever our test is. We sat down as a group before with whole team, principal, I think we’ve been able to continue. It looks different and sounds different but the meat of what the kids get is as good or
but the “meat” has stayed the same since RF. We pulled out of Math, Reading, science, ss, writing b/c we didn’t know how else to do it. You couldn’t pull out of the 2 hour block. But the kids missed other content. The push in has been better for that. Math suffered. All push in now. I think its for the better. It’s probably the biggest difference.

interventionist, coach. We do the same thing now. We used to get subs for that but not anymore. We’re doing it during team meetings, on our own mainly. We’re more responsible on our own now. We’re expected to. No babysitting us. More natural now. We learned to do it. We learned why we did it, learned the right ways, & we’ve just carried that over. It’s a good thing. I don’t know any different. New teachers say it’s really different, they say it’s more organized. I know who I’m getting, what I’m doing. We had 6 years of structure. We were kinda happy to let it go, but we miss the money and extra positions. We carried over what we knew. No more coach to turn in this and do this book study. We just took all that.

better instruction. We learned about explicit teaching, sometimes you have to be told.
| P6 | Remember RF being very program based. Tier 2 = this program and this person. Tier 3 = reading recovery. We’re very different in the sense that we really don’t pull kids out. Really in the regular classroom with special ed staff unless IEP says they get resourced. We’ve kept the data boards from RF. Just really paying attention to what the kids data is telling and that whole progress monitoring. RF caused teachers to become more data driven & we’ve kept that. Moved away from programs towards pulling what is needed from a plethora of materials that will meet the needs of that small group of kids. | Special ed teachers were the ones figuring out when kids were going to be pulled. Our school, 80% F & R and at the BOY we give MAP, more of our kids are below grade level than on. If we went by strict Tier 2 and Tier 3 guidelines and pulled kids out, there’s not enough people in the building to do it. So really necessitated the whole pushing in. It works for us. We do a good job of using the resources we have. Truth be told we don’t talk about tiers. When we meet, teachers bring their data & we will specifically talk about reading. Talk about students who are doing well and they inform me of students who are moved in and out. Based on performances. Kids move where they need to be moved. If they’re not moving, they might be referred. |
Teachers will say “here’s all the things we tried” They’ll complete the referral process and we have to have 6 weeks of data to show progressing or what intervention were tried. I always tell them, if they place, are you gonna do anything different for them. So I think our instructional practices are pretty solid. If referred, may help with accommodations like extended time, scribe, something to show a little bit more what cognitively they know.

| Overall repeater phrases, ideas, words | Trainings provided knowledge/foundation-6x Push in(now) vs. Pull out(then)-3x Less rigid now w/program requirements-5x Guided reading/mini-lessons-2x Began data driven and has evolved-6x | Teachers feel confident in knowing what to do/collaborative decisions-7x Better at providing interventions-6x Same/Intentional data driven-4x Don’t pull out for intervention-2x Not dependent on programs-1x | Continued basic foundations of RF-2x Leadership changed-1x Glad for RF-1x RtI is streamlined-1x Learned explicit teaching-1x |
## Appendix G: School C Data and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School C Interview Participants</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years worked in School</th>
<th>Years Worked in current Role</th>
<th>Years in RF</th>
<th>Years in RtI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10 (3rd)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12 (K)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3 (2nd)</td>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5 (Sp.Ed)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3 (14 total)</td>
<td>3 (Principal)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Averages of Participants</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tiers of Instruction-Q. 5 A-C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School C Interview themes</th>
<th>Length of Lit. Block</th>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| P1                        | 120 min. 40-45 in whole | Whole class group instruction based upon standards  
Engage New York, Storyworks Jr. & Houghto Mifflin | Sm. group, Center time, Daily 5  
Work w/me for 30 min.  
Specialized/individualized instruction  
Extra Pullout 1X a wk 30 min.  
Project Read-30 min in the morning |
| P2                        | 75 min-20-25 in whole | Whole group, similar to RF & Daily 5.  
Project Read, rug time, focus on high frequency words, vocab, | Sm group, intervention strategies, different activities based on what the students are | No program, just based on what that child needs.  
Pulled individually by teacher, by assistant, and by a volunteer.  
Individualized instruction. May repeat a lesson. |
<p>| P3 | 90-30-40 min. whole | Whole group and 2nd gr. Content Engage New York &amp; Houghton Mifflin, but teacher created curriculum based on standards | Struggling students 4-5 and work on specific content. 30 min. No program. Individual students based on whatever they are falling behind in, gathering data to help them succeed. 30 min. During computer time. |
| P5 | High Yield Instructional practices, all students get the same level of instruction. | 2 retired teachers, librarian, intervention clubs if students are 2 grade levels below go | One-on-one during computer labs. Researched based instruction. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall repeated phrases, ideas, and words</th>
<th>Engage New York, Kegan. Co-teaching to close the gaps w/special ed.</th>
<th>on Fridays. Four solid days of intervention.</th>
<th>Outside of block-4x One-on-one-3x Individualized instruction-3x No programs-2x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>75-120 minutes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Whole group instruction-4x Standards based-3x Specific programs… Engage New York-4x Project Read-2x Houghton Mifflin-2x</strong></td>
<td><strong>Small group-4x Intervention strategies are specific to individual-3x</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Process for RtI Q’s. 6-8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>School C Interview Themes</em></th>
<th><em>Decision Making Process for RtI</em></th>
<th><em>Deciding Interventions</em></th>
<th><em>How Students are Served</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Fluency Checks, Comprehension Checks, Spelling Inventory &amp; Listening</td>
<td>2 grades below=Tier 3 1 grade below=Tier 2 RtI Committee is RtA teacher, special ed, principal &amp; teachers 1x a month. We only look at these students for Spec. ed after they have gone through the 3 tiers</td>
<td>Literacy Block for Tier 1 &amp; 2 Tier 3 is pull out &amp; spec. Ed teacher pushes in to provide tier 3 along with retired teacher pulling out 1 day a week. Man power is little so we provide the tiers. The special ed teacher will do some tier 3. Intervention 1x a week w/retired teacher. We service all tiers within the classroom b/c we’re not guaranteed that we’re...</td>
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<td><strong>P2</strong></td>
<td>Map (3x a year) and Benchmark scores. K uses the Brigance. Daily informative assessments. Reflect on my lesson plans daily so I can change my instruction for the next day.</td>
<td>Bring lesson plans to PLC once a week as a grade level and with instructional assistants and principal to discuss what each child needs help with.</td>
<td>Pullouts are outside the literacy block Tier 2 is in the literacy block plus outside pullouts with retired teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P3</strong></td>
<td>Exit Criteria for each grade level. Every 9 weeks, extra intervention if students are not getting the content. What are they struggling with? Data like MAP, benchmark assessments, standards, like what’s coming up next week? We use our data to prove it. Data is in the conference room with spreadsheets we fill out every PLC meeting.</td>
<td>PLC once a week with the principal. Who’s falling behind, who do we still need to look at? Weekly looking at data on every child in our class with excel sheet.</td>
<td>Individual students pulled out during lab time, 2x a day for 30 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P4</strong></td>
<td>RtI team, spec. Ed teacher, principal, Reg ed teacher, RtA teacher. Based on fluency checks, benchmark, Map, Exit Criteria every 9 weeks.Project Read, Achieve are used and</td>
<td>Student intervention logs-All students in intervention have a log. Look to see their progress and data behind it and if they need to move. The team looks to make sure we aren't’</td>
<td>Pull out during computer time. Breakfast club four mornings a week. Friday clubs are time for intervention as well. Breakfast clubs are Project Read and its for phonics b/c we noticed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading A to Z.</td>
<td>moving kids for no reason. We follow the RtI process. It’s not just a road to special ed.</td>
<td>a lot of students missed phonics. Friday clubs are meant to do fun activities but learn missing skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>12 data points in each tier. Usually 6 weeks, but can last longer. PLC’s every week. Data room, data wall. Summative, formative assessments</td>
<td>The teachers decide. Collaboratively who is two grade below, who is one grade level below, who is struggling with a particular standard. We use triangulation-classroom data, MAP and learning continuum. Target students below 50th percentile. Benchmark data as well. All those pieces of the puzzle, look for discrepancies, patterns, trends and base our decision on that.</td>
<td>Students are pulled during computer time and Friday clubs that are not during core content time. Two retired teachers pull out, our librarian provides intervention. Our certified teachers on Friday clubs. Our classroom teachers do a great job providing intervention within the classroom. We utilize Achieve 3000, Read Theory, I-Excel, different programs to help provide placement and individual instruction as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated phrases, ideas, words</td>
<td>Assessments/Data-driven-5x Principal, teachers, special ed, RtA teacher make decisions-4x Look at progress weekly-2x Not just a road to special ed.-2x 2 grades below=Tier 3-2x 1 grade below=Tier 2-2x Use of Exit Criteria-2x PLC-2x RtI team-1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pull out for Tier 3 outside of core-5x Breakfast Club-3x Serviced by classroom teacher-3x Friday reviews-2x Special ed pushes in-1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for teachers Q 9-11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **School C**  
**Interview Themes** | **Professional Development** | **Principal Support** | **Coach Support** |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| **P1**                 | Whole school PLC 1x a month. Flexible PD if we find something we want to go to. KDE, teachers go to PD and come back and share what they learned. | “With us every step of the way”  
“She’s always there, ready, willing, and able to help us with anything we need.” Instrumental in getting the retired teacher to come in and do interventions.  
“She’s on the edge of things” She looks into programs/research to find what we need or what works.  
She leads RtI. Teachers needing help with tier 1 and 2 can come and get support. Teacher help one another out. | No Coach anymore. No funding. We have a Reading Recovery teacher on a grant for three years with intense interventions. |
| **P2**                 | School surveys to ask what we want. School wide PLC’s 1x a month. District does vertical team meetings once a quarter, so 4x a year. Whatever we need. I went to Handwriting Without Tears training. | She’s very supportive! She gives input on what she thinks the kids need, but she leaves it up to us. She helped provide extra intervention with retired teachers. She makes sure our schedules provide us time to do things during different times of the day, other than in class. | No Reading coach anymore. |
| **P3**                 | We have PLC’s 1x a month. Grade level PLC every week where we talk with the | She’s supports us by letting us choose whatever we think is best for kids. We do | No Coach. |
### P4
Monthly whole school PLC’s. We have surveys to decide what kind of pd we need at the school. Vertical team meetings 3x a year in the district.

If I need anything with pd, the principal will figure out a way to get it for me. She’s very accommodating in trying to find ways to help us. She’s a part of the RtI team and has helped us set criteria to move kids within the tiers. She’s helped inform teachers what the tiers should look like so that way we are doing them with fidelity and not getting so many students referred for special ed before actually going through the tiers. She’s always right there in the mix of things. She’s always there to help you do anything that those kids need you do to.

No Coach

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### P5
We have a PD committee. A teacher leader is the chair. We survey the teachers a the BOY to see what needs there are. RtI was among those. They identify what their biggest needs are individually and as a

RtI has been an evolving process. RtI wasn’t very systematic when I came here. Data wasn’t being used or looked at to make sound decisions. We did a lot of training on knowing where your kids are. Black and

No coach
It’s on me to provide those opportunities to grow based on their needs. Groups are planned each month based on the survey. Regrouped in Dec. Our staff likes internal and external support for PD. It’s a mix from teacher leaders within the building to support from KDE. However we can best meet the professional learning opportunity.

white, you have to know where your kids are going. We worked with an effectiveness coach from KDE and provided one-on-one training with teachers around student growth goals and data collection. Utilized different graphing mechanisms to ensure parallelism between what we’re saying our students are scoring to how they’re performing in universal screenings, state assessments, our own benchmark assessment. Just ensuring that congruency that language, that standards are being taught with fidelity. Individual students, breaking down their needs. Coupling students w/the appropriate small group or one-on-one.

Overall repeated phrases, ideas, words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole School PLC</th>
<th>Very Supportive/Always there for us</th>
<th>No Coach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1x a month-5x</td>
<td>Leads RtI-5x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School surveys-3x</td>
<td>Helps get resources-4x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible/What we want-3x</td>
<td>Inform teachers what tiers look like-4x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KDE-2x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vertical teams-2x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade level PLC-1x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>On principal to provide-1x</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Reflection Q 12 & 13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School C Interview themes</th>
<th>Doing Well...</th>
<th>Needs Improvement....</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Identifying students and their needs Providing them w/interventions that allow them to become successful. Analyze data-benchmark, MAP, fluency. Exit Criteria=sight words, fluency, test scores. Points help us recommend promotion or retention.</td>
<td>More resources. Not enough funding. Wish we could have intervention teacher but that’s beyond our control. We have to supplement our curriculum so more resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Phonics. We struggled with that for awhile. We had a lot of new teachers come in and they struggled with it. Project Read for phonics.</td>
<td>Fluency. Trying to figure out what’s expected. Fluency is always on the table at our primary meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Different programs, Engaged, Houghton Mifflin. We do what’s best for our students. Each individual classroom and for individual students. The principal is very supportive of that. Whatever we think is best.</td>
<td>Writing. Incorporating writing. Writing responses and being descriptive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Project Read (phonics). Implemented full in K/1. 2nd uses as intervention. Noticed growth in our K/1 compared to our 2nd who didn’t have it in 1st. Implemented it w/fidelity. We’re extending to 3rd w/linguistics next year. It focuses on writing. We are good at being flexible.</td>
<td>Still figuring out what’s best for students. Not everyone does Engage b/c they feel it’s not good for their students so they are doing their own assessments and guided reading activities. Maybe finding something that works so we can do it every year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Project based learning. Passion projects. We try to incorporate</td>
<td>½ day K. No Project Read. We had to implement Project Read in K-2 and 3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
student interests. Mix fiction and non-fiction. Different strategies to help students be successful. Project Read has been very beneficial for helping with phonics. Daily five, just that small group instruction. Differentiation with literacy and homework. Book clubs.

| Overall repeated phrases, ideas, and words | Project Read/Phonics-4x Providing interventions/strategies for students-4x Flexible-1x Identifying students-1x | Fluency-2x Phonics-1x Writing-1x Figuring out what works for everyone-1x Not enough funding-1x |

### Comparing Reading First and RtI practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School C Interview themes</th>
<th>Compare literacy practices now to literacy practices during RF</th>
<th>Compare RtI to before RF to after the grant ended</th>
<th>Participants Extra comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Dedicated 90 minute block. Knowing time needs to be dedicated to reading. Knowing those strategies to teach kids to use. RF made you aware of things. It's not all about Tier 1. Individually work on areas. They've gotten better. Took what was learned in RF and incorporated it into everything. Children show growth every year, so I feel successful. Some start a lot lower so you</td>
<td>RtI went to the wayside for awhile. We didn’t do it with fidelity. There was a misunderstanding about what RtI was about. The past 3 years (since new principal) very good handle on RtI and different tiers. Expectations for tier 1. Expectations for tier 2. Expectations for tier 3. Helped teachers and ultimately the kids. It’s a beast! Very complex.</td>
<td>Our structure is very organized. Every teacher in this building has a focus. We have a support system that allows us to be successful with the RtI committee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
can’t compare each child to each other. That’s one big take away. Look at them individually.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>P2</strong></td>
<td><strong>P3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy practice is a little more flexible now. Still cover all 5 areas of reading. Common knowledge you have phonics, pa, fluency... More flexible in how we cover it RF was very structured and strict how you did it and if you did it right. More say in how we teach now.</td>
<td>Knew what to expect when it was RF. Every teacher was doing the same thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still did group time, but didn’t really know what we were doing. Thrown to the wolves. More group based now. More individualized now. RF helped us get into that mode, especially with groups. Evolved from there, gone to individualized instruction.</td>
<td>We had a different principal-we didn’t do a whole lot of RtI. A change in leadership has really improved this school, not only through RtI. Reading has improved. I’d like to go back to RF just so you’d know what to expect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P4</strong></td>
<td><strong>NA</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We are still trying to figure it out. Finding what works best.. Teachers make the switch to find what works for their students. So students went from not much engagement to fully engaged and not liking reading to being fully engaged in reading. We’re good at</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
P5 | NA | We’ve had 3 principals and 3 superintendents since RF was in this building. First year was a productive struggle. 2nd year was, what’s missing, let’s problem solve. 3rd year is we’ve found the solution. Let’s move forward. Don’t think it’s as much the turnover as let’s follow the curriculum the district has established.

We’re meticulous in RtI. Every student in this building has an individualized plan based on their needs, interests, growth areas, and strengths. Past the point of just having a great RtI structural system to a cultural piece of knowing every student. Knowing them as a person, and embracing that and ensuring those opportunities happen on a daily basis. Anyone may get small group or one-on-one based on their needs and growth areas.

Overall repeated phrases, ideas, words | More flexible now-2x Kept 5 components-2x Very Structured-1x Knew what to expect with RF-1x 90 minute block-1x | Different principals impacted RtI-3x Didn’t do RtI with fidelity or understand it-3x Small group/individualized instruction-1x | Organized/meticulous with RtI-2x Know what works for students-2x Successful with RtI-2x Flexible-1x
## Appendix H: Cross Analysis Interview Data and Themes

### Tiers of Instruction - Q. 5 A-C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Lit. Block</th>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School A</strong>&lt;br&gt;K-2= 120 min.-4x 3-5=90 minutes</td>
<td>Core Program/Reading Wonders-4x Guided Reading-3x Same instruction for everyone/Whole group-7x Kagan</td>
<td>Lexia Program-2x Great Leaps-1x Sing, Spell, Read, Write-1x 30 min. Pull out-3x 15 min groups w/assistant Individual instruction-5x Small group-2x</td>
<td>SRA/Reading Plus-3x Extra Lexia-2x Targeted for RtI/Special Ed.-3x Pull out one-on-one-2x Daily-4x Pulled before bell AmeriCorps &amp; ESS Sub May get 90 min total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School B</strong>&lt;br&gt;120-5x 100-1x</td>
<td>Whole group-6x Learning targets/standards-5x Common assessments-4x No program-3x Daily 5/Centers/small group-3x Imaginate program-1x Kagan</td>
<td>Ability group/flexibly grouped-5x Small group-4x Differentiated/Individualized-3x Smaller class ratio-3x Spec. ed pushes in-3x Data based-2x Standards-2x 15-25 min daily LLI</td>
<td>One-on-one-7x Small group-4x Individualized to child’s needs-3x Only Push in-20-30 min-2x 30min. assistant, volunteer, teacher Review Fridays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School C</strong>&lt;br&gt;75-120 minutes</td>
<td>Whole group instruction-4x Standards based-3x Specific</td>
<td>Small group-4x Intervention strategies are specific to individual-3x 30 min. daily-by teacher Daily 5-10-20 min rotations</td>
<td>One-on-one-3x Individualized instruction-3x No programs-2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Decision Making Process for RtI</td>
<td>Deciding Interventions</td>
<td>How Students are Served</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Use Assessments-10x Meet with principal-7x Student in-class performance/needs-7x Work as a team-7x Explicit planning-6x Use progress monitoring data-6x Target below 25th%ile/struggling students-6x Look at whole child-6x Teacher opinion/observations-4x Determine which students are struggling-4x Fluid/all year process-Not just a road to special ed.</td>
<td>Pull out-8x Not during Core-4x Small group classroom-5x One-on-one-1x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Who decides... General ed teachers-6x Principal-3x Spec. ed.-2x</td>
<td>Small group or One-on-one-5x No pull out-4x Served in classroom/Push in-7x Meet w/spec. Ed &amp; gen. Ed.-5x Interventions based on learning targets/grade level content-4x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>Assessments/Data-driven-5x Principal, teachers, special ed, RtA teacher make decisions-4x Look at progress weekly-2x Not just a road to special ed.-2x 2 grades below=Tier 3-2x 1 grade below=Tier 2-2x Use of Exit Criteria-2x PLC-2x RtI team-1x</td>
<td>Pull out for Tier 3 outside of core-5x Breakfast Club-3x Serviced by classroom teacher-3x Friday reviews-2x Special ed pushes in-1x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Support for teachers Q 9-11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A Interview themes</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Principal Support</th>
<th>Coach Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Variety-3x</td>
<td>Very involved/supportive/does whatever it takes-6x Provides advice/extra support-3x Leads RtI-2xExplicit planning meeting w/principal and CI-2x</td>
<td>No Reading Coach, but Curriculum Specialist.-5x CI leads RtI process/same as principal-4x Principal and CI provide interventions-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job embedded-3x</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District provided-3x</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growth plans-4x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal supports/provides-5x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>District provided-6x</td>
<td>Providing extra materials/people-6x Review Fridays/teaching a group-5x Very involved-5x Data driven discussions-5x Good discussions/suggestions-5x Walkthroughs/observations-3x</td>
<td>No Coach Anymore due to funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on areas of growth/need-5x PD in Summer-4x Don’t go outside district-4x Choices provided-4x Based on teacher surveys-3x Based on</td>
<td></td>
<td>Past RF coach was very supportive Started Daily 5 Provided PD Observations with feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data/walkthroughs-2x</th>
<th>Principal influenced/provided-2x</th>
<th>Whole School PLC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1x a month-5x</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School surveys-3x</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Flexible/What we</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>want-3x</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KDE-2x</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vertical teams-2x</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grade level PLC-1x</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On principal to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>provide-1x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Reflection Q 12 & 13 |
|----------------------|------------------|
| **Doing Well...**     | **Needs Improvement...** |

**School A**
- Identifying each individual students’ needs-4x
- Uninterrupted block-3x
- Focus on literacy, small groups, centers 5x
- Keeping 5 components from RF-2x
- Ringing the Literacy Bell-1x

**School B**
- Reading block/dedicated reading time-7x
- Assessments/data-4x
- Really good at providing interventions-4x
- Willingness to try everything/give everything to kids-3x
- Continued Big 5 (PA, phonics, vocab, comp. & fluency)-2x
- Co-teaching/push in-2x

**School C**
- Very Supportive/Always there for us-5x
- Helps get resources-4x
- Leads RtI-5x
- Inform teachers what tiers look like-4x

**No Coach**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Project Read/Phonics-4x</th>
<th>Fluency-2x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Providing interventions/strategies for students-4x</td>
<td>Phonics-1x</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible-1x</td>
<td>Writing-1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying students-1x</td>
<td>Figuring out what works for everyone-1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not enough funding-1x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparing Reading First and RtI practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Compare literacy practices now to literacy practices during RF</th>
<th>Compare RtI to before RF to after the grant ended</th>
<th>Participants Extra comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Practices have stayed the same-11x</td>
<td>Process is better now-4x</td>
<td>RtI is not a ticket to special ed. -3x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different programs-1x</td>
<td>Process is the same-3x</td>
<td>Uninterrupted block of reading-1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No coach-3x</td>
<td>No process before RF-1x</td>
<td>Reading First was great!-2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss extra materials/funding-2x</td>
<td>Targeted instruction-2x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss PD funds-1x</td>
<td>Structured-2x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual needs-3x</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Track progress-1x</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Meeting on students-2x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Trainings provided knowledge/foundation-6x</td>
<td>Teachers feel confident in knowing what to do/collaborative decisions-7x</td>
<td>Continued basic foundations of RF-2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Push in(now) vs. Pull out(then)-3x</td>
<td>Better at providing interventions-6x</td>
<td>Leadership changed-1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less rigid now w/program requirements-5x</td>
<td>Same/Intentional data driven-4x</td>
<td>Glad for RF-1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guided reading/mini-lessons-2x</td>
<td>Don’t pull out for intervention-2x</td>
<td>RtI is streamlined-1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Began data driven and has evolved-6x</td>
<td>Not dependent on programs-1x</td>
<td>Learned explicit teaching-1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>More flexible now-2x</td>
<td>Different principals impacted RtI-3x</td>
<td>Organized/meticulous with RtI-2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kept 5 components-2x</td>
<td>Didn’t do RtI with fidelity or understand it-3x</td>
<td>Know what works for students-2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Structured-1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Successful with RtI-2x</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Knew what to expect with RF-1x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>90 minute block-1x</td>
<td>Small group/individualized instruction-1x</td>
<td>Flexible-1x</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>