LEADERSHIP OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

PERCEPTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

By

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LEADERSHIP OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

PERCEPTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Abstract

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This study seeks to describe how elementary principals in a large Washington school district perceived the district office administration's implementation of Response to Intervention over a four-year period. RTI is a widely used intervention system that requires schools to assess whether each of their students is learning, adapting instruction for those who are not, and continually reassessing and, when appropriate, re-adapting instruction. A case study, interview-based, action research methodology with data collected from interviews, principal professional learning communities, meetings, and professional development plans and programs were used to explore the perceptions of 14 elementary school principals as they reflected on the RTI implementation process over four years. It was my charge as the assistant superintendent to lead, assess, and refine the implementation process with the principals involved in this study.

The principals generally agreed that the following facilitated program implementation: overcoming resistance to change, developing a widely shared vision for RTI, the identification of specific yearly stages of implementation, providing a professional development program aligned with the stages, providing feedback on performance with formal and informal assessment, the complexity and sophistication of RTI, the development of PLCs, the importance of the instructional coach and teacher leaders, and coordination with Title I and Special Education.

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Introduction

As a newly appointed Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Schools in 2008, it was my charge to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) in all seventeen elementary schools in the district. RTI is data driven and responsive, designed to identify and address student learning issues. Widely used, it tracks student learning, especially for those who appear to be struggling. It develops individualized interventions, constantly monitors outcomes, and makes further adaptations as required. RTI divides students into three intervention tiers based on assessment data.

This action research dissertation describes our efforts to train educational professionals and implement RTI between 2008 and 2011. Response to Intervention is defined as the change in behavior or performance as a function of an intervention (Gresham, 1991). This dissertation is an account of the issues we encountered and the lessons that we learned. I will address the issues surrounding change and the underlying logic behind them, some of which only became apparent after the implementation. Our thinking evolved during this time period. We developed new perspectives over time and what we know and are considering now includes issues and actions we did not consider, much less understand before.

Research Question

I worked with 14 of the elementary principals who implemented Response to Intervention as a framework to improve reading scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), later revised as the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP). We assumed, consistent with the arguments advanced by Reeves (2004, 2006) and others, that by developing principal leadership skills, we could also improve student achievement in reading. Stresses on teachers

during a change initiative, such as RTI, translate into stresses on principals, and vice versa, in addition to the innate stresses associated with change. What are the elementary principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the district's RTI implementation process?

The following more specific questions served to orient this study:

1. In an elementary school, what leadership challenges do principals face in the implementation of an RTI framework?

   a. What key barriers were encountered?

   b. What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

2. What professional development can be provided to elementary principals so they can successfully overcome those leadership challenges?

   a. systemic supervision?

   b. comprehensive curriculum?

   c. The principal's knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment?

Background

The Bethel School District covers 202 square miles in southeast Pierce County in Washington State. Bethel, the 14th largest district in the state, serves about 18,000 students in 17 elementary schools, six junior highs, three comprehensive high schools, one alternative high school, and an online academy.

The interest in RTI is a direct result of the concerns highlighted by the transparency required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Since Congress enacted NCLB in 2001, educators and schools have become more accountable. In particular, state education officials, school boards, school personnel, and parents have given low reading scores heightened scrutiny and attention. Indeed, in 2008, only 68.7% of third graders, 72.6% of fourth graders, 73.7% of fifth

graders, and 68.1% of sixth graders in the Bethel School District succeeded in passing the reading component of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (*WASL*). These scores are similar to the state average. We sought ways to engage and effectively instruct a generation of children reared in a rapidly changing world of media amusement where reading seems to be of not much importance.

Because reading ability is essential to attaining a college degree, state policymakers utilize state test results like the WASL and MSP scores as the means to hold leaders and classrooms accountable for helping students obtain reading skills. The perceived competency of schools, school districts, administrators and educators is therefore heavily based on such assessments.

From 2006 to 2010, the district did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as defined under the federal "No Child Left Behind" Act. The district met the benchmark in 85% of student categories, but did not meet AYP requirements in reading and math among special education students and in reading among low-income students. Because of the need to improve student achievement in reading, the district adopted Response to Intervention (RTI) as a systemic initiative to address the reading achievement of elementary students in all elementary schools. This decision was made following the development of an RTI Task Force composed of elementary principals, teachers, and district representatives from the Curriculum and Instruction Department. The task force researched RTI and the professional development necessary for teachers to implement the interventions necessary to individualize instruction.

The task force focused on what teachers needed and neglected the professional development needs of administrators to implement the change. My study searched for areas of

focus to better support the implementation process of RTI. It also examined the district initiative implementation process.

Principals were held accountable for improving student achievement regardless of their experience or leadership training. Rapid changes in expectations for schools and school leaders resulted in a continual demand for principal professional development. Much of this learning about improved leadership skills, data collection and analysis, and remaining current on curriculum and instructional practices, took place at the district level. To be able to effectively supervise teachers, principals were encouraged to also attend professional development opportunities with their teachers.

In this climate of high stakes assessments, it is not surprising that there has been much research and many recommendations offered regarding effective leadership-influenced practices that impact classroom instruction and, in turn, student outcomes. While there is increasing research on how principals influence school effectiveness, less is known about how to help principals develop the leadership capacities that make a difference in how schools function and what students learn (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). A study done by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), suggests that district leaders are most likely to build the confidence and sense of collective efficacy among principals by emphasizing the priority they attach to achievement and instruction, providing targeted and focus for school improvement efforts, and by building cooperative working relationships with schools.

This same fostering of relationships must be systematized between principals and teachers using Facilitative Leadership (Goldman et al. 1993). The building of a horizontal leadership framework using instructional coaches and teacher leaders is most effective during large-scale change.

Research evidence from Barnett and McCormick (2004), suggests that the leadership on student learning outcomes is mediated by school conditions such as goals, structure, people, and school culture. One of the leading authors on the topic of leadership is Marzano (2005), who reviewed hundreds of research studies related to effective leadership in order to pull together a coherent set of recommended strategies. At the school level, Marzano cites the leader's role as critical for establishing the goals, mission, climate of the school and classrooms, attitudes of teachers, classroom practices of teachers, organization of curriculum and instruction, and opportunities for students to learn. Thus, the principal's role is essential for a school's improvement and achievement. At a classroom level, Marzano found effectiveness was based upon a teacher's instructional strategies, classroom management, and curriculum design, all impacted by the leadership practices within the broader organization.

There is an increasing body of literature that highlights the importance of district leadership in improving instruction. Waters and Marzano (2006) looked at previous literature about leadership effects on school outcomes, and argued that the preponderance of evidence suggests that there is definite, but relatively small impact of district leadership. While that finding makes sense, doubts about the methodology of their meta-analysis casts some question on the evidentiary value of the conclusions.

Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (2006) researchers also identified five district-level leadership responsibilities that have a statistically significant correlation with average student academic achievement. All five of these responsibilities relate to setting and keeping districts focused on teaching and learning goals. Principal leadership matters in improving student achievement, but the responsibility for a principal's achievement increasingly rests with district leadership. Bethel District office administrators attempted to provide

leadership by developing programs and activities designed to assist principals in instructional leadership. They took the lead in developing the capacity of teachers and, more recently, of principals.

Student Centered Accountability

Douglas Reeves' (2004) concept of *student centered accountability* provides a useful framework that links assessment, instruction, and leadership, and is consistent with the logic of RTI. At the same time, Reeves' thinking aligns with the Bethel's approach to the challenges it faced and helps explain why the district originally chose to implement RTI in its elementary schools.

Reeves' (2004) theory of student-centered accountability is of interest because of the components that require supervision by the principal, especially as it applies to the implementation of a systemic and challenging change initiative, such as RTI. Reeves' overall theory of student-centered accountability provides a context for test scores, is constructive as it focuses on the improvement of teaching and learning, and is motivational for teachers because it includes mechanisms which can be directly influenced by teachers. Student-centered accountability is an idea that not only focuses on collecting data, but also attempts to understand student achievement scores with information relating to at least four indicators.

Four indicators Reeves discusses are critical components of principal leadership. He follows-up on Marzano's (2003) work on school effectiveness, emphasizing (1) a leader's supervision, (2) the comprehensiveness of the curriculum being used, in this case RTI, (3) teaching practices supported by professional development, and (4) the leader's knowledge of curriculum and instruction.

As one component, Reeves emphasized that leadership supervision must be a strong component of a student-centered accountability system. Such supervision involves leaders' examining their building practices and supervising the connection of those practices to student achievement. This might involve supervision practices such as having the leader visit each classroom daily to observe what is being taught and recognizing teacher best practices at staff meetings.

A second key component within a student-centered accountability system is that the leaders must be committed to implementing a comprehensive curriculum, particularly in the core basic subjects such as reading, writing and math.

In addition, a third aspect of Reeves' theory implies greater success via student-centered accountability when educators are philosophically congruent with, and well versed in the use of best practices. This occurs when leaders make teacher success the focal point of strong professional development and teachers are involved in the planning of such professional development activities. This might be evidenced through direct support of teachers as they review data and implement changes by engaging in meaningful discussions in structured professional learning communities.

Finally, as a fourth piece, Reeves stresses the importance of a leader's knowledge of curriculum and assessment.

Reeves' theory frames this study in order to closely examine how the development of principal leadership practices might lead to improved student achievement in a Response to Intervention (RTI) environment. Reeves' (2004) theory of connecting leaders and classrooms is considered to be a way that school leaders along with teachers can improve student achievement

(Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003). The four concepts laid out above parallel what teachers must know and principals must know to implement RTI as a system.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Response to Intervention is defined as the change in behavior or performance as a function of an intervention (Gresham, 1991). The response to Intervention (RTI) model is a multi-tiered approach to providing services and interventions to students at increasing levels of intensity based on progress monitoring and data analysis. Rate of progress over time is used to make important educational decisions, including possible determination of eligibility for special education services. The instruction and interventions encompassed within the RTI model, however, may involve many different levels of intensity and individualization. By design, RTI divides students and appropriate instructional strategies, into three tiers. Tier One is designed for all students using flexible grouping and differentiated instruction. Tier Two is for ten to fifteen percent of students and is targeted or supplemental to general education. Tier Two utilizes small groups not to exceed five students during a thirty-minute period of time. Tier Three is the intensive level designed for five to ten percent of students. Tier three best serves the students if instruction is individual or groups not to exceed three students. There are generally two 30-minute daily sessions.

RTI codifies practices previously used by many teachers, especially the good ones, including assessing whether individual students are learning, adjusting instruction for those who aren't, and continually assessing and readjusting. Thus, it represents a systematic method for evaluating the needs of all students and for fostering positive student outcomes through carefully selected and implemented interventions. It also may be used to assist schools in identifying students who may require more intensive instructional services and/or be eligible for an

exceptional student education program. Reeves' theory of student-centered accountability emphasizes the importance of reviewing data and implementing changes by engaging in meaningful discussions in structured professional learning communities.

RTI is an integrated approach to service delivery that encompasses general, remedial, and special education through a multi-tiered service delivery model. It utilizes a problem-solving framework to identify and address academic and behavioral difficulties for all students using scientific, research-based instruction. Essentially, RTI is the practice of: (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to all students needs and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions to guide instruction (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005). RTI practices are proactive, incorporating both prevention and intervention, and is effective at all levels from early childhood through high school. RTI integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems.

For example, a reading intervention such as Reading Mastery or Corrective Reading, designed to produce oral reading fluency, would be considered successful if it produced reading fluency rapidly and reliably during intervention, and if reading fluency persisted after the intervention is withdrawn. In contrast, if oral reading fluency deteriorated after the intervention is withdrawn, teachers would not be satisfied with the rate of oral reading fluency no matter how ell the student read during intervention. Also, if oral reading performance occurred at low rates with numerous errors, omissions, or substitutions, during intervention, teachers would likely conclude that the student had not established automaticity in oral reading and would extend, intensify, or change the reading instruction.

RTI protocols suggest that teachers not change interventions prematurely. It generally takes a six week period of instruction using an intervention to establish whether or not the intervention is effective. Changing interventions is based on frequent progress monitoring of DIBELS data. With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities. This process is often accomplished by teachers and administrators in structured professional learning communities.

Core RTI concepts and attributes include: high-quality, research-based classroom instruction, universal screening of academics and behavior, continuous progress monitoring, research-based interventions, integrity of instruction and interventions, tiered interventions, implementation of differentiated curriculum, instruction delivered by staff other than classroom teachers at higher tiers, and varied duration and frequency of interventions. An example would be using the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Basic literacy Skills) assessment as a progress monitoring tool and using the assessment data to provide a specific, targeted intervention, such as Corrective Reading or Reading Mastery, to approach the reading deficit of fluency. DIBELS would be used to assess the progress every two weeks to determine if the intervention was being successful. This individualized targeted instruction based on formative assessment data simply applies much of what we know about good teaching and especially effective practices in special education. Technical details about RTI, DIBELS, Reading Mastery, and Corrective Reading are presented in the Appendix.

According to Kavale, Holdnack, and Mostert (2006), Response to Intervention has been proposed as an alternative system, in addition to discrepancy and psychological processing, for

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making decisions about the presence or absence of a specific learning disability (SLD). They however believe that many questions regarding RTI remain unanswered and that a more rigorous implementation of existing identification criteria may be a better strategy. Kavale (2005) acknowledged that RTI appears to be an appropriate first step in identifying an SLD. If at the end of the RTI process, a student is known to have significant reading difficulties that have not responded positively to validated interventions, the only conclusion would be that the student did not respond to the interventions. Non- responsiveness should not be viewed as a diagnostic criterion; non-responsiveness is an outcome that may or may not be caused by an SLD. Thus, the RTI model cannot stand alone as the primary means to identify an SLD. It is only a single criterion.

Kavale and Forness (2000), argued that the lack of a clear definition of an SLD, not the identification, is the fundamental problem. Further, they've written that the formal definition fails to provide closure on two critical elements; understanding – a clear and unobscured sense of an SLD – and explanation – a rational exposition of the reasons why a particular student is SLD. A number of definitions for an SLD have been proposed, however, none have been universally accepted, meaning there is no single statement describing the SLD condition. The present SLD definition has always been too broad to be wrong and too vague to be complete (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, and Young, 2003; Kavale, Holdnack, and Mostert, 2006) claim that, if we are to abandon such a method for identifying LD students as discrepancy or psychological processing deficits, RTI is the front-running alternative.

Two identifiable groups vigorously promoted RTI. There is an early intervention/prevention group consisting of early reading researchers and behaviorally oriented school psychologists who have lobbied for years to change the psychoanalytical-driven

identification process and their typical role as psychoanalysts. Whereas the early interventionists and school psychologists agreed that the LD identification process needs fundamental revision, beginning with the elimination of IQ-achievement discrepancy, they have had different visions of how RTI should play out.

For the school psychologists, RTI is synonymous with "the problem-solving model." For the early reading group, RTI is accomplished by use of a standard and validated treatment protocol. Bethel used this "problem-solving model" as a working definition of RTI. As these groups advocate their respective strategies, they have inadvertently contributed to the confusion surrounding RTI (Fuchs, et al., 2003).

The district used RTI as a way to prevent premature identification of students with an SLD as opposed to using it to identify those students. RTI as a system to provide targeted interventions actually decreased the number of students being referred to special education in some schools. Bethel used RTI as a model to improve reading achievement. Students with a learning disability may not have a reading disability. An SLD may not be solely a reading achievement problem, and although a large proportion of students with an SLD show difficulties in reading, they may also be deficient in other subjects such as math.

Figure 1: Example of RTI process used at Newport Elementary

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┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
┆ Teacher Concern  ┆ ─────► │ Other (e.g. speech,  │ ───► │ Go to school psych re:│
┆                  ┆        │ autism, DD, OT, etc.)│      │ MDT                   │
└──────────────────┘   └──► └──────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────┘

                              ┌──────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
                              │ Academic or behavior │ ───► │ Bring concern to PLC  │
                              └──────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────┘
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- **Teacher Concern** →
  - Other (e.g. speech, autism, DD, OT, etc.) → Go to school psych re: MDT
  - Academic or behavior → Bring concern to PLC → PLC and liaison develop intervention with measurable outcome. → Implementation intervention and track data →
    - Intervention works. Continue and monitor.
    - Intervention does not work. → Develop second intervention with PLC and liaison. Contact parents if have not already. → Implementation intervention and track data →
      - Intervention works. Continue and monitor.
      - Intervention does not work. → Review RTI paperwork with liaison (intervention sheet, assessment data, and referral). → Liaison will take paperwork to team. RTI meeting is scheduled. → RTI team meeting. No parents. Teacher must keep parent informed. → RTI intervention implemented. (SPED referral not appropriate at this step.) → Follow-up meeting. Teacher, with help of liaison, brings data. Teacher in contact with parents. →
        - Partial success. Modify intervention or add new intervention.
        - Little or no progress. Discuss SPED referral. → MDT with parents to discuss SPED evaluation.
        - Successful outcome. Continue intervention and monitor.

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Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This review examines the prominent theories about and research on principal leadership

practices that effectively impact classroom instruction. Specific attention is paid to Douglas

Reeves' (2004) discussion on connecting leadership practices and classroom teachers. Studies

examining his approach are reviewed, focusing on main leadership practices: (1) leadership

supervision, (2) a comprehensive curriculum, (3) strong professional development, and (4)

leaders with knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Reeves' (2004) theory of

connecting leaders and classrooms is considered to be a way that school leaders along with

teachers can improve student achievement.

Systematic Supervision

Reeves (2004) believes that supervisors of a school system are most accountable for the

success of the students. The foundation for his work is found in Marzano's (2003) theory

regarding effective supervisors. In an effort to determine what makes supervisors successful,

Marzano (2003) found that effective principals took the pulse of the building, identified a

strategic intervention, and continually examined the effect of that intervention on student

achievement. The supervisor used small group leadership and inspired the staff with strong

guidance, optimism, honesty, and consideration. These small groups, or professional learning

communities (PLCs), are a chance for teachers to discuss DIBELS data and instructional

interventions for individual students in the RTI process. Principals using a distributive leadership

model support the PLCs by providing the time to meet, leadership development, and guidance.

Influenced by Marzano, Reeves (2004) wrote that leaders must coach and supervise their

colleagues systematically, through discussions and action items related to student achievement

and best practices. Interaction needed to occur between leaders and teachers before teachers would commit to the implementation of new curriculum and instruction. Reeves' (2004) theory is supported by Saha and Biddle (2006), who surveyed 120 principals in the United States and Australia and found that most experienced pressure from their peers to be innovative, and as a result supported innovation and provided the supervision necessary for its success. In addition, they found that that the success of an innovation was correlated more to the enthusiasm of the supervising principal than to the strategy used to encourage the innovation, and that the collegial approach was more effective than the authoritarian approach. They also discovered that the principals' ability to acquire and apply research knowledge was the underlying reason for the staffs' positive attitudes toward innovation. This is supported by Goldman, Dunlap, and Conley's (1993) study of 16 sites receiving Oregon 2020 Grants. As principals took on a more indirect supportive role, teachers learned. As they learned, their desire for more information increased. They increased their understanding of school-wide functions, and participated more in decision-making.

To help with this facilitative role, it is important for principals to attend professional development opportunities with their teachers and to stay abreast of recent research. Attending trainings with teachers makes it easier to create a shared philosophy and set of expectations for instructional practices and student outcomes.

Ferrero (2005), in his study of belief systems and practices in seven great small high schools supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, concurred with Reeves' (2004) thinking when he wrote that there are many ways for a school to be good, but they definitely needed a single shared philosophy stressing high standards for all staff, a philosophy that was also championed by the supervisor. This was confirmed by Corbett, Wilson and Williams (2005)

in their study of two schools in different districts where the teachers said they were responsible for student success. They discovered that these great urban teachers shared common beliefs, namely, they did not accept failure for their students and it was critical to those teachers that they receive time and support from their supervisor.

Time and support from the principal is paramount during change. Principals must have frequent classroom visits and provide timely, honest feedback on RTI systems, routines and instructional strategies. These frequent visits must become a cultural norm and expectation (Fullan 2001).

Leading change is one of the most important leadership responsibilities. For some theorists, it is the essence of leadership. Innovations such as RTI require a monumental change in thinking about and actually doing teaching practice for both teachers and administrators. Principals must be able to manage change in order to effectively lead teachers in these efforts to improve classroom instruction. Efforts to implement changes in teaching practices are more likely to be successful if the principal understands the reasons for resistance to the change.

Goldman, et al. (1993), found that certain facilitative behaviors support experimentation and successful change. Principals showed a clear sense of purpose linked to a school vision, they shared in the creation of decision-making structures, they creatively used tension by bringing people together who might not otherwise interact, and were more involved in supporting roles from teachers that were more indirect, and less involved in direct leadership activities.

Resistance to Change

Conner (1995, p. 26) defines resistance to change as a reaction to anything causing disruption or loss of equilibrium. This explanation would imply that resistance to change is implicit in the definition of change. He believes people resist the implications of change more

than the change itself. Because managing change is a leadership task, leaders often see resistance negatively and as a reflection on them.

Resistance to change is a common phenomenon for individuals and organizations. There are a number of different reasons why people resist major changes. Conner (1995) suggests nine distinct explanations for why individuals resist change. The nine, as presented below, are not mutually exclusive and are consistent with Muncey and McQuillan's (1996) qualitative analysis of how educators respond to demands for change required by the Coalition of Essential Schools.

1. *Lack of Trust.* A reason for resistance to change is distrust in the people who propose it. When principals have established trust relationships with teachers, they can better initiate major change in instructional practice. Because some innovations require significant changes in practices, and even in thinking about teaching and learning, teachers who do not trust their leaders are often unwilling to put in the effort required to make changes.

2. *Belief that change is unnecessary*. Resistance is more likely if the current way of doing business has been successful and there are no obvious problems that require major change. Principals use student achievement data in a non-threatening manner to show the need for changing instructional practices.

3. *Belief that the change is not feasible*. If there is a problem, people need to believe that the change will be successful. Principals demonstrate to teachers how changes in schedules and instructional practices will improve student achievement.

4. *Economic threats*. Even if a change will benefit the organization, people may resist if they will suffer personal loss of income, benefits, or job security. When teachers have to change their teaching practices, there may be loss in confidence, a fear that their performance evaluations may be negatively affected.

5. *Relative high cost.* Familiar routines may have to change, causing inconvenience and requiring more effort. Any change in teaching practice is more work at first and requires more effort until routines and new strategies have been learned.

6. *Fear of personal failure.* Change requires new learning and creates some loss of self-confidence. Principals and teachers require extensive professional development regarding new teaching strategies to improve their self- confidence and improve the chances that the change in pedagogy will be successful.

7. *Loss of status or power.* People who enjoy status or power through knowledge or expertise may feel a loss of that status or power. Some teacher leaders have better skills and more expertise than others. These teacher leaders may temporarily feel a loss of status with their peers.

8. *Threat to values and ideals.* A threat to strong values or cultural norms may fuel resistance to change. If teachers have been teaching the same way for extended periods of time with some success, those practices will have become part of their values and teaching culture. There could be a natural resistance to changing these practices.

9. *Resentment to interference.* People do not want to be controlled by others and may resist change. Principals use a distributive leadership model and work through the changes in schedules and practices with the entire staff rather than dictating the way things will be done.

In order to address resistance to change, principals must understand the human reality behind resistance. They model kindness, caring, and compassion. They focus on the values of respect and fairness. They reframe change from an overwhelming threat to a modification of practice while reaffirming every colleague as a worthwhile professional and person.

Leaders' Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment

Reeves (2006) advocates that the supervisor and teacher leaders set the direction of the professional development agenda. For example, at Oceanview Elementary in Virginia, the principal and teacher leaders provided professional development, and in five years reading scores increased 37 percentage points. More support for Reeves' (2004) work came from Kelehear and Davison (2005) who studied 882 students and 61 certified teachers working in teacher teams in a K-5 school in Georgia. This school was successful when the supervisor believed that teachers needed to be included in decision-making with curriculum, scheduling, budgeting, and personnel to build a sense of responsibility. Reeves (2006) provided the example of Simpson-Waverly Elementary School, where 94% of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Many children did not live with their parents. Low morale among students and low achievement were characteristic of the school. Principal James Thompson changed his leadership approach to a network-supporting role. His role at staff meetings became one of a listener, where he questioned teachers whose students did well about the strategies they use, stressing that the focus of the conversation was on learning, not evaluation. He set up a peer-to-peer teacher network and structure for mutual observation. Simpson-Waverly students outperformed some of their more affluent suburban neighbors on achievement measures. The school now is a statewide model for academic excellence. Leaders seeking change must give up their dream that human organizations function as hierarchies and see the importance of networking.

Comprehensive Curriculum

The foundation for Reeves' (2004) thinking on the importance of a comprehensive curriculum was established in Marzano's discussion of effective schools. Although Marzano and Reeves used different terms—"comprehensive" versus "guaranteed"—to label effective

curriculum, they had the same ideas of what constitutes effective curriculum. In order to be effective, curriculum needs to be aligned with instruction as well as with the state assessments that are utilized to monitor students' growth and school effectiveness. Such a curriculum contains standards and benchmarks that are appropriate for each grade level and agreed upon by leaders in the respective fields.

When examining effective schools over the last 35 years, Marzano (2003) cited the critical school-level factors as being a guaranteed curriculum, challenging goals and feedback, parent and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism. As previously addressed, collegiality and professionalism are enhanced by the practices of distributive leadership and professional learning communities. Response to Intervention would not be a viable instructional system without these two factors. A guaranteed curriculum ensures that common and appropriate interventions are provided to individual students for whatever level students are presently learning. Guaranteed curriculum ensures that teachers have the proper tools to provide the interventions necessary to meet the individual needs of students.

Reeves (2004) claimed that a comprehensive, aligned curriculum produced successful schools only if the school system was willing to determine and document the relationship of the curriculum alignment to actual implementation in the classroom. This measurement via the school improvement plan must assess a few things consistently rather than many things once a year. For example: Using DIBELS testing as a formative assessment for intensive level students every two weeks will provide more useful data to drive changes in use of the curriculum and instructional practices than a once a year state assessments.

According to both Reeves (2004) and Guskey (2003), the focus on the comprehensive curriculum, can result in changes in instruction and increased student success, and consequently contribute to changes in teachers' beliefs. They both noted that this change process comes in stages, requiring extra effort from the teachers and involving stress and a tendency to resist. In addition, the teachers need regular feedback regarding the progress of their students' learning to keep motivated. If supported in their use of the curriculum, the teachers can then find the time to translate research-based strategies into sound instruction and subsequently modify it for their diverse student populations (Snow et al, 1998).

Professional Development

Reeves (2004) stressed that teaching is both an art and a science in that certain teaching practices have a high degree of success. The *No Child Left Behind* mandate made professional development even more important than previously, requiring educators to be fully certified and highly qualified for their positions. To examine the impact of professional development, Marzano (2003) surveyed teachers using a 66-item survey instrument about their use of instructional strategies, a classroom management plan, and support of curriculum design. He found that expert teachers had more strategies at their disposal than ineffective teachers. These teachers had a list of rules, procedures, and interventions with consequences. They knew curriculum standards and benchmarks and made sure that their students had engaging exposures to them; in addition, they used aligned assessments to determine mastery. It is important for principals to have a superior knowledge of the curriculum, standards, and effective instruction. They must have the opportunity to attend the same professional development as teachers, so they are able to effectively monitor new implementations or changes in practice.

Reeves (2006) extended the research of earlier studies when he wrote that, due to all the challenges in education today, teachers require a step-by-step process that narrows the research-to-practice gap while meeting students' instructional needs. In addition, according to Kelleher (2003), professional development was most successful when embedded in the teachers' work. Where an effective implementation of aligned instruction and curriculum occurred, principals had provided staff development that allowed teachers to study together regularly, build a strong commitment to meeting the needs of each student and encourage one another as the changes in instruction occur.

Professional Learning Communities

The concept of PLCs emerged from teachers' explicit commitment to working together in processes of collective inquiry in order to achieve better results for students. A PLC places its emphasis on learning for all students and adults, building a collaborative culture, and maintaining a constant focus on results.

Rick DuFour, a successful, principal and superintendent, implemented professional learning communities in his high school and district in Lincolnshire, Illinois (Schmoker 2004). He greatly reduced the time he spent trying to be the traditional instructional leader. Instead he focused on the elements of learning communities. He ensured that teams met on a regular schedule and documented their progress on self-made formative assessments. He honored and celebrated successes at every faculty meeting so that every success was recognized. As result he experienced years of dramatic, uninterrupted progress on every kind of assessment from teacher-made tests to state assessments to college entrance exams. The success rate on Advanced Placement exams at his school rose by 800%.

In a study done by Fisher and Frey (2007) at Rosa Parks Elementary School in San Diego, implementing a literacy framework including professional learning communities resulted in higher expectations for students and increased time on task for both students and teachers which in turn resulted in improved opportunities to learn. The final result was a group of students who read, write, and think at impressive levels.

Extensive staff development on intervention curricula and the implementation of professional learning communities are necessary to enhance the alignment of teaching strategies to the individual needs of students. This is especially true for such complex innovations as RTI.

Similar to Reeves (2004), others have found that there is often a knowing-doing gap whereby school leadership knows what to do, but the effect of hierarchical communication hinders effective actions (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Within this hierarchy, attention must be paid to the fact that teachers, principals, and superintendents emphasize instructional matters differently, with principals and superintendents focused more on managerial and political matters. This is a good example of why, if RTI is going to become a successful district-wide system, principals and assistant superintendents should attend the professional development opportunities with teachers.

Michael Fullan (2003) made a comparison that the focus on leadership in this decade is to the focus that standards had in the 1990s. Researchers call for more studies on *how* to help leaders build high-performing school systems, specifically in the age of accountability. They also ask for leader-influenced practices that impact classroom instruction with school systems moving away from outdated 20th-century models of leadership**.**

While the importance of principal instructional leadership has dominated the literature and practice in recent years, the instructional leadership role of superintendents has begun to take focus.

In the past, district leadership effects on students have been considered too indirect and complex to figure out. However, a few research studies have stressed the role of superintendents in the area of instructional leadership. The success or failure of public schools has been directly linked to the influence of the superintendent, particularly in the instructional arena. While most of the literature on the superintendency points to the managerial role, instructional leadership by superintendents does exist in various forms. Some researchers argued that the instructional leadership of superintendents might be more indirect rather than direct and include changing reward structures, communication patterns, decision-making procedures, and evaluation processes (Leithwood et al., 2007). Recently, due to strict accountability measures, more emphasis on the role of the superintendent as instructional leader is emerging. According to a poll of 813 superintendents, district leaders indicated they were playing a more assertive role in shaping instruction (Archer, 2005). The top instructional leadership practices identified by these superintendents include: (1) training for teachers and principals on use of performance data; (2) common district curriculum; instructional walkthroughs; (3) standardization on writing school improvement plans; (4) induction programs for new teachers; (5) induction programs for assistant principals/novice principals; (6) common math and reading programs; common planning time for teachers; (7) and administering their own district-wide assessments and adjusting instruction accordingly (Archer, 2005). While there is prominence of curricular and instructional issues for today's superintendents, particularly in the area of improving student achievement, planning for the future, involving others in decision making, building cultural leadership, and managing tight fiscal resources add to their increasingly complex roles.

Several factors inhibited superintendents' effectiveness in the role. Lack of finances dominated the list while having too many insignificant demands placed on them by boards, community, and staff, including teachers, administrators, and classified, rated second. The third

factor inhibiting their effectiveness was compliance with state mandated reforms In a poll, conducted by the Education Week Research Center, almost 90% of the superintendents reported that a lack of money prevented them from acting as instructional leaders in their districts (Archer, 2005). Other barriers, cited in order of importance, included competing priorities, lack of district staff, teacher concerns about loss of creativity, lack of proven instructional strategies, union contracts, and principals' concerns about lost autonomy.

The No Child Left Behind law enhanced the instructional leadership role of superintendents by requiring a more in-depth understanding of instructional issues. Although NCLB has created mandates without adequate funding and has added numerous stresses for superintendents, some superintendents note positive benefits. Archer (2005) pointed out that three-quarters of the superintendents polled by the Education Week Research Center indicated that the NCLB legislation has forced district leaders to play a larger instructional role, and 93 percent felt that district leaders needed to play a more active role in instruction than in the past, regardless of the NCLB legislation. Superintendents describe that board members, community members, teachers and administrators are more involved in instructional improvements due to NCLB legislation. While superintendents have faced difficulties with increased state and federal mandates, a small number of studies attempt to describe how district leaders grapple with these mandates to ensure reflection on reform efforts while also doing justice to district and school priorities (Leithwood et. al., 2005). The position of the superintendency is being redefined. The dilemmas I previously mentioned, related to increased accountability from state and federal mandates, have certainly contributed to the changing role.

This review has demonstrated the implications of principal leadership on instruction and change. There has also been evidence shared that points to the importance of the superintendent as an instructional leader.

This study describes the evolution of the district's effort to implement RTI as a way to enhance its elementary reading program. While it is important to understand that RTI is a monumental change and **c**hange needs to be understood by principals, leadership has a large affect on the implementation of RTI. This study will research the ways to improve principal leadership for a successful district-wide implementation of Response to Intervention.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

This study required an action research approach. The research was about people, 14 elementary principals and me as their supervisor, but also had "places," specifically the 14 diverse suburban elementary schools these principals led. The context was the very complex changes required to implement Response to Intervention. I was actively involved in this change with the principals, while at the same time, leading their efforts. I was taking action to effect initiative implementation practices at the district level. Consequently, an action research methodology was appropriate.

The interviews and meeting transcriptions resulted in qualitative analysis of open ended interviews. The transcriptions were coded and further analyzed by individuals in the focus group composed of four of the participating principals and the researcher. There was also some quantitative analysis of DIBELS and MSP data to help us understand the effectiveness of the implementation process.

Action research draws on many theoretical frameworks and methodologies, but one of the most fundamental benefits of action research is participation. This allows those who participate in an action research project to adopt the role of researcher. Together researcher and participants define or pose a problem that directly impacts their lives or work lives, and with careful, systematic processes determine some action or actions that can be taken to resolve it to the betterment of those who are most directly affected by the problem. This action, or intervention, sets action research apart from basic or traditional research or evaluation.

Proponents of action research such as Nolan and Vander Putten (2007), argue that involving relevant others in an action research project leads to a strong sense of ownership of any

proposed change. One of the most important standards of quality is that the action research must be practical. What can be more practical for principals than developing their leadership? Action research differs from basic research in precisely that respect. The intervention is shaped by those who are most affected by the issue under investigation. Grogan et al. (2007) point out that unlike the experimental method in the positivist or post-positivist paradigm, the intervention is not designed for one group in comparison to another or other groups. There is no attempt to draw conclusions based on the concept of a "treatment." Instead, as the above standards suggest, the emphasis is on the movement towards a workable solution that changes the activities or the infrastructure of the unit being studied. Our results will not be generalizable, but will be specific and important to the elementary principals in this study.

Action Research

According to Stringer (2007), action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives. Unlike traditional experimental/scientific research that looks for generalizable explanations that might be applied to all contexts, action research focuses on specific situations and localized solutions (Stringer, 2007). Participatory action research provides an opportunity for collaborative, democratic partnership in this process. Action research empowers the participants to decide on the research agenda, enact the research, evaluate the process, and to become beneficiaries of the outcome. This idea differs from conventional research because action research focuses upon research in action, rather than research about action. Since the focus of action research is on the particular characteristics of the populations with whom some action must be taken, in this case the elementary principals, the results can potentially increase usefulness and effectiveness for the practitioners. In essence, action research is an effort to find

answers to important questions or to foster change. Most important, action research can support the call for transformative educational leadership (Grogan et al, 2007). Stringer goes on to make the case that it is a systematic development of knowing and knowledge that differs from traditional academic research, but is no less rigorous or scientific in its approach. According to Grogan et al. (2007) action research makes sense in a program for part-time doctoral students like me who are employed in some leadership capacity because they can study their own settings if they so choose.

Grogan et al. (2007) as well as Nolan and Vander Putten (2007) make the point that relationship building is a key element of the action research process and that democratic opportunities for input and critical analysis play an important role in the possible successful outcomes of the study. Peer review of action research is another form of what Herr and Anderson (2005) call dialogic validity. There are many ways to achieve this. The action research itself can be a collaborative inquiry that is conducted with others throughout. This ensures multiple perspectives. Action researchers can also provide peer review for each other to provide opportunities for critical and reflective dialogue. Action research seemed most appropriate for me as an assistant superintendent who needed to facilitate new practices and policies designed to disrupt the status quo to achieve greater equity in educational outcomes for students (RTI). Action research, as an approach, draws upon multiple methodologies and research tools and therefore does not privilege one research paradigm. "Action research is a messy, somewhat unpredictable process, and a key part of the inquiry is a recording of decisions made in the face of this messiness" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 78).

Overall, using action research, I: (1) examined how these school leaders systematically supervised the development of classroom instruction, (2) examined whether and to what extent

14 schools embraced change in effective reading practices using the RTI framework in professional learning communities, (3) examined the professional development process as it pertains to the 14 principals' leadership skill and, (4) examined how the principals have developed their own skills regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This information is significant because it explores the connections between principal leadership and how it affected a district initiative implementation, changing practices of teachers and student achievement.

The study participants in this research had all experienced the same training on Response to Intervention and training of a comprehensive curriculum. I also attended these trainings. In addition, the study participants all shared this common training with elementary school leadership teams composed of teacher leaders and administrators. Another commonality is that, in all grade levels, K-6, the teachers utilized similar lessons, curriculum, assessments and student monitoring using DIBELS as a monitoring tool.

I used in-depth interviews with the 14 principals, observations, monthly principal meetings, principal professional learning communities, and a focus group of volunteer principals were avenues of data collection in an attempt to further understand the experiences of these leaders and the degree to which, and how, their leadership impacted their ability to help teachers maintain high morale in the face of change in and RTI environment. All interviews and meetings were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Artefacts were examined, including the professional development, School Improvement Plans, checklists of assessments, and instructional strategies that were used. There are ethical issues associated with interviewing principals whom I evaluated. I wanted to have honest interviews that avoided responses that the principals thought I wanted to hear. The process used for the study was collaborative, building trust that the collection of data would not be tied to the evaluation of the principals.

Data Collection

In order to conduct this study, several different types of data were used, including: interviews, student achievement data, and professional development records. I had the IRB approval and had been collecting interview data for the past year. Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the principal. The interviews took place in an office within the school building, with each session being recorded to guarantee accuracy of records, permitting me to focus on the principal and his or her responses. All recordings were transcribed for qualitative data analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Prior to the interview, the principal signed a consent form permitting the session to be recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis. These interviews provided insight into whether or not the district's efforts to provide vision, mission, and support through professional development activities were seen as contributing to the ability of the principals to act as instructional leaders and change agents throughout the RTI implementation process. A second interview was requested when clarification was needed. All participants involved, and the focus group, had the opportunity to review the written record on an ongoing basis to ensure accuracy and to permit any follow-up questions or comments. In addition, professional development plans and data on how they were carried out were examined. Test scores were used as summary data. Monthly principal meetings, principal professional learning communities, and individual meetings with each principal every two weeks also offered data for analysis.

In using interviews, the questions needed to be carefully designed to solicit insight regarding the objective perspectives of the principals participating in the study. I encouraged the participants to talk in the areas of interest and probed more deeply, focusing on the topic of the

RTI implementation process. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, citing the interviews will be vague.

Ethical Considerations

In any study, it is important to consider ethical concerns. In action and qualitative research, the researcher must be aware of relationships, personal bias, and misconceptions that could interfere with the data collection. The interviewer must establish a professional relationship and a strict code of confidentiality, using pseudonyms for the participants and schools.

A protocol of informed consent was followed to make sure that participants were protected. Exempt status was received from the Washington State University IRB. Approval for this study was acquired from the Bethel School District. Prior to conducting an interview, every principal was asked to sign a consent form signifying his or her desire to be included as a participant in the study. Additionally, each participant was informed of his or her right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also notified that they could review the written transcript from their interview and at that point make any helpful statements they felt were reasonable.

Consideration was taken to inform all participants in this study about the process of data collection, security, and storage. In this case, the recordings from the interviews and transcriptions were stored in a locked safe at my home. These materials will be transferred to Washington State University at the conclusion of the study. The records will be available for inspection and copying by individuals who have been authorized by the institution sponsoring the research.

I believe there was no risk to principals who agreed to participate in the study. Special attention was given to ensure that this study and collection of data would not have affect on the evaluation of principals who are participants in this study. Because I directly supervised and evaluated the principals in this study, there existed the possibility that positionality would interfere and the principals would tell me what I wanted to hear instead of their true reflections. I had in-depth conversations with each principal to point out the possible conflicts of interest in this study. Establishing trust with the principals for a year prior to the study made it easy to have the conversations. All of the principals were enthusiastic participants and looked forward to receiving the results of the study.

I had to be careful in regard to potential bias, first as the assistant superintendent and second as a previous principal in the district. I hoped that consciously putting aside any preconceived notions about how an initiative implementation and professional development should look lessened the bias. It was important to hear and truly understand the perceptions of the participants.

An important factor in the data-analysis portion of an action research study was that I was the primary source for data collection. This creates risks for the integrity and accuracy of the study. I was directly involved with the participants in a collaborative manner in the data collection and analysis. (Stringer, 2007) points out that direct involvement with the participants in data collection and analysis is one of the key challenges of action research, so steps must be taken to establish trust. I accomplished trust through a process wherein the study participants were allowed to discuss and clarify transcripts from the interviews and statements made during data collection. I also communicated preliminary findings with the participants at principal meetings, PLCs, and individual conferences. I made every attempt to limit the impact of any bias

that may exist. Ken was an important participant in the research due to his expertise and experience in RTI. Our relationship changed to one of close collegiality, which required me to focus on being objective during our interviews.

Attempts were made to confirm data through multiple sources, such as principal meetings and bimonthly meetings with individual principals and the focus group rather than relying only on the principal interviews. Other sources considered were: inviting principals to include any records or artefacts that they felt speak to their leadership experience and reviewing academic records or scores with principals.

Limitations

While I made reasonable efforts to anticipate potential issues in the process of conducting this study, there is still a limitation present in this project. The research was conducted using action research methodology with a limited number of study participants. Moreover, the research arena was a single district going through an intensive intervention at a specific point in time. As a result, the responses of the 14 principals who participated in the study cannot be applied to other principals or to a larger population of principals under other educational frameworks. The findings of this study can be used only to better understand and explain the experience of the principals involved in this action research study. The findings are limited to the experience of the principals, the knowledge differences of the principals and central office leadership in providing professional development. It is difficult to determine the extent to which the experience of the district and its elementary principals can be generalized to other districts, but what happened is consistent in the implementation of major reform elsewhere. Another limitation is that I interviewed only administrators and did not get a perspective from teachers. I do not supervise

teachers and relied on the principals' perspectives regarding the implementation of RTI on

teachers.

Table 1 Principal Profiles

Principal	Years in Education	Years in Administration	Years as Principal
Karen	20 + years	7 years	5 years
Sam	20 + years	16 years	16 years
Laura	11 years	6 years	2 years
Maria	20 + years	12 years	10 years
Marsha	20 + years	14 years	13 years
Ronald	20 + years	6 years	1 year
Shirley	20 + years	18 years	17 years
Emily	20 + years	17 years	15 years
Ken	15 years	11 years	8 years
Brian	20 + years	20 + years	20 + years
Stuart	19 years	9 years	6 years
Doug	20 + years	20 years	19 years
Caleb	13 years	9 years	5 years
Marvin	19 years	10 years	6 years

Table 2 School Profiles

School	Principal	Students	FRL	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Native American
Cali	Stuart	600	49%	23%	44%	21%	10%	2%
Clovis	Doug	300	46%	17%	56%	16%	10%	2%
Edison	Marvin	400	22%	12%	70%	7%	7%	3%
Elliot	Brian	600	62%	19%	46%	20%	12%	3%
Franklin	Emily	600	44%	10%	61%	12%	10%	1%
Garrison	Ron	600	32%	7%	74%	12%	5%	2%
Kent	Maria	500	36%	5%	82%	7%	3%	3%
Nolan	Ken	600	27%	3%	79%	11%	5%	2%
Newport	Karen	600	44%	10%	64%	12%	8%	4%
Pines	Sam	500	32%	13%	62%	14%	8%	3%
Rivers	Laura	500	49%	6%	72%	6%	3%	4%
Reese	Caleb	300	57%	6%	73%	11%	6%	4%
Stevens	Marsha	500	48%	14%	57%	16%	11%	2%
Tulio	Shirley	600	65%	21%	49%	19%	9%	3%

Table 3 MSP Data

Grade 3

Meets or Exceeds Standards

	Cali	Clovis	Edison	Elliot	Frank-lin	Garri-son	Kent	Nolan
Reading 2006	70.8	70.6	86.5	50		73	80.4	
Reading 2007	63.1	70	83.3	57		75.7	85.3	
Reading 2008	60.2	71.1	72.2	67.9		81.3	78.3	
Reading 2009	70.3	53.8	80.3	59.6		75.6	84.6	
Reading 2010	59.2	67.9	77.9	61.8	69.7	77.5	81.8	87.5

Grade 4

Meets or Exceeds Standards

	Cali	Clovis	Edison	Elliot	Frank-lin	Garri-son	Kent	Nolan
Reading 2006	79.1	82.1	94.4	69.6		87.7	86.4	
Reading 2007	71.8	77.8	81	59.6		82	83.6	
Reading 2008	65.4	63	90.2	49.5		88	83.8	
Reading 2009	61.5	50.7	79.3	53.8		77.3	80.3	
Reading 2010	58.9	60	72.3	55.1	51.5	82.7	75.4	75

Grade 5

Meets or Exceeds Standards

	Cali	Clovis	Edison	Elliot	Frank-lin	Garri-son	Kent	Nolan
Reading 2006	67.9	57.1	80	63.2		82.9	83.8	
Reading 2007	59.6	57.5	86.9	55		79.7	70.8	
Reading 2008	69.2	70.2	85.2	72.2		72.1	88.7	
Reading 2009	77	59.8	83.6	72.5		77	78.8	
Reading 2010	77.3	50.9	63.8	81.7	51.7	67.1	57.1	62.3

Grade 6

Meets or Exceeds Standards

	Cali	Clovis	Edison	Elliot	Frank-lin	Garri-son	Kent	Nolan
Reading 2006	67.9	71.2	61.4	58		75.9	73.6	
Reading 2007	77	57.3	75	61.6		73.8	75.3	
Reading 2008	68.3	2.2	80.3	64.6		77.7	70.6	
Reading 2009	75.5	61.1	77.6	59		72.4	76.8	
Reading 2010	67.5	68.3	73.3	43.8	54.5	85.7	73.2	67.7

Grade 3

Meets or Exceeds Standards

	New-port	Pines	Rivers	Reese	Star	Tulio	Dist.	State
Reading 2006	72.4	69.3	52.9	55.3	65.1	45.5	68.8	68.2
Reading 2007	72.2	78.2	57.3	69.6	65.7	70.1	69.2	
Reading 2008	78.6	69.8	60	72.7	54.9	56.2	68.7	70.7
Reading 2009	77.7	70.8	65.3	57.9	58.1	55.6	66.8	71.3
Reading 2010	79.3	76.3	67.8	42.9	73.9	61.2	71.1	72.1

Grade 4

Meets or Exceeds Standards

	New-port	Pines	Rivers	Reese	Star	Tulio	Dist.	State
Reading 2006	81.1	91.5	85.2	76.2	87.2	79.2	83.1	81.1
Reading 2007	73.7	79.3	64.8	74.4	72.4	72.6	72.6	76.4
Reading 2008	77.5	77	68.7	63.5	76.5	79.1	72.6	72.6
Reading 2009	83.8	71.3	74.1	66.7	62.4	58.3	68.4	73.5
Reading 2010	57.6	65.2	64.6	64.9	73.2	46.3	64.7	67.2

Grade 5

Meets or Exceeds Standards

	New-port	Pines	Rivers	Reese	Star	Tulio	Dist.	State
Reading 2006	80.4	78.3	68.7	71.4	76.4	78.9	73.4	76.2
Reading 2007	62.4	81.4	70.2	69.8	71.9	56	68.3	71.1
Reading 2008	77.5	82.2	66	72.5	72.8	66.2	73.7	75.6
Reading 2009	72.6	74.5	64.4	59.6	66.7	58.8	70	73.9
Reading 2010	68	67.8	48.8	62.9	67.1	50.5	62.3	69.6

Grade 6

Meets or Exceeds Standards

	New-port	Pines	Rivers	Reese	Star	Tulio	Dist.	State
Reading 2006	49.4	63.1	51.2	56.5	62.9	49.1	63.6	66.6
Reading 2007	66.7	80.8	39	66.7	56.4	57.4	65	67.8
Reading 2008	69.6	79.5	59.6	41.9	71.4	57.3	68.1	68.9
Reading 2009	78.6	75.6	64.7	54.3	63.6	50	68.6	72
Reading 2010	59.1	59.6	45.4	53.7	53.5	44.9	60.3	64.9

Chapter 4

Findings: RTI Implementation in Bethel

Introduction

In this chapter I outline the history of the RTI implementation process as it was experienced by fourteen elementary principals in the Bethel School District from the 2007-2008 school year to 2011 and by me as the leader of the effort beginning in Summer 2008. I also reflect on how the process and the data collected during this action research project affected my leadership actions and those of the elementary principals.

I use Ken's story to provide the reader with both a chronological sequence and a sense of how RTI implementation was experienced. His story, transcribed in a single long interview sums up, and is consistent with and is consistent with, conversations I had with him over three years and what I saw in observing his interactions at school and in meetings. It captures the perspectives and feelings expressed in the interviews and interactions I had with other principals also seems to sum up the interviews and interactions I had with other principals. My relationship with Ken changed and became more intimate over several interviews due to his enthusiasm and knowledge of RTI and the processes for implementation and also because his eloquence so clearly highlighted important issues for RTI implementation in Bethel.

I also present data from principal interviews in several categories: vision/mission, timeline, professional development, and teacher resistance. These categories came up repeatedly during the interviews. I also discuss the work that I did as assistant superintendent with the elementary principals to support the implementation and how our thinking has changed regarding the implementation of a district-wide initiative.

Ken, and his school are fairly typical of the district in his experience and the characteristics of his student population, demographics and the school size are similar to that of the other principals and their schools involved in the study. Ken was more thoughtful and more discursive than his colleagues, and that he anticipated the student needs RTI was developed to address well before either the other principals or the district did. His account gives voice to many of the issues his colleagues addressed. His story begins two years prior to me becoming the assistant superintendent in 2007.

Ken's Story

"*Prior to 2007, what prompted me to look at RTI, and this was before I even knew what it was called, before I even knew the term, RTI. One the things that I noticed in my last building, Garrison Elementary, I noticed while watching the data that we were outstanding at keeping kids exactly at the level where they came in. What I mean by that is, students that came in as an underperformer in kindergarten, remained at that low level all the way through sixth grade. They were the same kids that we would run through our pre-referral system over and over and over.*

We also found that we were pretty darn effective at keeping students who were at the mid level, at the mid level, and students who were at the high level at the high level. The reason that I knew this is because we had a stable student population. Again, I was able to look at my kindergarten. What percentage of my kindergarten students were at risk? Then I'd follow that data. What percentage of my students were at risk in first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, all the way to sixth grade? Again, those percentages were constant. So the bottom line is, we were not helping or moving students to the next level. So that's ignited RTI.

There were a couple other things that came into it as well. I remember my conversation with the Assessment Director. She had attended a conference at Harvard and it was regarding

at-risk students and the failures of special education. In fact, terms that she used: casualties of instruction, meaning, our poor instruction is the cause of failure not necessarily disability being the cause of failure. She also shared some more statistics with me about if we don't help a child, what's in their future. What she showed me was a student who is at risk doesn't learn to read, the irregular attendance, the anti-social behaviors, the distaste of school, how that again occurs through junior high and high school and then as you go beyond that, the likelihood of any incarceration. So the bottom line is there was a little bit of a moral imperative that was ignited by her. And again, I didn't know what RTI was yet.

I talked with the new special ed. director at the time, and asked, "What do we do about this?" And he told me that there is a concept on the horizon called RTI. And I remember him telling me that it's going to sweep us with a vengeance. One of the things that I also knew was I didn't want this tidal wave to hit me. I wanted to work toward this tidal wave so I wasn't smashed by it. So I asked him, "Where can I learn about this?" He said, "You know, one of the places where the topic is hot is in the National Association of School Psychologists, their conference." He encouraged me to go to that conference in Spokane. Actually it's the Washington unit. But, I was hesitant to go to a psychologist's conference. What will this be like? On my own, I went to the psychologist's conference with the hope of learning more about RTI. I was fearful that I would learn nothing because I was not a psychologist. I was fearful it would be a bunch of people talking numbers and statistics that wouldn't mean much to me. It ended up being a spectacular conference. I learned a ton about RTI.

This was this before the Bethel School District started looking at it. The district hadn't even touched it. All we had in the district was a special ed. director saying "You're going to be hearing about it in the future." But I wanted to move forward towards it because I wasn't getting

results. And I also knew there was a moral reason to go after this. So I did and I was pretty fired up when I came back and looked at my special services program in an entirely different light. I knew that, again, things needed to be changed. I wasn't exactly sure how to do it but I knew I was going to move towards it. So after the very first steps that I began to take, I became more intrigued.

There were two different models that I had heard about. One was the treatment protocol model and the other, the problem-solving model. And of course, the problem solving model is as each individual student comes up, we're going to problem solve that individual. We're going to build a plan around them, and monitor progress, that sort of thing. The treatment protocol was, we're going to have a research validated intervention in place for our most at risk students that those students receive immediately, those who need it.

There was another concept that hit me that we were going to strive towards, which was, if the good stuff, and when you define the good stuff as small group instruction, targeted instruction, was only available through special ed., your model was broken. So we needed to be certain that we had it available to any student who needed it. So again, I knew that we had to devise some systems to provide the needed intervention materials.

I knew that we had to build a number of systems for this to work and the first system that needed to be built was a method to help us determine who needed help. We needed an accurate assessment system. I knew that many of the successful districts were using DIBELS. I approached our Curriculum Department, approached the Director of Assessment again and told her that I wanted to use DIBELS. I was told we can not use DIBELS in this district. I was told that DIBELS is ineffective and ends up on the shelf. I was told that some of the people who work in the Bethel District have friends who work in other buildings where they use DIBELS and,

again, it's entirely ineffective. And again, DIBELS being a measure of fluency, I knew I needed

that system.

So, I went around it. I purchased Read Naturally probes, which are measures of fluency

that are normed, and I adjusted my office allocation to put some additional hours into a LAP

paraprofessional who is very, very detailed and would help us with this fluency which was going

to be our probe to tell us who's at risk and also to monitor progress. So, instead of using

DIBELS pass probes or passages, we used Read Naturally and we created our own Excel system

that would draw our own trajectory lines, that would close the gap in a year, and then we would

progress monitor with Read Naturally passages in relationship to that. We created our own

DIBELS type of assessment system. We copied it, which was a ton of work. Exhausting, it was

killing people, because, again, we were guided to not touch DIBELS. That system helped us right

off the bat.

We assessed everybody with Read Naturally passages and rank ordered the students, and

our lowest students we called our intensive students. The intensive students were to be progress

monitored with the Read Naturally passages, not DIBELS passages, but Read Naturally

passages, every other week. Then that data was to be collected, plugged into the Excel system so

we would be able to track the progress data. System number one was built and was running

across the building. At this point we did not have powerful interventions in place.

All we had was a system that told us who needed it and how they were performing. I was

inviting my teachers, not inviting them, I was requiring my teachers to come back and we would

review those graphs, those trajectory graphs. And we'd put them on the table. I'd ask teachers

"Talk to me about this. What does this mean? How are the students doing?"

What the teachers continued to say was, "We just don't feel like we have the tools to help the students who are at the lowest level." They began to see that the lowest students were not progressing, remaining flat. Those discussions prompted the need for the next tool to make this thing fly. We need intensive interventions that will work.

I didn't have the money to buy the interventions. They're very expensive. I did, at the time, have a partial textbook allocation, but it wasn't enough to purchase these really expensive materials. I knew what materials would get the job done. It was the direct instruction stuff, it was the Corrective Reading, the Reading Mastery. All of the research pointed to it as the tool.

So I got creative. I contacted SRA and said, "I've done a number of things in our building and others have followed. I think we're an investment for you. You help us with SRA, you help us with training, it will help you, because others will follow, we'll advocate for your product. But I can't afford your professional development. I can't afford all of your materials. And they came out, met with me, talked some more, invited me to another meeting and said they'd partner with us. Again, this was still prior to the district taking any initiative. Probably a couple of years.

So then, the next step was, to put as much building money into it as I could. SRA came back with an offer and said, "We'll pick up half of it." I said, "I need you to pick up more than half because, again, we want every kid who needs this to get it." So they came back and gave me more. So, all kinds of it for free.

I said, again, in order for us to be successful, we need powerful professional development. We need your best trainers to come in and I can't afford it. And they agreed to send in one of their best trainers. The trainer came to our building for free and trained my staff in using the SRA materials.

I also said I need people to attend your summer institute before we get this off the ground. I can't afford to send them all. But again, we are your investment. They provided a ton of scholarships to my staff to spend time at the summer institute to receive the necessary training.

Year one, we had our own, self-created Read Naturally copy of a DIBELS type assessment in place. Ton of work. Year two, we brought in the interventions prepared the summer before.

By the way, at the end of year one, knowing what was going to happen year two, I released every one of my grade level teams for a full day for a presentation I put together including everything I had learned about RTI. I met with each grade level team and the instructional coach. The presentation included; Here's what's wrong with our current system, here's what the data says, here's what ends up with kids who cannot read, and here's why we have to go after this.

And I even made it real clear to every teacher… I said, "I won't work in a building that doesn't move towards this. It's irresponsible for us to not to that. If a kid cannot read, they're not going to access science, and they're not going to access math. It's wrong, it's not morally right, so I will not work in a building that's not going to move toward RTI and I want you to come with me." And I asked them at the end, "Are you going to come with me?" And every one of them said "Yes. We're going to come with you."

Then, year two, was the harder year. It was much easier for everybody to say, "Yah, we'll do that." But year two came to, "You said you're going to do it. Now you're going to do it."

So there were a lot of things that needed to be solved and figured out, and of course, we did. As we move into year two, we used the system that we devised on our own emulating DIBELS to identify who needs intervention. We plug students into small groups, had general education teachers trained to use SRA's materials, and SRA funding supporting us to get this off the ground. So every student who needed intervention was provided it at on a daily dosage. Groups no more than six or seven kids.

The next thing that happened, the word began to get out about these systems we had. I was approached by a board member who said, "Ken, we're hearing that special education kids aren't passing WASL." It was WASL at the time. "Talk to me about that." And I shared with the board member, "Here's what I've been doing and here's where I intend to go next."

I got a call shortly after that from my assistant superintendent, "Ken, I just got slammed by a board member. The board member wants to know what our district plan is for RTI. We would much prefer that you talk with us before them because we didn't have answers about our plan for RTI." And, of course, I shared with him she just asked me what I'm doing for my at-risk kids and that this was my response. He said, "I understand. No problem." And then, I believe that was the ignition of the district's RTI push. Now the board members know what RTI is. That was probably, four or five years ago.

Then, the next thing that I was asked to do, because the board was asking more about RTI, will you present to the School Board about RTI and what it is. You would? Sure, I'll put together a presentation. So I put together a presentation, a power point for a board study session.

SRA began to hand out our name. SRA handed our name to Orting, handed our name to Eatonville, handed our name to Tacoma, Federal Way, and Olympia. So these other schools

calling me saying, "We want to see your RTI systems." So I began talking about our RTI

systems.

And again, as word was getting out, other principals began saying, "We're hearing

about this. What are you doing?" So a principals' group that was planning a principals' retreat

said, "We'd like Ken to present on RTI." So I presented half the day, or the whole day on RTI.

The systems, the pieces, the rationale, the challenges, those sorts of things. Kind of igniting this

thing.

At the same time this was happening, I remember the new Director of Assessment came

into his role. The previous director had retired so I went to the new director and asked, "Can we

please do DIBELS?" I said, "You know, as people learn about RTI, you cannot learn about RTI

without hearing DIBELS, DIBELS, DIBELS." We go to OSPI conferences and we hear, "it's

DIBELS." Our people need to have a knowledge base, they need to know what they're talking

about, particularly as we push them towards RTI."

The director said, "Ken, you have a good argument. I don't feel like I can tell you no, but

I have to get back to you." He had conversation with the Assistant Superintendent for

Curriculum and they opened the door and said we're going to more towards DIBELS now. So

DIBELS flew.

One of my biggest problems was an issue that I created myself. My fault entirely, my own

stupidity. When I got to Garrison Elementary as the new principal, I was concerned because

there was no, zero, small group instruction occurring at the primary. None. They did not meet

with kids in small groups. You can't teach reading to a younger student without meeting with

them in a small group. You've got to hear them read. You've got to guide them. It simply won't

work without small group instruction.

So I figured, I've got to get small group instruction rolling or we're just never going to produce, so what I did was, I got really creative and I pushed all of my resources into the first grade reading block. And at the time, I thought it was a great move. Anybody who was available was pushed into the first grade reading block. Even my custodian was pushed into the first grade reading block. There were violations of contract language doing that. My librarian was pushed in. My counselor was pushed in. I was pushed in.

Okay. So what we had, we had small group instruction, but what we did not have was good instruction. We had small group instruction in that building but no good instruction. The people that I pushed in didn't have the capacity or the skill set to provide high quality instruction and I didn't give them the capacity or the skill set to do it. They were just simply reading with kids. Nothing was targeted. And I knew we weren't producing.

Unfortunately, there was a message that I was sending to the first grade teachers. The message that I was sending to the first grade teachers was a message that haunted me for the rest of the time that I was over at Garrison Elementary. Here was the message. In order to do small group instruction, you need a ton of people. The students are not developmentally ready to be independent so you can work with them in a small group. That was the message they picked up. So how would we ever do this without having all sorts of people pushed in?

So here's the deal now. What I wanted to do was to take that apart. I wanted to blow that apart because the instruction was not good. The other thing that I wanted to do was to infuse resources very strategically and methodically to run an RTI model.

So, believe it or not, the hardest group to move was my primary as again, they needed to meet with small groups without me dumping all sorts of bodies in there. I created a mindset and that mindset haunted me because I had to force it apart. And I think they're still mad at me for it.

They thought I was a hero when I first came in and did it. In fact, I think this is where, if at any time in my career, I think I displayed courage when I gave them this. I gave all these resources into their reading model and again those first grade teachers had really strong personalities, pretty emotional people, and they thought I was God's gift to the building. They said, "Oh, Ken, you're so wonderful. You're helping us. We love you." And I knew it wasn't producing, but I was loved for it. Then I took it away because I had to. I had to. It took courage and I got beat up for it for years. So, that was a big challenge.

Another challenge that we faced was when a student didn't appear to be doing well when we were using more valid and more reliable assessments, some teachers thought the students were doing well because the teacher wasn't necessarily trusting the data and figured we must have an anomaly.

Some teachers wanted to look for another assessment until they found one that confirms what they believed. Who cares where the assessment comes from, who cares how long the assessment is. Ah, I found it! It confirms that I am right as a professional and that I am a good teacher. Disregard all of the other data. That was another fight.

And I caused some issues there too, because when I was building these systems, because I knew there were some anomalies when you're using your classroom based assessments and that sort of thing, so I pumped it. I said, "There will be anomalies. Here's how to do an override, automatically." Then when I started seeing massive overrides just on the kids who weren't doing well, I knew I had to rip it apart. So that was another real issue as well.

Another issue, too, which was a real challenge, real challenge, is the excuse making. It was the population we served at Garrison and some people would think this wouldn't be a problem. It was a problem. We had an easy population to serve. Pretty low free and reduced

lunch counts, supportive community, not very diverse, etc. So, again, one would say, "You've got

an easy population."

That population made it harder for us. The reason why is because we didn't have to

develop the skill set to take care of the most at risk kids. With that population, your most at-risk

kids stood out like a sore thumb, get them in Sp. Ed. as quickly as you can and out of your

classroom. Done. And that was the skill set that people developed. They did not develop the skill

set to help those students so again, in my opinion, having an easier population to serve, causes it

to be more difficult to shift into an RTI model where you're going to suddenly take care of your

more challenging students.

I often said, "Hey, if you have a really difficult population, you need a different skill set

or 80% of your kids aren't going to make it." Again, we were good at keeping kids right at the

level where they came in.

So then what happened next was this imperative, this initiative, let's move RTI forward.

The assistant superintendent before you said, "RTI is an initiative in this district; we're going to

do it."

We put together the RTI task force. The RTI task force, their charge was to develop a

plan to support the RTI initiative district wide. The RTI task force included me, a couple of

instructional coaches, two directors in the Curriculum Department, and several elementary

principals. The attendance of principals was pretty inconsistent. We didn't meet terribly

frequently. We didn't do, as an RTI task force, we didn't do much studying, and we didn't do

much building of a knowledge base. We began by mapping out an implementation plan.

Essentially what it was one document that said, year one you need to have a screening and

progress monitoring system in place. Year two you need to have an intervention delivery in place. Year three you need to have whatever else in place.

And the message was, well here's the document, here's the tool. There's several different entry points because buildings are all on different spots; go ahead and go. And the Curriculum Department agreed to buy the intervention materials.

One of the challenges...this document was created and communicated once or twice, I don't know. But what we didn't, in my estimation, what we missed, this is the word that just hits me right in the face. Underestimating! Underestimating! We as a district completely underestimated the magnitude of what we were going after. The RTI initiative is massive and the initiative within the initiative; there's several components that are massive and we didn't view it as massive. When one views something as massive, they say we need to have all sorts of supports in place to get this off the ground in the appropriate way. So we didn't.

Here's an example: we were going to use data in an entirely different way. I can tell you, we did not know how to use data in this district. I can tell you we still struggle with data. I saw some examples of it yesterday in the discussions. People don't know the difference between a diagnostic assessment, a screening assessment, or progress monitoring tools. People don't know what those are. You can't do RTI if you're confusing diagnostic assessments with progress monitoring assessments.

So again, we weren't using data appropriately before, and we were going to bring in new data tools and some of these tools would need not just a knowledge base around them, but some belief system adjustments as well. So again, what we thought was, we can provide some training for our instructional coaches and leadership teams about DIBELS, what DIBELS is and then they can carry that out and everybody will be fine. I don't believe that it worked. And my

evidence for claiming that it didn't work would be the fact that as you share with me, others share with me, it's not used consistently and in the same sort of ways throughout the district.

Okay. So again, back to the concept of underestimating. We now know that if we want something to come off the ground and it's big, and when I say come off the ground, we want people to implement it, we want it to be a pillar, we want it to be something used regularly, consistently, reviewed, etc., you cannot do that just through a one summer institute session.

What you have to do is, you have to show the need for it, you have to, yes, build knowledge around it, but you also have to set up opportunity and situations for people to translate that knowledge. You've got to set up structured opportunities for people to reflect about the impact, make adjustments, and its something that they have to come back to on a regular basis to review.

What we did, we said, "here it is, duck!" And if we were to take that concept into the classroom, if I was to tell a good teacher, "Here's an incredibly sophisticated concept, really, really big, huge, probably one of the most difficult things that the students will ever attempt and you need to use all of this material or all of this information and apply it over here to create something grand. By the way, you've only got one day to teach it to them and expect them to do it for the rest of the year. And, don't monitor, don't provide feedback, don't set up opportunity for them to reflect." They'd look at you in the face and tell you, "You're nuts. It's not going to take." But that's what we did in our district. And in my opinion, it didn't take. I don't mean to be negative. We did the best we knew how to do.

And I take a lot of the blame for it too. I was one of the leaders. I ignited the thing and I made some of this work in my building. But I'd also say, too, I think I did less underestimating in my building than I did while working with the team to move the district forward.

As the district took on the RTI initiative, the professional development that was provided included a LID day where all elementary teachers were invited to go to a training. We brought Wayne Calendar in as sort of a kick off. Here's RTI, here's why we're going to do it, because we had thought he's a good "Ra Ra" guy. In my opinion, it was one of his worst presentations I'd ever seen. He wasn't as articulate. I just remember walking away feeling, this isn't the guy has inspired so many of us in the past in his conferences. He just seems flat today. The hope was that he would provide that inspiration. Here's where we're going to go after this. This is the initiative kick off. I think it failed to ignite that high level of enthusiasm. That was the first level of professional development.

The second level of professional development was some optional Reading Mastery or Corrective Reading trainings that I think occurred through Summer Institute, which I don't think were attended too heavily. The training was optional.

The DIBELS training was also offered, but only for the instructional coaches and leadership teams. They had the responsibility of pushing it all out there and providing information at the building level. One of the things we know, too, is just by attending a one-day workshop, you're not yet an expert with it. That was the initial professional development.

Much of my professional development was on my own. I continued to take more people to the psychologists' conference, the SRA training. I contracted with the ESD and attended a series of workshops that were designed to build the capacity of a team to guide your building into the implementation of RTI.

Then when you came on board as the new Assistant Superintendent. One thing that we had more of when you came on board than we had had in the past was clarity in regards to

initiative expectations. It was very clear from you that RTI is an expectation that you have. You will move towards RTI! It became more loud, if you will, as you stepped into the role.

For continued RTI professional development, we had Wayne Calendar return last summer (2009) for leadership teams. That was after your first year in and that was specifically for leadership teams. It was more targeted and more specific. It was specifically for the needs of the buildings. I recall that. You've pushed for it to be a topic that teacher PLCs and principal PLCs discuss. I don't know that we've had a lot of professional development surrounding RTI in the district. It's the main initiative. So, if it's the main initiative, it seems like that's what it should have been focused on.

In my opinion, not an expert on the topic, but I'm okay at developing systems that work. One of the things that I would say would be, we should have done is we should have laid out each component. Let's say progress monitoring, using data effectively, the intervention itself, and analyzing the impact and making adjustments. All of those are RTI elements, even the understanding of the levels pyramid.

We should have painted the target. After painting the target, then what we should have asked ourselves many things. What will it take? What sort of supports? While understanding effective elements of professional development, what makes good professional development? What will it take in terms of good professional development for this to be actualized? We said it's a priority, so what needs to occur? What's available to us to support that? We have Summer Institute available to us. We have Learning Improvement Days available to us. We have principal meetings available to us. We should have said, "How can we use each of these structures that exist to support the development of, or the actualization of what we described as fundamental?" What are important timelines, benchmarks, and what evidence? What evidence

will tell us that we have it in place? Real evidence. How do we prove it and not accept just claims? "Yup, we're there. We do RTI."

We said that we need to use progress-monitoring data in this way and we described what that would look like when it's occurring, and occurring well. We said this is how we're going to support it. Now how are we going to assess? And if we're not there, how are we going to confront those brutal facts? That's what we should have done for everything that we said was critical.

The other thing that we should have done, which I think we sometimes fall into the pattern of doing, and this isn't anybody's fault, we just don't have a ton of time. We say, because we don't have a ton of time, we've got to do this quickly, and move on. But again, if we say that it's foundational and fundamental we should say we're going to give it whatever time it takes to insure that it is ready to rock. But that also doesn't mean to say that we can sit around and spin our wheels and that sort of thing. In my estimation, what it is, again, identify the key elements. Which ones are foundational? Those become our priorities. What would it look like when actualized fully and well?

The team has to do some studying, build a common knowledge base, and then again, build the plan using the existing structures to bring the staff to that initiative with benchmarks in place that demand the collection of real evidence to claim success. Then the next one. Then the next one. We also have to build in the opportunity to correct, because, again, if we're going to collect evidence to make a claim that we're rocking and the evidence says otherwise, adjust. Don't move on. Adjust. So, the bottom line is, again, we didn't do that. I think we underestimated it. And now we're all in different places.

I claimed that the ignition of the RTI initiative occurred at Garrison Elementary. Often I felt like I about killed myself studying. I didn't feel like I had a lot of close available resources and guidance. I was in some water that others weren't familiar with so I felt kind of alone out there. So in igniting an initiative like that, I didn't have that lateral capacity, buildings helping each other move through difficult turbulent stuff. I was kind of on my own.

I think, at the time, initiatives didn't come from the top. We took our initiatives and we sailed our buildings. It was still site-based, local control. I would have said, if we as a district had said this is our initiative, we're going to go after this methodically, carefully, and do it all together. We're going to have the benchmarks and everybody's going to be really clear on those. I think I could have advanced more quickly. I think I would have made fewer mistakes. I think I would have enjoyed my work more. I think we all would have been further along. I do. Again, I think we, the district, did the best that we knew how to do at the time."

Ken identified several categories that helped with, or in some cases may have interfered with, the facilitation of the implementation process that were consistent with data collected from the interviews. He identified the RTI Task Force, the underestimation of the complexity and sophistication of RTI, the importance of a clear mission and vision, resistance to change, professional development for teachers and principals, the development of PLCs and teacher leaders, the importance of the instructional coach, and coordination with Title I and Special Education.

RTI Task Force

Because of the need to improve student achievement in reading, in 2006, the district adopted Response to Intervention (RTI) as a systemic initiative to address the reading achievement of elementary students in all elementary schools following the development of an

RTI Task Force. The RTI Task Force was composed of elementary principals, teachers, and district representatives from the Curriculum and Instruction Department. The charge of the RTI task force was to develop a plan to support the RTI initiative district wide. The RTI task force included a few elementary principals, a couple of instructional coaches, and two directors in the Curriculum Department. The attendance of principals and the scheduling of meetings was inconsistent and actual meetings were not frequent enough. According to the principals, the RTI Task Force did not do much studying, and or building of a knowledge base about reading instruction or RTI.-The task force did, however provide a vehicle for discussing RTI and emphasized the idea that the district was moving forward with the initiative. Marv shared, "I think that lots of discussion and lots of visiting what RTI was, what it looked like, and having the RTI Task Force, I think those really solidified the ideas in my mind". Doug sent his instructional coach to some meetings to help them understand RTI. Stuart remembered, "I didn't get a chance to go, but there were regular RTI meetings where they bring stakeholders together and say, so, how's it going? What are some ideas? What assessments do you use? Talk about curriculum. What kind of training do you need?'"

The task force began by mapping out an implementation plan. Essentially it was ~~one~~ a single document that said: Year 1 you need to have a screening and progress monitoring system in place, Year 2 you need to have an intervention delivery in place, and Year 3 you need to have whatever else in place. The meetings did show district support for the initiative. Caleb pointed out, "We're better today with RTI having RTI Task Force meetings early on. I think RTI would look different today if our curriculum and instruction department was not behind this".

I attended the RTI Task Force meetings once I became assistant superintendent in order to help me gain knowledge of RTI and learn where we were as a district in the implementation

process. There were different principals in attendance at each meeting and there did not seem to be a targeted focus for the meetings at that time. The meetings seemed to be more of a chance for principals to talk about RTI and not about the district process of implementation. The task force stopped meeting in 2010 for two reasons. (1) The meetings became unproductive because all of the buildings were at different stages of implementation and (2) the district considered the implementation of RTI as "off the ground".

Unanticipated Consequences of RTI Implementation

The perceptions of all of the principals pointed to RTI as a complicated initiative that required extensive systems development and consideration. All 14 principals elaborated on the complexities and unexpected issues that were encountered during the process of implementation. RTI is such a large initiative that it is very difficult to forecast every challenge or barrier ahead of time.

Emily stated, "I think that first of all is all the time that it takes to do it. It takes longer than you think you have and more energy and resources than you'd ever imagine." Another said it this way, "I think it's real easy to believe that RTI is simple and you develop simple systems, and that is a trap. If you believe that RTI is simple and you develop simple systems and don't treat it as a massive undertaking, I think you are setting yourself up for failure. The initiative is all consuming." Caleb reported, "All of the other things that tug and pull at us in education need to be cleared out of the way in order to get this main thing down correctly because it's so difficult."

Because it is so difficult and so much work, some principals experienced resistance from teacher union members regarding workload.

Vision/Mission

It appeared that the district did not establish a clear mission and vision for RTI prior to the implementation process. If there was one developed, it was not communicated. Most of the principals felt we should have laid out in advance all of the pieces that were critical to the effective implementation of an RTI operation. We should have prioritized those pieces. We should have said, this comes first. It's foundational. This comes next. This comes next. Once laying it out, we should have asked, what does it take? What does it look like when this is fully functional? We should have created a detailed vision when this thing is rolling and a detailed vision for when people are using progress-monitoring data effectively. What does it look like in a building? What does it look like at a staff meeting? What are teachers doing during their PLCs? We should have articulated that clearly.

Most principals generally felt that although stages of implementation were identified, the timing of implementation and steps to be completed each year were not developed and communicated clearly. Hence, there was no way to assess each school's progress on the steps of implementation. As a result, accountability was minimized. It was difficult to hold people accountable for an initiative that appeared for many to be optional.

Sam saw that there were some other folks who were working hard at it and thought, "Why don't we just wait this time. Let somebody else do it. The district, instead of coming in and saying, okay, everybody's doing this on this timeline, and here's the curriculum you are going to use, instead, it was like the district evolved with it. So, I inferred that the district understood that people are in different places, so we're going to let you go at the pace that works for you".

Doug said, "I've kind of felt that RTI is like an option. We got into it maybe a little later than other schools. I kind of felt that way because the RTI Task Force, that's a voluntary thing. It would be nice if we had the common experience with information that wasn't voluntary to get." Caleb felt that there should have been mandatory trainings that all teachers and principals should attend before implementation.

Marsha shared her experience, "And I knew it was going to be hard and that's why the first year we just kind of did some slow talking, sharing, we didn't really get into it. And then I got scared cause there were other schools that were full into it and they were running all these groups and I felt I was behind."

Ken stated, "I think building a specific long range plan with specific expectations and a specific professional development plan for the leader and also the teachers insures that us principals are all essentially exposed to the same things which allows us to build each other's knowledge base. I think that was lacking."

One point shared by most principals was the process of trying to move things too fast out of a sense of urgency. I witnessed and probably contributed to this problem. As a result of this action research effort, I initiated monthly meetings for the elementary principals with the directors of assessment, curriculum, and professional development. The meetings focused on the elementary principals being part of the process of developing a focused professional development program as opposed to being recipients of one.

Leaders in curriculum and instruction developed more intimacy in their relationships with principals. We began to move away from the emphasis on directives and bureaucratic practices by visiting schools and becoming immersed in meetings with principals to identify needs of the individual schools as well as recommended changes in district processes.

District office leadership was recognized by principals as credible and supportive, providing assistance with legal issues, personnel, and policy issues. District administration was described as customer service oriented in developing systems to provide necessary curriculum and materials and providing assistance with assessment and student data analysis. Caleb pointed out, "I did a good job of acquiring knowledge. I was very supported by those in curriculum and instruction and my immediate supervisor". Emily said, "The district has really done well at getting the materials for us. They have done a really good job of being customer service oriented".

As a result of the data collected during this action research, I became keenly aware of what was needed to effect district level change in the process of initiative implementation and involve the principals more in the process. An example is that the district began a focused initiative on improving student achievement in mathematics. The initiative called for a long-range plan, a clear mission and vision, strategic steps in the plan, a way to assess those steps, and focused professional development. All of these elements were lacking to some degree for the implementation of RTI.

Teacher Resistance

A main struggle that most principals identified was the difficulty many teachers had sharing students with other teachers. Many teachers do not want to share their students with other teachers because they don't trust the teaching ability of others, or they are not familiar with the teaching ability of others. This is a philosophical change in teaching practice where teachers teach their own class all day. Any change in teaching habits creates insecurity or a fear of personal failure and is one of the reasons for resistance to change (Conner 1995).

Shirley shared that one of the big things that happens when teachers open their doors is that really strong teachers see what's going on next door and they don't always like it. Developing the trust and transparency of student achievement data, and the use of the data to change instructional practices is important to the effectiveness of the professional learning community. Mediocre teachers may be challenged or threatened by observing other teachers who have better skills or philosophies different from their own.

On the opposite side of this struggle is that teachers are so accustomed to believing that in order to individualize instruction for all students, there must be significant additional staffing to accommodate small group instruction. Most of the principals eventually implemented learning stations in the classrooms to provide the teacher the opportunity to differentiate instruction with small groups or individuals. Students are first taught and trained to be purposefully independent while the teacher is instructing other students or small groups of students.

Most of the principals mentioned that teachers did not trust DIBELS data even after the first year of implementation. Many teachers continued to use other forms of assessment, which tended to support their feelings of their own effectiveness as opposed to accurate measures of student achievement.

In a follow up interview, Ken said, "Some teachers wanted to look for another assessment until they found one that confirms what they believed. Who cares where the assessment comes from, who cares how long the assessment is. Ah, I found it! It confirms that I am right as a professional and that I am a good teacher. Disregard all of the other data."

Supporting Reeves' leader's supervision indicator of student-centered accountability, principals felt it was important to get into classrooms frequently to supervise RTI in action. Although it was considered to be somewhat of a challenge for some principals, most overcame

the challenge by spending less time in each classroom, which allowed them to see all of the classrooms at RTI time. It was important for principals to use a purposeful eye to analyze what students were engaged with as opposed to simply being engaged.

The principals identified teacher resistance as a challenge. There are teachers who do not believe that all kids can learn. When they don't believe that the kids are going to learn, they don't have a reason to move to RTI. They don't have a reason to help that student who is really struggling. When the teacher believes that the struggle is caused by the parents, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, the student can only be fixed by special education or plugging the student into a special program somewhere else. If this were the case, why would a teacher want to do extra work and analysis to support their students? This concern was identified often during the principal interviews.

Laura tried to work with two teachers that fought her on most of the RTI initiative. These two were active in the union and not fully trusting of administrators nor enthusiastic of a new program that promised to add to their workload. The two teachers attempted to rally the rest of the staff against the initiative without much success. They finally realized the resistance was not working for them or anyone else. The two teachers gave in to the peer pressure and requested assistance from the principal as to how to get out of the mess that they had created.

Sam reported, "The teacher that I am picturing in my mind, she had a choice, wouldn't touch RTI, wouldn't have anything to do with it. Special Ed. would have taken all of the challenging students. I said no! Here is the way it's going to look, here are the expectations, and here are the supports. It wasn't smooth. She didn't turn around and say thank you, I've got it." The teacher did change and get results, but it took time.

All of the principals experienced excuse making by teachers for the lack of student achievement. Brian shared, "And then, there's the naysayer group at the bottom that . . . it's the kid . . . it's the families . . . it's the . . . I heard it today in the staff room. It comes into my office like a funnel. There was one of the biggest out-spoken people preaching to all the staff that were in there that would listen…it's all about the parents and what they don't do. It's all about the kids and what they don't do. It's all about everything else."

Most principals noted that Special Education, Learning Assistance Program, and Title I teachers also had a difficult time with sharing regular education students. They were used to a pullout model, which served only students in those programs. Purposefully grouping all students into three tiers and serving students based on data was a different concept and improved communication systems were created for reporting. We spent a substantial amount of time clarifying Title I and Special Education program requirements to ensure compliance. Ron shared, "Teachers, particularly at the third and fourth level really sort of resented that they had to have special education kids in their classrooms. They were operating under the assumption that the special education teacher was kind of dropping the ball. They thought he was not being a team player". Emily said, "The first grade situation was difficult because they had several Benchmark students falling off. That means the instruction is the problem. There was a little finger pointing at Title. They didn't talk to each other much".

RTI and teachers sharing students and meeting together in what they saw as highly effective professional learning communities was a change in teaching philosophy for teachers, so it creates a challenge for principals. Teacher resistance was experienced by all of the principals. There is disequilibrium that people experience. Things don't feel right and they become uncomfortable. They become afraid to take risks. It is natural for them to back away or return to

familiar practices at that point. That is when it becomes very important for the principal to keep in place that subtle pressure and encouragement to keep moving forward, showing the teachers that, yes they are on the right track. It is not an option to steer away from the initiative, but work with the team to identify supports to put in place. Principals must continually take a pulse of the building to understand who is struggling, what that struggle is, and provide support.

Professional Development

Because I assumed responsibility for leading the RTI effort a year after it was begun, I attended my first professional development on RTI with the elementary principals only in spring of 2008. I was a year behind in my knowledge of RTI and the implementation of the initiative. The District had already set the direction the year prior. I remember thinking that RTI was a very complicated and large initiative and was working on ways for me to catch up and to create some consistency in the initiative.

Professional development was provided to the principals regarding the philosophy and structure of an RTI system on two occasions. Some principals found other opportunities that were outside of the professional development provided by the district. Professional development was provided to teachers and paraprofessionals on the use of Corrective Reading and Reading Mastery as interventions for struggling readers in the three tiered RTI system described earlier in this paper. Trainings for the use of these two reading interventions, as well as DIBELS for assessment and progress monitoring, continued to be offered each year during Summer Institute to accommodate staff turnover and as schools developed sophistication in the RTI process. Trainings were also offered by building trainers during the school year as needed.

Most principals felt that although the curriculum and instruction department was very important to RTI and was really behind the efforts, the district's professional development plan

did not align with the implementation steps for RTI over the long term. It was also felt that although stages of implementation were identified, there were not clearly identified implementation steps for each year and a way to assess each school's progress on the steps of implementation. As a result, accountability was minimized.

One principal shared, "I saw that we had a long range plan and I like a long range plan. I think it is really important to know how things will look over multiple years. So, I think we missed, we didn't align professional development to those stages. We said this should happen by this year, this should happen by this year, and this should happen by this year, which is subtle pressure, but what I didn't necessarily see were the supports, the required professional development specific to those stages. What we had were a whole lot of good offerings, but I didn't see how these offerings connected to that which we were lifting off the ground."

Another principal stated, "I don't think at the district level that it was well thought out and the game kept changing. The rules kept changing along the way. And there wasn't enough information and training for us. So, it felt like for me, do this and figure it out as you go along."

More than half of the principals felt it was important to attend the same professional development with their teachers. Having this shared knowledge of the curricula for interventions and teaching strategies allowed them to effectively supervise the instruction and systems for a successful implementation of RTI. Being able to attend the same professional development as teachers, although important, was problematic due to the vast array of professional development offered to teachers, and the timing of those opportunities. This philosophy fits with Reeves' indicator of leader's knowledge of curriculum and instruction.

The summer I began my RTI responsibilities, I attended the professional development for DIBELS to gain a better understanding of the progress monitoring and scoring system. I

remember thinking how complicated the scoring was at first. I wanted to be able to discuss the data collected through DIBELS with the principals. I was disappointed that the training was optional. How could we have a district-wide implementation with optional training on the use of curriculum and assessment systems? How could we hold people accountable? How would we be able to know if the initiative was working?

Professional Learning Communities and Teacher Leadership

Teaming or building effective professional learning communities was also identified by all of the principals as a key factor to successful implementation of RTI. The teams need to be able to solve problems effectively. Professional development should be provided to administrators and teachers in the areas of data analysis, use of protocols, and facilitation, to ensure that the teams or PLCs can solve the issues surrounding individual student academic performance. RTI cannot be successfully implemented without high functioning teams.

Maria pointed out that she wanted her teachers to see that initially, it is a lot of work, but eventually teaming starts to take the stress away.

Most of the principals spoke to the importance of highly functional professional learning communities (PLCs) to successfully implement RTI. The district has also seen the importance of highly functional professional learning communities and has programmed professional development to focus on improving the leadership, facilitation, and data analysis in the professional learning communities. Doug stated, "I really believe that the system is one of the best things I've ever seen come across my experience in education. PLCs and RTI".

The question remains, should the district have provided for the development of PLCs prior to the implementation of RTI, or, does RTI act as an effective vehicle to create the need to develop functional PLCs?

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The principals all identified the role of the instructional coach as crucial in developing functional professional learning communities. The principals felt that their roles were now so complex that it was important to distribute leadership by way of the instructional coach, leadership teams, and grade level leaders. Teacher PLCs were at all levels of functionality and had to be monitored with clear expectations. One principal stated, "I'm not a micro-manager, but in order to be successful, in order to be sure that it's implemented, I have to be more of a micro-manager."

Laura shared, "I want my teachers, my teacher leaders to take charge of areas and it's happening, and it's working, and the more they do it, the more confident they become, the more skilled they become and they actually become like you, the principal. So, I pulled myself out of the training part and became more the facilitator and the go get the stuff they need now." Laura's actions are an example of facilitative leadership (Goldman, et al., 1993).

Summary

In summary, identified key issues were: the complexity and sophistication of RTI, resistance to change, professional development for teachers and principals, development of PLCs and teacher leaders, the importance of the instructional coach, and coordination with Title I and Special Education. These issues came up repeatedly throughout the interviews, observations, and meetings conducted over the three years of this research. In Chapter 5, I discuss changes in district procedures that occurred as a direct result of this research.

Chapter 5

Action Leadership and Reflections

Once the initial interviews were completed, I met with each principal on alternating weeks and continued dialogue about RTI implementation. Our meetings became more collegial over time. My individual meetings with the four members of the focus group focused on preliminary findings to verify the data collected during the interviews. I selected the four principals for the focus group based on their experience of the implementation process and RTI knowledge.

I meetings and during interviews, principals repeatedly shared the importance of PLCs. Hence, I outlined a proposal for Principal PLCs. The principals were placed into four groups based upon geographic proximity to each other. Each PLC was comprised of between four and six principals. The PLCs meet in a different school each month on a rotational basis.

The objective of the PLCs was to develop instructional supervision skills and a sense of relevancy and leadership in the development of teacher PLCs. I felt it was important for principals to experience the challenges and strengths that teachers experience in developing their skills in collaboration, the use of protocols, and following an agenda that will result in action. During these meetings principals shared their experiences and assisted each other in the development of RTI systems and schedules as well as other leadership issues.

The principals continued to gain sophistication and knowledge regarding highly functional PLCs. As a result, they were awarded the shared responsibility of designing professional development and providing feedback to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction to insure alignment with the district's PLC initiative.

We eventually set a schedule of monthly meetings with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in effort to have the principals be a part of the process of designing professional development for themselves and teachers. It had not been past practice for the principals to be an integral part of the process, although they had the opportunity to provide feedback by other methods such as e-mail.

The interview data gave me insight as to how to improve the process for improving student achievement in math. I decided that I did not want to repeat the RTI implementation process in the new math initiative. I had conversations with members of the focus group and then moved the conversation to an elementary principals meeting. The principals concurred that we should consider a more structured way to implement a math initiative. The district organized a trip to a national math conference. Two members of my focus group and I were able to attend. We learned that our best avenue for improving student achievement in math would be to improve the quality of teacher PLCs in the areas of teacher leadership, data analysis, and structure. The district provided stipends for a math grade level leader (MGLL) for nearly every grade level in every building. The MGLLs received professional development to develop their skills in facilitation, agenda development, and data analysis.

Two members of the focus group and I were also part of the District Math Improvement Team. We began the process of developing a framework and plan for which to align the resources and professional development surrounding mathematics. The plan would provide a mission and vision, steps and ways to assess the progress towards them. This kind of a comprehensive plan was not developed prior to the implementation of RTI for reading.

My Education Experience

Inspired by this action research and Ken's story, I decided to put down what I learned

about learning in the course of my own public school education as well as my experience in learning to lead.

During my public educational experience in the 1950s and 1960s, there were no accountability measures, state-mandated standards, or state assessments. There was nothing like No Child Left Behind legislation. It must not have been such a bad education at that. I found at my last class reunion that most of my classmates have been fairly successful. My teachers were in my opinion, mostly smart, mostly women, and completely committed to our academic success.

Even decades prior to NCLB, we got all of our basic skills, and most went on to higher levels of education. We studied history, the classics, English, geometry, trigonometry, Science, German, and other subjects, and we had varied musical opportunities, both choir and band. We did term papers and researched from encyclopedias and books, not search engines and the Internet. In addition, we had a full array of other opportunities, athletic, extra-curricular, drama, and social. Our education journey brought us the best of public education. There seemed to be a place for everyone. Our public education truly was the great equalizer.

Our journey in school provided us with a strong foundation, often coupled with family and community support, as a springboard to our future. Some of my classmates went on to be doctors, lawyers, teachers, business people, editors, and many other professions. It certainly appears that we were taught to think and that creativity and innovation were prized. At the time of course, I didn't realize that many of my classmates had less supportive parents and that teachers may have responded less positively to them. Drop-out rates were higher and students with special needs were underserved, if served at all. The schools I experienced were very different from the ones I led decades later.

Like ours, parents today want their children to learn to think and dream, all the while learning basic skills that will take them into higher levels of learning. They want music and art for their kids, whether or not they will become professional musicians and artists, because of what those disciplines contribute to a child's life and development. And they want teachers who are beloved and respected by their communities and who respond to that respect by making sure students get what they need to succeed.

In retrospect, the report cards I received in high school during the 1960s seemed to be a source of great amusement to me, but not necessarily for my family. I seemed to perform at least at an average level in most subjects with an inclination toward the sciences and math, although my aptitude tests always pointed towards music and the arts. To me, this seemed to be a conflict with the way I thought about what I could be good at. I thought I could be good at anything.

As a child I was blessed with an inquisitive mind, and wanted to know reasons for just about everything. My father and mother firmly believed in self-education even then. Learning did not, in their minds, start at 8:30 and end at 3:00. It was a continuous process. This is illustrated by one of my fondest memories: during a leisurely after dinner talk at the table (I must have been about nine or ten), I asked my mother why it is that objects look different under water. Rather than expecting me to simply accept her explanation about the refraction of light, the dirty dishes were immediately pushed aside, the curtains closed and the lights switched off. My mother produced a glass jar filled with water from the kitchen, and a flashlight. In order to make the light clearly visible, a candle was lit and I was able to see, before my very own eyes, what happens to light when it passes through water. I never looked at objects in the water at the lake in the same way after that, and I never looked at the teachers at my school in the same way either.

I began to distinguish two different types of teachers: those who merely teach and those who motivate. In my high school, the first type of teacher attempted to persuade us students to absorb information and regurgitate that information during exams. The other type stimulated us to discover this information on our own.

The discovery I made at school, that there are teachers and motivators, was expanded with the idea that we can be our own teacher and motivator, and that anyone can be a motivator or teacher to another person. I have learned to lead with that in mind. I try to motivate my colleagues and those who I lead. Throughout this project, I continually projected excitement for the research and for the potential for us to affect change. I treat those I lead as colleagues instead of subordinates. I believe that sustainable change can only be accomplished with sharing leadership.

As I reflect on my recent experience working with the principals on this project, I can't help but appreciate more, my own public education experience and how it and my parents provided me with ample opportunities to develop my philosophy of leadership, although I certainly did not realize it at the time.

During this action research project, I have learned from and been motivated by the thinking and reflections of the principals in this study. They inspire me with their ability to analyze problems and work as a team to create solutions. They are sometimes impatient due to their passion for creating systems that best serve their students and teachers. I have feedback from most of them that they have learned from and been motivated by me as well. Our thinking about leadership and RTI has evolved from developing systems in isolation to working together as a team to process information and implement sustainable change.

Leading change in district practices by embarking on action research was challenging and a

commitment for the district leadership, the principals, and me. There were, and continue to be, benefits of the opportunities for team learning implicit in our critical, constructive, and collaborative approach to improving management practices. We learned that leadership is about designing the learning processes whereby all of us together can deal productively with the critical issues we face.

Principal and Central Office Leadership

While I realize the many differences and challenges in American schools today and fully understand the accountability system, I see monumental changes in the job of the building principal. In my school experience, if I ever saw the principal or assistant principal, it was in his office or he was walking around and yelling at us for not being clean-shaven or for having hair that was too long. Some were sent home for this. I don't recall ever being in class and seeing the principal come in to observe the teacher's instruction.

The school principal wears many hats. The principal must be the manager, administrator, instructional leader, and curriculum leader at different points in a day. It is a balancing act of having to juggle between these various roles. Often times, more attention is accorded to managerial and administrative tasks and that of the instructional leader is relegated to others in the administrative hierarchy even though the core business of a school is teaching and learning. The role of instructional leader by school leaders is a relatively new concept that emerged in the early 1980's which called for a shift of emphasis from principals being managers or administrators to instructional or academic leaders. Recently, instructional leadership has made a comeback with increasing importance placed on academic standards and the need for principals and schools to be accountable.

While most would agree that instructional leadership is critical in the realization of

effective schools, I found that it was seldom being satisfactorily practiced. For example, in 2007, the year before I became assistant superintendent, among the 1000 teachers in the district rated using the seven criteria for evaluation, there were only 13 unsatisfactory marks given on annual teacher evaluations. Instructional leadership and the elements of effective instruction became an area of focus for the district. As a result, the district experienced a dramatic increase in unsatisfactory marks on teacher evaluations. School leaders continued to seek a balance in their role as manager-administrator and instructional leader.

Interestingly, among the reasons cited for less emphasis given to instructional leadership is the lack of in depth training for their role as an instructional leader, lack of time to execute instructional activities, increased paper work, and the community's expectation that the principal's role is that of a manager (Fullan, 1991).

More recently, the focus of instructional leadership has been expanded towards deeper involvement in the implementation of RTI and differentiated instruction. Principals have also learned the importance of developing functional teacher professional learning communities. In learning communities, staff members meet on a regular basis to discuss student achievement data, design formative assessments, align curriculum to the state standards, and take action to change their instruction. They operate in networks of shared and complementary expertise rather than in hierarchies or in isolation. Teachers in a learning community "own the problem" and become agents of its solution. The principals have also learned to set high expectations for performance and create a culture of continuous learning. Blase and Blase (1998), expressed instructional leadership in specific behaviors such as making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting collaboration, providing professional development opportunities, and giving praise for effective teaching.

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The principals and I learned the importance of attending professional development opportunities with their teacher. For example, teaching reading is different from teaching math and we would not expect the principal to be knowledgeable about instructional strategies specific for each of the subject areas, without ongoing professional development to update their skills. Furthermore, with the growing importance of the use of data to inform instruction, the principals and I learned how to analyze formative and summative student achievement data and develop systems for changing instructional practices. For example, if some students are unable to read and write at grade level, the principals as instructional leaders learned to take steps to alleviate the problem by supporting teachers' instructional methods, allocating resources and materials, visiting classrooms frequently, providing feedback on instructional methods and techniques, and using data to focus attention on improving the curriculum and instruction.

I have learned that interpersonal or people skills are essential for the success of being an assistant superintendent. These are skills that maintain trust, spur motivation, give empowerment, and enhance collegiality. Relationships are built on trust and tasks are accomplished through motivation and empowerment wherein principals are involved in planning, designing, and evaluating instructional initiatives and the professional development necessary for implementation. Empowerment leads to ownership and commitment as the principals identify problems and design strategies themselves. The district has considered collegiality to promote sharing, cooperation, and collaboration, where the assistant superintendent, central office leadership, and principals talk about teaching and learning.

The district leaders have considered that planning an initiative begins with clear identification of goals or vision to work towards, as well as inducing, commitment and enthusiasm. The next step is to assess what changes need to occur and which may be

accomplished by asking the principals, who in turn will try to assess the needs and attitudes of their staffs.

District leaders have acknowledged that it requires a redefinition of the central office administration, one that removes the barriers to leadership by eliminating bureaucratic structures and reinventing relationships. It has learned to build a community of learners, share decision-making, support ongoing professional development for all staff members, redirect resources to support a district initiative, and create a climate of integrity, inquiry, and continuous improvement. Scheduled monthly meetings with the curriculum and instruction department and elementary principals is evidence of district leaders involving principals in the process of identifying needs for and planning of the professional development necessary for success of the new district math initiative.

The district will need to evaluate whether when it provides a clear vision and mission, a plan with steps and evaluation, and alignment of professional development activities, a more effective initiative implementation process will result. Although we believe that district provided professional development can make a difference in teacher leadership and increase the effectiveness of PLCs, this study did not examine whether the leadership of teachers actually changed or improved as a result of the professional development activities provided by the district. The district will need to delve deeper to understand whether teacher leadership professional development provided by the district administration is leading to improved professional learning communities that in turn supports improved student learning.

As a direct result of this study, the district leadership became aware that for a district initiative to be successful, it has to provide (1) a clear mission and vision, (2) identified sequential steps with accountability measures, (3) a way to assess the progress, (3) professional

development aligned with each step, and (4) a process to ensure that principals are an integral part of the initiative.

I have also learned and helped the central office leadership understand that leadership needs to be of a facilitative nature in order to effectively promote sustainable change during an initiative implementation. Facilitative leadership, together with vision, generates and capitalizes on opportunities for change (Goldman et al. 1996). The district leadership is undergoing changes to break down hierarchical structures that impede the ability of principals to implement district initiatives. I have also learned that I must monitor and facilitate district changes in the system to create consistency. Our RTI implementation process was fragmented do to the lack of facilitative leadership between the district and the principals. The fragmentation led to some resistance and reluctance to implement RTI.

It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor doubtful of success, than to initiate a process like RTI, which requires an extensive amount of change in the way teachers teach and how they actually think about teaching. District leaders and principals need to consider what practices can be given up in order to take on new ones. Consideration must also be given to how present practices can be assimilated into the proposed changes. Resistance is an expected part of the change process. A reason for the resistance is distrust in the people who proposed it (Conner 1995). When central office leaders have established trust relationships with principals, they can better initiate major change in instructional practice. Because RTI requires significant changes in practices, and even in thinking about teaching and learning, principals and teachers who do not trust their leaders are often unwilling to put in the effort required to make changes. Successful change is a systematic rather than segregated process. People on the scene who are most familiar with the needs and problems are in the best position to

do something about them. Ken and his story are an inspiration and a model for how a leader can be proactive in developing systems with little or no support. He showed pervasiveness throughout the implementation of RTI with no defensiveness. He chose to never give up when he was faced with challenges more severe than faced by the other principals.

Throughout the past three years of this research, the principals and teachers showed great resiliency in spite of the shortcomings of the implementation process. It has been a serious challenge for principals and teachers and most of them were able to adapt and continue with the implementation.

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Appendix A

1. What are the specific issues for you as a leader, that arise out of implementing RTI?

2. Who or what encourages you to lead your school to participate in researched instructional practices under the RTI framework?

3. Give examples of how you, as a leader, impact the RTI process in your school.

4. There are teachers who participated in professional development opportunities for RTI and returned to the classroom to implement their new learning. Please give examples of how you offer support for your teachers.

5. Give examples of barriers that you encountered regarding your systematic supervision for the implementation of RTI. Give examples of how have you overcome these barriers.

6. What is your main purpose in participating in an RTI professional development opportunity?

7. What RTI professional development activities were most useful/helpful to you? What did you learn from the experience? What specifically about the activity made it helpful?

8. Give examples of frustrations have you experienced when implementing RTI at your building. How did you respond to them?

9. What leadership attributes would describe your leadership in promoting RTI?

10. Give examples of barriers have you encountered regarding your acquiring knowledge of RTI curriculum, instruction and assessment. How have you overcome these barriers?

11. Give examples of issues that teachers have in the implementation of RTI.

Appendix B
Consent Document

Washington State University
Dr. Paul Goldman, Principal Investigator
Roger Samples, Student Investigator

You are invited to participate in a study examining "Developing Principal Leadership in an RTI Environment." This study is being conducted by Roger Samples, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, and doctoral student in the Education Leadership doctoral program at Washington State University, under the supervision of Dr. Paul Goldman, his dissertation committee chair.

The following information is being provided for you to determine if you wish to participate in this study. In addition, you are free to decide not to participate in this research or to withdraw at anytime without affecting your relationship with the researcher or Washington State University.

If you decide to participate you will be asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. To help in your preparation, you will be given questions for you to reflect upon prior to the interview. These interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the collected information and all interviews will be transcribed into a written record. You would be able to ask the interviewer to turn off the audio recording equipment at anytime during the interview.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating, or while the research is taking place. I will be happy to share the results with you on an ongoing basis throughout the study. Your name and school name will not be used in the dissertation dissemination process; rather, it will only be known to the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used for participants (i.e. Principal 1, Principal 2, and so on) and general terms will be used in reporting results (i.e. "Five of the principals commented…;" "Two principals reported that…;" etc.).

Written transcripts will be stored in a locked safe in the home of the researcher for one year following the completion of the study. The written transcripts will then be stored on the campus of Washington State University.

There are several expected benefits from participating in this study. They are: 1) information on the experiences of principals who have become successful leaders; 2) a better understanding of the impact of schools leaders on instructional practices; and 3) the ability for the researcher to participate in an action research study developing the leadership of the stakeholders.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Roger Samples, the student investigator at (253) 683-6015 (office), (360) 480-7158 (cell), or via email at rsamples@bethelsd.org.

A signed copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records.

_____   _____
Participant   Date

Consent obtained by: _____   _____
                                    Interviewer/Student Investigator   Date

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Appendix C

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

The most researched, efficient, and standardized measure of reading proficiency is Oral Reading Fluency (ORF). It is the culminating measure of the DIBELS assessment system. The ORF measure has students read an unfamiliar passage of grade-level material for one minute. The final score is the number of words read correctly in that minute. With this robust measure, we can readily determine how a student's reading development is progressing and whether that student is on the path to becoming a proficient and fluent reader.

The DIBELS measures were specifically designed to assess three of the five big ideas of early literacy: phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and fluency with connected text. The measures are linked to one another, both psychometrically and theoretically, and have been found to be predictive of later reading proficiency.

Measures of Phonological Awareness:

Initial Sounds Fluency (ISF): Assesses a child's skill to identify and produce the initial sound of a given word.

Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF): Assesses a child's skill to produce the individual sounds within a given word.

Measure of Alphabetic Principle:

Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF): Assesses a child's knowledge of letter-sound correspondences as well their ability to blend letters together to form unfamiliar "nonsense" (e.g., fik, lig, etc.) words.

Measure of Fluency with Connected Text:

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF): Assesses a child's skill of reading connected text in grade-

level material word.

These measures link together to form an assessment system of early literacy development depicted in the following figure that allows educators to readily and reliably determine student progress.

Appendix D

Reading Mastery is an SRA/McGraw-Hill developed program which is provided as a reading intervention to tier I and II students in kindergarten through second grade.

Three strands in Reading Mastery address Reading deficits, oral language/language arts, and literature. Activities within each strand reflect clearly stated goals and objectives. Skills and processes are clearly linked within, as well as across, each strand. Each strand can be targeted for use as an intervention program, as a supplement to the core program, or combined for use as a comprehensive stand-alone reading program.

Reading Mastery addresses all five essential components of reading as identified by Reading First: phonemic awareness, phonics and word analysis, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. It also provides spelling instruction to assist students in developing decoding and word recognition skills, making the connection between decoding and spelling patterns.

Reading Mastery is designed to teach the oral language skills necessary to understand what is spoken, written, and read in the classroom, helps students to communicate ideas and information effectively, and helps students develop the ability to use writing strategies and writing processes.

The Literature Strand of the program provides multiple opportunities for students to work with useful and important words and gives ample opportunity for each student to read at his or her independent level. The amount of new information is controlled and connected to prior learning, while practice opportunities ensure intensive, explicit, systematic instruction.

Whatever is taught, is taught clearly and directly and is actively practiced multiple times while being linked and applied to new learning. Continuous informal tests and curriculum-based assessments are available to regularly measure progress in key skills, determine areas that need

attention, and guide placement and movement through the program.

Appendix E

Corrective Reading is used to deliver the extra support that struggling readers need to succeed in grades three through six. Using the research-based, classroom-proven SRA/McGraw-Hill Direct Instruction methodology, this comprehensive intervention program acts as a scaffold for good teaching behaviors while providing a well-organized scope and sequence.

Corrective Reading has coordinated and aligned practice materials and activities and includes assessments to help with proper placement and movement of instruction.

As with all SRA Direct Instruction programs, effective instructional principles are embedded in the program's content so that skills and strategies are presented explicitly and complex tasks are analyzed and broken down into component parts. Each part is taught in a logical progression with brief, frequent practice to ensure mastery of each of the processes and skills.

Materials are organized to provide cumulative review of skills. The amount of new information is controlled and connected to prior learning. Consistent lesson formats allow pre-teaching and re-teaching as needed.

To enable teachers and paraprofessionals to make the best use of their time, the instructional routines of this program provide direct teaching, teacher modeling and demonstration, guided and independent practice, and application with corrective feedback, frequent interactions between teacher and students, appropriate pacing of lessons, and adequate practice and review.

Appendix F
Definition of Terms

The following are operational definitions of terms related to this study and are noted in alphabetical order:

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): A diagnostic tool that determines how schools need to improve and where financial resources should be allocated.

Benchmark: Tier one of a multi-tiered RTI model. The general education core curriculum is provided to all students. Successful academic achievement on a benchmark would indicate that students can perform at grade level expectations.

Benchmark Assessments: A universal screening method that is updated on a consistent basis through assessments to chart student growth.

Core Curriculum: A scientific research-based general education curriculum that is provided to all students.

Discrepancy Model: A model of identifying students as having an SLD. This is determined by administering a standardized, norm-referenced intellectual achievement test and academic achievement test to determine if there is a discrepancy between ability (potential) and achievement.

Differentiated Instruction: A way of adjusting curriculum and instruction by providing accommodations to meet the needs of all students.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS): A universal screener that measures reading fluency and is used to monitor literacy development in children. These are standardized, brief assessments that are individually administered.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 2004: A federal law that outlines rights, regulations and provisions of special education students.

Instructional Interventions: Curricular and instructional strategies determined through student achievement data collection.

Intensive: Tier 3 of a multi-tiered RTI model. Students in this tier have not responded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions. Individualized and intensive interventions including additional time, small group instruction, and modified curriculum are provided to the students.

Learning Disability: A classification including several disorders in which a person has difficulty learning reading, writing, and/or math in a typical manner, usually caused by an unknown factor or factors.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that became effective in 2002. This act outlines accountability for schools and students; including addressing standards based education and highly qualified teacher status.

Progress Monitoring: A method to assess a student's performance and track student growth using interventions within the general education or intervention/small-group setting. The data point(s) is charted and used to monitor the effectiveness of interventions and guide instruction.

Response to Intervention (RTI): An education reform initiative that provides assessment and interventions for all students. It integrates universal screening, progress monitoring and intervention within a multi-tiered structure of interventions. Using scientifically researched curricula and interventions, teams review data and adjust interventions depending on a student's responsiveness to interventions. This ongoing data and monitoring system can be used to identify a student with a SLD (2010, National Center on Response to Intervention).

Specific Learning Disability (SLD): A special education category where a psychological processing disorder manifests itself through a person's ability to perform tasks in one or more of

the following areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem solving. This has traditionally been determined through a Severe Discrepancy Model, but may now also be determined through a RTI model.

Strategic: Tier 2 of a multi-tiered RTI model. Students in this tier have not made sufficient gains in academic achievement using the core curriculum alone. Supplemental materials and more prescriptive instructional interventions are provided to students.

Universal Screening: A brief assessment administered to all students to identify whether they are potentially at-risk for learning difficulties. These results assist in placing students into RTI tiers.