

Spring 5-1-2017

# How the Response to Intervention Model Utilized by an External Provider Impacts Student Achievement in an Urban Setting

Christopher L. Johnson  
*Arkansas Tech University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds\\_2017](https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds_2017)

Part of the [Urban Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Johnson, Christopher L., "How the Response to Intervention Model Utilized by an External Provider Impacts Student Achievement in an Urban Setting" (2017). *Theses and Dissertations from 2017*. 6.  
[https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds\\_2017/6](https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds_2017/6)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research and Publications at Online Research Commons @ ATU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations from 2017 by an authorized administrator of Online Research Commons @ ATU. For more information, please contact [cpark@atu.edu](mailto:cpark@atu.edu).



HOW THE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION MODEL UTILIZED  
BY AN EXTERNAL PROVIDER IMPACTS STUDENT  
ACHIEVEMENT IN AN URBAN SETTING

A Dissertation Submitted  
to the Graduate College  
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in School Leadership

in the Center for Leadership and Learning  
of the College of Education

May 2017

Christopher L. Johnson

Bachelor of Science, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2005  
Master of Education, Arkansas State University, 2012  
Educational Specialist, Arkansas State University, 2014

## Dissertation Approval

This dissertation, “How the Response to Intervention Model Utilized by an External Provider Impacts Student Achievement in an Urban Setting” by Christopher L. Johnson, is approved by:

Dissertation Chair:

---

John Freeman  
Professor, Center for Leadership and  
Learning

Dissertation Committee:

---

MarTeze Hammonds  
Associate Dean, Diversity and Inclusion

---

Jeremy Owoh  
Assistant Superintendent Curriculum and  
Instruction/Desegregation

Program Director:

---

John Freeman  
Professor, Center for Leadership and  
Learning

Graduate College Dean:

---

Mary Gunter  
Professor and Dean of the Graduate College

## Permission

Title: How the Response to Intervention Model Utilized by an External Provider Impacts Student Achievement in an Urban Setting

Program: School Leadership

Degree: Doctor of Education

In presenting this dissertation in partial fulfillment for a graduate degree from Arkansas Tech University, I agree the library of this university shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted to my dissertation chair, or, in that professor's absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the Graduate College. To the extent that the usage of the dissertation under control of Arkansas Tech University, it is understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to Arkansas Tech University in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my dissertation.

---

Signature

---

Date

© 2017 Christopher L. Johnson

## Acknowledgements

Embarking on this journey to gain a doctoral degree has been engaging, meaningful, and has increased my capacity as a scholarly practitioner. This journey has taught me life lessons and how to overcome obstacles and challenges.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Marteze Hammonds and Dr. Jeremy Owoh. Dr. Hammonds accepted the task to serve as a committee member without hesitation and provided meaningful information that helped me become a better researcher. Dr. Owoh has served as a friend, colleague, and, most importantly, a mentor. Dr. Owoh's vast knowledge and skills assisted in helping to shape this dissertation into a product of which I am proud. I would like to extend a gracious appreciation to my dissertation chair, Dr. John Freeman. Dr. Freeman ensured this process would be beneficial, thought provoking, and would increase my understanding of what a transformational leader should be. Lastly, I would like to thank my mother, Rebecca Johnson who instilled in me the value of education and to never give up on life's ambitions and goals.

## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to determine if the interventions utilized by an external provider was impacting the student achievement for ninth-graders in an urban high school. The Response to Intervention (RTI) model is currently being utilized by the external provider to provide interventions for incoming ninth-graders in the areas of literacy and math, grounded in RTI. The RTI model can be described as an approach to integrate assessment, instruction, and interventions through a multi-tiered system that seeks to help all students, especially struggling learners. The current external provider seeks to help the struggling schools by providing extra assistance in the classrooms with their service members, who are recent college graduates from diverse backgrounds around the country.

The urban high school that is the focus of this study is designated as a low socioeconomic Title I school with 80% of the student body considered free and reduced lunch, with a 20% special education population, and a high minority student population (98%). It has been designated by the state department of education as having priority status, due to a three-year trend of low end-of-year benchmark exams.

Using archived testing data and stakeholder interviews, the researcher sought to answer two research questions; is there evidence of academic growth by the students needing assistance; and what are the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the program?

The testing data were collected from 144 ninth-grade students in math and literacy. Using paired t-test analysis, the year-to-year results were compared to determine if there was academic improvement. The qualitative interview data from the stakeholders



was analyzed using the constant-comparative method to determine if themes arose that addressed the research questions.

The results indicated that there was improvement in math and literacy by the third-year of the program, indicating a cumulative effect of the program meeting the needs of the students. The qualitative interview data indicated that the stakeholders involved with the program from both sides, felt that the program was effective and was making a difference in the educational outcomes of these at risk students.

## Table of Contents

	Page
PERMISSION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Significance of Study.....	8
Assumptions.....	9
Definitions of Key Terms.....	9
Limitations.....	10
Delimitations.....	10
Summary.....	11
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
External Providers.....	13
Current External Providers.....	15
RTI Origin.....	16
Models of RTI.....	18
RTI Teams.....	21

RTI and the Achievement Gap .....	23
RTI Components .....	24
2004 Reauthorization of IDEA .....	25
Closing the Learning Gap .....	27
Identifying the Problem .....	28
Data Collection in Support of RTI.....	29
RTI Assessments.....	31
RTI Multi-Tiers.....	35
Integrity of RTI.....	39
Barriers to RTI.....	41
RTI and Secondary Schools.....	43
RTI in the Urban Setting.....	45
Summary .....	47
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	49
Research Questions .....	49
Research Design.....	49
Setting .....	50
Participants.....	52
Procedures.....	54
Instrumentation .....	56
Data Analysis .....	58
Ethical Considerations .....	60
Summary .....	61

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....	62
Research Questions .....	62
Data Collection .....	63
Study Results .....	65
Trend Analysis .....	70
Qualitative Questions.....	72
Teacher Interviews.....	73
Team Leader Interview .....	80
Central Office Personnel Interview .....	85
Principal Interview.....	89
Themes .....	91
Answers to Research Questions.....	93
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS....	95
Introduction.....	95
Summary of Findings.....	95
Interpretation of Findings .....	98
Limitations .....	101
Implications and Recommendations for Practice .....	102
Recommendations for Further Study .....	103
Conclusions.....	105
REFERENCES .....	106
APPENDICES .....	117
Appendix A.....	117

Appendix B .....	118
Appendix C .....	119
Appendix D .....	120
Appendix E .....	127
Appendix F .....	128

## List of Tables

Table 1: 2013-2014 State Assessment Results and Grade Distribution .....	66
Table 2: 2014-2015 State Assessment Results and Grade Distribution .....	68
Table 3: 2015-2016 State Assessment Results and Grade Distribution .....	70
Table 4: Trend Analysis of State Assessments by School Year .....	72
Table 5: Instructional Themes .....	93

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

The Education Research Center (2011) defines the achievement gap as the disproportion in the academic performance of a group of students. These groups are usually identified by race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES). Different state benchmark exams, graduation rate, and grade point average are all used to determine the achievement gap within an educational setting. The Education Research Center (2011) utilizes the term achievement gap in its portrayal of the academic performance gap that exists between African American and Hispanic students when compared to Caucasian students. The term also indicates the academic performance gap that exists between low SES students and students who have backgrounds that are considered to be above the poverty level. Lastly, the achievement gap can be used to describe the performance gap that exists between genders, learning disability students versus nonlearning disability students, and English Language Learners versus students who are proficient in the English language.

According to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, too many students of African American and Hispanic background are being left behind by our schools. NCLB sought to ensure that all schools were held accountable for the academic success of all students regardless of the child's race, gender, ethnicity, SES, or disability. It attempted to focus on the increasing achievement gap that existed in the nation's schools. NCLB (2001) required that each district assess its students in grades 3-11, and based on these assessments, a school could be labeled "achieving" "focus" or "priority."

Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle (2007) suggested that implementing interventions within an urban secondary setting can help narrow the achievement gap among students who are considered to be at risk. Scaffolding, one-on-one instruction, and small group settings have been suggested as possible interventions to help serve these struggling students. The majority of secondary urban school settings are already faced with many obstacles to learning, such as socio-emotional issues, poverty, limited resources, inexperienced teachers, and sometimes a non-supportive environment (Bradley et al., 2007).

In many instances, students entering the high school setting are three to four years below grade level (Bradley et al., 2007). Garcia and Guerra (2004) found that students who struggle and are below grade level have a high tendency to drop out. As academically challenged students' progress in a secondary setting, they get further behind their counterparts, resulting in an increase in the achievement gap. The achievement gap has multiple dimensions, which includes disparity of academic achievement among races. The Response to Intervention Model (RTI) provides a guideline to implement skill-specific interventions to assist students in their struggle to reach grade level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). According to Hauerwas, Brown, and Scott (2013), the RTI model began with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. With that reauthorization bill, Congress sought to devise a way to minimize the number of students that were considered to be special needs by reducing the number of misidentified students receiving special needs services, especially students of color, and those students that were limited in their proficiency of the English language. Hauerwas et al. (2013) believed that the students' lack of academic achievement was not a result of a disability.



Hauerwas et al. (2013) believed it was the product of a lack of interventions, and being placed in an insufficient learning environment.

The reauthorization of the IDEA bill allowed schools and districts to provide interventions for students who lacked certain academic skills. Through these interventions, schools were able to pinpoint specific deficiency areas, monitor progress, and make data-driven decisions to heighten academic performance for struggling learners (IDEA, 2004). Prasse (2006) stated that a targeted intervention consists of providing interventions that target specific deficiency areas, and providing individual prescriptions to address deficient areas.

Early interventions have been proven to help with the detection of academic deficits. If a problem is detected the early, an educator can provide the necessary interventions or strategies to help address the issue. Prasse (2006) indicated that simple diagnostics can determine a student's lack of a concept of a particular skill, or if a student has achieved mastery of a particular skill. Likewise, early detection and intervention can help a school perform better on mandated high stakes tests such as state assessments.

The RTI model attempts to identify at-risk students, monitor student progress, provide data-based interventions, and provide meaningful interventions and instructional strategies to boost student achievement (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Mellard, Frey, and Woods (2012) suggested that to drive student achievement an educator must utilize data. Data provide educators with needed information to determine the achievement needs and progress of a student. It provides useful knowledge in determining if a school or a particular student is displaying academic growth. The Response to Intervention Model is implemented via three tiers (Fitzell, 2011). As students progress through the multi-tiers,

each level becomes more intensive. Instruction within the tiers calls for whole group, small group, and individualized instruction. Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) found that if a student does not show adequate improvement, they are referred for special education services.

Referring a student for special needs services can be a long process. For a student to be referred for special needs services, the team must have up to date data to support the decision. Before a student is referred for such services, the student has received intensive support and interventions over a period of time but has not made adequate progress. Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) believed the implementation of the RTI model within a secondary setting can be a daunting task but can prove beneficial to reducing the achievement gap if it is done with fidelity.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act can redirect Title I, Part A funding to support strategic partnerships to help nonprofit and community-based agencies (NCLB, 2001). Title I funding can also be utilized to fund direct student supports and school-wide interventions. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act encourages schools to utilize high performing nonprofit agencies or community-based agencies to ensure struggling schools have the resources and personnel to provide needed intensive services to students to implement proven best practices.

Currently, the district that is the focus of this study has agreed to pay the external provider \$12,500 per team member. The cost of the external provider equates to \$100,000 in funds being disbursed for the 2016-2017 school year at Summerville High School, to fund eight team members. This figure will increase to \$112,500 for the academic years of 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 to accommodate an extra member.

The RTI model is currently being utilized by the external provider to provide interventions for incoming ninth-graders in the areas of literacy and math. The external provider utilizes an approach referred to as the “whole child, whole school” method, however, the educational interventions administered and the data collected are RTI grounded. These interventions are administered via three methods, which are whole class push in, small group instruction, and one-on-one tutoring.

The first method is through whole class push in. In this method, a member of the external provider provides in-class support to all students, whether they are on the identified list or not. In essence, every student in the class receives the intervention. Implementing minor interventions within the class can solve basic misconceptions within the classroom. Within this method, the service member and teacher ensures progress by scaffolding for all students. The interventionist builds on the teacher’s lesson by providing differentiation that allows the students to gain competency and small group instruction inside the classroom. For this method to be effective, it takes proper planning, collaboration, and implementation by the teacher and service member.

The second method is small group instruction via pull outs. Before small group instruction occurs, the teacher and team member must identify the problem area. This approach is implemented if the strategies within the push in method were not successful. Small group instruction allows the service member to provide more support, and target the students’ deficiencies. This method provides more intensive targeted interventions to students who are struggling with certain concepts. In this approach, the service member coordinates with the teacher to work on skill sets with the students.

The third method is one-on-one tutoring. This method is for students who are the most at risk, and who require the most intensive support. The students receive support from this method once or twice a week. The interventionist determines if the students are gaining competency by administering mastery tests to determine if the students are making progress in their deficient area. If the interventions are implemented with fidelity, the students are expected to demonstrate growth in the areas above.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A major issue facing Summerville High School is the increased number of students who enter the ninth-grade below grade level in both literacy and math. As academically challenged students progress in school, they get further behind their counterparts. These are the students who did not receive the needed interventions or support, and without targeted interventions, the achievement gap tends to become even wider. Therefore, the challenge for these urban schools is to identify interventions that will reduce or eliminate this achievement gap.

Fitzell (2011) stated that when achievement gaps first appear, that is the ideal time to address the deficiencies. Interventions that target the student's deficient area are in essence better than remedial education. As the student progresses in school, the gap widens and becomes harder to address. Before the implementation of the interventions occurs, the students' deficits in literacy and math have to be identified (Fitzell, 2011). The RTI model could provide the means to address the academic concerns and provide the necessary interventions (Fitzell, 2011). For the RTI model to be successful, the interventionist must be able to pinpoint exactly where the problem is occurring (Fitzell, 2011).

Implementing targeted interventions within a secondary setting can sometimes be a daunting task. The task can be difficult based on the student's perceived grade level performance, the amount of limited academic skills, and willingness of the student to accept help (Buffum, Weber, & Mattos 2012). Interventions seek to apply educational strategies to combat the many academic deficiencies a student may possess. Such interventions can be addressed by utilizing strategies that target a student's problem area and providing academic prescriptions to address the areas of need. Interventions must provide an accurate prescription to address the many deficiencies a student may possess, and prescriptions must be based upon an accurate depiction of the individual student's needs (Buffum et al., 2012).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the external provider, which utilizes strategies grounded in the RTI Model, are providing adequate interventions to incoming ninth-graders in an urban school setting. The evidence of appropriate interventions included students showing growth on archived benchmark assessments, grade distributions, and interviews with participants.

All incoming freshmen that are deemed to be low performing as determined by their eighth grade end of the year state assessment scores were given intensive academic interventions. For the high school that is the subject of this study, there were 90-95 identified students out of 262 projected incoming freshman that were placed on the "needs intervention" list. The researcher attempted to determine if the utilization of RTI interventions by the external provider were having a positive impact on at-risk students in this urban high school setting, and as a result, is closing the achievement gap between

these students and the rest of the student population. The amount and the intensity of the interventions are determined by the individual academic needs of the students.

Again, the educational interventions consist of whole class push in, small group instruction, as well as one-on-one instruction. Utilizing the RTI framework the external provider meets and collaborates with the school's educators to identify students with one or more off-track behaviors. The off-track behaviors consist of attendance, behavior, grades, and end-of-year benchmark exams. Once the students are identified, the students are placed on an intervention needs list. The external provider's objective is to hold data review conferences often to deliver personalized support to address the students' needs. The external provider assigns team members to individual classrooms to assist the teacher in the lesson, as well as assist in differentiating the classroom instruction. The team members attempt to provide intensive support to address the students' academic needs through small group and one-on-one instruction.

### **Research Questions**

1. Based on end-of-year ninth-grade state assessment exams and fall/spring semester grade distributions, is there evidence of academic growth by the students who are identified as needing assistance?
2. What are the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the interventions utilized by the external providers?

### **Significance of the Study**

Due to a lack of academic skills, and a deficit in math and literacy the vast majority of the ninth-grade students entering Summerville High School setting are in need of academic interventions. The significance of this study was to determine if the

RTI educational interventions administered to the ninth-graders by the external provider are effective in reducing the achievement gap within an urban school. The study also sought to determine how the teachers who have been employed by the urban high school since the partnership began with the external provider assess the effectiveness of the RTI interventions.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher assumes that the interventions were conducted with absolute fidelity, that is, the external provider was using the RTI model as prescribed. It is also assumed that the service members who are conducting the interventions within Summerville High School were properly trained on how to implement RTI interventions. It is assumed that the service members implementing the interventions are coordinating with the teachers and administration to provide certain and targeted interventions. It is assumed that there is not a definitive answer to explain the current trend or deficiencies.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

1. *Achievement Gap*- refers to the observed, persistent educational gap between the academic performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and gender (ESEA, 2015).
2. *Academic Interventions*- strategies designed to help students achieve learning standards in the core subjects (Buffum et al., 2012).
3. *Diagnostic Exams*- The measurement of a student's understanding of a subject area, or particular academic skills (Buffum et al., 2012).

4. *External Provider*-Educational companies that provide consulting, modeling or professional development to support a school in their areas of need (Roebuck, 2012).
5. *Interventions*- strategies that are research and evidence based designed to address educational deficiencies (Buffum et al., 2012).
6. *Performance Gap*- is the difference between the actual or present compared performance by groups of students (ESEA, 2015).

### **Limitations**

Currently, the limitations to this study included the change of state assessments administered by the state. For the past three years, the students of this particular state have taken three different state benchmark exams. The state has administered the Algebra I end-of-course exam, the PARCC exam, and is currently administering the ACT Aspire exam. The second limitation is the interventions are provided via an external partnership. The personnel who are administering the interventions receive professional development in administering the interventions; however, they are not trained educators. The third limitation is the students are sometimes unwilling to participate in the interventions administered by the service members actively. It can appear that the students are not always engaged in their educational process.

### **Delimitations**

The study involved one urban high school. The reason for choosing this particular urban high school setting involved the accuracy of the data presented. Currently, the external provider's partner with several other schools within the district, however, it could not be verified if the interventions were adequately implemented.



**Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the importance of conducting this study. This study seeks to make a determination if the interventions that are carried out in an urban setting are sufficient in providing growth to freshmen that are considered to be at risk. The researcher identified that the intervention model that is utilized by the external provider.

In the upcoming, chapter the researcher will define and illustrate how the RTI model is applied within an academic setting. The researcher will also outline the benefits of providing interventions at an early stage, and how research indicates, it can assist in narrowing the achievement gap.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature for this study began by utilizing the online database systems through the Arkansas Tech University Library. The databases produced a variety of journal, newspaper, and book articles. The keywords and phrases that the researcher used were: Response to Intervention, external providers and RTI, achievement gap, No Child Left Behind, urban students and RTI, RTI tiers, and models of RTI. The researcher also searched Google and Google Scholar to find journal, newspaper, and book articles. The phrases that were used in this part of the search were RTI, How can RTI be implemented in an urban setting, barriers to RTI, models of RTI, and achievement gap and RTI. The researcher also utilized various books he received from colleagues such as *RTI Strategies for Secondary Teachers* and *Simplifying Response to Intervention Four Essential Guidelines Principles*.

According to No Child Left Behind (2001), all states are required to hold schools responsible for student achievement. If schools did not meet the prescribed annual yearly progress goals, then districts were mandated to provide support via data analysis, instructional strategies, and analysis of their budgets (U. S. Department of Education, 2006). This new law required states to allocate a portion of their Title I funds towards school improvement. School improvement should center on outsourcing to external providers (NCLB, 2001). The external providers assisted schools with providing targeted interventions based on the student deficits. One model that has a proven track record for success is Response to Intervention. Response to Intervention was created because of the excess of students who were referred for special education services (Buffum et al., 2012).

The majority of the students referred did not have a disability but suffered from a lack of differentiation or targeted interventions in the classroom. The RTI model is comprised of three tiers with each tier becoming more intensive as the student progress through the model (Fitzell, 2011).

### **External Providers**

Schools that receive Title I funds should allocate 4% of their funding towards school improvement (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2003). This is usually done by allocating money to pay for external providers to provide educational and achievement support to the schools. The external providers are charged with assisting in providing the necessary resources a school needs to be successful and close the achievement gaps that may exist in the schools. The ultimate goal of an external provider is to help the underperforming school to get out of school improvement. By contracting with an external provider, it can be assumed that the school district does not contain the capacity to initiate the needed changes to improve on their own (Datnow & Honig, 2008; Huberman, 1995). These external providers can provide support in a variety of areas such as data disaggregation, best practices, instructional strategies, and good teacher practices (Honig & Ikemoto, 2008).

According to the Arkansas Approved Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility (2015) guidelines, opportunities exist for priority schools to utilize federal funding, specifically, Title I, Part A funds to pay for external providers.

According to the act, the external providers must demonstrate an extensive knowledge of evidence-based practices to build internal capacity in the school (Roebuck, 2012). The external provider must provide evidence of efficiency in improving student learning and

assist in closing the achievement gap (ESEA, 2015). As the accountability system for No Child Left Behind began to cultivate, multiple external providers began to be formed to provide educational consulting to risk schools. Some of the first companies that received state contracts in the state of Arkansas were America's Choice and JBHM (Roebuck, 2012). Roebuck (2012) said that along with consulting companies forming, many educators both retired and employed, began to form educational consulting agencies. These companies originally only offered professional development opportunities, then eventually ventured into more comprehensive services as federal funding increased (Roebuck, 2012). These companies can sometimes bill struggling schools up to \$300,000 (Roebuck, 2012). Some Arkansas districts who were considered at risk received additional funding through Title I 1003a and 1003g funding, while other districts choose to utilize funds via the National School Lunch Act state funding (Roebuck, 2012). In 2009, Arkansas Department of Education included in its provisions for struggling schools that hiring a consultant was a viable option. Also in 2009, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act which increased the 1003a grant to as much as \$2 million a year (Roebuck, 2012). The new grant program did not require struggling districts to hire consultants, but it did state struggling schools must ongoing intensive support from a Local Educational Agency, State Educational Agency, or an External Partner Agency (Roebuck, 2012).

Roebuck (2012) stated that in 2012, 587 Arkansas schools were classified as needs improving, 109 as needs in improvement "focus," and 46 as needs improvement "priority." The urban high school that is being researched is in year 13 of school improvement, with the tag of "priority." For the academic year of 2010-2011, the school

was awarded more than two million dollars in grants for the purpose of school improvement (Roebuck, 2012). Before the 2013-2014 school year, the school had already utilized four external providers before its current external provider (Roebuck, 2012).

### **Current External Provider**

The existing external provider has serviced Summerville High School since the 2012-2013 school year. The external provider currently services over 200 schools in 28 school districts in 24 cities. The external provider being studied seeks to help the struggling schools by providing extra assistance in the classrooms with via their service members. The service members are recent college graduates from diverse backgrounds around the country. The external provider prides itself on its service members being close in age to the students they serve. The external provider collaborates with district leaders to identify high schools that are affected by poor test scores, and a high dropout rate, as well as the elementary and middle schools which directly feed into the high schools. Once the schools are identified the external provider allocates a team of 8 to 20 service members to each school. The external provider implements a model called whole school whole child. This model was designed to address the warning signs of students at risk of dropping out, poor attendance, small group, intensive one-on-one support and tutoring, social-emotional learning, and disruptive behavior. The service members collaborate with teachers, and school leaders to identify students who are considered at risk (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce & Fox, 2011). These at-risk students are placed on a focus list. The external provider bases its academic interventions on the RTI model. The external provider believes the RTI model provides its service members with the necessary

tools to effectively collaborate with teachers and administrators to at-risk students, and provide educational interventions to ensure academic achievement (National Association of State Directors of Special Education Incorporated and Council of Administrators of Special Education [NASDSE & CASE], 2006). Before the beginning of the school year, the external provider provides training on the RTI model, and the district's math and literacy curriculum. The external provider and its service members utilize the RTI model evidenced based targeted interventions (NASDSE & CASE, 2006). The service members are assigned to multiple classrooms with the school setting. The external provider believes the RTI model allows their service members and cooperating teacher to differentiate instruction inside the classroom. The presence of the service members inside the classrooms allows the teachers to provide more personalized learning environments inside the classrooms (Balfanz et al., 2011). The students who are identified via the focus lists are provided small group instruction outside of the classroom. The students are given assessments to determine if the students are responding to the interventions, or if more intensive interventions are needed (NASDSE & CASE, 2006). The aggressive interventions are delivered via one on one instruction (NASDE & CASE, 2006). Along with classroom support, the service member's conduct an afterschool program to as an avenue to provide opportunities for reinforcement and tutoring.

### **RTI Origin**

Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) explained that RTI has multiple appearances, definitions, and dimensions. Depending on the school or district, it will come in various forms, shapes, and sizes. RTI can be described as an approach to integrate assessment,

instruction, and interventions through a multi-tiered system that seeks to help all students, especially struggling learners. RTI emphasizes the use of high-quality instruction, which is validated through research and is inclusive for all students in the classroom, not just students considered to be in danger of low achievement (Ehren, Lenz, & Deshler, 2004).

RTI can be considered a framework that uses student performance data to determine if the instruction is effective for most students and to identify students who need supplemental instruction to attain benchmarks (Wilson, Faggella-Luby, & Wei, 2013). Haager, Klingner, and Vaughn (2007) asserted that RTI is a conceptual framework for providing rigorous academic interventions to match the diverse needs of students. Through the multi-tiers, services are both integrated through general and special education (Rudebusch, 2007).

RTI can also be referenced as a comprehensive, student-centered framework that encompasses research-based instruction and interventions with the intent to provide systematic help to students who are having academic learning problems (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). RTI signifies an approach to establish and construct learning environments that are effective, efficient, reliable, and durable for all stakeholders, including but not limited to parents, students, and practitioners (Sugai, 2008). Presently, RTI focuses on a gamut of issues ranging from academic to behavior (Mellard et al., 2012). RTI utilizes assessment and interventions to boost student achievement within a school (Prasse, 2006). In most cases, this formulated approach is an opportunity for those who struggle to learn to obtain a targeted intervention before experiencing academic failure (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009).

A school that utilizes the RTI framework will identify student needs; provide targeted instruction, review data, and monitor student progress and programs (Hawkins, Kroeger, Musti-Rao, Barnett, & Ward, 2008). Al Otabia and Targesen (2007) stated that the purpose of diagnosing and providing interventions is to develop and deliver strategies that will remediate the students, and help ensure academic achievement. The diagnosis leads to actions that will benefit the students whose condition is being identified. RTI can address the many academic needs of struggling learners, prevent labeling, and circumvent a long history of school failures. Reed, Wexler, and Vaughn (2012) stated that through its functionality and ability to be integrated across the curriculum, RTI had become a popular means of addressing the many academic needs students face. For the RTI model to be effective and have an impact on student achievement, it requires considerable time, planning, and commitment from all educators in the school. Reed et al. (2012) found that successful implementation requires sufficient training on the principles of RTI, educational leaders to support the implementation of the model, and all stakeholders to be fully committed.

### **Models of RTI**

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) discussed two models of RTI standard protocol and the problem-solving approach. The standard protocol model provides standard treatment over a period, and the problem-solving model provides a specific problem-solving format for each student at different levels. Cameron, Parks, Schulte, and Stiefel (2006) stated that the problem-solving approach consisted of advocates and a team of teachers working together to determine learning deficits, cultivate interventions, and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. This model allows the team's flexibility to provide



targeted instruction that fits the specific academic deficits of the students. The drawback to this model is the quality of teaching and interventions depends on the level of skills, knowledge, and training the school personnel possesses (Cameron et al., 2006).

Carney and Stiefel (2008) suggested that the standard protocol model is more effective than the problem-solving model. Carney and Stiefel (2008) stated that the standard protocol model consists of all staff members, and one intervention. Carney and Stiefel (2008) believed the standard protocol model is easier to access accuracy and provide a group analysis. Carney and Stiefel (2008) also stated that through the standard protocol model more students could participate in the interventions, which mean more students are being serviced.

The standard protocol model has its roots in utilizing research-based strategies to provide one or two validated interventions. The one intervention ensures correct implementation of the intervention however like the problem-solving model the implementation depends on the skill level of the educator. Carney and Stiefel (2008) expressed that the intervention should meet the requirements set forth by NCLB (2003) and IDEA (2004). The interventions may be administered by certified and non-certified personnel assuming they are properly trained. The advantage to implementing this model with one or two interventions is that it can be done with strong fidelity. Carney and Stiefel (2008) realized the drawback to this model is it relies on at least two interventions to address a variety of student deficits.

The external provider utilizes the problem solving and standard protocol model to implement its whole school whole child model (Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools, 2010). The whole school whole child model seeks to

create a positive school environment enriched in multiple activities and interventions. The model reinforces skills that correlate with active learning within the classroom (Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools, 2010). The model allows the service members to provide group and one on one tutoring. The model allows the service members along with the cooperating teacher to differentiate instruction within the classroom (Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools, 2010). The whole school whole child model allows the service members to implement various literacy and math interventions. Within the classroom, the service members can apply both guided reading groups and independent reading (Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools, 2010). For struggling students, the service members encourage targeted reading twice a week. For the math interventions, the service members support math skills development inside the classroom, bi-weekly math assessments, and skills development (Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools, 2010). For students who require targeted interventions, the service members offer small group and one-on-one support as well as supplemental math support (Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools, 2010). A component the external providers deem as whole school whole child model is its commitment to reinforcing concepts through homework. The service members provide after school homework help, signed contracts, track the daily number of student assignments completed, stay in contact with parents, and monitor and support independent reading (Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools, 2010).

**RTI Teams**

Christ (2008) stated that for RTI to be successful within a school building, a functioning team must be assembled or designated. The purpose of the team is to customize and implement the various student intervention plans. The team is composed of a multi-disciplinary group of educators who are tasked with understanding and analyzing different challenges a student might face. Christ (2008) explained that the RTI works with various teachers and administrators to determine specific student problems that are measurable and observable. The teams work to identify underlying issues that might be causing the problems and implement evidenced-based interventions. Also, they evaluate the interventions to determine if the students have reached the desired goal. Christ (2008) stated that for teams to be effective within a school, it must garner the support of both the parents and teachers. The teams must validate its expertise by generating strong and useful intervention plans that will be helpful in the general education classroom. Buffum et al. (2012) stated that for RTI implementation to be successful both a teacher and school-wide teams must be formed within a school. There are four team structures, which are grade level teams, subject specific teams, vertical teams, and interdisciplinary teams. The major responsibilities of each team consist of: clearly defined learning outcomes, effective tier one core subject instruction, assess student instruction, effective instruction, identifies students who need additional support and takes responsibility for the implementation of tier two interventions for students who did not master the intended standards. Buffum et al. (2012) believed the logical reason why teacher teams should take on the responsibility to ensure every student learns the essential standards is to ensure they are: highly trained and certified in the subject, are

experts in the content, have the assessment data, they know the students the best, and it is why they were hired. Buffum et al. (2012) believed teachers should be empowered to design tier one core instruction and lead the school's response when a student requires extra support. Buffum et al. (2012) stated that in contrast to teacher teams which focuses on intended learning outcomes of a certain grade level or subject, a school-wide team places its emphasis on coordinating instructional support programs building wide. School-wide teams are comprised of a school leadership team and a school intervention team. The primary responsibility of the school leadership team is to lead the instructional focus, and not dictate it. Buffum et al. (2012) continued that the school leadership team should: monitor school-wide evidence of student achievement, ensure sufficient resources are available for tier three interventions, ensure each student is receiving grade level core instruction, lead the school's tier one behavior interventions, facilitate the school's universal screening for tier three interventions, allocate school fiscal resources to support core instruction and interventions, coordinate school personnel to best support core instruction and interventions, help create a master schedule for optimal core instruction and interventions, and lastly build a consensus for the school's mission.

Buffum et al. (2012) stated that while the school leadership teams focus on a broader macro view of student achievement, the school intervention team's primary responsibility is to take a micro view of the specific students in need of tier three intensive support. These students are in need of intensive support mainly due to significant deficits in fundamental skills of reading, math, and writing, excessive absenteeism, behavior issues, or a combination of all the listed factors.

The main purpose of the intervention team is to focus on the individual needs of the school's identified at risk students. Buffum et al. (2012) continued that the intervention team is tasked with: determining the instructional needs of students who require intensive support, diagnose the reason for the student struggles in tier one and two, determine the most appropriate interventions to address student's deficits, monitor the student's progress and desired outcomes, and revise interventions when the outcomes are not the expected ones. Confidentiality and honesty are necessary for an effective intervention team, which is why parents and students are not recommended to serve on this team (Buffum et al., 2012).

The external provider's service members along with the help of the schools' teachers and administration comprise the RTI teams to address student deficits. Before the academic year beginning the service members collaborate with various teachers and school leaders to identify students who are considered to be at risk. The teams review the prior school year state assessment to determine students who might be in need of educational interventions due to attendance and behavior issues. Along with collaborating with teachers, the service members serve as an integral part of the Summerville High School's school leadership team. The service members work with the school leadership team to identify needed interventions, disaggregate data, and provide next steps to address academic needs within the school.

### **RTI and the Achievement Gap**

Bradley et al. (2007) expressed a belief that RTI can help reduce the achievement gap among students. One common issue with the achievement gap, however, is false perceptions of students, and over-identification of students requiring special education

services, when in fact, the child is not disabled but has only received insufficient or ineffective instruction. When examining the achievement gap and RTI, experts should focus on the link between school practices and student outcomes, as well as the exact causes of failure (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Student achievement problems can be credited to widespread deficiencies in the teaching-learning environment, including the inability to provide evidence-based interventions for students with identified needs and learning gaps (Torgesen, 2000). Bursuck and Blanks (2010) suggested that RTI has the academic potential to narrow the achievement gap and reduce the number of referrals for special education by catching students before they fail. Implementing the necessary interventions will allow special educators to focus their attention and resources on children whose needs are beyond the scope of what can be addressed through general education.

### **RTI Components**

Hoover and Laree (2011) proposed that an RTI model should have two components, the evidence-based practice/comprehensive curriculum, and specific teaching interventions. There are distinct differences between the suggested components. One way to decipher the difference is to understand that evidence-based practices consist of instruction, interventions, or strategies that have resulted in consistent positive results when experimentally tested. It is important to realize that a comprehensive curriculum will require adaptation and change. Hoover and Laree (2011) clarified that specific teaching interventions target a child's specific deficit area, and provides interventions that are essential for the student to reach proficiency. When targeting a child's deficit area and providing interventions, it is essential for the teacher to be well versed in the

differentiation of instruction. Based on the research of RTI, two things can be concluded; first, it meets the needs of struggling learners and second, depending upon the need of the school or district, it comes in different shapes and forms (Hoover & Laree, 2011).

### **2004 Reauthorization of IDEA**

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004, a child is determined to have a disability if they suffer from: mental retardation, hearing impairments, speech or language impairments, visual impairments, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities (IDEA, 2004). IDEA (2004) stated that the students suffering from any of the listed disabilities should require special education services (IDEA, 2004). The current RTI model began with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). According to Hauerwas et al. (2013), the new version of IDEA created a new section titled “Additional Procedures” that provides a more detailed structure on how a multi-disciplinary team could identify if a student would be considered to be under the umbrella of Specific Learning Disability.

The most significant change from the previous IDEA was that states could no longer rely exclusively on the use of an IQ assessment, states must use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific-research-based interventions as a part of the evaluation procedure. VanDerHeyden and Jimerson (2005) proposed that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 provide an alternative to the ability-achievement discrepancy model for identifying students with learning disabilities.

Before the implementation of RTI, students were allowed to fail assessments and then were provided opportunities for remediation. VanDerHeyden and Jimerson (2005)

continued that remediation is a response to poor test scores. By providing remediation instead of interventions, some schools continued to fall further behind. This lagging in performance could be considered a response to the problem instead of a systematic plan to prevent the problem. Before the reauthorization of the IDEA of 2004, No Child Left behind of 2001 sought to address the same issues of low literacy and math scores by suggesting an RTI framework (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton 2010).

Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) explained that when Congress reauthorized the Individual with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, and this was to ensure that all students were equally provided a high-quality, rigorous research-based instruction in reading and math. This was an attempt to circumvent children being mislabeled as having special needs and would enable students to receive the necessary tools to acquire English language and math skills to be deemed proficient. Hauerwas et al. (2013) explained that another key aspect of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disability Education Act allowed the use of a student's responses to their instruction when categorizing a learning deficit, and alleviated the discrepancy between a child's potential, and their actual achievement. The educational flexibility of IDEA allowed states to evolve from the pre-referral intervention model to the same form of a response to intervention model. Teachers in the general education classes were now mandated to monitor, observe, and document all desired academic and social outcomes for these inclusion students (Batsche et al., 2005).

Through the RTI model, schools attempted to identify special needs students specifically those who would be under the umbrella of specific learning disability (IDEA, 2004). According to Hauerwas et al. (2013), the passage of the Education of all Handicapped Children Act in 1975, allowed students diagnosed with a specific learning



disability to be eligible for special education services. This act required all schools receiving federal funds to educate every student regardless of their disability equally.

The RTI model provides the schools an avenue to properly identify students who are deemed at risk (Hoover & Patton, 2008). Through the RTI model, at-risk students can receive academic and behavior interventions immediately. Thus, allowing the identified students to remain in the classroom to receive needed interventions (Prasse, 2006).

Hauerwas et al. (2013) argued the most important factor surrounding RTI is that it helped reduce the number of students being diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability.

Through RTI, students who genuinely do not have disabilities can receive targeted strategies, and not be falsely identified for special education services (Hauerwas et al., 2013).

### **Closing the Learning Gap**

According to Batsche et al. (2005), schools who utilized the RTI model could target more individuals than just special needs students. Appropriate use of the RTI model provides schools a means to identify all struggling learners. Once the students have been identified, the major goal of the RTI model is to close the learning gap (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). Students who receive the proper intervention can catch up academically to their classmates (Berkeley et al., 2009). Fuchs et al. (2010) maintained that appropriate, evidence-based instruction could be a determining factor for which at-risk students can return to the general education classroom, and not be falsely identified for special education services. Evidence-based instruction should consist of providing instructional strategies or lessons that are research-based, and that can produce evidence of its success. Fuchs et al. (2003)

explained that evidence-based instructional strategies have been tested, and have proven success. This is proof that the research or results can be utilized to provide targeted interventions.

### **Identifying the Problem**

The premise behind the RTI model is to properly identify the student's deficit area, select the appropriate intervention, and lastly set a goal (Berkeley et al., 2009). Stollar, Poth, Curtis, and Cohen (2006) suggested that before a school can begin to implement RTI, the school must first identify the problem it is attempting to resolve, which can be a difficult task while trying to implement school improvement pinpointing one area at a time.

A school must decide whether it is trying to tackle math and literacy scores, reading, or implementing a behavioral model. Buffum et al. (2012) stated a school should not wait till a student begins to struggle or fail before deciding to intervene. Schools should start to intervene when they notice that a student lacks the prerequisite skills required to complete a task. The best intervention can sometimes simply be prevention.

Buffum et al. (2012) stated that experienced teachers could be an asset in identifying students who need more time and support. This can be accomplished by the first week of school. However, the formal way of identifying these students is known as universal screening. Buffum et al. (2012) stated the main purpose of universal screening is to identify the at-risk students as early in the school year as possible for intensive interventions. The universal screening tool should identify students for differentiated instruction and intervention. There are usually two approaches to universal screening

which are a district or an outside entity designed benchmark assessment, or teacher created screening tools (Buffum et al., 2012). Buffum et al. (2012) indicated that district or outside entity exams should focus on the information that directly relates to the prerequisite skills and knowledge that students will need to master essential standards. However, the benchmarks should not include items that are not aligned with the essential standards that are selected by the teams. The screening mechanisms that are tied to the specific learning targets should be evident in a teacher's lesson plans. Buffum et al. (2012) suggested that if screening information is tightly aligned to skills and knowledge, this will enable teams to understand better how to create differentiated instruction for all students. Research-based universal screening tests are the most accurate way of identifying students who are below grade level. Most schools rely on end of the year assessment data for this, usually the previous year assessment data. Buffum et al. (2012) determined that mini universal screening assessments should be given throughout the school year to determine growth. For this screening process, it is best to utilize district administered exams which are provided in the fall, winter, and spring to every child. Administering these exams can be time-consuming, but measuring the growth of students is a valuable outcome.

### **Data Collection in Support of RTI**

Implementing the RTI model requires the staff to maintain accurate data. The RTI measurements should be comprised of student-level data, student assessments, exams, and referrals (Mellard et al., 2012). Some examples of the data that are collected through various assessments are pre- and post-tests, unit assessments, and interim assessments (Berkeley et al., 2009). Mellard et al. (2012) suggested data can also be

collected and evaluated through various forms of on-site observations, interviews, and focus groups. However, it is important to remember that while evaluations elicit valuable information, they are not always a true depiction of the academic and behavioral interventions implemented by school instructional staff.

Through data collection, school personnel can determine if the students will need additional interventions to improve their performance. The data can also help in determining if the intervention is effective and if the students are meeting their goals (Batsche et al., 2005). Utilizing student data is essential for an educator to be able to interpret, appropriately identify, and repair early learning problems, and tailor a specific intervention to meet the need of the student (Al Otabia & Targesen, 2007).

Wilson et al. (2013) stated that when properly implemented, RTI generates a dataset that allows educators to respond to students' diverse learning needs and determine when their needs for instructional support exceeds the capacity of general education. Once the dataset is properly generated, it is instrumental in helping to provide educational decisions aimed at improving learning for all students. Knowing how important data is to RTI, a practitioner can theorize RTI as a process for making data-based decisions by using methods that increase or decrease in intensity in response to an initial or ongoing need for support (VanDerheyden, Witt, & Gilibertson, 2007).

RTI encompasses the use of high quality, data driven evidence-based practices (Ardoin, 2006). Gresham (2002) suggested that decisions made within an RTI framework should reflect the rate of growth, multiple assessments, and data-supported decisions. Making decisions that are not data-driven could disrupt the entire model, thus causing more harm than good. RTI can lead to positive learning outcomes. However, to

achieve these learning outcomes assessments should be employed with precision, frequently, and with sensitivity to change. Hoover and Laree (2011) suggested that when utilizing data to make a determination about a student's future, educators use a cut score. A cut score can be defined as a targeted proficiency score. If a learner does not attain that minimum score, she/he can be considered at risk or struggling. A cut score affects the accuracy of screening. Schools must determine guidelines for deciding when a student's performance around this dividing line warrants further investigation. Hoover and Laree (2011) explained that the determination of a cut score is influenced by the use of a criterion reference or narrative comparison standard of performance. Within a criterion reference screening, a student must score at a specific level of aptitude which differs from a narrative comparison where there is a comparison to an appropriate group.

### **RTI Assessments**

Myers, Simonsen, and Sugai (2011) suggested that RTI follows a common prescriptive approach that is applied to all students. It is a fundamental component of an RTI model that quantified data is utilized to illustrate learner progress toward achievement of a curriculum benchmark. The first step is universal screening, diagnostics, frequent progress monitoring, data-based decisions, and curriculum-based measurement to determine if students require more or less intensive interventions and how additional instructional support should look. Myers et al. (2011) continued to explain that universal screening consists of teachers utilizing a screening measure to discover students who may be at risk for specified difficulties. Within the screening process, children are readily identified as being at risk and could benefit from additional instruction. This procedure is carried out three times per year for all students in a school.

A screening measure identifies students who require additional assessments, must be practical and must generate positive outcomes, without consuming measures that could be better used elsewhere. Fitzell (2011) explained that diagnostics make a determination on what students can and cannot do in certain academic areas. Diagnostic assessments usually consist of pre-tests, measurement of a student's proper knowledge, baseline data, documented observations, or probing questions to determine whether a student understands a particular concept.

Diagnostics help the teacher to determine in what particular knowledge or area the students are lacking. Vaughn et al. (2010) explained that progress monitoring is a valid and effective tool that is used to collect essential data on student progress. The data collected during progress monitoring is accumulated, read, and documented as evidence for the student's response to the specified intervention. The data that collected is utilized to determine whether students still require intervention support. Ardoin (2006) and Shapiro (2008) specified that monitoring does not guarantee that the intervention will have the intended impact; however, it does assist in utilizing the data to make an appropriate determination. Fitzell (2011) explained that progress monitoring simply assesses a student's progress on an ongoing basis as opposed to assessing at the end of a unit, to prevent failure. Within this model, teachers utilize quick one to three-minute assessments several times a week to determine if it is okay to proceed on with the unit, necessary to re-teach the whole class, or simply to re-teach a couple of students who are struggling. This is more than a pop quiz to record a grade; this information is utilized as data to drive instruction. These assessments should be reliable, valid, determine a

student's response to the intervention, and assist in the subsequent instruction (Ardoin, 2006; Shapiro, 2008).

Fuchs and Deshler (2007) expressed that the most critical and complex aspect of RTI is data-based decision-making. Data-based decisions rely on the regular measurement of student performance. Data collected during screening and progress monitoring are utilized in making instructional decisions, assignment of youngsters to the various tiers of the multi-tiered system, and in some cases determinations of eligibility for special education.

Fitzell (2011) asserted that a curriculum-based measurement is a form of a scientifically based method for monitoring progress. Curriculum-based measurement directly assesses academic skills and links instruction with assessment. Curriculum-based measurement seeks to describe academic competence, track academic development, and lastly improve student achievement. Fitzell (2011) continued to explain that curriculum-based measurement determines eligibility, develops specific goals, and evaluates the students' progress within the curriculum. Based on the data collected teachers can specify instructional goals, or make changes in the curriculum or instruction of a topic. Myers et al. (2011) theorized that data generated from these assessments would serve as the foundation for making both formal and informal instructional decisions.

Ardoin (2006) warned educators of the face value of a curriculum-based measurement. Some educators have a habit of setting easily attainable goals, and overestimating performance, thus yielding misleading results. Curriculum-based measurement data should not be used exclusively; rather, the dataset that is used to make

instructional decisions for students should have multiple sources. Capizzi and Fuchs (2005) asserted that teachers who utilize curriculum-based measurement and diagnostic feedback garnered more skills through instruction, adapted instruction, and implemented more interventions. Data provided through a curriculum-based measurement can specify the progression a student is making toward certain, but that data sometimes are not appropriate in making decisions regarding the types of interventions needed to address the deficit area.

Myers et al. (2011) suggested that the next step is to ensure the continuation of evidence-based or data-driven services along with decision points to determine if students are falling below, meeting, or exceeding their academic expectations. It is important to establish a predetermined position to determine if students are responding to the interventions, and referral for special education services should be explored. Diagnostic information will be required to pinpoint a student's specific instructional needs, especially within tier two and tier three. These assessment procedures utilized must be adequate in determining a student's first risk (screening), the effectiveness of the interventions (progress monitoring), and in planning further instruction (Wilson et al., 2013). Myers et al. (2011) stated a tiered-based format and protocol should be established to ensure that everything is done with fidelity, including correct and sustained implementation of the systems and practices. Witt, Daly, and Noell (2000) asserted that the data accumulated within the RTI model would be utilized to identify the specific needs of the students and prescribe the right intervention.

While educators are going through this prescriptive approach of gathering data, it is important that the data be accurate and current. Incorrect data or a false prescription



can cause more harm and may cause the students to fall further behind academically. Some assessment procedures that are commonly used in schools today are often inconsistent with the prescription of RTI. Therefore it is important that the instruction is of high quality (Bender & Shores, 2007).

### **RTI Multi-Tiers**

RTI is implemented via three tiers. Each tier provides the appropriate academic interventions to address the needs of the students (Fitzell, 2011). A well-defined multi-tiered system will alleviate academic and behavioral difficulties; while at the same time support the students' existing needs (Mellard et al., 2012). The success of a multi-tiered system is more than simply incorporating interventions; it is contingent upon an educator's knowledge about and implementation of effective instruction (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Before tiered instruction can be implemented proper planning must be high quality to support the interventions that RTI might require (Ysseldyke, Burns, Scholin, & Parker, 2010). Both academic and behavioral interventions will differ as the student progresses through the tiers, becoming more intense and precise (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008). It is estimated that between 90-95% of all learners that receive an intervention via RTI will elicit some success through tier one and tier two (Haager et al., 2007).

Berkley et al. (2009) stated the first tier is providing high-quality classroom instruction, screening, and group interventions. This tier provides students with quality research-based instruction, to ensure that their poor performance is not due to insufficient instruction or strategies. Within this tier, the students are assessed on a regular basis to set baseline data. Tier one involves ongoing screening and progress monitoring. Typically, tier one is provided to the entire class throughout the school year by highly

qualified instructors. Myers et al. (2011) explained that the screening process would occur during a tier one instruction. Progress monitoring can and may take place in any tier of instruction. Screening and progress monitoring are essential to providing data for making decisions regarding the grouping of students or changing instructional practices. All students will receive instruction within this tier, so it is imperative that the educational practitioners be familiar with the screening and progress monitoring components of the RTI model. Myers et al. (2011) continued that within this tier all students are serviced, not just students at a particular ability level. Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) argued that within this tier the general education teacher specifically displays progress by utilizing interventions and strategies that are a scaffold for all students. Teachers work to create benchmarks that provide accurate assessments of the students' mastery. According to Fitzell (2011), students are identified via this method or scoring below average on a high stakes test. This intervention tier normally lasts around eight weeks. Students who become proficient are moved back to the regular classroom instructional model, while the students who do not show progress continue to receive targeted interventions. (Berkeley et al., 2009; Fitzell, 2011).

The tier two interventions provide a more intensive approach to addressing the student's deficiency (Berkeley et al., 2009). Berkeley et al. (2009) stated that tier two takes at-risk students who are known to be at risk, performing below basic, and provide them with targeted interventions. These students are usually monitored on a weekly to monthly basis. Within tier two, the students are provided interventions within a small group setting, as well as interventions within a regular classroom setting. During a student's placement within the tier two model, the general education teacher provides

small group instruction to students who responded poorly to whole group instructional procedures that occurred in tier one (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008). For the small group setting students are placed according to their ability level with no more than four students per group (Burns & Gibbons, 2012). Each student that is within this tier receives an additional 20 minutes of group time per day, to receive targeted, systematic interventions (Bradley et al., 2007). The focus of this tier is usually English and math (Fitzell, 2011). The tier two intervention period usually lasts a quarter of a semester; however, students who do not make adequate progress move on to the tier three model (Fitzell, 2011).

Burns and Gibbons (2012) indicated that within tier two, problem analysis must occur, which means identifying the particular problem and using that information to assign groups. In elementary schools, problem analysis includes universal screening data; however, in secondary schools engagement would be contained in the analysis. Burns and Gibbons (2012) suggested that engagement can be defined as a student's commitment and willingness to participate in their learning experience. Engagement can be divided into two components, with the first element being academic engagement. Academic engagement entails the students GPA, credit hours, and test scores. Cognitive engagement consists of a student's attention and participation in the actual instruction of a lesson. Burns, Jacobs, and Wagner (2008) explained that the completion of tier two instructional model could result in a couple of things. First, the students exit tier two, and return to tier one instruction, the student remains in tier two and continues tier two instruction with a slight adjustment. Lastly, the student proceeds to tier three instruction for more individualized instruction or a possible determination for special education services.

Like the previous two tiers, the interventions and strategies are intensified (Fitzell, 2011). Within the RTI model, tier three is designed to meet the various needs of students who are in the most danger of falling behind (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003). Tier three interventions are commonly defined by three attributes, which are individualized instruction, instruction intensity, frequent and precise progress monitoring (Reschly, 2005; Vaughn et al., 2010). Tier three should be obviously distinguished from interventions at tier one and tier two by its difference in instructional context and pedagogy (Wilson et al., 2013). Fitzell (2011) stated that within this tier, students who were still considered to be struggling are provided specialized instruction. This tier allows evaluators to provide more frequent assessments and a documented progress report that are intended to be an ongoing process.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) explained that during the tier three processes, specialized educators address the students' individual deficiencies via a pullout system. Through this intensive instruction, educators utilize progress monitoring at least once or twice a week to determine students' growth and development. The general education teacher provides the necessary information about the pupils such as work habits, academic skills, and classroom behavior to the facilitator who is responsible for the pull outs. The tier three period is essential for identifying students who are at risk for being diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability, and for implementing intervention strategies catered to various needs of each student (Bender & Shores, 2007). Students who still do not make adequate progress are then referred for an evaluation and referred for special education services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Fuchs et al. (2010) asserted that tier two and tier three are a school's last line of defense in the battle of reducing the number of low performing

students or some students who are referred for special education services. However, it is important to understand that to make an appropriate placement; the evaluator utilizes the data collected in tiers one, two, and three (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Hoover and Laree (2011) explained that before the recommendation is made, educators are expected to have exhausted all efforts in the previous tiers. However, should a recommendation with clear documentation of data reflect the lack of progress and low proficiency levels achieved in the past three tiers? The previous tiers should provide a sound basis for a special education recommendation. It is important to understand parents can make a referral for special education services within any tier (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). However, students who do respond positively to the interventions and make progress are removed from tier three immediately (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008).

### **Integrity of RTI**

To measure the integrity of the model among the multi-tiered interventions, it is incumbent upon the school leadership team to ensure the program was done with fidelity (Mellard et al., 2012). Kavale and Spaulding (2008) expressed that RTI is an experimental model; therefore it has no specific model. Sometimes this can produce uneven or inaccurate results across academic areas. Knowing this, it becomes essential for teachers and administration to formalize a plan and provide the necessary professional development and a proven evaluation tool. The assessment of fidelity should include whether the necessary support was given to the instructors (Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, & Leaf, 2008; Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). Hoover and Laree (2011) explained that there are a couple of issues surrounding the implementation of the RTI

model which are garnering teacher support and buy-in to conduct the necessary changes that accompany the intended instructional models.

Barnett, Daly, Jones, and Lentz (2004) stated that RTI encourages the use of a continuum of services; however, it does not prescribe which precise intervention to utilize for which student. As the intensity of interventions increases so does the complexity, dosage, frequency, and resources. It is important that educators utilize the resources honestly and wisely. Not only does the district have a moral responsibility to educate every student, but it also has an ethical responsibility to the taxpayers to utilize their money wisely.

Hoover and Laree (2011) explained the central issue surrounding the implementation of an RTI model is gap analysis. Gap analysis can be defined as the process for determining the size of the gap between expected and actual proficiency levels. Whenever there are higher gaps, it creates a need for tier two and tier three interventions. Hoover and Laree (2011) explained that another issue surrounding RTI is the actual rate of progress of the students. This is the actual comparison between the expected rate of progress and the actual performance level of the pupil's age and grade level peers. Once again lower rates of progress will indicate a need for tier two and tier three interventions and instruction.

Hoover and Laree (2011) discussed that to ensure fidelity; the educators should observe the decision rules. The decision rules center around the premise that the educators accurately interpreted the data, such as adherence to the cut scores, determination of the achievement gap analysis, consideration of a student's rate of progress, along with procedures to corroborate implementation of instruction with

reliability. Not only is the school leadership evaluating the fidelity of the model, but they are also ensuring that the delivery of instruction throughout the tiers was sufficient.

Haager et al. (2007) expounded on another barrier for properly implementing an RTI model, and that is meeting the diverse needs of English Language Learners. This area can be problematic for educators because it can be a daunting task to differentiate between a language barrier and learning deficiency from a suspected disorder (Haager et al., 2007). If the procedure is not done properly, this may result in a high number of unnecessary special education referrals that could be easily addressed by making simple accommodations for students' ELL status. When dealing with this particular area of RTI, it is essential to understand that there is not a one size fits all approach, especially when dealing with students who come from a diverse cultural background.

### **Barriers to RTI**

Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) explained that research on RTI has mainly been performed at the elementary level. Very little research has been conducted at the secondary level, which would be an essential component to determining the concerns, needs, and problems of secondary teachers when instructing at-risk students. Fuchs et al. (2010) warned that adapting the elementary RTI model to function in a secondary setting is one of the first challenges to implementation. Another issue surrounding the implementation of RTI at the secondary level is content teachers' ability to provide evidence-based instruction in tier one. Block scheduling at many secondary schools presents an added challenge when scheduling and staffing interventions.

Fuchs et al. (2010) proceeded to explain that the need to demonstrate content over mastery for high school credit puts a burden on students and educators. Within the

secondary setting, there is a large emphasis on remediation rather than screening.

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2005) expressed their belief that another problem is the lack of clarity about who is tasked with implementing the research-based strategies, and who's responsible for ensuring that interventions are provided with fidelity. Some experts contend that it is regular education teachers who should implement interventions, while others insist that it be building level administrators because they are considered the instructional leaders of the building.

Mahdavi and Beebe-Frankenberg (2009) wrote that a school's culture and climate are essential to implementing a successful RTI model. The researchers contend if the culture and climate are toxic, then the teachers are less likely to buy into the new system. Some teachers will implement the new policy but will do so out of compliance rather than with student achievement in mind.

Shinn (2007) indicated that RTI in some schools is not successful simply because teachers are afraid of change. When a teacher belief system is challenged, the teacher automatically shuts down or is hesitant to buy into the new system. To combat this problem, it is important that the teacher be provided with adequate relevant professional development. Shinn (2007) implied that professional development would empower educators to implement the RTI model and boost their confidence in the new system. Shin (2007) found that when teachers are hesitant to apply new strategies or procedures, it is because of a lack of training or knowledge about the new system. Proper education and data about the new system help ensure educators that the new system has validity, and is proven to be successful.



## **RTI and Secondary Schools**

Fuchs et al. (2010) insisted that RTI can become a mainstay in secondary schools. Because of issues such as scheduling, and a lack of differentiation at the secondary level, RTI must be delivered in a modified version at that level. At the elementary level, students' progress through the tiered system based on their response to normal or modified instruction. Fuchs et al. (2010) suggested that secondary students should go immediately into the most intensive model. The rationale behind this is that the majority of students entering a secondary school that is considered to be at risk are already behind two to three years in math and literacy. It becomes obligatory for secondary teachers to help in the reduction of an already sizeable achievement gap. Fuchs et al. (2010) insisted that secondary students will transition from the most intensive intervention to the less intensive interventions. Fuchs et al. (2010) believed this method would assist in providing new and innovative strategies to address the needs of at-risk students. Fuchs et al. (2010) believed this approach should be applied to all students both general education and special needs students.

Fuchs et al. (2010) gave a rationale for this method. The approach is that students entering the higher grades have less time than a student in an elementary school. Therefore the students should encounter the most powerful intervention possible. According to Mahdavi and Beebe-Frankenberg (2009) students who enter three or more years below grade level are at a higher risk for dropping out. Of those students who dropped out, only 46% of those students were able to find regular employment within two years of dropping out of high school. Fuchs et al. (2010) suggested that secondary students who are identified as being at risk based on reliable data should be given

meaningful interventions as soon as possible. The data should consist of performance data, high stakes test information, and teacher nomination. However, with identifying these students, it is important to determine an appropriate group size for these students. Mahdavi and Beebe-Frankenberg (2009) suggested that educators should examine the amount and type of instructional strategies that will be utilized. Along with instructional strategies that should be determined, but specific targets should be determined. The targets should be aligned with the district or state definition of proficiency in each subject area.

Enhren, Lenz, and Deshler (2004) indicated RTI should be viewed as prevention in secondary education. Prevention can be thought of a way address students at risk, and to forestall to certain negative behavior such as poor academic achievement, or dropping out of high school. Enhren et al. (2004) discussed that for RTI to be truly successful at the middle school level, it is imperative that the teachers be optimistic about student outcomes. Some secondary teachers are under the impression that students entering a secondary environment have surpassed the threshold to be helped, and some of the issues the students have should have been addressed at the elementary level (Enhren et al., 2004). Enhren et al. (2004) discussed that teachers must differentiate secondary RTI from an elementary model, arguing that the individual learner has to be taken into consideration. RTI at the secondary level can provide an advanced tool to service every student at the school, rather than simply depend on individual teachers or remediation programs. In essence, everyone is responsible. Vaughn and Linan-Thompson (2006) discussed remediation as being based on two ideas: quality instruction can fix low performance due to poor instruction, and students with learning deficits require a form of

supplemental instruction. There are multiple innovative ways to incorporate RTI within the secondary setting which are a class within a class or small group activities, labs, special elective courses, co-teach model, and before and after school tutoring (Enhren et al., 2004).

### **RTI in the Urban Setting**

Kincheloe (2010) discussed implementing RTI in an urban school setting. RTI frameworks in urban areas should be designed to encompass cultural dimensions, race, and a student's ability to receive an equitable opportunity to learn. All of these issues should be taken into account. RTI can provide innovative, meaningful, and research-based interventions. However, the context for teaching and learning in an urban setting must be addressed before implementing a model. Kincheloe (2010) described an urban setting as densely populated and serving a large number of students. Urban school settings usually consist of high concentrations of poverty, high minorities, high language barriers, and high rates of student mobility (Kincheloe, 2010). Kincheloe (2010) stated that urban schools are plagued with persistent low academic performance, lack of instructional coherence, inexperienced teaching staff, poor data analysis systems, and low expectations for students.

Theoharis (2009) explained that low academic performance consists of low performance on state assessments, not performing at grade level, high dropout rate, and a large special education population. Most of the students in this environment want to succeed. However, distractors inside and outside of school become a barrier.

Theoharis (2009) discussed a lack of instructional coherence with districts having a lot of instructional initiatives that sometimes contradict each other. In this situation,

school districts continue to pile many innovations on teachers or impose the latest educational concepts on teachers without giving proper training. Many school districts develop an RTI model to fit its current practices, instead of developing RTI to pinpoint specific student deficit areas (Theoharis, 2009). Because of the diversity within each urban school district, initiatives should be relevant, specific, and catered to the needs of the students.

Lee (2004) indicated that inexperienced teaching staffs are at the heart of low-performing schools. Schools with a high number of black and Latino students are more likely to have inexperienced or unqualified teachers. These inexperienced teachers can sometimes not have the proper training in assessing student learning or implementing the right RTI strategies. These schools encounter a high turnover rate. Lee (2004) indicated the longer a teacher is in education, the more effective they are. Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2005) reported that teachers are more likely to make long-term careers in schools that are low in poverty, minorities, and are high achieving.

Reeves (2008) stated that urban school districts usually have poor data management systems, which can lead to misidentification of student needs and progress. Resource allocation and funding is considered to be at the heart of this issue; however, data is essential to student achievement. Thus, districts need to be innovative with developing and storing useful data. Reeves (2008) discussed that urban districts have low expectations for student performance. In urban districts, sometimes, teachers can feel overwhelmed by the many needs of students, and in turn, lower their academic expectations for the students. Reeves (2008) indicated that given the chance and encouragement urban students can rise to lofty standards set by teachers. Kincheloe

(2010) stated that implemented correctly RTI can succeed despite the many challenges that urban school districts face. However, when implemented, the model must address the specific needs of the students, and not be viewed as another initiative thrown at the teachers. In this setting, RTI can produce consistent, equitable, and positive outcomes for students, which can be paramount for student achievement.

### **Summary**

With the implementation of No Child Left Behind schools began to be held accountable for academic achievement. Schools that did not achieve their prescribed annual yearly progress goals became tagged as schools in need of improvement (NCLB, 2003). Schools that fall under the umbrella of need improvement are eligible for grants to help with student success and academic achievement. With the grants, schools can contract external providers to help facilitate the process of gaining student achievement (ESEA, 2015). The particular external provider at Summerville High School incorporates the RTI model to address the various academic needs of the school. For the RTI model to be successful in an urban academic setting, the necessary components must be in place and done with fidelity. Urban schools continue to face numerous hardships such as poverty, inexperienced educators, poor environmental factors, and lack of funds or resources to initiate needed programs (Kincheloe, 2010). RTI in an urban secondary setting seeks to narrow the achievement gap among the students (Kincheloe, 2010). If implemented correctly RTI has been shown to raise test scores, identify deficits, and provide timely interventions for students to be successful. Through the reauthorization of the IDEA in 2004, RTI has been able to provide interventions and skills that allow students to become proficient and on grade level (IDEA, 2004). Without such reform,

the special education population would continue to rise, and students especially those of minority descent would continue to fall further behind their counterparts. Through the multi-tiered system, educators can provide intensive interventions and support that allows all students to achieve academically (Fitzell, 2011). Implementing RTI at the secondary level comes with a multitude of barriers such as scheduling, lack of differentiation, and teachers focusing on particular contents rather than looking at the broader picture (Fuchs et al., 2010). If implemented correctly at a secondary urban setting, RTI will not only narrow the achievement gap, but it will ensure struggling students will become proficient and engaging students.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the program used by an external provider in an urban high school was effective in improving the academic success rate of at-risk students. This program mirrors the RTI Model, as presented in Chapter II. Since there is some debate in the research literature as to the effectiveness of RTI in urban, secondary schools, it will be the focus of this study to examine this program's effectiveness to determine whether or not the students receiving the interventions are improving their academic performance in this particular school.

#### **Research Questions**

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. Based on end-of-year ninth-grade state assessment exams and fall/spring semester grade distributions, is there evidence of academic growth by the students who are identified as needing assistance?
2. What are the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the interventions utilized by the external providers?

#### **Research Design**

This study used a mixed methods design, specifically a concurrent, qualitatively driven design (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Different designs are classified as mixed methods, usually based on time sequence for data collection and whether the study is predominantly qualitative or quantitative. In this particular study, the qualitative component (interviews) comprised the majority of the data, hence the designation, qualitatively driven. By collecting perceptual data from the primary stakeholders, it was the researcher's intent to paint a picture of how the program was implemented, in terms

of fidelity, and how the program was perceived by the teachers and administrators involved. During this same phase of the study, the researcher collected quantitative data in the form of end-of-year benchmark exams and semester grade distributions to answer Research Question 1, regarding student academic success as a result of the program.

### **Setting**

The study was conducted in an urban high school setting. The school is designated as a low socioeconomic Title I school with 80% of the student body qualifying for free and reduced lunch at least a 20% special education population and a high minority student population. The minorities at this school make up 98% of the student body, with African American students consisting of 91%, and Hispanics consisting of 7%. The school has had five principals in the past ten years and has been designated by the state department of education as having priority status, due to a three-year trend of low end-of-year benchmark exams.

The external provider for Summerville High School (pseudonym) has existed since 1995 and is currently operational in over 20 cities and more than 25 school districts across the country. The external provider is funded through Title I, Part A funds, or through the School Improvement Grant and uses the “whole school, whole child” approach to providing interventions. The external provider works in teams of eight to 20 members, who are usually recent college graduates.

For academic interventions, the external provider heavily relies on the RTI model to provide academic interventions and strategies. The external provider utilizes academic data and collaborates with teachers and administrators to identify students who are considered to be at risk. These students are then placed on a focus list. Each member of



the external provider was given a focus list of students to assist with the student's behavior, attendance, and academic needs.

Once the school year began, each member of the external provider team was assigned a teacher to assist in providing whole class interventions. Students who are identified as being at risk, and in need of further academic interventions were provided support outside of the classroom environment. These students were pulled out of regular classes throughout the day, usually during their electives courses to receive intensive small group or individual assistance. The members collaborate with the cooperating teacher to determine which skills the students were deficient. The intent was for the students to be regularly assessed to determine growth or need for further assistance. The external provider provided an end-of-year data report to the school and district outlining the improvements of the students, and what gains were made.

This study was a mixed methods study that focused on the data collected from end-of-year state benchmark exams, semester grade distribution, and interviews. The researcher gained entry by consulting with both the principal and the associate superintendent for secondary education. The researcher was able to obtain access to school data by applying to and receiving permission from the district IRB committee (Appendix E). The researcher also received approval from the Arkansas Tech University IRB Committee before collecting data (Appendix F).

Currently, the external provider utilizes two interventions which it calls the push in and pull out method. The push in method entails the facilitator entering the class and providing academic tutoring/interventions services for the class as a whole. The

facilitator will enter the classes that are considered to be performing at the basic or below basic level.

For the pull out method, the facilitator provides small group and individual student interventions. The small group usually consists of four to five students per group. The students are provided diagnostic exams to determine their current academic level. The diagnostic exams serve as baseline data for the facilitator. The baseline data combined with end-of-year exams/state assessment exams act as the determinant as to whether the student experienced academic growth.

Throughout the school year, the students were provided diagnostics to determine if the students were making gains. Students were also provided individualized instruction. The individualized instruction was for students who needed intensive interventions on an individual basis. Students were also afforded the opportunity to attend an after-school program, which continued to provide tutoring and interventions. The data that were utilized in this study were the students' previous year and current benchmark exams.

### **Participants**

The participants for the qualitative phase of the study were purposively sampled, using a criterion sampling method. The criterion, in this case, was all participants (i.e., teachers, external providers, administrators) who were involved, directly or indirectly with this program (Patton, 2015). The researcher used archived data, which meant that students only participated indirectly. These archived data were collected for 263 freshman students. The research focused on the interventions implemented to students

during their freshmen year of high school. The students consisted of both male and female.

The researcher interviewed four teachers who were at the school during the beginning stages of the partnership, using the interview guide included as Appendix A, B, and C. These interviewees had knowledge of the training that teachers received to prepare for the collaboration with the external providers and were asked to provide their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the program. These teachers described the different strategies and interventions that were initiated inside of the classroom and how they provided diagnostic information to the external providers to initiate tier two interventions.

In addition to the teachers involved in the program, the researcher interviewed the central office personnel who took part in the establishment of the first partnership and who were actively involved during the first four years of the contract. The central office personnel provided insight into the development of the partnership and described the expectations of the external provider. Lastly, the central office personnel provided insight about the effect the program was having on this priority school.

The researcher also interviewed the principal of Summerville High School who was in place during the fourth year of the contract. The principal provided insight as to the effectiveness of the external provider in meeting the school's annual measurable outcomes. The principal provided insight on how the external provider assisted with tier one strategies inside the classroom and whether the external provider was instrumental in student achievement growth.

The researcher interviewed two former team leaders of the external providers to determine how they were trained to implement RTI strategies and interventions. The team leaders provided insight on the specific interventions that were utilized. Lastly, the team leaders provided insight on how they tracked student data, and how the data were used to give the right interventions.

### **Procedures**

The researcher began the study by applying to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Arkansas Tech University (ATU). After approval had been obtained from ATU, an additional application was submitted to the urban school district to gain permission to collect data about the participating high school. The district's IRB approval allowed the researcher to gain access to data, and interview personnel. After permission was granted, the researcher began collecting data.

The data obtained were end-of-year benchmark exams and grade distributions. The researcher requested the district release four years of end-of-course data that were specifically linked to the ninth-graders in the school. The state assessment data consisted of the students' assessment scores before entering the ninth-grade, and the same students' end-of-course data after they completed the ninth-grade. The data were classified as students who scored below basic, basic, and students who achieved proficient and advanced. The fall/spring grade distribution data for math and literacy were analyzed to determine if the interventions provided to the students were successful, and caused the student to show academic growth.

Next, the semester grade distribution report for the freshmen was analyzed and disaggregated. The grade distribution determined how the freshmen were improving

academically. This analysis provided another perspective of academic growth for these freshmen students. The disaggregation began by comparing the first-semester grade report against the second-semester grade report. The grade reports were separated by students who were considered basic, below basic, and students who were found to be proficient and advanced. The students were assigned a number by the district to maintain the anonymity of the students. This analysis determined whether the interventions impacted the students' mastery of concepts, academic growth, and in fact, whether the interventions were having a positive effect on the students' academic achievement.

The data were entered into SPSS22, a commercial statistical software package, again with each student only identified by an assigned number by the district. The data were disaggregated by the benchmark exam, which identified the students that demonstrated growth. Growth was considered moving from below basic to basic or basic to proficient. The grade distribution was analyzed to determine if the interventions utilized have impacted student achievement academically.

The researcher analyzed the external partner annual report submitted to the school district. The annual report provided the external provider's perspective about how they believed their interventions and instruction impacted student growth and achievement. The annual report detailed the interventions utilized, how they determined who received the interventions, and the steps they took to implement the interventions. The annual report also gave the overall comparison of how the freshmen in general, and the students who were identified as at risk performed during the school year.

To collect the qualitative data, the researcher interviewed teachers, a principal, central office personnel, and former team leaders. These individuals were chosen

because of their direct knowledge, their interactions with the external providers, their collaboration with the external providers, and their knowledge of the data. The instrument that was utilized was a ten-question interview guide that was semi-structured in form. To conduct the interviews, signed consent forms were collected before the interviews taking place. The interviews were held at Summerville High School, the district central office, and a public library. The interviews lasted about one hour each. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions served as qualitative data and were analyzed using the constant comparative method as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The constant comparative method is performed by taking the qualitative data and through the process of “unitizing and categorizing” the data, certain themes emerge that provide insight into the processes under study.

The researcher conducted the interviews with the teachers, team leaders, principal, and central office personnel as described in the previous section. The interviews were conducted between October 2016 and November 2016.

### **Instrumentation**

For this study, a mixed methods approach was utilized. In particular, the student achievement data was problematic regarding the end-of-year assessment, since the state of Arkansas has used three different tests over the last three years. To identify some commonality between these tests, the scores, along with the end of semester grades were converted into standardized scores. The first test during the school year of 2013 through 2014 was the Algebra I end-of-course exam. The Algebra I end-of-course exam gives four distinctions; below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. The Algebra I end-of-course exam determines the mastery of algebra content after taking the Algebra I course.

The second standardized test was the PARCC exam. PARCC denotes the partnership for assessment of readiness for college and careers, and the exam attempts to articulate and assess the K-12 curriculum in math and English based on the Common Core State Standards. The assessment gives four distinctions: level 1, did not yet meet expectations; level 2, partially met standards; level 3, approached expectations; level 4, met expectations; and level 5, extended expectations.

The third assessment is the ACT Aspire exam. The ACT Aspire exam shows the students' strengths and weaknesses in five subject areas: English; math; reading; science; and writing. The ACT Aspire exam gives the following designations for readiness which are: the need of support; close; ready; and exceeding. These standard scores were then used to compare the at-risk students with the regular education students through the use of paired *t*-test analysis. Each ACT Aspire exam assesses a student's readiness for those particular subject areas.

Also, the scores over three years were examined by trend analysis to determine if there were any consistent gains over that period in the students' academic success.

For the qualitative phase of the study, the researcher developed a ten-question interview guide for the teachers, principal, central office personnel, and former team leaders. (See Appendices A, B, C) The interview guide helped to determine how the teachers view the partnership, how they feel about the interventions if the interventions have made an impact on student achievement, and if any training was provided.

The interviews were recorded via a digital audio recorder. The interviews took place at the urban high school. The researcher gained consent by the participant's

signature on an informed consent form (Appendix D), as well as gaining approval from the district's IRB committee and the IRB at ATU.

The interview guide for the team leaders helped to determine how they were trained about RTI, specific training the external provider initiated, how they disaggregated the data, and specific interventions they implemented. The interviews took place at a public library. The researcher gained consent by the participant's signature on an informed consent form.

The questionnaire for the principal provided insight into the principal's perspective of the effectiveness of the partnership, how the external provider has helped with student achievement, and how the external provider has been instrumental in assisting the teachers with tier one implementation. The interview took place at the principal's current school. The researcher gained consent by the principal agreeing via signature on the informed consent form. The interview guide for the central office personnel helped to determine the district's perspective on the effectiveness of the partnership, the conception of the partnership, and the expectations for the partnership. A digital recorder was utilized to record the interview. The interview took place at the office of the central office personnel. The researcher gained consent by the participant's signature on an informed consent form.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data were analyzed to determine if there was a significant gain in the academic success of at-risk students in this particular school, as a result of this program. The researcher used SPSS22 to analyze the data. A paired *t*-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant gain in the academic performance of the students



receiving services from the external provider for each of the three school years of 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016. For each school year, state assessment scores and semester grade distribution were analyzed. During the academic year of 2013-2014, approximately 155 ninth-grade students' state assessment scores were analyzed via SPSS.

The state assessment scores compared their eighth-grade state assessment math scores to their ninth-grade Algebra I End-of-Course exam. The same paired *t*-test was conducted on the students' semester grade distributions for Literacy and Math.

Approximately, 155 students' semester English I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement. Approximately, 155 students' semester Algebra I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or increase in achievement. During the school year of 2014-2015 approximately, 172 ninth-grade students' state assessment scores were analyzed via SPSS. The state assessment scores compared their eighth-grade state assessment math and literacy scores to their ninth-grade PARCC state assessment math and literacy scores. Approximately, 172 ninth-grade students semester English I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement.

Approximately, 172 ninth-grade students semester Algebra I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or increase in achievement. During the school year of 2015-2016, approximately 144 ninth-grade students state assessment scores were analyzed via SPSS. The state assessment scores compared their eighth-grade state assessment English scores to their ninth-grade English, Writing, and Reading ACT Aspire State Assessment Exam.

During the school year of 2015-2016, approximately 144 ninth-grade students state assessment scores were analyzed via SPSS. The state assessment scores compared their eighth-grade state assessment Math scores to their ninth-grade Math ACT Aspire State Assessment Exam. Approximately, 144 ninth-grade students semester English I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement. Approximately, 144 ninth-grade students semester Algebra I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or increase in achievement.

The researcher collected qualitative data by using the interviews to determine what interventions were utilized, how the data was were disaggregated, and if the teachers, principals, central office personnel, and former team leaders believed the interventions were impactful on student achievement. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The teachers, administrators, and former team leaders who participated in the survey will not be named; they will be given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The researcher sought and gained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the school district and ATU before data collection began.

The student-level data used in this study were provided to the researcher by the school district and were coded to avoid identifying any of the students. The researcher did not involve direct contact with the students in collecting these data.

## Summary

In this chapter, the researcher discussed how the study will be implemented, and how the data will be disaggregated. This study seeks to determine if effective the interventions utilized by the external provider were effective in affecting student achievement and growth. The setting will be at Summerville High School, which is an urban school setting that is designated as a low socioeconomic Title I school with 80% of the student body considered free and reduced lunch, with at least a 20% special education population, and has a high minority student population. The minorities at this school make up 98% of the student body, with African American students consisting of 91%, and Hispanics consisting of 7%. The school has had five principals in the past ten years and has been designated by the state department of education as having priority status, due to a three-year trend of low end-of-year benchmark exams. The researcher will analyze archived state benchmark exams, semester grade distribution reports, and the external provider's annual report. The researcher will also interview three teachers, two former team leaders, one principal, and one central office personnel. To analyze the quantitative results, a paired *t*-test was utilized, and for the qualitative results, the constant comparative method as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was used. The results of the analysis and all relevant findings are presented in Chapter IV.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the external provider, which utilized strategies grounded in the RTI Model, was providing adequate interventions to incoming ninth-graders within an urban school setting. The evidence of appropriate interventions included students showing growth on archived state assessments, grade distributions, and the perceptions of key stakeholders. The students that were administered the interventions were all true freshmen without the tag of special education.

All incoming freshmen that were deemed to be low performing as determined by their eighth-grade end-of-year state assessment scores were given intensive academic interventions. For the high school that was the subject of this study, there were 92 identified students out of 262 projected incoming freshman that were placed on the “needs intervention” list. The researcher sought to determine if the utilization of the RTI interventions by the external provider had a positive impact on at-risk students in this urban high school setting. The amount and the intensity of the interventions were determined by the individual academic needs of the students.

### **Research Questions**

1. Based on end-of-year ninth-grade state assessment exams and fall/spring semester grade distributions, is there evidence of academic growth by the students who are identified as needing assistance?
2. What are the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the interventions utilized by the external providers?

## **Data Collection**

The data collection for this study began on October 10, 2016, after the IRB application was submitted and approved. The quantitative data consisted of end-of-year state assessment scores for the school years of 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16. The population consisted of true freshmen for each year. The students did not have an IEP and were eligible to receive the interventions. During the 2013-14 school year, the school compared their eighth-grade math state assessment scores to their ninth-grade Algebra I end-of-course exam to determine if there was a significant difference after implementation of the interventions. The 2014-15 school year compared their eighth-grade state assessment scores to their ninth-grade State Assessment. During the academic year of 2014-2015, the state assessment consisted of the PARCC exam. The 2015-2016 school year compared their eighth-grade state assessment scores to their ninth-grade state assessment. The state assessment for 2015-2016 was the ACT Aspire.

The semester grade distributions were used to determine if the interventions helped to improve student achievement within the classroom setting. The researcher received the data sets from the urban school district. The data sets consisted of state assessments scores from the academic years of 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016. The data sets also consisted of semester grade distributions. The researcher compared each identified student's semester one math and literacy letter grades to their second-semester math and literacy letter grades. This was done to determine if the prescribed interventions positively impacted the students' academic performance within a classroom setting. Once the researcher received the data sets, the researcher performed a paired *t*-test to determine if the interventions made a significant impact on student performance on

the state assessments and classroom performance. To use *t*-test analysis, the letter grades had to be converted to a numeric value. The letter A was given the value of four, the letter B was given a value of three, the letter C was given the value of two, the letter D was given the value of one, and the letter F was given the value of zero.

The qualitative data collection consisted of the researcher interviewing seven participants. Each participant was recruited based on their knowledge, and ability to contribute to the study. The researcher interviewed three teachers, two former team leaders, one central office personnel, and one principal.

The three teachers were recruited because they worked and interacted directly with the external provider. The teachers were instructors at the school during the beginning stages of the partnership. The instructors gave firsthand accounts of the external provider's interventions, how they interacted with the students, how the interventions impacted student achievement and the student's view of the external provider. The interviews for the teachers were conducted at Summerfield High School, after school hours. All participants signed the participant consent form and agreed to the interview being recorded.

The two team leaders were recruited to participate in the study based on their firsthand knowledge of the external provider, the interventions implemented, how the focus lists were determined, the data utilized, and how the students viewed their interventions. The interviews for the team leaders were conducted at the public library. All participants signed the participant consent form and agreed to the conversation being recorded.

The central office administrator was recruited based on extensive knowledge of the external provider, the interventions, and the data sets utilized. The central office administrator was integral to the process and sat on the committee that elected to utilize the external provider's services. The interview was conducted at the person's office. The participant signed the participant consent form and agreed to the interview being recorded.

The former principal was recruited because of direct interaction with the external provider. The former principal helped develop the focus lists and debriefed with the external provider quarterly to determine the external provider's progress. The interview with the principal was conducted at the principal's current office. The participant signed the participant consent form and agreed to the interview being recorded.

Once the interviews concluded the researcher transcribed each interview and these transcriptions became the qualitative data that was analyzed using the constant comparative method to identify the themes that arose from the analysis.

## **Study Results**

A paired *t*-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant gain in the academic performance of the students receiving services from the external provider for each of the three academic years of 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2015. For each school year, state assessment scores and semester grade distribution were analyzed. During the school year of 2013-2014, approximately 155 ninth-grade students' state assessment scores were analyzed via SPSS. The state assessment scores compared their eighth-grade state assessment math scores to their ninth-grade Algebra I End-of-Course exam. There was a significant difference in the scores for eighth grade math ( $M = 2.03$ ,

$SD = .92$ ) and Algebra I ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) conditions  $t(153) = -7.45$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . This correlates to being a significant difference or growth in achievement from the student's eighth grade academic year to their ninth-grade academic year. The same paired  $t$ -test was conducted on the students' semester grade distributions for Literacy and Math.

Approximately 155 students' semester English I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement. There was not a significant difference in semester one English I grade distribution ( $M = 1.30$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) and semester two English I grade distribution ( $M = 1.22$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) conditions  $t(173) = .310$ ,  $p = .310$ . The difference was not significant from semester one to semester two in the subject of English I. Approximately, 155 students' semester Algebra I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement. There was not a significant difference in semester one Algebra I grade distribution ( $M = 1.07$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) semester two Algebra I grade distributions ( $M = 1.11$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) conditions  $t(173) = -.816$ ,  $p = .416$ . According to the data, it was determined there was not a significant difference or academic growth from semester one to semester two in the subject of Algebra I.

Table 1

*2013-2014 State Assessment Results and Grade Distribution*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2 tail)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Algebra I EOC	-.461	.768	-7.449	153	.000*
Semester 1 English Semester 2 English	.075	.968	1.018	173	.310
Semester 1 Algebra I Semester 2 Algebra I	-.046	.744	-0.816	173	.416



During the school year of 2014-2015, approximately 172 ninth-grade students' state assessment scores were analyzed via SPSS. The state assessment scores compared their eighth-grade state assessment math and literacy scores to their ninth-grade PARCC state assessment math and literacy scores. There was not a significant difference in the scores for eighth grade literacy ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) and ninth-grade PARCC English scores ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) conditions  $t(153) = -.103$ ,  $p = .918$ . These results indicated that there was no significant difference or growth in achievement from the students' eighth grade academic year to their ninth-grade academic year in the area of literacy.

There was not a significant difference in the scores for eighth grade math ( $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) and ninth-grade math PARCC scores ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) conditions  $t(164) = -1.46$ ,  $p = .148$ . This data suggested that there not be a significant difference or growth in achievement from the students' eighth grade academic year to their ninth-grade academic year in the area of math. Approximately, 172 ninth-grade students semester English I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement. There was not a significant difference in the scores for semester one English I grade distribution ( $M = 1.39$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) and semester two English I grade distribution ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) conditions  $t(200) = .661$ ,  $p = .509$ . The data determined there was not a significant difference or academic growth from semester one to semester two in the subject of English I. Approximately, 172 ninth-grade students semester Algebra I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement. There was not a significant difference in the scores for semester one Algebra I grade distribution ( $M = 1.77$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) semester two Algebra I grade distribution ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) conditions  $t(200) = .90$ ,  $p = .372$ . The

data determined there was not a significant difference or academic growth from semester one to semester two in the subject of Algebra I.

Table 2

*2014-2015 State Assessment Results and Grade Distribution*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2 tail)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade English 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade PARCC	-0.006	0.772	-0.103	156	.918
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade PARCC	-0.091	0.803	-1.455	164	.148
Semester 1 English Semester 2 English	0.040	0.853	0.661	200	.509
Semester 1 Algebra Semester 2 Algebra	-0.055	0.867	-0.895	200	.372

During the school year of 2015-2016, approximately 144 ninth-grade students state assessment scores were analyzed via SPSS. The state assessment scores compared their eighth grade state assessment English scores to their ninth-grade English, Writing, and Reading ACT Aspire State Assessment Exam. There was a significant difference in the scores for eighth grade literacy ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) and ACT Aspire English ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) conditions  $t(147) = 6.9$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . There was a significant difference in the scores for eighth grade literacy ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) and ACT Aspire Reading ( $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) conditions  $t(147) = 16.25$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . There was a significant difference in the scores for eighth grade literacy ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) and ACT Aspire Writing ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) conditions  $t(147) = 10.64$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . This correlates to a significant

difference or growth in achievement from the student's eighth grade academic year to their ninth-grade academic year in the areas of English, writing, and reading.

For the same school year of 2015-2016, approximately 144 ninth-grade students state assessment scores were analyzed via SPSS. The state assessment scores compared their eighth-grade state assessment Math scores to their ninth-grade Math ACT Aspire State Assessment Exam. There was a significant difference in the scores for eighth grade mathematics ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) and ACT Aspire math ( $M = 1.37$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) conditions  $t(146) = 12.00$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . This correlates to a significant difference or growth in achievement from the student's eighth grade academic year to their ninth-grade academic year in the area of math. Approximately, 144 ninth-grade students semester English I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement. There was not a significant difference in the scores for semester one English I grade distribution ( $M = 1.37$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) and semester two English I grade distribution ( $M = 1.59$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) conditions  $t(169) = 2.6$ ,  $p = .010$ . The data determined there was not a significant difference or academic growth from semester one to semester two in the subject of English I.

Approximately, 144 ninth-grade students semester Algebra I letter grades were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference or growth in achievement. There was not a significant difference in the scores for semester one Algebra I grade distribution ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) and the scores for semester two Algebra I grade distribution ( $M = 1.72$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) conditions  $t(169) = 1.56$ ,  $p = .123$ . The data determined there was not a significant difference or academic growth from semester one to semester two in the subject of Algebra I.

Table 3

*2015-2016 State Assessment Results and Grade Distribution*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2 tail)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade English 9 <sup>th</sup> English ASPIRE	0.466	0.812	7.00	147	.000*
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade English 9 <sup>th</sup> Reading ASPIRE	1.054	0.789	16.25	147	.000*
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade English 9 <sup>th</sup> Writing ASPIRE	0.743	0.850	10.64	147	.000*
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math 9 <sup>th</sup> Math ASPIRE	0.721	0.729	12.00	146	.000*
Semester 1 English Semester 2 English	-0.218	1.085	-2.62	169	.010*
Semester 1 Algebra I Semester 2 Algebra I	1.00	0.841	1.55	169	.123

*Note:* \* represents significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

**Trend Analysis**

A trend analysis was conducted to determine the number of students who improved or declined academically. For the school year of 2013 through 2014, 73 students improved, 65 students had no change, and 17 students declined on the state assessment exam from the eighth to the ninth academic school year.

For the school year of 2014 through 2015 in the area of English one student improved, 48 students had no change, and 108 students declined on the state assessment exam from the eighth to the ninth academic school year. For the school year of 2014 through 2015 in the area of math two students improved, 70 students remained the same,

and 85 students declined on the state assessment exam from the eighth to the ninth academic school year.

For the school year of 2015 through 2016 in the area of English 67 students improved, 65 students had no change, and 15 students declined on the state assessment exam from the eighth to the ninth academic school year.

For the school year of 2015 through 2016 in the area of reading 22 students improved, 83 students had no change, and 42 students declined on the state assessment exam from the eighth to the ninth academic school year.

For the school year of 2015 through 2016 in the area of writing 44 students improved, 77 students had no change, and 25 students declined on the state assessment exam from their eighth to ninth academic school year

For the school year 2015 through 2016 in the area of math 18 students increased, 103 students had no change, and 26 students declined on the state assessment exam from the eighth to the ninth academic school year. The trends indicated from 2013 through 2014 there was a significant increase in some students who improved compared to the students who test scores declined. For the school year of 2014 through 2015, there was a drastic amount of students who declined in both math and English. However, for the school year of 2015 through 2016, a significant amount of students test scores improved in the areas of English, reading, writing, and math. The number of students who declined in test scores was also drastically reduced.

Table 4

*Trend Analysis of State Assessment by School Year*

	Increased	Remained	Declined
2013-2014 (Math)	73	65	17
2014-2015 (English)	1	48	108
2014-2015 (Math)	2	70	85
2015-2016 (English)	67	65	15
2015-2016 (Reading)	22	83	42
2015-2016 (Writing)	44	77	25
2015-2016 (Math)	18	103	26

**Qualitative Questions**

Qualitative data was collected to determine the stakeholder perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the interventions implemented by the external providers. The stakeholders consisted of three teachers, two former team leaders working for the external provider, one central office person, and one principal. Each participant consented to being interviewed, and having the interview recorded via digital audio tape. The interview guide for the teachers and principal consisted of 11 questions. The interview protocol for the team leaders and central office personnel consisted of ten questions.

The analysis of the qualitative interview data for this study is presented below. The interview question is presented in parentheses, and the responses and themes are submitted for the stakeholders involved.

## Teacher Interviews

### 1. What training did you receive to work with this particular external provider?

Teachers one, two, and three all stated that they did not receive any specialized training to work with the external provider. Teacher one stated that the information they were given was the external provider was a service based organization. Teacher one further indicated that the teachers did know the external provider would provide one on one support for the students and that the team members would be in the classroom setting with the teacher. Teacher two stated the external provider was introduced via the ninth-grade academy. Only the rules and the goals were explained. The goal for both parties was to focus on the school's improvement plan for the areas of math and literacy.

### 2. How were you first introduced to the external provider version of the RTI model?

Teacher one indicated that during the initial phase of the program, the external provider did not use the acronym RTI. The lead teacher for the ninth-grade academy served as the liaison between the teachers and the external provider. This discussion may have happened with the lead teacher. Teacher two expressed that the external provider informed the teachers of the protocol for the students. The external provider's model was beneficial for some, and not for others. It allowed students to become engaged, and it helped improve students' test scores. The one-on-one became an academic achievement for some students. Teacher three stated that the external provider's model consisted of a focus list being developed. The lead teacher and principal, along with the external provider decided on what students would be serviced based on their deficit areas. The teacher, along with the external provider, decided on what interventions to be utilized.

The main two interventions utilized were the push in and pull out method. Teacher three explained the pullout method involved the students being taken out of class for targeted interventions. The push in method required the external provider to enter the classroom, and the associate provided the student interventions throughout the lesson. During the push in method, every student received the intervention whether they were on a particular focus list or not.

3. What input did you have in deciding what students were chosen for the focus list?

Teacher one and two stated that they did not have any input in which students would be on the focus list. Teacher three, however, did have input on which students were chosen because of teacher three's role as the Academic Improvement Plan coordinator. Teacher three stated the focus lists were aligned with bubble students who could be pushed over to proficiency. The learners also received reading 180, and were double blocked for Algebra I. The initial focus was on non-special education students, who were non-proficient.

4. When you think of RTI, what does it mean to you?

Teacher one described the progress as each student progressing through levels. Tier one consists of whole class intervention. Tier two consisted of pull outs or push ins. During the whole class push in the external provider may work with the student one on one within the classroom setting. Tier three consisted of one on one or a pullout. The external provider never explained how they intended on closing the achievement gap. It was explained in the generic sense, but it was not explained which students would be in



the different tiers, or how they would move from tier to tier. The specific interventions were modeling of appropriate behavior, and working with the students one on one.

Teacher two indicated RTI served as a means to work with the students individually on items that would improve their “needs improvement” areas in literacy, math, and behavior.

Teacher three stated they believed RTI meant assigning levels to the types of interventions implemented. RTI sets building blocks to what the student knows, then builds on prior knowledge. RTI prescribes specific interventions based on data. It is precise and bases the interventions on the standards they need to learn.

5. What professional development opportunities have you received relating to RTI, and how to do you plan to continue your professional development in this area?

Teacher one stated they did not receive training specifically targeted towards RTI. However they would like to attend the training if it is offered.

Teacher two stated they received training via PLCs on helping to improve literacy and math scores inside the classroom to better coordinate with the organization’s RTI method. Teacher two hoped to attend training on RTI in the future, and implement it within the classroom setting.

Teacher three indicated they did not receive professional development towards RTI. They were introduced to RTI via the external provider, watching their model, and helping to implement it.

6. How often does the external provider provide you with diagnostic information about the students they service?

Teacher one indicated they did not receive diagnostic information, and that most of the information about the students came from the teachers. The teachers gave the external provider service members different concepts with which to work. The service provider associates asked the teachers for the diagnostic information. The teachers and the service members would have informal discussions based on the students' progress.

Teacher two indicated that once a week information was provided to the teachers on the progression of the students.

Teacher three indicated the external provider did not provide week to week or interim data. However, the teacher provided the associates with data. The only data received from the external provider came in the form of an end-of-year report, which described the academic progress of the students.

7. How often do you collaborate with the external provider about the progress of the students?

Teacher one indicated they collaborated on a daily basis with the external provider service member that was assigned to their class. The service member was included in the lesson planning process, classroom activities, upcoming concepts, and the coherent plan. The coherent plan consisted of where the students were academically, what lessons had been taught, and what future lessons would be implemented.

Teacher two indicated they would collaborate weekly with the associate assigned to their classroom, and meet weekly with the team to see how the push ins, pull outs, and the individual work was going.

Teacher three indicated they collaborated once a month on the students' progress, to ensure the students were being pulled out, students received their time and intervention.

8. What are some of the noticeable gains you observed among the students?

Teacher one stated that the students, who did not normally complete work, would attempt to complete the assignment if the service member was present in the classroom. The service member would sit with them, help the students complete the assignments, and get the work turned in. However, most students would not work if they did not receive the one-on-one attention from the associates. Teacher one also indicated the reason the students would not function without the associates, is some of the students have trouble thinking and working independently. Most of the students do not have independent study habits. Teacher one explained that on the state assessments, no one is permitted to help the students, so the intent is to get the students to work and think independently. Teacher one continued that if the students have someone present to help them, then that person becomes a security blanket. Teacher one indicated that they had seen noticeable gains in student performance on the Algebra I EOC, PARCC Exam, and Act Aspire Exam. Teacher one expressed that some of the gains can be attributed to the external provider working with the students. Teacher two indicated they had seen noticeable gains with the students working one-on-one with the service members in the classroom. The service members helped the students complete assignments, understand the concepts, and increase their capabilities.

Teacher three indicated that when students come to you three to four years behind grade level, gains become noticeable. Even though the students may never reach grade

level, the students may move from a third to fourth reading level or a fifth- to sixth-grade reading level. Teacher three indicated that the teachers could see growth, it might not be at a rate most people expect to see, but it is some growth.

9. What are the drawbacks to the RTI model, and utilizing the external provider?

Teacher one indicated that the students become dependent on the associates. If the associates are not present, then some students will choose not to work. In essence, the students develop an unhealthy dependency.

Teacher two indicated that it could sometimes be difficult to coordinate the push ins and pull out especially during a testing week.

Teacher three indicated they did not see any drawbacks. However, due to high absenteeism on behalf of the students, it was difficult to maintain consistency.

10. What are some of the complications of implementing the RTI model in a secondary urban setting?

Teacher one indicated that there needs to be training for the teachers with the external providers included in the entire process. The teachers need a clear understanding of all the data that is utilized to determine if a student is on the focus list. Teacher one goes on to state that time can be a hindrance. Teachers are charged with ensuring the curriculum is taught, with the understanding that students have to be remediated, and interventions put in place.

Teacher two stated that some of the complications are the vast amount of students who are in need of RTI, but most are absent due to sickness, behavior, or parents.

Teacher two indicated the RTI model gives the students a chance to succeed. The teacher

believes the model has been very effective at their school and has helped close the achievement gap for some students.

Teacher three indicated high suspension rates, absenteeism, and parent questions centered on why their child has to work with the external provider. Teacher three also indicated that another complication is some students are embarrassed to be pulled out.

11. What end-of-year data are provided by the external provider and how is that data utilized for future interventions?

Teacher one indicated that no end-of-year report was given. The only report was derived from the state assessments. Teacher one concluded that they believe the external provider's program is good. However, it can be better. The teacher believed that if the external provider-initiated training, the teachers would have a better understanding of how to utilize the program better. Teacher one believes the program does help in closing the achievement gap and that it was well received by the students. Teacher one goes on to state that if it were not for the external provider some students would not have passed their class. Teacher one continues that the state assessments do not tell the complete story when it comes to student achievement. Teacher one concluded by saying overall their classes received the external providers well. Students enjoyed the one on one support, and relationships were built over the course of the school year. There were some students however who felt they did not have to listen to them because they were not the teacher.

Teacher two indicated they did not see an end-of-year report. Teacher two stated that the students enjoyed working with the external provider. The students particularly enjoyed the one-on-one support and relished the time with the external provider. Teacher

two concluded that you see a growth in the articulation in class, higher comprehension skills, and better writing skills.

Teacher three indicated that they did not receive an end of the year report.

Teacher three indicated the gains academically were minimal. The pull outs can sometimes be concentrated on the student's deficits, and not totally align with what is being taught in the class. Teacher three insisted the push in method be more effective because the assistance or the interventions provided were aligned with the classroom instruction.

### **Team Leader Interview**

The external provider former team leaders were asked a total of ten questions about their knowledge how they implemented the RTI model and provided interventions to the at-risk students.

#### **1. How were you first introduced to the RTI model?**

Team leader one indicated the first time they were introduced to the model; it was referred to as whole school, whole child. The former team leader was introduced to the model during their first year of service. The in-service lasted around three to four weeks before being placed at the school. When the personnel took over as team leader additional training was provided via professional development in the city of Boston.

Team leader two indicated they were introduced to the model during initial team training. They were in-serviced on the current situation of the schools, the pitfalls, and how the students were falling through the cracks. It was indicated that RTI was one of the solutions to combat the pitfalls.

#### **2. What is the extent of your knowledge of the RTI model?**

Team leader one stated tier one would be the push in method or whole class support. The external provider associates would go into the classrooms and assist the teachers. The service members would be extensions of the teachers. The push ins focused on a group of student. Each service member had a focus list of fifteen students, which focused on either literacy or math. The pull out method would be conducted during the student's elective courses. The service members utilized the state assessment tests from the previous school year, Scholastic Reading Inventory data, and Scholastic Math Inventory data. Tier three would provide one on one support. This tier targeted students who could not focus on small group activities and would serve as a less distractive environment.

Team leader two indicated they knew it contained three tiers. Tier one encompassed whole class interventions, tier two small groups, and tier three was a more intensive track. Tier three mainly consisted of one on one support. Team leader two indicated for them to perform their duties, it was essential to know each structure, and how the students fit into them.

### 3. When you think of RTI, what does it mean to you?

Team leader one specified it meant implementing a strategy based program to address the deficits in math, literacy, behavior, and attendance. The math and literacy components were based on what the students were learning in class, and what foundational aspects the students were missing. The behavior component was addressed with the help of the assistant principal of the freshman academy. The team provided support based on what the instructors were teaching. The external provider members would address the academic gaps with what the students were supposed to be learning in

class. The interventions were based on the data the external provider received, and from collaborating with the teachers.

Team leader two suggested RTI meant data-driven and targeted interventions.

4. What professional development opportunities have you received relating to RTI, and how do you plan to continue your professional development in this area?

Team leader one specified they received training about the whole school whole child model. How to implement the various methods such as push ins and pull outs. The team would have learning and professional development days every other Friday during the first semester. The team also took part in the school-based professional development opportunities.

Team leader two stated they received training a month before entering the schools, where they learned about RTI and different techniques to implement the model. From there the team was integrated into the school system via professional development to further their skills, the attained skills and strategies were then transferred into the classrooms. The team met every Friday to reflect and learn new strategies.

5. Other than professional development how do you plan to continue to stay up to date with the latest trends in RTI?

Team leader one indicated the team would use strategies they thought would best serve the students. The team analyzed different data sources and created pre/post tests to determine the students' deficit areas. The interventions would then focus on the students' deficit areas. The math pre/post assessments consisted of five questions about different



math skills. Literacy assessments consisted of a 60-question test administered at the beginning of each semester.

Team leader two insisted they stay up to date by having the associates observe different teachers, ensure the team was immersed in the latest trends of RTI. The team also met with the literacy and math facilitators who were more versed in the RTI model than the team.

6. Which educational level are you currently implementing the model, and does it differ from implementation on the other level? (In other words, how does implementing RTI on the secondary level differ from the elementary level?)

Team leader one stated they implemented the RTI model on the secondary level. They often collaborated during in-services, and with the middle school teams. When implementing the RTI model on the elementary level personnel attempts to create a foundation, whereas the secondary level focused on filling in the cracks of the foundation. On the secondary level, the team attempts to equip the students with skills that were not attained during their elementary years.

Team leader two indicated the model was implemented on the ninth-grade level. The biggest difference is by the time the students arrive at the high school level the educational gap has become huge. Within the elementary level, it is the teams' responsibility to build a strong foundation.

7. What are some of the noticeable gains you have observed among the students?

Team leader one insisted 75% of the students tutored have a significant increase, whether it was a letter grade increase, or something antidotal. Team leader one continued

that they believed the students understood the material better after the various intervention sessions. The students could take what learned and apply it in the classroom setting.

Team leader two stated gains were noticed on an individual level. The gains consisted on increased level of trust with the teacher, the student's confidence level increasing, a renewed interest in learning, and an increase of school involvement by the students. Team leader two continued that 40% of the students were moved from basic to proficient.

8. What are the drawbacks to the RTI model?

Team leader one stated one particular drawback is the associates have a one-year commitment. Every year the team is reorganized, retrained, and consistency with students has to be reestablished. A lack of extended pre-school training is an issue this particular external provider faces. The majority of the training falls upon the lead manager or team leader to determine what the students need.

Team leader two stated the risk of student dependency, lack of training of the associates, and focusing on social issues rather than academics are major drawbacks to implementing this model. The last drawback is when the associates leave the students sometimes feel abandoned.

9. What are some of the complications of implementing the RTI model in a secondary urban setting?

Team leader one insisted when implementing the model on a secondary level it can be difficult for the students to be pulled out. Even though the students are mostly pulled from their elective courses, it can sometimes cause the student to get behind in that

particular course. When students are pulled from courses, it can sometimes cause embarrassment for those students. Team leader one indicated out of one hundred students; 25 previously had associates at the middle or elementary level. If test scores increase, then the student is dropped from the focus list.

Team leader two insisted some complications consist of students already having a huge academic gap between themselves and their classmates. Some of the students have given up on school, and the associates are tasked with motivating and encouraging the students.

10. What specific diagnostic information do you solicit to determine if a student transcends into a more intensive tier?

Team leader one stated the main reason a student was transferred to another tier is that of behavior. The students sometimes have a problem focusing in a group environment. Additionally, if a student cannot grasp the concept in the tier two setting, then they are pulled individually for more intensive interventions. During the tier three instruction, students are encouraged to talk through the process, so the associate can figure out what the student's mode of thinking, and how to best address the deficit. The team member gives the students guiding hints, yet have the students do the majority of the talking. Team leader two monitors how the students interact with the group and make note of the students who might need more attention. Every three weeks a landmark exam is given, if the data demonstrates the students are still behind, the students move from tier two to tier three, and the academic dosage is increased.

### **Central Office Personnel Interview**

1. What were your standards in looking for an external provider?

The central office person stated the purpose was to find an entity that could provide full wrap around services for the students with the highest needs. Highest needs can be defined by poverty level, as well as academic needs. Total social integration in the school setting started at the elementary level and progressively moved into the middle and high school setting like a feeder pattern design.

2. What made you select this particular external provider?

The central office person stated the external provider demonstrated a proven track record for improving academic growth in an inner city type model. These particular schools mirrored the schools of this urban school district. The external provider was a perfect fit for the high needs of the district, and working in tandem with the teachers.

3. How does the district utilize the external provider in its attempt to remove the priority status from the school?

The central office person specified the district works hand in hand with the provider, and site base facilitator to identify students who have the greatest needs, and providing professional development for working with the students. The external provider is aware of the curriculum demands that the students are exposed. It is a two prong approach for the students. The students are exposed to the interventions from the teachers, and the RTI model from the external provider. The students, in turn, receive the benefit from working together to fit the academic and social needs best.

4. Over the past four years, how have you compared student achievement and growth of the students who have worked with the external provider?

The central office person insisted the external provider produce a mid-year, and end of year data information that provides summative information based on the growth

model. Several indicators such as attendance, discipline, overall grade performance, and the student activities are used as indicators of success. These are the matrices being utilized to help with student growth and overall student success.

5. How have you prepared the teachers to collaborate with the external providers?

The central office person stated the external provider reports to the school one week before school starting, and begin assisting teachers with setting up their rooms. The service members attend school-based professional development and have access to data of the students that will be serviced. The external provider becomes a member of the school leadership team. As a member, the external provider can better understand what the state expects as far as the academic needs of the students they service.

6. What is the extent of your knowledge of the external provider use of the RTI model?

The central office person stated they gain knowledge from meetings and working with the site managers and directors. Their model fits the whole child as far as the wrap-around method. The external provider's method is more individualized and meets the students where they are. The external provider celebrates small successes and individualizes the interventions.

7. How often do you monitor the external provider student data and collaborate with the external provider?

The central office person monitors the data by attending the school leadership meetings, where the external provider is required to give updates about student progress, and particular needs of the students. When the central office personnel visits the schools,

they visit with the site managers and ensure the memorandum of understanding is carried out. Lastly, the central office personnel works in tandem with the principal to ensure the needs of the students are being met.

8. Over the past four years, what student gains have you noticed among the students who are serviced by the external provider?

The central office person stated there had been significant gains in literacy at the elementary level, moderate gains in math at the middle school level, and growth in literacy. There has been a holistic change in student behavior; this is primarily seen in the students who were disengaged in learning and instruction. At the high school level, there have been noticeable gains in behavior at the high school level.

9. How does the district assess student growth?

The central office person indicated there had been three different state assessments over the past three years. Student growth can be assessed based on the students' readiness and closeness to meeting academic expectations. Student growth is also assessed by the amount of improvement the students demonstrate. A student's grade point average, performance on the ACT Aspire, PSAT, and monitoring of the pre/post tests can also be used as a determination of student growth.

10. What end of the year data is provided by the external partner, and how is it disaggregated?

The central office person stated the external provider generates a report that is provided to the superintendent on aggregate growth based on students overall growth pattern and additional areas that will need further assistance. To better increase the effectiveness of the external provider's assistance, there are plans to provide the services

to the tenth and eleventh graders. Currently, the upper-grade levels only receive assistance in the after school program, if additional services are added that would mean an increase in the cost of the external provider.

### **Principal Interview**

1. What training did you receive to work with this particular external provider?

Minimal training was provided by the organization, and their academic expectations given by the district was explained to the principal.

2. How were you first introduced to the external provider version of the RTI model?

The major response indicated that they were introduced to the external provider's version of the RTI model through observation of the associates working within the ninth-grade academy. The model assisted in identifying bubble students, or students needing interventions.

3. What input did you have in deciding what students were chosen for the focus list?

The principal indicated in response to the third question that the focus list was determined by student data. The majority of the focus list was determined by the external provider unless the principal had a particular student that needed assistance.

4. When you think of RTI, what does it mean to you?

The principal's response to the fourth question was RTI meant an individualized approach to address student academic needs.

5. What professional development opportunities have you received relating to

RTI, and how to do you plan to continue your professional development in this area?

The fifth question the principal indicated they received training related to RTI from an issued book that addressed RTI on the secondary level. Along with the resource, the area cohort provides training with both a local, and district RTI specialist.

6. How often does the external provider provide you with diagnostic information about the students they service?

The principal indicated in her response to the sixth question that diagnostic information was provided every two to three weeks. Along with a biweekly report, a quarterly report was issued to the principal. The principal further indicated that if other deficits were discovered, the students transitioned into a higher tier. The principal further stated that an estimated 70% to 80% showed positive movement with varying degrees. Data allowed the provider to identify students who were not moving, and provide a more intense intervention regiment.

7. How often do you collaborate with the external provider about the progress of the students?

The seventh question the principal responded to, it was stated that collaboration occurs weekly. The site manager or team leader debriefed with the principal concerning the students' current reality, other interventions the external provider felt needed to be addressed.

8. What are some of the noticeable gains you observed among the students?

The eighth question the principal responded to was there was a positive movement in Algebra I, and some in literacy.



9. What are the drawbacks to the RTI model, and utilizing the external provider?

The principal responded to question nine by stating one of the drawbacks to implementing the RTI model was there were not enough of the external provider associates to provide building-wide interventions. The external provider focused on the ninth-grade in hopes of building that grade level academic capacity. The hope was the academic growth would transfer to the higher grade levels.

10. What are some of the complications of implementing the RTI model in a secondary urban setting?

The tenth question the principal responded to it was indicated the major complication to implementing this model was transportation when it came to before and after school academic activities and interventions. The next complication was buy-in from the students, and being able to utilize the learned skills away from the school. The last complication was the master schedule and students being pulled out during their electives except athletics.

(What end of the year data are provided by the external provider and how is that data utilized for future interventions?)

The eleventh question the principal stated the end of the year data that was provided was a breakdown of the identified students gains, continued deficits, and what were the next steps going into the upcoming school year.

## **Themes**

After concluding the interview protocol for the multiple participants, a couple of themes or mainstays arose from the conversations. The first theme was there was not

much training provided by the external providers to the teachers. The second theme that occurred was there was little input from the staff on what students should be on the focus lists. Speaking to all the participants, the academic focus lists were determined by the student's eighth-grade state assessment scores. The external provider, along with minimal input from the principal, decided what students needed the interventions. The third theme that surfaced was the external provider had an impact on student achievement at the school. Each participant felt the teacher scores improved, along with the students' willingness to be engaged in classroom instruction and activities. The fourth theme was the majority of the participants felt students worked better when one on one support was provided in the classroom setting. The fifth theme was the students would become dependent on the external provider associates being present in the classroom. The dependency stemmed from the push in method provided by the external provider. As stated the push in method was an intervention where the external provider associates provided whole class interventions. Each student whether they were on the focus list or not was provided interventions. The sixth and final theme was the external provider primarily worked with the ninth-grade academy. Interviewing the participants, they felt the greatest academic impact could be made at the freshmen level.

Table 5

*Emergent Themes*

---

Main Themes

1. Not a lot of training provided to the teachers or principal.
  2. Very little input on which students are placed on the focus list.
  3. The external providers are impacting student achievement.
  4. Students work better when provided with one-on-one support.
  5. Students become dependent on the service members.
  6. External provider worked mainly with the ninth grade.
- 

**Answers to the Research Questions**

Based on end-of-year ninth-grade state assessment exams and fall/spring semester grade distributions, is there evidence of academic growth by the students who are identified as needing assistance? Based on the evidence provided the researcher can deduce that there is evidence of academic growth. For the school year of 2013 through 2014, the data suggested there was a significant difference in state assessment scores. For the school year of 2014 through 2015, there was not a significant difference in test scores. The test scores declined. However, for the school year of 2015 through 2016 the test scores increased, and the data suggested there was a significant difference or increase in academic growth. In the area of grade distribution, the data suggested there was not a significant difference or lack of academic growth. The qualitative data presented suggested the students benefited from the interventions utilized by the external provider. The teachers suggested some students would not have passed the course, and their content knowledge increased.

What are the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the interventions utilized by the external providers? All participants suggested the teachers perceived the interventions to be effective. The participants insisted the students relish the one-on-one support provided in class. The one-on-one support allowed the students to have access to another resource. The teachers suggested if it was not for the external providers some students might have failed their class.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact the interventions prescribed by the external provider impacted student achievement at a particular school in an urban setting. The external provider methods are grounded in the RTI model. The interventions should have an impact on the students state assessment results, grade distribution, and overall readiness to achieve in an engaging instructional environment. All incoming freshmen are considered to be at risk based on their eighth-grade state assessment results. The high which is the subject of this study around 90-95 of the students are placed on focus lists to help address some of their deficits and begin to bridge learning gaps. Utilizing the RTI framework, the external provider meets and collaborates with the school's educators to identify students with one or more off-track behaviors. The off-track behaviors consist of attendance, behavior, grades, and end of year benchmark exams. Once the students are identified, the students are placed on an intervention needs list. The external provider's objective is to often collaborate with teachers and administrators and hold data review conferences to deliver personalized support to address the students' needs. The external provider assigns team members to individual classrooms to assist the teacher in the lesson, as well as assist in differentiating the classroom instruction. The team members attempt to provide intensive support to address the students' academic needs through small group and one-on-one instruction.

### **Summary of Findings**

According to the analysis that was conducted on the state assessment scores for this particular school, it was found that there was a significant difference in state

assessment scores for the years of 2013-2014 and 2015-2016. However, for the academic school year of 2014-2015, the data suggested there was not a significant improvement in the students' state assessment scores.

For the academic school year of 2014-2015, the state switched to administering the PARCC state assessment exam. Even though the scores dramatically decreased for the school year of 2014 through 2015, Summerville High School was very close about the state assessment scores for demographics that mirrored the high school.

Holistically, for the state, the average percent of students in the ninth-grade who scored in the met or exceeds category on English Language was 36.5%. However, that can be broken down further by socioeconomic status and race. The urban school setting which was studied is comprised of 98% minorities of which, 91% were African Americans, and 7% were Hispanic. The school was also considered 80% free and reduced lunch. The state average of students in the percent of students in the ninth-grade who scored in the met or exceeds category for free and reduced lunch was 25%. The state average of students in the percent of students in the ninth-grade who scored in the met or exceeds category who were considered Hispanic was 27.3%, and which were considered African American was 18.2%. For the school that was studied, 17.2% of the African American population scored in the met or exceeds category. Historically, the state average percent of students in the ninth-grade who scored in the met or exceeds category on Algebra I section was 28.4%. The state average of students in the percent of students in the ninth-grade who scored in the met or exceeds category for free and reduced lunch was 18.4%. The state average for students in the ninth-grade who scored in the met or exceeds category who were considered Hispanic was 22.1%, and for African Americans, it was

10.5%. For the school that was studied 7% scored in the met or exceeds category. As a whole, the state did not perform well on the PARCC exam. Immediately following the scores being reported, the governor ordered the commissioner of education to explore other state assessment options. After only one year of implementation, the PARCC exam was non-renewed by the state.

When the researcher examined the grade distribution of semester one to semester two, it was found that there was not a significant difference, or it did not directly impact student achievement. When determining grades for a student, there are many factors that come into play. A student grade can be determined by the amount of homework they turn in, participation points, how well they do on summative exams, and other various rubrics depending on the teacher. The external provider did provide whole class intervention as well as one on one support to the students. During the interviews with participants, it was brought out that the majority of students became dependent on the associates being present in the classroom. It was explained that the students would not attempt the classwork unless the associates were present to provide assistance.

The interviews produced a variety of pertinent points. The interviews brought out during the initial stages, as well as during the partnership there was no real training provided to the teachers. All the teachers indicated they were told what about the external provider; however, no substantial training was provided. The second point was the teachers did not have any input on the students who would be put on the focus lists. The focus lists were determined by the student's state assessment scores. All the participating teachers and administrators felt the external provider had a major impact on the student's state assessment scores. From the data presented for the years of 2013

through 2014 and 2014 through 2015, the data indicated there was an increase in student achievement. The third point was students worked better when the associates helped them one-on-one in the class, and that the students could sometimes become dependent on the associates. That can be indicated by the students' grade distribution data. The last point was the external provider is helping to close the achievement. The majority of students that were serviced arrive at the school three to four years behind grade level. This once again can be indicated by the rise in student achievement the students' eighth-grade academic year to their ninth-grade academic year.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

According to No Child Left Behind schools that are considered to have a priority status can allocate 4% of their budget to contract an external provider to assist in helping the school close the achievement. The external provider must provide efficiency and capacity in assisting the school close the achievement gap. The particular external provider that was subject of the study bases its interventions on the RTI model. Bradley et al. (2007) expressed a belief that RTI can help reduce the achievement gap among students. According to the data presented during the school years of 2013 through 2014, and 2015 through 2016 with the assistance of the external provider, the school noticed a rise in student achievement via the state assessment scores.

During each of the school years, the external provider service members implemented interventions that were embedded in the RTI model. The RTI model utilized assessments to boost and increase student achievement within an academic setting. This approach is an opportunity for students who struggle to learn to obtain a targeted intervention before academic failure. For the school years of 2013 through 2014



and 2014 through 2015 according to the data the targeted interventions the students received enabled them to increase their academic performance on the state assessments. According to the interviews, each of the participants felt the external provider had a major impact on the state assessment scores. Bradley et al. (2007) expressed a belief that RTI can help reduce the achievement gap among students.

To help with the reduction of the achievement gap, educators must first identify the students' deficit areas. According to the interviews with the team leaders, the deficit areas of the students were identified via the students' state assessment data, classroom observations, and pre and post-tests that were administered by the external provider. According to Garcia and Guerra (2004), experts should focus on the link between school practices and student outcomes, as well as the exact causes of failure. During the interview protocol, the teachers and team leaders indicated this done via collaboration with the external provider and service members. To garner the improvement on the state assessment tests the interventions were implemented via tiers. For tier one, the external provider implemented the push in method. Within this method, each service member entered the classroom and provided interventions, and academic support to every student regardless of the student being on their focus list. According to the interviews with the teachers, this encouraged the majority of the students to complete tasks, and work within the classroom. The service members were able to build student confidence in completing classwork and encouraged students to turn in assignments. One teacher stated with the help of the service members; certain students were able to garner a passing grade in their course. Tier two and tier three interventions were implemented via the pull out method. Within these tiers, the service members utilized assessment protocols such as pre and post

tests to determine if the students were adequately progressing. According to the interviews with the teachers, weekly collaboration existed between the service members and the teachers. During the collaboration, the service members were informed of deficiencies the students exhibited in the classroom. This enabled the service members to better service the students.

The grade distribution data were analyzed, and it was determined that there be no significant difference in the grade distribution for any of the years analyzed. In other words, there was not a major change or increase in student achievement in the grade distribution category. According to the interviews, all the participants felt the students developed a dependency on the service members being present in the classroom. During the push in method, the service members provided the intervention to every student. Some students became reliant on the service members to provide assistance within the class. Without the service members present, some students opted not to participate or complete assignments. According to Kincheloe (2010) urban schools are plagued with persistent low academic performance and a lack of instructional coherence. This could help explain the lack of student achievement when it comes to grade distribution. As stated previously by the participants, the students were reluctant to complete assignments, unless they were aided by the external provider service members. The reluctance can be contributed to their previous misconceptions, prior academic performance, and a lack of understanding of the content. An urban classroom setting is sometimes characterized by a high student to teacher ratio, which makes it impossible for the teacher to meet the individual needs of every student adequately. As stated previously, it was discovered during the teacher interviews that having the external provider service members inside

the classroom made a difference in whether the student passed the course or not. Kincheloe (2010) stated that RTI can produce consistent, equitable, and positive outcomes for students, which can be paramount for student achievement. This is contingent on the proper implementation of the model. According to the data, the school is making adequate gains in student achievement, by implementing the interventions based on the RTI model.

### **Limitations**

The limitations associated with this study were the change of state assessments implemented by the state. Within the past three years, the state has implemented three different state assessment exams for ninth-grade students across the state. During the academic school year of 2013 through 2014, the state implemented the Algebra I End-of-Course Exam. For the Algebra I End-of-Course exam the students were placed into four categories which were below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. During the school year of 2014 through 2015, the state implemented the PARCC exam. For the PARCC exam, the students were delegated into five categories which did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, and exceeded expectations. During the 2015 through 2016 school year, the state implemented the ACT Aspire exam. For the ACT Aspire exam, the students were delegated into needing support, close, ready, and needing support. With different terminology for each state assessment, the researcher had to determine how to compare accurately compare the data sets, to ensure the data was accurate.

The second limitation to the study was the service members implementing the interventions to the students. The service members were not trained educators. From the

interviews with the team leaders, the service members were brought in one month before school starting. Properly educating a person on interventions, and the RTI model can sometimes take longer than the time the external provider allocated. The third limitation was performing the grade distribution. The grade distribution depends on the students' willingness to take part of their educational process, and the interventions implemented by the external provider's service members.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the data presented, the researcher suggests that the utilization of the external provider in the urban setting has been beneficial. The researcher can deduce the use of an external provider to assist with school improvements can be beneficial. This current external provider assisted in increasing state assessment scores for two out of the three academic school years. For the school year of 2013 through 2014, the data suggested there was a significant increase in academic achievement on the state assessment in the area of math. However, during the school year of 2014 through 2015, there was a decline in test scores. The researcher previously explained the decline in test scores for the academic school year of 2014 and 2015. Holistically, students in the ninth-grade did poorly on the exam. When compared to like demographics across the state, Summerville High School was close about some students who met or exceeded expectations on the exam. For the academic school year of 2015 through 2016, the test scores increased, and the data suggested a significant difference in academic achievement. Based on the interviews with the school and district personnel the external provider had an impact on student achievement and academic performance within Summerville High School.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

After concluding the research, there are a couple of things that could have improved the study. The first thing would be having scores from the same state assessment exams. Having scores from the same test could have given a better indicator of the students' achievement on that particular test. Having three different state assessment tests could provide different meanings when disaggregating the data. The three state assessment scores that were administered each had different levels of difficulty and gave different levels as indicators of success. As stated previously the PARCC exam was done away with after the only year of implementation. This was due to the level of difficulty, and the student's performance on the exam.

The second recommendation for future research is to interview the students. Due to time constraints of the researcher completing the study, the researcher was not able to interview any students. The student could have given the researcher firsthand information on the relationship between the students, and the external provider's service members. The students could have articulated what the interventions consisted of, and how much they participated in the process. Secondly, the students would have given insight on whether they felt the interventions made an impact on their academic performance. If the students felt the interventions impacted their academic performance, what particular interventions or strategies did the service members utilize? The third implication from the students could have answered the question of why they did not perform tasks when the service members were not present. Lastly interviewing the students could have helped explain why there was not an increase in classroom performance; however, the data concluded there was an increase in state assessment

performance. The students could have given insight on whether they choose not turn in their assignments, they failed the summative exams, or they simply were not engaged within the classroom setting.

The third recommendation for improving this study would come in the form of the researcher gaining permission actually to observe the interventions being implemented by the external provider. From the observations, the researcher could gain firsthand knowledge of how the interventions were implemented. According to the research, it is important for the interventions to be targeted to fit the specific deficiencies of the students. The researcher would have also gained firsthand knowledge of the students' reaction or willingness to participate in the group or one on one activity. The last recommendation would be to research and gain access to the external provider's professional development protocol. It would have been beneficial to examine the external provider's professional development session, and how they train their service members. Currently, the external provider utilizes the whole school whole child model, which is based on the RTI model. This model was designed to address the warning signs of students at risk of dropping out, poor attendance, small group, intensive one on one support and tutoring, social-emotional learning, and disruptive behavior. Once the researcher had a perspective on how the service member is trained, a correlation could have been conducted to determine if the training methods carried over to the educational setting. When implementing interventions, it is important that the interventions are implemented with validity and fidelity. From researching the external provider's professional development protocol, the researcher could have determined what

professional development the external provider needs could benefit from that would help increase student achievement.

## **Conclusions**

When schools consistently underperform it can have an affect the school's climate, culture, student confidence, and teacher morale. Sometimes it can be necessary for school districts to contract external providers to assist underperforming schools in closing the achievement gap. The purpose of an external provider is to assist with the providing of the necessary resources a school needs to be successful and close the achievement gaps that may exist in the schools. The ultimate goal of an external provider is to help the underperforming school to get out of school improvement. The particular external provider that was the subject of the study has its foundations within the RTI model. The RTI model if implemented with fidelity, can have a lasting impact on student achievement, and assist with closing the achievement gap within a school setting. The data presented within this study suggested that the interventions implemented by this particular external provider impacted the school's state assessment scores two out of the three years it was implemented. The year it did not have an effect, the state as a whole performed poorly on the exam, and governor encouraged the commissioner of education to explore other state assessment options. The interviews conducted by the researcher indicated that the participants felt the external provider assisted with increasing academic and student achievement. Implementing the RTI model in a high school setting requires the interventions to be intense, and powerful. If the external provider continues its trend of impacting the state assessment scores of Summerville High School, the school will eventually exit the school improvement domain.

## References

- Ardoin, S. P. (2006). The response in response to intervention: Evaluating the utility of assessing maintenance of intervention effects. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(6), 713-725.
- Al Otabia, S., & Targesen, J. (2007). Effects from intensive standardized kindergarten and first-grade interventions for the prevention of reading difficulties. In S. Jimerson, M. Burns, & A. VanDerHeyden (Eds.), *Handbook of Response to Intervention: The Science and Practice of Assessment and Intervention* (pp. 212-222). doi:10.1007/978-0-387-49053-3\_15
- Arkansas Approved Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2015). Retrieved from [http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Flexibility/AR\\_Approved\\_ESEA\\_Flexibility\\_Request.pdf](http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Flexibility/AR_Approved_ESEA_Flexibility_Request.pdf)
- Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M. & Fox, J. (2011). *On track for success: The use of early warning indicator and intervention systems to build a grad nation*. Retrieved from [http://www.civicenterprises.net/reports/on\\_track\\_for\\_success.pdf](http://www.civicenterprises.net/reports/on_track_for_success.pdf)
- Barnett, D., Daly, E., Jones, K., Lentz, F. (2004). Response to intervention empirically based special service decisions from single-case designs of increasing and decreasing intensity. *Journal of Special Education*, 38(2) 66-79  
Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ693732.pdf>
- Batsche, G. M., Elliot, J., Graden, J., Grimes, J., Kovalski, J. F., Prasse, D., Reschly, D. J., Schrag, J., & Tilly III, W. D. (2005). *Response to intervention: Policy considerations and implementation*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.



- Bender, W. N., & Shores, C. (2007). *Response to intervention: A practical guide for every teacher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Berkeley, S., Bender, W. N., Peaster, L. G & Saunders, L. (2009). Implementation of response to intervention: A snapshot of progress. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(1), 85-87. doi:10.1177/0022219408326214
- Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2005). Explaining the short careers of high-achieving teachers in schools with low-performing students. *American Economic Review*, 95(2). 166–171. Retrieved from <http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/000282805774669628>
- Bradley, R., Danielson, L., & Doolittle, J. (2007). Response to intervention 1997 to 2007. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 39(5) 8-13. doi:10.1177/004005990703900502
- Bradshaw, C. P., Reinke, W. M., Brown, L. D., Bevans, K. B., & Leaf, P. J. (2008). Implementation of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) in elementary schools: Observations from a randomized trial. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 31(1), 1-26.
- Buffum, A., Weber, C., & Mattos, M. (2012). *Simplifying response to intervention: Four essential guiding principles*. Bloomington IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Burns, M. K., Appleton, J. J., & Stehouwer, J. D. (2005). Meta-analytic review of responsiveness-to-intervention research: Examining field-based and research-implemented models. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 23(4), 381-394.

- Burns, M. K. & Gibbons, K. (2012). *Response to intervention implementation in elementary and secondary schools: Procedures to assure scientific-based practices* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Burns, M. K., Jacobs, S., & Wagner, A. (2008). Ethical and legal issues associated with using response to intervention to assess learning disabilities. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*(3), 263-279. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2007.06.001
- Bursuck, B., & Blanks, B. (2010). Evidence-based early reading practices within a response to intervention system. *Psychology in the Schools, 47*(5), 421-431. doi:10.1002/pits.20480
- Capizzi, A. M., & Fuchs, L. S. (2005). Effects of curriculum-based measurement with and without diagnostic feedback on teacher planning. *Remedial and Special Education, 26*(3), 159-174. doi:10.1177/07419325050260030401
- Carney, K., & Stiefel, G. (2008). Long term results of a problem solving approach to response to intervention. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal, 6*(2), 61-75. Retrieved from [http://danlane.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/Carney+\(Long+term+results+of+a+problem-solving...\).pdf](http://danlane.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/Carney+(Long+term+results+of+a+problem-solving...).pdf)
- Christ, T. (2008). Best practices in problem analysis. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.) *Best practices in school psychology V* (pp. 159-176). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Cameron, S., Parks, L., Schulte, K., & Steifel, G. (2006). Redefining the nature of a learning disability: A critical point in time. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal, 6*(2), 61.

- Datnow, A., & Honig, M. I. (2008). Introduction to the special issue on scaling up teaching and learning improvement in urban districts: The promises and pitfalls of external assistance providers. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 83(3), 323–327. doi:10.1080/01619560802222301
- Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. (2011). *Issues A-Z: Achievement Gap*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/achievementgap/>
- Ehren, B. J., Lenz, B. K., & Deshler, D. D. (2004). Enhancing literacy proficiency in adolescents and young adults. In A. Stone, E. Silliman, B. Ehren, & K. Apel (Eds.), *Handbook of language and literacy* (pp. 600–625). New York: Guilford Press.
- Fitzell, S. (2011). *RTI strategies for secondary teachers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Fletcher, J. M., & Vaughn, S. (2009) Response to intervention: Preventing and remediating academic difficulties. *Child Development Perspectives*, 3(1), 30-37. doi:10.1111/j.1750-8606.2008.00072.x
- Fuchs, D., & Deshler, D. D. (2007). What we need to know about responsiveness to intervention (and shouldn't be afraid to ask). *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 22(2) 129-136. Retrieved from [http://danlane.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/Fuchs+\(What+we+need+to+know+about+...\).pdf](http://danlane.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/Fuchs+(What+we+need+to+know+about+...).pdf)
- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (2006). Introduction to response to intervention: What, why, and how valid is it? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(1), 93-99. doi:10.1598/RRQ.41.1.4
- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (2007). Responsiveness to intervention. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 39(5), 14-20.

- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (2008). *Responsiveness to intervention within a multi-tier prevention system: The role of assessment*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Compton, D. L. (2010). Reflecting on response to intervention at middle and high school. *School Psychology Review*, 39(1), 22-28.
- Fuchs, D., Mock, J., Morgan., P. L., & Young, C. L. (2003). Responsiveness to intervention: Definitions, evidence, and implications for the learning disabilities construct. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 18(3), 157-171.
- Garcia, S. B., & Guerra, P. L., (2004). Deconstructing deficit thinking: Working with educators to create more equitable learning environments. *Education and Urban Society*, 36(2), 150-168. doi:10.1177/0013124503261322
- Gresham, F. M. (2002). Responsiveness to intervention: An alternative approach to the identification of learning disabilities. *Identification of Learning Disabilities: Research to Practice*, 28(4) 467-519. doi: 10.2307/4126964
- Haager, D., Klingner, J., & Vaughn. S. (Eds.) (2007). *Evidence based reading practices for response to intervention*. Baltimore, MD: Brooks Publishing.
- Hauerwas, L. B., Brown, R., & Scott, A. N. (2013). Specific learning disability and response to intervention: State-level guidance. *Exceptional Children*, 80(1) 101-120.
- Hawkins, R. O., Kroeger, S. D., Musti-Rao, S., Barnett, D. W., & Ward, J. E. (2008). Preservice training in response to intervention: Learning by doing an interdisciplinary field experience. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45(8), 745-762. doi:10.1002/pits.20339

Honig, M. I., & Ikemoto, G. S. (2008). Adaptive assistance for learning improvement efforts: The case of the Institute for Learning. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 83(3), 328–362.

Hoover, J., & Laree, E. (2011). Supporting school-based response to intervention: A practitioner's model. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 43(3), 40-48.  
doi:10.1177/004005991104300305

Hoover, J., & Patton, J. R. (2008). The role of special educators in a multi-tiered instructional system. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 43(4), 195-200.  
doi:10.1177/1053451207310345

Huberman, M. (1995). Professional careers and professional development: Some intersections. In T. R. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices* (pp. 193–224). New York: Teachers College Press.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004)

Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools. (2010). *Whole school, whole child: An innovated school and national service partnership*. Retrieved from [http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CityYear\\_WholeSchool\\_Child.pdf](http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CityYear_WholeSchool_Child.pdf)

Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L. (2014). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kavale, K. A., & Spaulding, L. S. (2008). Is response to intervention good policy for specific learning disability? *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 23(4), 169-179.

- Kincheloe, J. L. (2010). Why a book on urban education? In S. Steinberg (Ed), *19 urban questions: Teaching in the city (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*, (pp. 1–28). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Lee, C. (2004). *Racial segregation and educational outcomes in metropolitan Boston*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mahdavi, J., & Beebe-Frankenberg, M. E. (2009). Pioneering RTI systems that work: Social validity, collaboration, and context. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 46(2), 64-72.
- Mastropieri, M. A. & Scruggs, T. E. (2005). Feasibility and consequences of response to intervention: Examination of the issues and scientific evidence as a model for the identification of individuals with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 38(6), 525-531. Retrieved from [http://danlane.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/Mastropieri+\(Feasibility+and+Consequences+of...\).pdf](http://danlane.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/Mastropieri+(Feasibility+and+Consequences+of...).pdf)
- Mellard, D., Frey, B. B., & Woods, K. (2012). School-wide student outcomes of response to intervention frameworks. *A Contemporary Journal*, 10(2), 17-32.
- Myers, D., Simonsen, B., & Sugai, G. (2011). Increasing teachers use of praise with a response to intervention approach. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 34(1), 35-59.

- National Association of State Directors of Special Education Incorporated and Council of Administrators of Special Education. (2006). Response to intervention: NASDSE and CASE white paper on RTI. Retrieved from <http://www.nasdse.org/Projects/ResponsetoInterventionRtIProject/tabid/411/Default.aspx>.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C.A. § 6319 et seq. (West, 2003)
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Prasse, D. (2006). Legal supports for problem-solving systems. *Remedial and Special Education*, 27(1), 7-15. doi:10.1177/07419325060270010201
- Rudebusch, J. (2007). *Linguis systems guide to RTI: Response to intervention*. East Molina, IL: LinguisSystems, Inc.
- Reed, D. K., Wexler, J., & Vaughn, S. (2012). *RTI for reading at the secondary level: Recommend literacy practices and reading questions*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Reeves, D. (2008). The learning leader: Looking deeper into the data. *Educational Leadership*, 66(4), 85–90.
- Reschly, D. J. (2005). Learning disabilities identification: Primary intervention, secondary intervention, and then what? *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 38(6), 510-515.

- Roebuck, J. (2012). *Review of school improvement consulting expenditures and results* (Project No. 10-155). Retrieved from Bureau Of Legislative Research website: <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2011/Meeting%20Attachments/410/I1014/020712%20Revised%20Public%20School%20Improvement%20Consulting%20Svs.pdf>
- Shinn, M. R. (2007). Identifying students at risk, monitoring performance, and determining eligibility within response to intervention: Research on educational need and benefit from academic intervention. *School Psychology Review*, 36(4), 600-620.
- Shapiro, E. S. (2008). Best practices in setting progress monitoring goals for academic skill improvement. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology*, (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) (pp. 141-158). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Stollar, S. A., Poth, R. L., Curtis, M. J., & Cohen, R. M. (2006). Collaborative, strategic planning as illustration of the principles of systems change. *School Psychology Review*, 35(2), 181-197.
- Sugai, G. (2008). *School-wide positive behavior support and response to intervention*. Retrieved from RTI Network website: <http://www.rti-network.org>
- Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2002). The evolution of discipline practices: School-wide positive behavior supports. *Child and Family Behavior Therapy*, 24(1-2), 23–50.



- Theoharis, J. (2009). "I hate it when people treat me like a fxxx-up." Phony theories, segregated schools, and the culture of aspiration among African American and Latino teenagers. In G. Alonso, N. Anderson, & C. Su (Eds.), *Our schools suck: Students talk back to a segregated nation on the failures of urban education*, (pp. 69–112). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Torgesen, J. K. (2000). Individual differences in response to early interventions in reading: The lingering problem of treatment resisters. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 15(1), 55-64. Retrieved from [http://www.fcrr.org/publications/publicationspdfs/individual\\_differences.pdf](http://www.fcrr.org/publications/publicationspdfs/individual_differences.pdf)
- U. S. Department of Education. (2006). *LEA and school improvement: Non-regulatory guidance*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/schoolimprovementguid.pdf>
- VanDerHeyden, A. M., & Jimerson, S. R. (2005). Using response to intervention to enhance outcomes for children. *The California School Psychologist*, 10(1), 21-32. doi:10.1007/BF03340918
- VanDerheyden, A. M., Witt, J. C. & Gilbertson, D. (2007). A multi-year evaluation of the effects of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model on identification of children for special education. *Journal of School Psychology*, 45(2), 225-256. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2006.11.004
- Vaughn, S., Cirma, P.T., Denton, C.D., Fletcher, J.M., Wexler, J., & Wonzek, J. (2010) Response to intervention for middle school students with reading difficulties: Effects of a primary and secondary intervention. *School Psychology Review*, 39, 3-21

- Vaughn, S. & Linan-Thompson, S. (2006). Special education for students with learning disabilities: What makes it so special? In B. Cook and B. Schirmer (Eds.) *What is special about special education? Examining the role of evidence-based practices*, (pp. 1-11). Austin, TX: PRO-ED, Inc.
- Wilson, J. A., Faggella-Luby, M., & Wei, Y. (2013). Planning for adolescent tier 3 reading instruction. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 46(1), 26-34.  
doi:10.1177/004005991304600104
- Witt, J. C., Daly, E. J., III, & Noell, G. H. (2000) *Functional assessments: A step by step guide to solving academic and behavior problems*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
- Ysseldyke, J., Burns, M., Scholin, S., & Parker, D. (2010). Instructionally valid assessment within response to instruction. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(4), 54-61.

## Appendix A

### Interview Teachers and Principal

1. What training did you receive to work with this particular external provider?
2. How were you first introduced to the external provider version of the RTI model?
3. What input did you have in deciding what students were chosen for the focus list?
4. When you think of RTI, what does it mean to you?
5. What professional development opportunities have you received relating to RTI, and how do you plan to continue your professional development in this area?
6. How often does the external provider provide you with diagnostic information about the students they service?
7. How often do you collaborate with the external provider about the progress of the students?
8. What are some of the noticeable gains you observed among the students?
9. What are the drawbacks to the RTI model, and utilizing the external provider?
10. What are some of the complications of implementing the RTI model in a secondary urban setting?
11. What end of the year data are provided by the external provider and how is that data utilized for future interventions?

## Appendix B

### External Provider Team Leaders

1. How were you first introduced to the RTI model?
2. What is the extent of your knowledge of the RTI model?
3. When you think of RTI, what does it mean to you?
4. What professional development opportunities have you received relating to RTI, and how do you plan to continue your professional development in this area?
5. Other than professional development how do you plan to continue to stay up to date with the latest trends in RTI?
6. Which educational level are you currently implementing the model, and does it differ from implementation on the other level? (In other words, how does implementing RTI on the secondary level differ from the elementary level?)
7. What are some of the noticeable gains you have observed among the students?
8. What are the drawbacks to the RTI model?
9. What are some of the complications of implementing the RTI model in a secondary urban setting?
10. What specific diagnostic information do you solicit to determine if a student transcends into a more intensive tier?

## Appendix C

### Central Office Personnel

1. What were your standards in looking for an external provider?
2. What made you select this particular external provider?
3. How does the district utilize the external provider in its attempt to remove the priority status from the school?
4. Over the past four years, how have you compared student achievement and growth of the students who have worked with the external provider?
5. How have you prepared the teachers to collaborate with the external providers?
6. What is the extent of your knowledge of the external provider use of the RTI model?
7. How often do you monitor the external provider student data and collaborate with the external provider?
8. Over the past four years, what student gains have you noticed among the students who are serviced by the external provider?
9. How does the district assess student growth?
10. What end of the year data is provided by the external partner, and how is it disaggregated?

## Appendix D

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **Arkansas Tech University**

Title of Project: EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXTERNAL PROVIDERS  
AS IT RELATES TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE IN AN URBAN SETTING

Principal Investigator: Christopher Johnson

We invite you to take part in a research study EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS  
OF EXTERNAL PROVIDERS AS IT RELATES TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT  
AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN AN URBAN SETTING at Arkansas Tech  
University, which seeks to determine how effective external providers are in providing  
interventions, and increasing student achievement. Taking part in this study is entirely  
voluntary. We urge you discuss any questions about this study with our staff members.  
Talk to your family and friends about it and take your time to make your decision. If you  
decide to participate you must sign this form to show that you want to take part.

**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of this study will be to determine if the external  
provider, which utilizes strategies based on the RTI Model, is providing adequate  
interventions to incoming ninth-graders in an urban school setting. The evidence of  
adequate interventions will include students showing growth on archived benchmark  
assessments, grade distributions, and interviews with participants.

**Procedures:** The researcher will begin the process by applying to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Arkansas Tech University. After approval is obtained, an additional application will be submitted to the urban school district to gain permission to collect data within their school district. Permission from the district's IRB will allow the researcher to have access to data, and interview certain personnel. After permission is granted the researcher will begin collecting data from the school district.

The data being requested are the end of the year benchmark exams and grade distributions. The researcher is requesting the district release four years of the end of course data that are specifically linked to the ninth-graders in the school. The benchmark exam data will consist of the student's benchmark scores prior to entering the ninth-grade, and the same students end of course data after they have completed the ninth grade. The data will be classified as students who scored basic/below basic, and students who achieved proficient and advanced. The end of course data will be analyzed to determine if the interventions provided to the students were successful, and caused the student to show academic growth.

Next, the semester grade distribution report for the freshmen will be analyzed and disaggregated. The grade distribution will determine how the freshmen are improving academically. This will give another perspective of academic growth of the freshmen. The disaggregation will begin by comparing the 1<sup>st</sup>-semester-grade report against the 2<sup>nd</sup>-semester-grade report. The grade reports will be separated by students who are considered basic/below basic, and students who are considered proficient and advanced. The students will be assigned a number, so their identity remains anonymous. This examination will once again determine if the interventions are impacting the students'

mastery of concepts, academic growth and if the interventions are the cause of better grades by the students.

The data will be entered via SPSS. Each student will be assigned a number, as to not identify a particular student. The data will be analyzed by desegregating the benchmark exam data, and determining which students showed growth. Growth can be considered moving from below basic to basic or basic to proficient. The grade distribution will be analyzed to determine if the interventions utilized have impacted student achievement academically.

The researcher will analyze the external partner annual report to the school district. The annual report will give the external provider's perspective about how they believe their interventions, and instruction impacted student growth and achievement. The annual report should detail the interventions utilized, how they determined who received the interventions, and the steps they took to implement the interventions. The annual report will also give the overall comparison of how the freshman in general, and the students who were identified as at risk performed during the school year.

In order to collect the qualitative data, the researcher will interview teachers, a principal, central office personnel, and former team leaders. These individuals were chosen because of their direct knowledge, their interactions with the external providers, their collaboration with the external providers, and their knowledge of the data. The instrument that will be utilized is a 10 question interview protocol. In order to conduct the interviews informed signed consent will be gathered from the interviewees. The interviews will take place at Summerville High School, Central Office, and a public



library. The interviews will last no longer than one hour. The qualitative data will be analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method as described by Lincoln and Guba

The researcher will interview the four teachers who were at the school during beginning stages of the partnership. The interviews will give the perspective of the teachers who were there when the partnership began. This perspective will give a different perspective of how the teachers view the interventions, the successes, and the barriers associated.

The researcher will interview the central office personnel during the forming of the initial partnership and was administrator during the four years during the partnership. This will help the researcher understand the need for the partnership, and the perspective of the district on how the partnership has been beneficial for the students, staff, and the school as a whole. The district will be able to explain how they vetted the external provider, the drawbacks, the successes, and the impact the interventions had.

The researcher will also interview the principal who was the administrator during the fourth year of the partnership. The interview will provide data on how successful the principal felt the partnership was, and how the external provider worked with the principal to identify students, provide interventions, the successes, and barriers.

Lastly, the researcher will interview two former team leaders of the external providers to determine how they were trained, interventions utilized, and how they tracked student data. A trend analysis will be done to determine if there was any academic growth among at-risk students compared with the students deemed as proficient within the urban setting.

**Time Duration:** If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last approximately one hour.

**Discomforts and Risks:** There are no physical risks associated with this study.

**Possible Benefits:** You will not benefit physically from taking part in this research study.

**Privacy and confidentiality measures:** Your participation in this study will be strictly confidential and anonymous. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

**Compensation for Participation:** You will not receive any compensation for being in this research study.

**Voluntary Participation:** Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this research, your major responsibilities will be answering questions included in the specified survey. You do not have to participate in this research. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time.

**Contact Information for Questions or Concerns:** You have the right to ask any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, complaints or concerns related to this research, contact Christopher Johnson at 870-665-9202.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant or you have concerns or general questions about the research contact the research participant's protection advocate in the *Arkansas Tech University* IRB Office at (479) 968-0319. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else.

For more information about participation in a research study and about the Institutional

Review Board (IRB), a group of people who review the research to protect your rights, please visit Arkansas Tech University's IRB website at <http://www.atu.edu/research/contact.php>. Included on this website, under the heading "Participant Info", you can access federal regulations and information about the protection of human research participants. If you do not have access to the internet, copies of these federal regulations are available by calling Arkansas Tech University at (479) 968-0319.

Before making the decision regarding enrollment in this research you should have:

- Discussed this study with an investigator,
- Reviewed the information in this form, and
- Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the research and those questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

**Participant:** By signing this consent form, you indicate that you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

Time

Printed Name

---

**Person Explaining the Research:** Your signature below means that you have explained the research to the participant/participant representative and have answered any questions he/she has about the research.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Signature of the person involved	Date	Time	Printed Name

## Appendix E

### IRB Approval

#### APPLICATION FOR REVIEW OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS RESEARCH

Submit to Jack Tucci, Ph.D., College of Business, Rothwell 445 or email (preferred) as an attachment to [jtucci@atu.edu](mailto:jtucci@atu.edu)

**Principal Investigator(s):** I acknowledge that this represents an accurate and complete description of my research.

Christopher Johnson	<a href="mailto:cjohnson99@atu.edu">cjohnson99@atu.edu</a>	10/07/16
Name of Primary PI	Email	Date

Additional Researchers' Names

Center for Leadership and Learning	(479) 964-3236
Department and Office Number	Telephone

The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) is an online training module teaching research methods. Researchers must complete the CITI training course prior to beginning their project. Please print the confirmation page at the end of the training and include it with IRB application. The CITI training course can be found here: [www.citiprogram.org](http://www.citiprogram.org)

**Adviser (complete if PI is a student):** I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human participants are properly protected.

John Freeman	<a href="mailto:jfreeman44@atu.edu">jfreeman44@atu.edu</a>	10/07/2016
Name of Adviser	Email	Date

Advanced Leadership Studies	CLL Annex, 61 Lake Point Lane	479-356-2001
Adviser's Department	Adviser's Office Number	Telephone

**EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXTERNAL PROVIDERS AS  
IT RELATES TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE IN AN URBAN SETTING**

**PLEASE NOTE:** All applications should be typewritten and edited prior to submission for review. If sufficient space is not provided below for a complete description of the proposed project, please use additional pages as necessary.

IRB Approval Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

approved:  Date: 10/10/2016

## Appendix F

### IRB Approval School District

Department of Testing and Evaluation  
3001 S. Pulaski Street  
Little Rock, AR 72206  
501.447.3385

November 1, 2016

Mr. Christopher Johnson / Dr. John Freeman, Advisor  
Advanced Leadership Studies  
Arkansas Tech University  
Russellville, AR 72801

RE: Permission Letter for Christopher Johnson

Dear Christopher Johnson:

I received your request to conduct research for your dissertation toward receiving a doctoral degree in advanced leadership studies. The study is entitled *Examining the effectiveness of external providers as it relates to student achievement and academic performance in an urban setting*.

I understand you are requesting to contact administrators and teachers at a high school and central office in order to gather archival data for ninth grade students who have been identified as "needing interventions". I understand that you are also requesting a 60 minute interview with administrators and teachers at a high school, as well as an administrator in central office. I further understand students will not be contacted, nor their names used on any data you choose to collect. After reviewing documents pertaining to your study and thoughtfully considering the request, my response is as follows:

X ☒ I approve your request to conduct your study in the Little Rock School District by contacting administrators and teachers at a high school and an administrator in central office to solicit interviews, as well as gather archival student data.

☐ The request to conduct this study in the Little Rock School District is denied.

As your study may prove beneficial to the education of students in the Little Rock School District, please provide a copy of your findings at the conclusion of your project. Should you need additional information feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

  
Dr. Danyell Crutchfield Cummings  
Director of Testing and Evaluation

cc: Michael Poirre, Superintendent of Schools  
Marvin Burton, Deputy Superintendent of Schools  
Dennis Glasgow, Executive Director of Accountability



The Power of Us!

