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## MOVING TOWARD RTI: THE INITIATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION PROGRAM: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY

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## PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION & TRAINING | REPORT

### Moving Toward RTI: The Initiation, Implementation, and Institutionalization of a Response to Intervention Program: A Descriptive Case Study

A. Matthew Kilic

**Abstract:** In the last three years, the number of special education referrals in the Longlake School District has risen dramatically. As more and more students have been referred for evaluation and then found ineligible for special services, the need for a systematic early identification and intervention system for struggling students has emerged. Response to Intervention (RTI) garnered attention as a proactive data-based framework for identifying students who are at-risk and providing them with research-based interventions. The district's Board of Education recently approved the proposal to pilot RTI in one elementary school to address this issue. In this paper, as a special education professional, the researcher will analyze and discuss the RTI program that the researcher plans to outline in this school. This paper does not follow a regular research methodology including data collection and analysis. Rather, as a descriptive case study, it serves as a resource for schools that are considering RTI or that have already attempted to implement RTI with limited success.

**Keywords:** A problem of practice in public schools, identification of learning disabilities, response to intervention, RTI, school-based interventions, staff development.

Longlake School District (a pseudonym) consists of one high school, one middle school, and two elementary schools with a total of 1,523 students. Recently, the special education department has experienced an influx of referrals from elementary school teachers. During the 2017- 2018 school year, the number of referrals was approximately 45; during the 2017-2018 school year, the special education department received a total of 60 referrals. Both of which are relatively alarming considering the size of the district. Each student was evaluated according to the state's special education law, however, only 19 referrals in 2017 and 23 in 2018 were actually found eligible for special education and related services.

This problem caused widespread concern within the school district. In an effort to reduce the number of referrals, the school board recently approved a multi-tier Response to Intervention (RTI) model aimed at serving students in kindergarten through third grade in the area of reading. The goal of shifting to an RTI model is to establish an early intervention protocol to identify struggling readers and provide these students with appropriate instruction in three tiers to ensure grade-level performance in the area of reading. Core elements of the approved RTI model include (a) periodically screening all kindergarten through third-grade students with an AIMSWeb program to determine which students, if any, are academically at-risk; (b) hiring new instructional aides to support these at-risk students within the general education setting (Tier-1); and (c) providing at-risk students with supplementary reading support through two reading software programs when they are placed into Tier-2.

The special education department in this district is in a stage of change in order to address this problem of practice. This RTI initiative will be plotted in one of the two elementary schools during the 2018-2019 school year. This paper

will serve as a guideline for the adaptation, implementation, and institutionalization of the RTI initiative. Data to be used for measuring the RTI change will come from online staff surveys, innovation configuration maps, and informal interviews with teachers. In order to help the district cope with the potential challenges of this change, the author will take a systematic approach and offer various strategies to the district's leadership team. First, he will begin by describing to the district where the RTI initiative will take place, and how the districts' unique circumstances might affect this change process since both of these factors influence the process of change (Hall & Hord, 2006). Second, the author will analyze how the RTI initiative should be implemented in this district. Within this step, the author will also describe the key elements of this change such as timelines, stakeholders, and mandated elements. Third, the author will analyze potential barriers and side effects that are likely to emerge during the implementation and will offer strategies to address these issues with the resources available in the district. Lastly, the author will discuss the outcomes that the district can expect from the ideal enactment of RTI and what needs to be done to sustain these outcomes moving forward.

### **1. Initiation Process and Key Components of RTI**

In this district, the desire to initiate RTI as a method to diagnose and treat learning disabilities stemmed from the increasing number of referrals this year from kindergarten through third-grade teachers. Typically, once a student failed in reading in two consecutive marking periods, the initial reaction of the teachers would be to refer the student to special education to get him or her additional support. As with many districts in New Jersey, this district has been using IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Method as the standard for diagnosing students with learning disabilities. This method requires students to technically exhibit a significant discrepancy between measures of their academic achievement and aptitude in one or more academic areas listed in IDEA (2004). In the past the district processed these teacher referrals and tested the students for special education; however, they often did not find a learning disability. As a result, they are shifting to an RTI model and no longer accepting direct referrals from teachers. Under the new RTI model, teachers will be responsible for assessing their students' reading skills through AIMSweb (a progress monitoring software) every other week. Students who score at or below the cutoff value of a certain percentile on the measures of reading fluency and vocabulary screening in the October assessment will be deemed academically "at risk." These students will receive differentiated reading instruction based upon their strengths and weaknesses from both their teacher and an instructional aide for eight to ten weeks. Following this support, if these students again score within the same percentile on the next AIMSweb district benchmark in January, they are moved into Tier-2, whereby they individually receive computer-based reading interventions, two times per week for 30 minutes, for a duration of approximately 18 to 20 weeks. These students will receive this reading support through one of the following Tier-2 software programs: *Reading Assistant* and *Fast Forward*. If students do not demonstrate adequate growth in Tier-2, they will move into the final stage where their complete academic profile is reviewed by a multidisciplinary team to determine eligibility for special education and related services.

### **2. Identifying Resources Needed for RTI**

As cited by Fullan (2001), Newmann et al. (2000) indicate that the capacity of an organization is the key to successful change. Building capacity for successful change depends on human capital, social capital, and financial and physical capital. It is anticipated that the district will need the following resources for the RTI initiative.

#### **2.1 Human Capital**

Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that each individual brings to an organization (Coburn & Russel, 2008). Since RTI is a data-driven decision-making model, developing sustainable data systems of instruction and support across RTI Tiers requires several skill-sets. It will be necessary to have a multidisciplinary team who can look at students' reading difficulties from different perspectives. In this school, this team will include the school principal, a guidance counselor, a general education teacher, and me (LDTC). This multidisciplinary team, under the

leadership of the principal, will meet once a month to discuss the issues related to RTI implementation. This team will also be in charge of determining appropriate tier placements and the reading software for each student by reviewing their AIMSweb benchmark scores. The RTI team will have its first meeting in September 2015, where the author plans to introduce my change plan and my activity calendar (Appendix 1). Depending upon their approval, the researcher will follow my activity calendar to deliver RTI services throughout the school year.

## **2.2 Social Capital**

Social capital refers to resources that are embedded in social relations and networks between individuals. Social capital is often deemed more important than the other two capitals since it is developed through knowledge sharing and diffusion of innovations (Coburn & Russell, 2008). RTI is not an individual endeavor; rather it presents a system of collective efforts that are built through ongoing knowledge sharing and collaboration. The district needs to nurture the social capital of the school by identifying social networks between teachers and using central figures as a motivating force for their colleagues. Therefore, the researcher plans to conduct a social network analysis on teachers during the RTI implementation. Results of social network analysis will help the study determine the teachers that can be used as RTI coaches during this change process.

## **2.3 Financial and Physical Capital**

Financial capital refers to tools and resources that an organization needs in a change process. My district has already allocated a certain amount of money from special education funds to spend on the RTI initiative. According to the approved RTI proposal, a portion of RTI funds will be used to purchase AIMSweb data management software, which is a web-based software used for universal screening, progress monitoring, and data management for students within the RTI. This software will be installed on teachers' computers before the school year starts in September, and teachers will receive professional development on how to use this program. Similarly, the district will use this portion of RTI funds to purchase a district-wide license for the *Reading Assistant* and *Fast ForWord* programs that our students will use in Tier-2. A classroom with a set of computers will be needed, as students in Tier-2 will individually work on one of these programs. The researcher thinks the district will meet this need by using the computers in the media centers. Another portion of RTI funds will be used to hire instructional aides who will provide students with small group reading instruction in Tier-1. The final portion of RTI funds will be used to give teachers stipends for the after-school hours they spend on administering AIMSWeb benchmark assessments and entering student data on the system.

## **3. Initial Steps to Launch RTI**

Initiation is the first stage in a change process. It requires strategic planning and management since the success of later stages highly depends on the initiation stage (Fullan, 2001). Once the school has set the stage for RTI with these resources, the study plans to use the following strategies to carry out the activities listed in my RTI calendar.

### **3.1 Spreading Out RTI to Create a Common Vision**

It is critically important to inform all stakeholders in advance about an intended change in order to have their support rather than their disapproval (Fullan, 2001). The "change game" activity that we played in the Leadership II class helped me to recognize the importance of communicating with internal and external stakeholders to create a common vision. In September, teachers will be surprised to find out that the district is shifting to a new model for special education referrals and that they will be taking certain roles within this model. This sudden shift to RTI will likely be perceived by our teachers as a "top-down" approach since their opinions were not solicited when the district decided to initiate RTI. If the teachers do not clearly understand the need to switch to RTI, we are likely to experience an erosion of teacher buy-in. Also, Fullan (2001) indicates that the more individuals experience failure with previous change attempts, the more resistant they become to the new change attempts. Comparing this change with their past experiences, some of the teachers may think that the district is trying to implement RTI for opportunistic reasons such

as getting additional funds from the state or opening new staff positions. This potential lack of common vision and difficulty understanding the need for this change poses great challenges to successfully adapting RTI. Fullan (2001) asserts that adaptation of a change becomes much easier once all stakeholders in an organization acknowledge the need for a change and have a common vision.

In an effort to help teachers recognize the need for RTI and create a common vision, the researcher will deliver a presentation to the school staff in the first week of September. The focus of my presentation will be an overview of the district's three-tier RTI model and how our students will benefit from this new data-based decision process. In my presentation, the researcher will also emphasize that our goal in shifting RTI is to make a difference in the reading levels of our students by establishing an early intervention protocol. My intention in emphasizing this point is to help the teachers notice the moral purpose of shifting to RTI, since noticing moral purpose in a culture of change increases individual buy-in (Fullan, 2001). Additionally, the researcher will share my RTI activity calendar with the teachers so that they know the schedule of our intended activities. At the conclusion of my presentation, the researcher will emphasize that the RTI team values teachers' input during this change and that they can expect to take part in an online survey next week so they can share their suggestions and concerns (Appendix 2). Following my presentation, the researcher will hold informal follow-up conversations with the teachers to further discuss their suggestions and concerns. The researcher will take notes during my conversations and analyze them later to figure out the common themes regarding the RTI change.

In addition to teachers, another stakeholder that needs to be informed about RTI is parents. The researcher will reach out to parents with a newsletter and inform them of the district's plan to implement RTI. Under IDEA (2004) districts are not obligated to get the written consent of parents to administer the screening and progress monitoring measures of RTI, as these measures are not considered standardized tests; however, parents may want to be aware of any discussion regarding their children's academic difficulties during RTI meetings. If parents do not understand the benefit of RTI for their children, they may consider it as a "wait-to-fail" model and may prefer skipping the RTI tiers to initiate the special education testing. This potential lack of parental support may impede the RTI adaptation process. Parental support will be crucial during the RTI process. When students are in Tier-1, RTI requires that they stay after school one day every other week in order to complete their benchmark assessments. When students are in Tier-2, RTI requires that they stay after school two times per week in order to work on their reading software. Carrying out these requirements of the RTI process requires the district to obtain parental support. Therefore, in September the researcher will mail out a detailed newsletter to parents that outlines the district's RTI initiative. This newsletter will compare the new RTI model with the old one, and explain to the parents how their children will benefit from this new RTI process. The newsletter will also include two open-ended questions in which parents will be able to share their concerns with the RTI team about this change. The feedback that the researcher receives from both teachers and parents will assist me both in developing a common vision for RTI and in planning for better services.

### **3.2 Needs Assessment for Teachers**

Young teachers will probably transition to RTI easily due to their familiarity with it from college, however, senior teachers are more likely to find it difficult to adapt or be slow to adapt. Part of senior teachers' difficulty might be related to the technical skills that they will need for using the AIMSweb software. The senior teachers in this district have a history of resistance to change. A recent example of this was evidenced two years ago when the district tried to switch to an online homework system. Due to their lack of technological skills, senior teachers had a hard time updating the online homework system on a daily basis, and consequently, they slowed down the change process. Lack of technical skills is a potential barrier that the researcher will have to address through various professional development opportunities and with ongoing technical support. Fullan (2001) indicates that data is the best friend of a change leader. In order to understand where teachers stand with respect to the technical skills needed for RTI, the

researcher will administer another online survey that includes a Likert Scale and open-ended items. The survey results will provide me with information about teachers' level of technical skills and needs. Based on the survey results, the researcher will arrange an AIMSweb training for teachers in October to help them obtain the technical skills necessary for efficiently using the program.

Another requirement of the RTI initiative is hiring new instructional aides to work with struggling readers in the general education setting. This element will transform our K-3 classrooms into somewhat of an inclusion classroom, in which the instructional aide and the teacher are expected to successfully co-teach. Although some of our teachers are experienced with co-teaching practices, not all of them use the following six co-teaching models suggested by research (Friend et al., 2010): one teach one observe, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, teaming, and one teach one assist. These research-based co-teaching models are proven to increase the effectiveness of Tier-1 interventions (Friend et al., 2010), so we want our teachers to perform as many of these co-teaching models as they can in the classroom. Each model requires different levels of teacher knowledge, experience, and collaboration with respect to co-teaching. For this reason, the researcher will include an additional section in my needs assessment survey to determine how much experience our teachers have with these six co-teaching models. Depending on the survey results, the researcher plans to design and deliver a practical professional development for teachers that will enable them to implement these six co-teaching models.

#### **4. RTI Implementation Process**

Change in an organization occurs in a dynamic fashion rather than a linear fashion (Fullan, 2001). Adaptation and initiation phases often overlap, so what occurs in each phase affects the other phase (Fullan, 2001). Therefore, while we will move on to the implementation phase in October, the researcher will keep open communication channels with teachers and parents to further understand their needs. This feedback and continuous communication will allow me to revise my RTI plan. As listed in my RTI activity calendar, the implementation process will begin by screening all kindergarten through third-grade students and entering their first benchmark data into AIMSweb in October. The administration of the AIMSweb screening probes to determine a student's reading level typically takes about 3-5 minutes and is carried out in a one to one setting. Although teachers can administer AIMSweb screening probes within their regular classroom period, we will ask them to do this after school, so that it does not take regular instruction time. We are likely to experience teacher resistance to staying after school; however, the district is planning to address this resistance by offering stipends, which the researcher thinks will motivate most teachers to stay after school. The results of this first screening assessment will help the RTI team identify at-risk students who need Tier-1 support.

In November, the RTI team will have its third meeting. While the first two meetings both will focus on ways to create a common vision for RTI, this meeting will focus on how to systematically deliver RTI services. The team will analyze the October benchmark data for all students to estimate the total number of students who are supposed to receive Tier-1 support. An important consideration at this point is to choose a reasonable cutoff score for assigning students to services in each RTI Tier. As is recommended by the AIMSweb manual, we will initially use the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile cutoff value. Students who score at or below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile will be recommended for Tier-1 support. After we identify at-risk students based on this cut-off score, an instructional aide will be assigned to work with them in class. This will be officially the beginning of Tier-1 services, which will take the team to determine how Tier-1 services should be delivered in the classroom. As discussed above, we want our teachers to use as many of the six co-teaching models as possible in their classrooms. Using only one co-teaching model may negatively impact the quality of Tier-1 services. To address this issue, the researcher will introduce the RTI team to the idea of using an "innovation configuration map" to ensure that the teachers are employing most of the co-teaching models in their classrooms. Innovation configuration maps describe different operational forms of an intervention and how they look in practice (Hall & Hord, 2006). In other words, innovation configuration maps are rubrics of a change. Using innovation configuration maps

makes the expected implementation of interventions more visible and clearer to change agents (Hall & Hord, 2006). In our RTI meeting, we will collaboratively develop an innovation configuration map (Appendix 3), which the researcher will use as my rubric to monitor Tier-1 services. Developing a strong innovation configuration map is a highly interactive and iterative process (Hall & Hord, 2006), so the researcher will periodically update my configuration map with the feedback the researcher receives from the teachers and the RTI team. As we start to implement Tier-2 interventions, the study will enhance the innovation configuration map by adding innovation complements to determine how adequately Tier-2 interventions are delivered.

For the next eight to ten weeks, while at-risk students are provided with differentiated reading instruction through multiple co-teaching models, their reading gains will be assessed by the teachers bi-weekly. Upon each of these periodic assessments, teachers will update the AIMSweb database for each student, which will enable the RTI team to monitor students' progress and determine the students who are non-responsive to Tier-1. In our January meeting, the RTI team will discuss the progress of each student and move the students who are still unable to score above the cut-off into Tier-2. As is mentioned above, these at-risk students will be using either *Reading Assistant* or *Fast ForWord*. The *Reading Assistant* is computer software that listens to the user as he/she reads out loud, intervenes when the user struggles, and automatically assesses the user's reading skills. The *Fast ForWord* reading program is another computer software that uses dynamic and interactive activities to increase the processing efficiency of students and further improve their basic reading skills. Both programs are user-friendly, so students do not need to have prior experience to use these programs. Students in Tier-2 will individually use one of these programs two times per week for 30 minutes, for a duration of approximately 18 to 20 weeks. Tier-2 interventions will be implemented in addition to Tier-1 support, and the delivery of this service will take place in the school's media center. During the course of 18 to 20 weeks, teachers will continue to administer by-weekly benchmarks to assess these students' reading gains, and update the AIMSweb database accordingly.

## 5. Challenges and Solutions

In this section of the paper, the researcher will identify factors that potentially support or hinder the implementation of RTI. Then the researcher will make recommendations about how to address these challenges using the resources in the district.

### 5.1 Time and Scheduling Challenges

RTI is a multi-tiered support system that relies heavily on student data for making instructional decisions. Datnow (2011) indicates that "although the use of data could pinpoint areas for improvement and areas of strength, data alone could not help improve student learning." In order for the data to guide classroom instruction, teachers need to meet regularly to discuss students' benchmark scores and make curricular changes accordingly (Datnow, 2011). In this school, teachers are so busy with their instructional responsibilities and other duties that they are less likely to respond well to an additional meeting for RTI. Requiring them to attend an additional meeting for RTI will not only be a counter-productive step, but it will also demotivate teachers to fulfill their responsibilities in RTI. However, our teachers already attend grade-level team meetings in which they discuss issues that relate to their grade level. These meetings are often kept short or canceled when there is not an important issue that relates to the whole grade level. The researcher will urge teachers to take the advantage of this time slot in their schedules to collaboratively analyze and discuss the AIMSweb benchmark data of each student. Incorporating data discussions into grade-level meetings gradually will allow RTI to become a natural part of the school routine.

The quality of Tier-1 interventions highly depends on whether or not teachers employ co-teaching models in their classrooms (Friend et al., 2010). Given that the teachers will use grade-level meetings to analyze the AIMSweb benchmark data of their students, they are less likely to have time to plan the co-teaching models that they will use in

class. Successful co-teaching requires much more than just placing two teachers in the same classroom. A considerable amount of planning is needed for teachers to discuss how to divide the students into homogeneous and heterogeneous small groups, as well as how to implement instructional activities accordingly. The lack of planning for Tier -1 interventions negatively impacts teachers' instructional efficiency and may make it hard for them to acclimate to the RTI initiative. The researcher plan to address this challenge by urging teachers to use online collaborative platforms such as "Google Docs" and "Zoho." These online platforms enable users to work on the same document asynchronously. For example, each week the classroom teacher will share his/her lesson plan with the instructional assistant through Google Docs, and both of them will plan instructional activities that they will incorporate into co-teaching models for the following week. Also, the researcher will encourage teachers to include the RTI team members in their online platforms, so that they can keep the RTI in the loop about the materials and resources that they need each week.

### **5.2 Challenges with Tier-2 Programs**

Our district is going to use the *Reading Assistant* and *Fast ForWord* programs as the reading intervention software for students in Tier-2. Soon after the school board approved the RTI plan, the district administrators rushed to purchase these reading programs by relying solely on case study findings published by the program vendor, without considering the findings of independent studies. If these programs do not perfectly fit the needs of our students, the district may see an increase in the number of students moving into Tier-3, in which they are referred to special education. This unexpected challenge may emerge down the road and negatively impact the success of RTI. The researcher thinks the district should have postponed purchasing reading programs until the results of the first AIMSweb screening is obtained in October. This way, we would have captured the needs of our students and had the opportunity to choose the programs that are most closely aligned with their needs. Also, the Institute for Education Sciences created an online resource, entitled *What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)*, to provide educators with a comprehensive list of research-based interventions. WWC allows educators to select a topic or an academic domain, and then customize a search based on grade level, program effectiveness, and program types, so that they can easily access an intervention that best matches the academic needs of specific students. The current WWC website unfortunately does not include the two programs that my district selected to use in our RTI model. If we end up getting mixed results from our RTI model at the end of the first year and consider replacing current reading programs with new ones, my district should consider choosing a program endorsed by WWC.

### **5.3 Challenges with Data-Based Decision Making**

RTI requires a culture of data use in the school since students are periodically monitored and placed into tiers based on a cut-off value. Although using a standard percentile may seem to be a fair practice of determining students who are eligible for RTI services, relying solely on a standard percentile can be misleading. For example, some students may obtain higher scores on the AIMSweb benchmark assessments, however, they may not be able to demonstrate the same level of achievement in the classroom. Such inconsistency between students' benchmark scores and their actual classroom performance may lead the teachers to question the validity of the AIMSweb assessment and cause them to lose their trust in the RTI process. To address this challenge, the RTI team should take into account students' cumulative records such as work samples, teacher comments, report cards, and state exam scores, in addition to their AIMSweb benchmark results. Looking at multiple measures will help the team to identify the students (false negatives) who truly need RTI support, and it can also help to increase the teachers' trust for RTI.

As Fullan (2001) asserted, change causes people to feel anxious, fearful, confused and overwhelmed. As the district begins to implement RTI, some teachers may take their students' low benchmark scores personally and avoid attending data discussions during grade-level meetings. These teachers may further think that their students' low scores will be interpreted as a lack of their teaching ability and be subtly used against them by the school



administrators. This misconception may gradually become more of a serious issue undermining teachers' trust for RTI change. As we learned from Timperley's (2005) 3-year long study, leadership activities significantly impact the way that teachers perceive student data and make use of it for their instructional practices. According to Datnow (2011), "one of the ways in which school leaders attempt to nurture trust is to depersonalize the process of looking at data (p. 154)." Therefore, the RTI team should regularly attend data discussions in grade-level meetings and appreciate the teachers' efforts and commitment to RTI regardless of their students' benchmark scores. As the teachers see that their efforts are recognized and appreciated by the team, they will begin to understand the purpose of using student data in RTI and feel more comfortable with attending data discussions.

#### **5.4 Challenges with Training Teachers**

Based on the results of the needs assessment survey, the teacher will have an AIMSweb and a co-teaching training in October in order to orient them to RTI. Given the fact that the teachers will be required to administer AIMSweb measures every other week and perform co-teaching techniques every day, they will definitely need and further be encouraged to seek guidance and ongoing support from the RTI team for implementing RTI services with fidelity. However, due to their other responsibilities, the RTI teams' ability to meet such a need might be limited to only attending weekly team meetings and offering additional professional development programs. Although the teachers may benefit from the RTI teams' support through weekly meetings, they are less likely to respond well to an additional professional development opportunity since they often view professional developments as sporadic events that have nothing to do with their needs and practices in class. Baker-Doyle and Yoon (2010) indicate that "individuals tend to seek advice from people with whom they share demographic similarities and equal work status" (p. 118); therefore, the researcher plans to create a school-based professional community where certain teachers can provide ongoing support to other teachers. In order to initiate such a professional community, the researcher will first conduct an online survey to determine the friendship and advice networks between the teachers. Next, drawing on the survey results, the researcher will run social network analysis (SNA) to determine which teachers tend to seek help from each other and which teacher(s) possess the most centrality among their colleagues. As the researcher identifies the central teachers, whom the other teachers feel most comfortable interacting, the researcher will ask them to take a role in our professional community as "RTI Coaches." With the approval of the school administrators, these RTI coaches will be assigned fewer daily duties in order to give them more time for their new roles. Once their new schedules are determined, RTI Coaches will post sign up sheets in the faculty room and ask teachers to indicate the time when they need assistance. However, Coburn and Russel (2008) indicate that "the creation of the coach role alone does not increase teachers' access to expertise" (p. 224), so these RTI coaches will attend webinars and workshops to deepen their knowledge and skills regarding the core elements of RTI. They will serve as "a trusted resource" for their colleagues when they take on the difficult task of deepening their practices. The researcher hopes that the establishment of a school-based professional community will promote "a collaborative culture that promotes spontaneous, voluntary, and goal-oriented relationships" (Datnow, 2011, p. 148). Once this is successfully established, it will help to transform the culture of our school from isolation and conflict to a collaborative learning community where teachers learn from each other rather than outside experts.

#### **6. Expected Outcomes and Suggestions for Sustaining RTI Initiative**

In this section of the paper, the researcher will describe the expected outcomes and potential benefits of this change for our school, then the researcher will make recommendations to our district leadership team for the institutionalization of the RTI program.

##### **6.1 Expected Outcomes**

In this district, the need to initiate RTI was the result of a high number of referrals to special education. Prior to RTI, teachers were not using any mechanisms of ongoing assessment, progress monitoring, and tiered instructions to

address the needs of struggling students. Now, the district is shifting to a data-driven system that will hopefully enable us to make informed decisions about each student's academic needs. Our first expected outcome from the RTI initiative is to see a decrease in the number of special education referrals. However, we are hoping the RTI initiative will bring many other positive outcomes for the district. First and foremost, we hope to see a paradigm shift among teachers, as they come to understand that special education is not the only option for struggling students. In the past, our teachers often viewed struggling students as "potentially-disabled." One of the goals of RTI is for teachers to view all students as "their" students, and for them to reconfigure their current instructional practices to meet the needs of all students. As teachers try to improve the quality of their instruction, they will also develop new relationships in which they can exchange ideas and find solutions for common academic issues. These new relationships will transform our school into a collaborative learning community, where teacher communicate strategies and share practices in order to increase student achievement.

Another expected outcome of this change is that struggling students will now receive systematic support at increasing levels and the level at which they respond to intervention will be recorded on the AIMSweb database. This data system will help our special education team to identify the underlying causes of students' academic difficulties and plan better special education services for students when they are referred. Similarly, this data system will enable our teachers to clearly describe a child's strengths and limitations to parents including specific progress indicators. It will help our teachers to develop better communication and relationships with parents. A final expected outcome of this change is that our students will be able to achieve grade-level standards, and their increased achievement will address our districts' chronic problem of performing poorly on high-stakes tests.

## **6.2 Suggestions for Sustaining RTI Initiative**

The researcher hopes that the district will make a smooth transition to RTI with a few relatively minor challenges, and that we will see most of the expected outcomes at the end of the first year. However, Fullan (2001) indicates that the mere initial implementation of a change does not guarantee that it will sustain over the years. Organizations have to take further measures and establish structures to sustain their initial outcomes over the years. Therefore, by the end of the first year, my district needs to accomplish several goals in order to institutionalize RTI.

Because many components of our RTI program have yet to be determined, we need to continue communicating with all stakeholders to converge on a shared vision of our program. Once all the stakeholders reach a consensus about the vision of RTI, we should write up a vision statement that is aligned with the schools' overall vision statement, and that includes measurable goals and objectives. Following this, we should develop our RTI manual, which describes the overall framework and required elements of RTI. It is important that we have distributed labor in our RTI team, so each member should be assigned to specific roles and responsibilities. The proposed RTI team includes me, the principal, a guidance counselor, and a teacher. Each of us has the same role of attending monthly RTI meetings to monitor students' progress and attending weekly grade-level meetings to monitor data discussions. For example, one of us should be primarily responsible for increasing community and parent involvement within the RTI system, while one of us should focus on fostering collaboration and relationships among the teachers through new learning opportunities. Such structured role assignments are likely to ensure that all areas of concern are covered and all stakeholders' needs are met.

A potential obstacle that may hinder the institutionalization of RTI is the rotation of teachers. Some of our current RTI teachers will be moving to a different grade level next year, and other teachers will have to be assigned to RTI grades (K-3). These new teachers will need to go through the same professional development cycle to be able to carry out their responsibilities in the RTI system. Repeating professional development for new teachers can be both time-consuming and expensive for the district, and it may cause a delay in the institutionalization of RTI. Instead, it is

reasonable for the school leadership to pair the RTI coaches with the new teachers in a mentor-mentee relationship to help new teachers learn the core elements of RTI. It is also reasonable for the district to hire teachers and instructional aides who are knowledgeable and experienced in RTI moving forward. These two strategies appear to have the potential to help the district move quickly from pilot-testing of RTI in one school to adapting RTI for the whole district.

A potential obstacle that needs to be considered for sustaining RTI is protecting it from funding crises. Similar to many other school districts, this district also suffers from sporadic budget cuts that impact student services. Such a budget cut may terminate our district's license for AIMSweb as well as the other two reading programs. Therefore, the leadership team needs to explore external resources, such as local associations, RTI resource centers, and voluntary service providers, all of which can offer us free RTI resources including reading programs. Similarly, the leadership team should consider establishing an RTI parent-teacher-association to obtain the support of the local community for the RTI program. This association may accept donations from the local community and make fund-raising activities to financially support the district's RTI program in the event of a budget cut. In addition to financially supporting the RTI program, the establishment of such an RTI association can also academically support the district while RTI goals are being achieved. For example, the RTI association, in collaboration with the RTI team, can provide parents with a workshop about Tier-2 reading interventions. After this workshop, with the districts' approval, students can be given access to use the Tier-2 reading program at home under their parents' supervision. The more time students spend on the Tier-2 programs, the more quickly they achieve RTI benchmarks and become proficient in reading.

Institutionalization of an innovation becomes easier when the innovation is incorporated into an organization's daily routine (Fullan, 2001). In order for RTI to be integrated into our school routine, the leadership team should take several measures. First, the leadership team should rename grade-level meetings as "data discussion meetings," and reorganize the structure of these meetings in a way that promotes more knowledge building and collaboration among teachers. Attendance at these meetings should be highly encouraged and innovative interventions should be supported. Second, the leadership team should make necessary changes in teachers' schedules to maximize their availability to consult with RTI coaches. Potential scheduling conflicts may not allow teachers to have enough time to receive the support they need from RTI Coaches. Third, the leadership team should urge teachers to administer AIMSweb benchmarks within their instructional periods rather than after school. AIMSweb benchmarks are similar to a variety of curriculum-based measures that teachers have been using for years, so teachers can use AIMSweb benchmarks as formative assessment tools. Lastly, the district should mail the students' AIMSweb screening results along with students' report cards to parents each marking period. Informing parents about their child's progress in this way helps parents perceive the RTI change as a regular curriculum assessment, and lead them to be further involved in RTI activities and interventions.

As the district has a solid plan to move forward with RTI, it is important to periodically monitor and evaluate the growth that results from the implementation. If the evaluation results indicate that measures taken to institutionalize RTI are not successful, then the district leadership team has to examine other potential factors that undermine the institutionalization of RTI, and resign the current program components with all stakeholders' input to address hypothesized factors. If the evaluation results suggest that the current program components are successful in facilitating RTI implementation, it would be ideal to develop long-term goals including other grade levels and schools within the district. As Hall and Hord (2006) assert, it may take 3-5 years for changes to institutionalize in schools, so we need to patiently keep working with all stakeholders.

## 7. Conclusion

In the past, Longlake school district has attempted to adapt many RTI-like changes with a great desire at the beginning but then ended up abandoning these changes as challenges arose. If the district leadership does not follow careful steps to implement this RTI initiative, this change may fall short in meeting expectations, and be included on that long list we have "tried and failed years ago." In this paper, the author presented a brief overview of three stages of this change and identified potential challenges and solutions in each stage. It is impossible to forecast every potential problem before implementing the RTI; however, communicating with all stakeholders regarding the types of challenges that they experienced in implementation and creating a culture of knowledge-building can alleviate many problems that may emerge down the road. In this sense, efforts to create a school-based learning community with RTI coaches will become one of the district's most powerful tools as it shifts to full implementation of RTI. When the strategies described in this paper are implemented, RTI change will serve as a highly effective school improvement program, and it will enable our district to meet the needs of all struggling students.

## 8. Disclosure of Conflict

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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**Appendix 1: Teacher Needs Assessment / Response to Intervention (RTI) Survey**

(Adapted from The University of Wisconsin-School of Education on 7/1/15)

Name:

Date:

Please circle the answer that best describes you.					
1. What is the highest degree that you hold? (circle)	None	Bachelors	Masters	Ed.S, Ed.D. Or Ph.D.	Other:
2. Please indicate your profession (circle)	University Faculty	Pre-Service Teacher	Teacher	Other:	-----
3. What grades do you currently teach?					
4. What type of program do you currently teach?	General	Special Education	Other:	Not applicable	
5. What subjects do you teach?	Subjects taught:				
6. How many years have you been teaching? (please include the current academic year)	Years teaching:				
7. What is your familiarity with RTI?	Not Familiar 1	2	3	4	Very Familiar 5
	None	In a few classes	In most classes	Don't know	Other :
8. Have you received <i>pre-service training</i> in the Rtl process through your university program?	Yes	No			
9. Have you received <i>in-service training</i> in the Rtl process?	*Yes	No	*If yes, please indicate the type of training:		
10. Would you be willing to spend time (or additional time) attending training programs regarding Rtl?	Yes	No	*If yes, indicate how much time and your preferred training program (in-service, college course, etc.)		

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
11. My school district's teachers support implementing RtI.	1	2	3	4	5
12. My school district's pupil services professionals support implementing RtI.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Interdisciplinary collaboration is critical in order for RTI to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I received pre-service educational interdisciplinary experiences during educational training.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Currently, interdisciplinary collaboration is an important component within my school.	1	2	3	4	5
16. The potential result of RtI is likely to benefit all students.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Even if RtI is implemented it is unlikely student outcomes will be improved.	1	2	3	4	5
18. The implementation of RtI will likely lower special education referrals.	1	2	3	4	5
19. For RtI to be effective, teachers will need additional classroom-level support.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Because of RtI, time will be taken away from typical teacher responsibilities (e.g., lesson preparation and instruction) in order to fulfill new roles.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I received pre-service educational interdisciplinary experiences during educational training.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Interdisciplinary collaboration is critical in order for RTI to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Currently, interdisciplinary collaboration is an important component within my school.	1	2	3	4	5
24. In order to function effectively with RtI, teachers will need additional in-service preparation and training.	1	2	3	4	5
25. What would you need, <b>as a teacher</b> , to be able to implement RtI in your classroom? Please be specific) (e.g. teacher support, in-service training, etc.):	1	2	3	4	5
31. Please indicate you questions and concerns regarding RTI initiative					

**CO-TEACHING TEACHER SURVEY**

A. I know about the following aspects of the co-teaching: (1=Not at all; 5=To a great extent)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Theoretical base of co-teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Six specific models of co-teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The co-planning process.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Co-teaching demonstrations.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Specific co-teaching strategies to use in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Expectations of cooperating teachers and teacher candidates.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel ready to utilize co-teaching strategies	1	2	3	4	5

<b>B. In my experience co-teaching means (1=Not at all; 5=To a great extent)</b>	1	2	3	4	5
7. One teacher teaches, another supports by providing additional help to requesting students.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The cooperating teacher observes and supports, while the student teacher provides instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The cooperating teacher provides the lesson plan and activities and the student teacher implements.	1	2	3	4	5
10. One teacher teaches the entire class while the other acts as a tutor.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>C. How much do you know about the forms of research-based co-teaching models? (1=Not at all; 5=To a great extent)</b>	1	2	3	4	5
11. Parallel Teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Station Teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
13. One teach, one observe.	1	2	3	4	5
14. One teach, one drift.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Alternate Teaching	1	2	3	4	5
16. Teaming	1	2	3	4	5
<b>D. I believe; (1=Not at all; 5=To a great extent)</b>	1	2	3	4	5
17. Co-teaching will improve the learning experience of students.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Co-teaching will better prepare students for the grade-level standards.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Co-teaching will provide a better instructional experience to all students.	1	2	3	4	5
20. What would you need, as a teacher, to be able to implement co-teaching in your classroom? Please be specific) (e.g. teacher support, in-service training, etc.):	21. Please indicate you questions and concerns regarding co-teaching implementation.				



**Appendix 2**  
**RTI ACTIVITY CALENDAR 2021-2022**

<b>September</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting/ Setting up AIMSweb on computers</li> <li>2. Week: Hiring Instructional Aides in 2 weeks/ Letter to Parents about RTI</li> <li>3. Week: Attending grade level team meetings to introduce RTI</li> <li>4. Week: Administering Survey to Teachers (Stages of Concern)</li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting</li> <li>2. Week: Informal talks with teachers to help them a common vision</li> <li>3. Week: Teacher training on AIMSweb tools and Co-teaching models</li> <li>4. Week: Universal Screening for all students to determine at risk-students (1<sup>st</sup> Data Entry Point)</li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting (Developing IC Map)/Determining student at-risk for Tier 1</li> <li>2. Week: AIMSweb data entry point</li> <li>3. Week: Providing Tier-1 support to at risk-student</li> <li>4. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Implementing IC Maps through classroom observations</li> </ul>
<b>December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting (Revising IC Map)</li> <li>2. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> <li>3. Week: 3. Week: Providing Tier-1 support to at risk-student</li> <li>4. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> </ul>
<b>January</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting (Moving students between Tiers)</li> <li>2. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> <li>3. Week: Beginning of Tier-2 Interventions (Fast ForWord or Reading Assistant)</li> <li>4. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. Aides</li> </ul>
<b>February</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting (Moving students between Tiers)</li> <li>2. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> <li>3. Week: Ongoing collaboration and support to teachers</li> <li>4. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> </ul>
<b>March</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting</li> <li>2. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> <li>3. Week: Ongoing collaboration and support to teachers</li> <li>4. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> </ul>
<b>April</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting (Moving students between Tier 1 and Tier 2/ Some go into Tier 3)</li> <li>2. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> <li>3. Week: Ongoing collaboration and support to teachers</li> <li>4. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> </ul>
<b>May</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting</li> <li>2. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> <li>3. Week: Ongoing collaboration and support to teachers</li> <li>4. Week: AIMSweb data entry/Lesson planning with teachers/ inst. aides</li> </ul>
<b>June</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Week: RTI Team Meeting (Planning to sustain and improve services for next year)</li> <li>2. Week/ 3. Week:4. Week:</li> </ul>

**Appendix 3**

**Weekly Innovation Configuration Model for RTI**

**Location/Classroom:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Week:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Vision:** All teachers follow the core elements of RTI program and improve their instructional practices to meet the needs of at-risk student

Innovation Component	A	B	C	D	E	F
	Description of ideal image of innovation component	Graduated description of image of innovation component	Graduated description of image of innovation component	Graduated description of image of innovation component	Graduated description of image of innovation component	Description of poor to non-implementation of innovation component
<b>IC 1 (Applying Co-teaching models)</b>	Teacher uses all of the six recommended research-based co-teaching models to help at-risk students improve their reading deficits	Teacher uses five of the six recommended research-based co-teaching models to help at-risk students improve their reading deficits	Teacher uses four of the six recommended research-based co-teaching models to help at-risk students improve their reading deficits	Teacher uses three of the six recommended research-based co-teaching models to help at-risk students improve their reading deficits	Teacher uses two of the six recommended research-based co-teaching models to help at-risk students improve their reading deficits	Teacher uses only one of the six recommended research-based co-teaching models to help at-risk students improve their reading deficits
<b>IC 2 (Attending Grade-level meetings/Data Discussions)</b>	Teacher always attends grade level meeting and participates, with colleagues, in conversations to develop understanding of the relationships between student data and instructional practices	Teacher very frequently attends grade level meeting and participates, with colleagues, in conversations to develop understanding of the relationships between student data and instructional practices	Teacher occasionally attends grade level meeting and participates, with colleagues, in conversations to develop understanding of the relationships between student data and instructional practices	Teacher rarely attends grade level meeting and participates, with colleagues, in conversations to develop understanding of the relationships between student data and instructional practices	Teacher very rarely attends grade level meeting and participates, with colleagues, in conversations to develop understanding of the relationships between student data and instructional practices	Teacher never attends grade level meeting and participates, with colleagues, in conversations to develop understanding of the relationships between student data and instructional practices
<b>IC 3 (Collaborating with RTI Coach)</b>	Teacher always collaborates with RTI Coach to analyze and interpret data from multiple sources (e.g. norm-reference tests, student work samples, student portfolios, and unit tests) to make informed decisions about students	Teacher very frequently collaborates with RTI Coach to analyze and interpret data from multiple sources (e.g. norm-reference tests, student work samples, student portfolios, and unit tests) to make informed decisions about students	Teacher occasionally collaborates with RTI Coach to analyze and interpret data from multiple sources (e.g. norm-reference tests, student work samples, student portfolios, and unit tests) to make informed decisions about students	Teacher rarely collaborates with RTI Coach to analyze and interpret data from multiple sources (e.g. norm-reference tests, student work samples, student portfolios, and unit tests) to make informed decisions about students	Teacher very rarely collaborates with RTI Coach to analyze and interpret data from multiple sources (e.g. norm-reference tests, student work samples, student portfolios, and unit tests) to make informed decisions about students	Teacher never collaborates with RTI Coach to analyze and interpret data from multiple sources (e.g. norm-reference tests, student work samples, student portfolios, and unit tests) to make informed decisions about students