Perspectives of Special Education Directors on Response to Intervention in Secondary Schools

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Despite intensified interest in secondary school applications of Response-to-Intervention (RtI), research in this area remains sparse. This study utilized a qualitative focus group methodology to explore special education directors' perceptions of current barriers, facilitators, roles, and practices related to RtI implementation in secondary settings. Based on their unique potential to affect change and promote collaboration between general and special educators, special education directors were selected as participants. Across two focus groups, four themes emerged: systems structures, roles and attitudes, evidence-based practices, and training and professional development needs. Each theme is explored in depth, followed by practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for practice. Although numerous barriers emerged, they should be viewed not as limitations to RtI in secondary schools but rather as serving to identify the systemic factors needed to support the complexity of an RtI initiative beyond the elementary school years.

KEYWORDS: Response to Intervention, Educational Reform, Special Education, Alternative Service Delivery

To achieve the stated goals of both the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2001) and the *Individuals with Disability Education Act* (IDEA, 2004), Response to Intervention (RtI), a service delivery approach for providing services and interventions to students at increasing levels of intensity based on progress monitoring and data analysis (Batsche, Elliott et al., 2006), has been endorsed by educational professionals and policymakers. Moreover, RtI has been recognized as a framework that can address the academic and behavioral needs of all students, with the goal of achieving positive student outcomes within less-restrictive environments (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). Generally, RtI methodologies encompass high-quality, research-based classroom instruction; continuous and frequent progress monitoring; implementation of research-based academic and behavioral interventions at multiple levels; and assessment of intervention integrity (Batsche, Elliott et al., 2006).

At its inception, RtI was designed to address the academic difficulties of children suspected of having high-incidence disabilities, namely a specific learning disability, within primary grades (Bender & Shores, 2007; Mellard, Byrd, Johnson, Tollefson, & Boesche, 2004; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003) and typically in the area of reading (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Marston, 2005). More recently, practitioners have broadened the scope of RtI to include systemic approaches for the identification of and the development of interventions for behavioral difficulties (Malecki & Demaray, 2007; Sandomeirski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007). From this perspective, RtI implementation serves all students, with the goal of achieving positive academic and behavioral outcomes through prevention, early identification, and intervention matched to their specific needs.

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Given that extant RtI practices largely have been applied within primary grades and typically in the area of reading, there is a growing interest among educational professionals and researchers about the degree to which RtI can be used in secondary settings. Batsche, Kavale, and Kovaleski (2006) contend that RtI can be applied to all grades, as long as there is the presence of (a) clear performance expectations and (b) methods to measure positive changes within these expectations. As school districts across the country consider the ways in which RtI can enhance student learning in a secondary setting, it is essential to view RtI as an educational change initiative rather than as an educational program or curriculum that is in vogue. Such a perspective necessitates that schools foster a structure that builds the capacity of the educational professionals and the system in which they work to sustain effective practices (Schaughency & Ervin, 2006). This concept of building capacity is not new to education, as similar change initiatives, such as Positive Behavior Support, have demonstrated that common features of successful implementation include (a) staff buy-in, (b) shared vision for change, (c) professional development/ongoing technical assistance, (d) organizational restructuring, and (e) committed administrative leadership (George, White, & Schlaffer, 2007; Kincaid, Childs, Blaise, & Wallace, 2007).

The new challenge since the passage and subsequent union of NCLB and IDEA is the manner in which administrative leaders appropriately merge general and special education to attain both school-wide and district-wide achievement. Typically, the responsibilities of special education directors encompass overseeing programming for those students who require specialized services or accommodations within academic settings. Within this more traditional role, these administrators may operate more as supervisors or managers rather than agents of change. The practice and, more importantly, sustainability of RtI likely will require an emerging role for special education directors who increasingly "promote collaboration between general and special education teachers . . . to assure that high quality education programs are accessible to all students" (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, it will be necessary for special education directors to (a) possess knowledge of the variables that influence change, (b) transform their traditional role of manager to an effective instructional leader, and (c) hone essential leadership strategies for establishing best practices for educators and positive educational outcomes (Boscardin, 2005). Unfortunately, the extant literature does not adequately address how special education directors can help build and sustain educational practices that promote a merger between general and special education practices within the context of RtI.

The purpose of this study was to obtain a better understanding of the perceptions of special education directors in regard to current barriers, facilitators, roles, and practices related to RtI implementation in secondary settings. Specifically, the researchers were interested in determining the factors that impede or facilitate RtI implementation at the secondary level. Although a variety of stakeholders could contribute to such an exploration, special education directors were chosen based on the impact that administrative leadership has on student achievement (Berends et al., 2002) as well as the essential role of administrative leadership in a successful system-wide change initiative (George et al., 2007; Kincaid et al., 2007). Based on these factors, it was anticipated that special education directors would provide a unique and informed perspective on the systemic issues influencing RtI implementation at the secondary level.

METHOD

Design

Focus group (qualitative) methodology was used to investigate special education directors' perceptions of RtI implementation in secondary schools. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the desire to determine perspectives and emerging themes, a focus group approach was selected (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Specifically, this study utilized a single-category approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In this type of design, several focus groups are conducted with a single audience (i.e., special education directors), and this approach is ideally suited for conducting this exploratory investigation (Morgan, 1998).

Setting and Participants

A total of 20 public secondary schools (grades 9-12) were randomly selected from the 85 public secondary schools within four counties in a Midwestern state. The special education director from the school district in which each school was located was invited via email to participate in one of three focus group sessions. Of the 20 invited special education directors, 19 initially indicated they would attend one of the three focus group sessions. Due to low participation (n = 1), one of three focus groups was canceled. In addition, one participant who had previously committed canceled prior to the session. In all, 17 participants attended two focus group sessions, with eight attendees at the first session and nine attendees at the second session. Both focus groups were conducted in a conference room at a professional development center for educators.

Following the focus group session, demographic information about each secondary school represented by the participants was obtained from the state department of education website. Table 1 presents the relevant comparisons to state data.

Table 1   *Characteristics of Participating Schools versus State Average*

Descriptor	Participant Mean	State Mean
Students (N)	1,655	N/A
Student Characteristics		
% Economically disadvantaged	11.6	35.5
% with Disabilities	11.7	14.5
% English Language Learners	0.6	5.5
% Caucasian	89.0	79.8
% African American	6.2	27.0
% Hispanic	0.7	5.4
% Asian/Pacific Islander	2.3	3.5
% Multiracial	1.3	4.0
Students-per-teacher ratio	17.3	15.6
% Graduation rate	94.6	88.8

In addition, to obtain further information about their professional background, involvement with RtI, and opinions on RtI, participants were asked to complete a five-question electronic survey, of which 12 were completed. These 12 respondents had a mean of 17 years of experience as a special education director, with a range of three to 25 years, and represented a variety of backgrounds, including school psychologists and regular and special education teachers. Table 2 presents a summary of their experiences and beliefs regarding RtI.

Table 2   *Participant Self-Reported Experiences and Beliefs during 2006-2007 School Year (N = 12)*

Item	*n* (Percentage)
District was involved in RTI	10 (83)
Secondary school was involved in RTI	8 (67)
Knowledge about RtI topics	
Significantly below average	0 (0)
Below average	2 (17)
Average	6 (50)
Above average	2 (17)
Significantly above average	2 (17)
General experiences with RtI	
Strongly negative	0 (0)
Negative	2 (17)
Neutral	0 (0)
Positive	10 (83)
Strongly positive	8 (67)

Data Collection

The authors developed a questioning route (Appendix A) to examine participants' perceptions of RtI practice in secondary schools. Based on the purpose of the study, pilot discussions with several practicing special education directors were used to develop the questioning route development. Minor revisions were made to the questioning route based upon expert review from two nationally recognized RtI researchers. The final questioning route included nine open-ended questions. Of the nine questions, five were "key questions" (Krueger & Casey, 2000) that drove the study and that required the greatest attention in the analysis phase.

Two digital audio recorders, a primary and backup recorder, were used to record each focus group discussion. Following each focus group, the audio file on the primary recorder was downloaded onto a computer and used for transcription. In addition to the audio files, relevant comments from participants were summarized on a flip chart by a moderator and on a notepad by an assistant.

Procedure

The author and another school psychology faculty member affiliated with the author's institution each moderated one focus group. Prior to conducting the first focus group, they met to review the questioning route and general procedures for conducting focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Each moderator was accompanied by one of two graduate students in school psychology who volunteered to be assistants during the focus groups.

Both the moderator and assistant arrived at each session 20 minutes early to prepare for the focus group session. The duties of the moderator included introducing the topic, leading the focus group discussion according to the questioning route, keeping participants on topic, prompting follow-up questions, and writing notes on a large flip chart. The assistant's responsibilities included greeting participants, securing informed consent, setting up snacks and drinks, operating the audio recorder, taking

notes, completing the integrity checklist, providing incentives at the end of the session, and addressing any unexpected problems that occurred during the focus group (e.g., lighting, noise). Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. At the end of each group, participants were thanked and given a $20 gift card for a national discount retailer.

The assistant completed an integrity checklist (available upon request from the first author) to assess the degree to which the focus group procedures were implemented as intended. The procedural checklist included procedures prior to the focus group (e.g., testing audio recorders, arranging seating), during the focus group (e.g., ensuring that the moderators asked questions in sequence, avoiding the sharing of personal opinions, limiting "why" questions, writing key points on an easel pad, and providing a summary at the end of the session), and after the focus group (e.g., checking the audio recording). Procedural reliability was computed as a percentage by dividing the number of items checked on the list by the total number of focus groups conducted and then multiplying by 100. Across both focus group sessions, 100% of the procedural steps were completed.

Data Analysis

Staff from a university Bureau of Educational Research transcribed each audio file into a document. In the infrequent event that portions of the transcript were inaudible or unclear, notes taken by the moderators and the assistants were consulted to provide clarification. The three authors then used a "long table" approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000) to analyze the data contained within the document. Specifically, responses to each question were read aloud and assigned a categorical descriptor, which was arrived at through discussion and consensus. As statements were coded, they were cut from the written transcripts and sorted into labeled categories underneath that question on a "long table." Data from both focus groups were combined, resulting in five to 20 descriptive categories for each question. A summarization document that provided a written record of these categories (sorted by question), as well as direct quotations supporting each, was prepared. Next, all authors reviewed the summarization document, identifying overarching themes that were suggested by the comments across the entire questioning route. Themes were constructed based on a comparison of codes assigned to segments of text that identified unique and shared characteristics. The comments associated with each of the initial descriptive categories were then recoded into four themes through discussion and consensus: (a) *systems structures*, (b) *roles and attitudes*, (c) *evidence-based practices*, and (d) *training and professional development*.

RESULTS

Systems Structures

A strong theme that emerged from the focus group data was the importance of systems structures in RtI implementation. Unfortunately, most of the current structures were perceived as barriers to RtI implementation within the participants' secondary schools. Most participants noted that, due to inflexibility of student schedules, finding time to provide interventions to students within a secondary schedule is difficult. In addition, a few participants indicated their concern that providing interventions may require sacrificing other content, which takes away from the ability to focus on teaching the humanities or nurturing artistic talents. Related to limited time to implement interventions and the sacrificing of content, participants felt that teachers are not afforded adequate time to engage in RtI-related activities (i.e., planning time, collaborative problem-solving meetings, data collection).

Several participants also reported struggling with unanswered questions regarding how RtI should be implemented locally within their secondary schools. Specifically, the participants agreed that more clarification and guidance in translating theory and research related to elementary-based applications of RtI into procedures and structures within secondary schools was needed. Overall, participants indicated that a lack of site-specific implementation strategies translates into inconsistencies across grade levels, especially within secondary schools.

In addition to inconsistencies at the local level, special education directors also viewed state and federal policy as potential barriers to RtI at the secondary level. For example, a few participants expressed

concern and uncertainty regarding the relationship between RtI and procedural safeguards. These participants commented that they "are very used to the old way in terms of the legal ramifications and due process and all of that" and shared apprehension of how such legalities "fit into this new way of identifying kids." Moreover, several participants indicated unease regarding the lack of leadership and clarity at the state department of education concerning the combined roles of general education and special education in RtI.

Finally, the availability and management of funds to support RtI was discussed as a primary barrier to the implementation of RtI within secondary schools. Although a few participants acknowledged that 15% of IDEA funds can be used for early intervention, these funds were not viewed as sufficient for supporting the personnel and intervention programs necessary for successful implementation of RtI. As a result of a perceived disproportionate allotment of such funds to kindergarten through third grade initiatives, these concerns were thought to be particularly salient at the secondary level.

Despite the several barriers that were discussed, a few systems structures were described as facilitating RtI within the participants' schools. Participants stated that the presence of a district leadership team and the possibility of small school size would facilitate the implementation of RtI. In addition, the special education directors indicated that increased options for co-teaching at secondary levels could have the potential to assist students who are struggling academically.

Roles and Attitudes

A second theme that emerged from the focus groups, and generated a great deal of discussion, was the need for changes in the roles and attitudes of educational professionals, parents, and community members. Most often, current roles and attitudes were viewed as barriers to RtI implementation. Participants indicated that, to implement RtI effectively, their own role as special education directors would have to change. The participants discussed the need for better collaboration with other district-level administrators, particularly curriculum directors. Depending on the district, such relationships were noted both as facilitative and inhibitory. In addition to collaborating with others, the majority of participants envisioned their roles as leading and managing change. Specifically, they viewed their role in the implementation of RtI within secondary schools as agents of accountability as well as supporters to student support personnel (e.g., school psychologists).

Second, the participants perceived that principals would need to change their roles and attitudes to better support RtI practices. A few participants discussed the need for principals to be good instructional leaders who have knowledge of content areas and grade-level expectations. The consensus among the participants was that principals who have limited understanding of systemic approaches likely would inhibit the growth of RtI within secondary schools.

Third, several participants indicated that the content-oriented beliefs of secondary teachers conflict with the student-oriented focus of RtI. The perception was that secondary school teachers focus much of their time on limited blocks of instruction and often share limited concern for students who are struggling academically in all areas. Participants noted that secondary teachers should take more ownership of their students, even if the concerns raised extend beyond the subject area that they teach.

Fourth, the attitudes of many parents and outside agencies frequently were mentioned as inhibitory to the RtI process. Participants noted that many parents and advocacy groups still operate under the assumption that the only goal is to obtain an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Consequently, parents and/or advocates may resist RtI procedures that they perceive are wasting time toward this end. To remedy this situation, participants suggested that parents and outside agencies may need more information and education on RtI.

Finally, there were numerous comments indicating the need for a shared commitment among all of the above-noted stakeholders. Although this shared commitment may have been a facilitator for a few of the schools, it appeared to be a barrier for most participants. In general, comments from the special education directors reflected the notion that RtI needs to be a long-term commitment and that general education and special education must work together to reap maximum benefits.

Evidence-Based Practices

Analysis of the data indicated that evidence-based practices were viewed as essential to RtI success. In a few instances, evidence-based practices were mentioned as facilitators. For example, one participant indicated that her district has common assessments for high school, middle school, and elementary school. More often, however, the current lack of evidence-based practices at the secondary level was noted as a barrier. For example, when asked what would be needed to bring RtI to the next level in their secondary schools, participants mentioned data-driven decision making, universal screening, intervention integrity, effective interventions, and better data collection methods.

Training and Professional Development

Participants indicated that a great deal of professional development will be necessary for RtI to be implemented effectively within secondary environments. Specifically, participants focused their discussion on both proximal and distal training opportunities/requirements necessary for RtI to be brought up to scale. With regard to proximal training, special education directors indicated that in-service trainings aim at increasing the knowledge and skills of administrators, teachers, school psychologists, and other student support personnel (e.g., guidance counselors, speech language pathologists). In addition to in-service trainings, participants indicated that the implementation of a coaching model would ensure greater success for implementing RtI.

Distally, participants overwhelmingly agreed that adequate college preparation and teacher selection were necessary for RtI success. Participants discussed a need for college training programs to emphasize components of RtI as well as for districts to select teachers who can provide quality instruction.

DISCUSSION

The present investigation provides a preliminary examination of special education directors' perceptions of the facilitators of and barriers to RtI implementation at the secondary level. Based on the impact of administrative leadership on student achievement as well as the essential role of administrative leadership in a successful system-wide change initiative, special education directors were chosen as the target audience. Because little is known about the implementation of RtI within middle and high schools, this study is viewed as a first step toward understanding how special education directors perceive the feasibility of RtI in these settings. Moreover, the complexity of today's school issues requires that research methods capture the rich, nuanced, varied, and sophisticated feedback that administrators are capable of sharing. By utilizing focus groups, this study provided practical data (i.e., directors' perspectives) that can be used by school-based practitioners assisting with RtI implementation in secondary settings.

During the focus groups, special education directors indicated several components that may inhibit successful implementation of RtI in secondary schools. Most often, the inherent features of a secondary setting (i.e., structured class periods, rigid schedules, requirements for graduation, high population of students in a high school) were described as major barriers to bringing RtI to fruition. The majority of participants endorsed the view that inflexible teachers and student schedules leave virtually no time for RtI practices. For educators, this translates into inadequate collaborative opportunities for problem solving, implementing, and monitoring student interventions. For students, this suggests that benefiting from interventions could lead to the potential of foregoing required credits in a content-oriented environment.

Coupled with the complex configuration of most secondary schools were additional inhibitory factors cited by the participants as germane to this setting. The participants agreed that RtI's vitality is dependent on connecting RtI research and theories to school-based practices; the presence of administrative support through district-wide and school-based leadership teams; collaboration between general and special education; and the availability of funding, state level support, and evidence-based practices (e.g., universal screening measures, high-quality instruction, interventions, progress monitoring tools). Most special education directors remarked, however, on the scarcity of these beyond elementary grades.

Despite the overall perception that many essential RtI components are lacking in the secondary setting, participants noted that, as these emerge, their strength relies on a major shift in all key stakeholders' roles and attitudes. The extant literature confirms that, without possessing the attitudes and beliefs that an

educational change initiative such as RtI requires for improving student outcomes, fidelity of implementation and sustainability over time are less likely to occur (Sarason, 1996). Participants also stated that, for educational professionals to be more apt to support RtI, they must be highly skilled in RtI practices (e.g., high-quality instruction, data collection, intervention implementation and integrity), yet there was concern that college preparation programs are not aligned with RtI practices. Moreover, concerns that professional training must promote positive beliefs and attitudes and foster knowledge and skills beyond the pre-service years emerged.

These concerns are in concert with the participants' beliefs that a shared commitment among stakeholders, including parents and the community, is critical to establishing and maintaining the essential RtI components. This also parallels previous research efforts that, for positive and systemic outcomes, receptive beliefs and attitudes about the change and sharing a common vision must be endorsed (George et al., 2007; Kincaid et al., 2007). Nevertheless, the group conceded that this shared commitment was more often absent than present in their districts. Taken together, the participants' described views of key stakeholders' roles, attitudes, skills, and knowledge substantiated how existing educational, psychological, and administrative practices need to change (and as early as the pre-service level) to meet the diverse needs of students within an integrated educational system such as RtI.

The participants in this study also noted that the role of the special education director as a leader and change agent is critical to successful implementation of RtI in secondary settings. Specifically, participants believed that they should work with district-level administrators and student support personnel (e.g., school psychologists) to foster a shared interest in improving student outcomes. Nevertheless, careful examination of the participants' comments demonstrated uncertainty regarding their receptiveness to implementing RtI. For example, concerns raised regarding the legal bounds of RtI, the lack of clarity on how to merge general and special education, and the lack of guidance from the state department of education on how to troubleshoot these issues suggest discomfort regarding RtI implementation in the secondary setting. These concerns hint at the ancillary role the special education directors may perceive for themselves in an RtI model, which is incompatible with current recommendations for leading and managing educational reform (Boscardin, 2005).

Despite numerous negative comments (barriers) in regard to RtI implementation, participants also identified facilitating factors within their district and their secondary setting. First, some participants mentioned that they are reaching out to create a shared belief that RtI is a systemic approach that will assist in helping students. Second, a few participants described the presence of leadership teams and co-teaching between general and special education in their secondary setting as promising because it has the potential to ease a transition into RtI implementation and channels the message that all personnel must work within an integrated model. Third, one participant indicated that common assessments and student database systems presently in use were viewed as essential to RtI implementation and would be sustained in their district within RtI practices. Finally, another participant proposed that a smaller school size would lend itself to a less complicated implementation. The descriptions of these emerging and facilitating RtI components illustrate a recognition that districts will need to examine their own strengths and weaknesses to structure a system that fits their unique needs.

The results of this investigation align with previous research demonstrating the inhibitory factors often present when implementing systemic change within schools (e.g., IAT process, PBS). For example, Kincaid et al. (2007) discovered that barriers to both IAT and PBS processes include a lack of support from administrators, a lack of knowledge (e.g., misperceptions, misunderstanding), and the absence of school-wide systems structures (e.g., data collection systems, bank of interventions from which to pull). In the Kincaid study and within the findings of the current investigation, systems issues remained the most significant barriers to systemic change. Further, Kincaid et al. (2007) identified administrative support, ongoing professional development, and cohesive team membership as significant facilitators of the change process. The results of the current study offer further support for such findings and suggest that the success of RtI within secondary schools rests on the future support of and advocacy within schools as well as the additional training and professional development, including ongoing technical assistance, of various educators.

Limitations of Current Research

The results of the current analysis of the facilitators of and barriers to RtI implementation are limited by several factors. First, special education directors who participated in the focus groups were those willing to talk about their experiences with, or perceptions of, RtI implementation within secondary settings. Therefore, the extent to which the participants' reports are representative of all special education directors in other locales or to other special education directors not willing to speak about their experiences is unknown. Second, the number of participants was relatively small and may have reflected only those who were actively participating in RtI implementation at the time of this investigation. Third, the sample schools that were recruited did not demonstrate significant racial/ethnic diversity. Such a limitation may minimize the generalizability of the results to other geographic locations. Fourth, there was limited validation of the focus group questions following the authors' revisions. While this is a minor limitation, such validation would add empirical validity to the questioning route. Fifth, resultant themes identified by the authors were not validated by other experts or the participants following the analysis of data. Finally, the use of a qualitative analysis only measures perceptions of participants and does not allow for more direct measures of the actual presence or absence of factors within secondary school environments related to RtI implementation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research is required to provide a more detailed picture of RtI implementation within secondary schools. Future researchers may wish to expand beyond focus groups and employ methods that provide more details regarding factors that contribute to the success or failure of RtI efforts. Additional qualitative methods such as nominal group process (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975) and Concept Mapping™ (Novak, 1998) may be particularly useful. Specifically, the nominal group process may provide a higher level of detail by delineating which facilitators of and barriers to RtI implementation are perceived as having the highest importance. Further, Concept Mapping™ may be useful for understanding the relationships between identified themes. In addition to various qualitative methods, future researchers should utilize more direct observation or systematic analyses that measure the actual presence or absence of factors (e.g., tiered interventions, administrative support, data collection systems) within school environments. Future research also should attempt to employ larger and more diverse samples of special education directors. It will be imperative to gather data from a wide range of teachers (i.e., general and special education), services providers (e.g., school psychologists, speech-language pathologists), and administrators (i.e., school-based and district-based). Finally, future research, using longitudinal analyses of RtI implementation, should identify the variables within a variety of secondary schools that have contributed to successful systemic change. Given that significant change likely will be needed for secondary schools to sustain RtI implementation efforts, it will be helpful to examine the enabling factors within successful schools that have supported full-scale adoption.

Implications for Practice

Although many barriers were discussed, these results should not be viewed as justification for abandoning RtI initiatives in secondary schools nor for accepting these barriers as insurmountable. Rather, it is anticipated that knowledge of such barriers can serve as a starting point for positive systems change. School psychologists can play an active role in helping schools avoid barriers and establish facilitators of RtI in secondary schools in several ways. First, school psychologists should conduct a needs assessment within the building to determine the setting-specific barriers and facilitators to RtI that exist. They should work collaboratively with a building leadership team to develop a specific action plan to address any identified obstacles to RtI. Second, school psychologists should maintain an active role in professional development efforts designed to promote understanding and knowledge of RtI. This may include formalized activities (e.g., workshops, consulting) as well as more informally distributed information (e.g., an RtI bulletin board, teacher-friendly articles). Third, school psychologists should help staff to recognize the broader importance of RtI for improving the outcomes of students (as opposed to eligibility determination) and refocus discussions on the preventive nature of RtI so that everyone is approaching RtI

from a similar theoretical framework. Fourth, school psychologists could create a binder/library of resources on secondary assessment and intervention resources that teachers can access. They should begin by consulting reputable websites and professional journals to collect and create user-friendly handouts on different research-based strategies. Then, they should consider having teachers contribute ideas and resources that they have used and allow shared access to the collection of materials. Finally, school psychologists should collect outcome data on the results of RtI in the school. It is important to understand that systems change can be a difficult process with many frustrations in the first few years of change. To maintain morale, avoid burnout, and increase the likelihood of sustainability, it is necessary to have data to share that demonstrate successes along the way.

CONCLUSIONS

Although projected to be a central group for reform (Boscardin, 2005) and essential to the success of RtI, as seen in the results of this study, special education directors experience frustration and uncertainty regarding the application of RtI in secondary schools. It is hoped that this analysis will not be interpreted as evidence against RtI implementation in secondary schools but rather as an identification of the major systemic factors that need to be adapted to build the capacity necessary to support the complexity of an RtI initiative in secondary settings. For example, as a result of the analysis of this, albeit small, sample, it is evident that there is a need for pre-service training programs and ongoing professional development to address the attitudes/beliefs, knowledge, and skills of general educators, special educators, and administrators to embrace an integrated systems model to meet the needs of secondary students. In addition, there is a need for practitioners to provide examples of how systems can be modified (e.g., block scheduling, students earning credits toward graduation by participating in RtI interventions) to ensure the sustainability of RtI approaches in secondary schools. Future research and demonstration projects likely will provide continued expansion of RtI into various aspects of educational service delivery.

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group Questioning Route

Question Type	Question
Introductory Comments	Say something like: "I want to thank you for attending to today's focus group session on Response-to-Intervention (RtI). My name is (insert name), and I am a (insert profession). As you may recall from the initial email you received, the purpose of tonight's focus group is to learn more about (insert profession)'s thoughts about RtI at the secondary level." "I want to let you know that there are no right or wrong answers to tonight's questions. It is expected that you may have different points of view on the issues discussed, and I encourage you to share your viewpoint whether or not it differs from what others have said. Feel free to engage with one another in dialogue about the questions. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure that everyone has a chance to share. I am interested in hearing from each of you, although you shouldn't feel obligated to respond to every question. Feel free to eat or drink during the focus group session."
Opening	To begin, please tell us your name and type of setting(s) you work in.
Introductory	What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase "Response to Intervention"?
Transition	What messages are you hearing about RtI from the national, state, and district level?
Key	Thinking about your secondary school, what are the structures or beliefs in place that facilitate RtI implementation?
	Thinking about your secondary buildings, what are the barriers to RtI implementation?
	If your school were to move toward an RtI model (or if it already has), what would you envision your role (or what was your role) in the process?
	If resources were unlimited, describe what RtI would look like if were implemented within a secondary school setting.
	Consider where your school is right now. What do you think it would take to build the capacity of your school to move RtI implementation to the next level?
Ending	Are there any concerns or hopeful comments about RtI at the secondary level that have not already been mentioned?